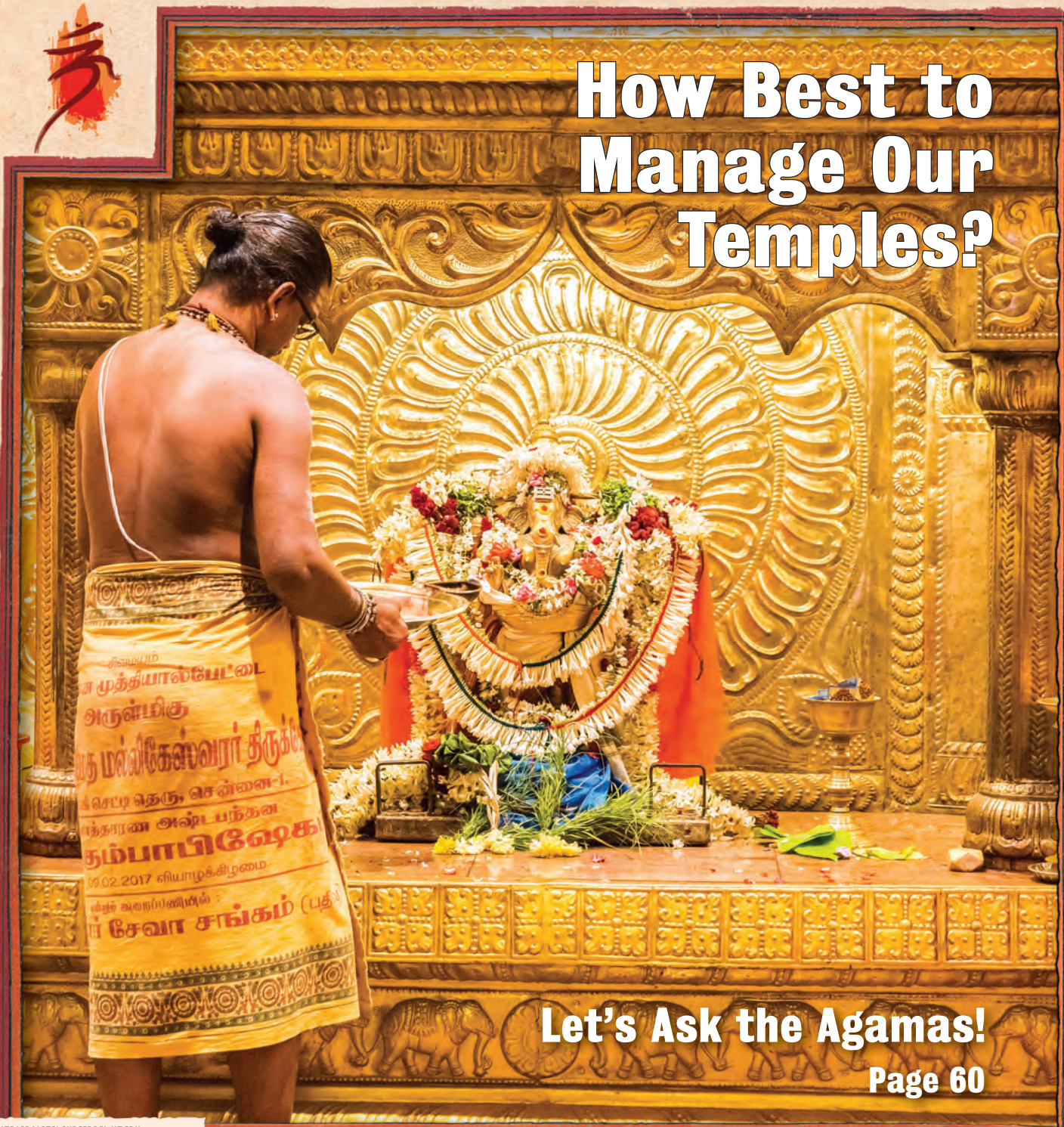


HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



How Best to Manage Our Temples?

Let's Ask the Agamas!
Page 60

SHUTTERSTOCK



(Cover) A priest performs the daily worship at one of the numerous Ganesha shrines at the Arulmigu Manakula Vinayagar Temple in Pondichery, Tamil Nadu; (above) Sunset on the idyllic island of Mauritius, where we posited some questions to Hindu youth

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INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** The Hindu Youth of Mauritius Candidly Share Religion's Role in Their Lives 18
In Summary: The Malaysian Hindu Sangam Crafts a Concise Summary of Shared Beliefs 30
Reporting: A Celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi, Far from the Shores of the Festival's Origin 32
Our Temples: Managing Temples Is Hard—the Agamas Provide a Complete Users' Manual 60

LIFESTYLE

- Insight:** Elegant Answers to Fourteen Questions People Commonly Ask About Hinduism 36
Hing: The Wonders of this Oft-Overlooked Spice 58
Health: Dr. Sodhi Explains How Ayurveda Can Help You Avoid Dreaded Diabetes 67

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** A Young Woman's Reflections on the Parental Duty to Pass on Our Hindu Heritage 9
Publisher's Desk: Practices to Prepare for Experiencing Your Innate Divinity 10
Letters 13
From the Upanishads: The *Chandogya Upanishad* Illumines the Path Leading Within 17
Asking Questions: Interviews and Reflections on the Roles of Women in Hinduism and Indian Society 34
Pushing Back: Revisiting Pat Robertson's Brutal Attack on Hinduism and Ram Swarup's Adroit Rebuttal 52

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** 6
Quotes & Quips 14
Digital Dharma 86

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What About Other Faiths?

One of the fourteen questions answered in our Educational Insight section speaks of how Hindus regard the other religions of the world. . . . Page 36

Artist Sundaram Rajan gathers followers of major religions onto a single platform, clockwise from lower right: Taoist, Buddhist, Jew, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Vaishnavite and Saivite.

GLOBAL DHARMA

COLONIAL TIMES

Robert Clive, Britain's Plunderer Extraordinaire

CREDITED WITH LAYING THE foundation for the British Empire in India in the 18th century, Major-General Robert Clive has only recently become better known for being the biggest thief of his day, bringing back so much loot from India that he became England's wealthiest person. This hadn't gone unnoticed in his day. He was actually brought before Parliament in 1772 over the large sums of money he had taken in India. He defended his actions as allowed by East India Company policy and stated, "I stand astonished at my own moderation."

According to a recent article in the *Khaleej Times* published from the UAE, the largest collection of spoils from India is held in Clive's Powis Castle in Wales. It is now administered

by the National Trust of Britain, which has acknowledged "the dubious way in which the collection was acquired and brought to England." This is in line with other museums who have taken an interest in just how the objects in their collections came to be there.

Among the 1,000 items in the castle are a gold tiger-head finial studded with diamonds, emeralds and rubies (right) from Tipu Sultan's throne, along with the sultan's state tent. The article states, "The trust notes that at Powis, it was used as a marquee for garden parties, highlighting the uncomfortable ways objects were used to signal colonial dominance and subjugation through appropriation." A review of the possessions, few on public display, is underway.



The spoils of war: (clockwise from top) Clive's Powis Castle in Wales; part of Tipu Sultan's throne; a jewel- and gold-studded vase

ARCHEOLOGY

Tamil Nadu's 2,200-Year-Old Murugan Temple Excavated

THE 2004 INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI uncovered an ancient Hindu temple at Saluvankuppam, south of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, near Mambalapuram, itself the site of many very old temples. According to an article on the travel blog Casual Walker (bit.ly/Saluvankuppam), the first evidence was a rock inscription revealed by the waves indicating the existence of a Subramanya temple.

Initially it was believed the temple was built with granite by the Pallavas around 800ce. Further excavation revealed a brick foundation dating to the Sangam era, 600bce to 300ce. The temple faces north, whereas most later temples face east or west. It appears that this original temple

was destroyed by waves around 200bce, then rebuilt by the Pallavas. It was again destroyed after



1215ce, the latest date given on nearby rock inscriptions recording donations to the temple, and only unearthed again by the 2004 tsunami.

The Archaeological Survey of India office in Chennai believes that the temple may well be the

oldest Subramanya temple ever excavated in Tamil Nadu.

The skinny, tabular bricks at the highest level were set by the Pallavas. The larger bricks beneath are plastered with lime and set on a gravel base—the same type of construction as found at other Sangam-era sites such as Puhar, Uraiyur, Mangudi and Arikamedu. Artifacts from that era have also been found nearby.

The original central sanctum is 6 by 7 feet and made of 27 courses of brick. A stone Vel, Murugan's spear, stands at the temple entrance. This stone spear was uprooted and broken in two by unknown vandals in May of 2018. It has since been repaired and reinstalled.

Tamil Nadu's Oldest: Foundation bricks more than 2,000 years old hold up Muruga's Vel (center)

PHOTOS: NATIONAL TRUST; CASUALWALKER.COM



Tradition continues: The new kartar signs the documents recognizing his ascension to the venerable religious seat

INDIA

Madurai Aadheenam Welcomes New Leader

SRI LA SRI HARIHARA SRI GNANASAMBANDA DESIKA SWAMIGAL, 67, took over as the 293rd pontiff of the Madurai Aadheenam in a formal ceremony on August 23, 2021. The previous head, Sri La Sri Arunagirinadha Sri Gnanasambanda Desika Paramacharya Swamigal, passed away after a prolonged illness on August 13th at the age of 77. The aadheenam, founded some 1,300 years ago, is one of the oldest Saivite monasteries in South India. It controls large amounts of farmland endowments and four temples and is a center of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. The new pontiff took sannyas at the age of 21 and has served in various posts at other aadheenams in Tamil Nadu.

KIDS

Modi Toys Creates a Playful Presentation of the Gods

SISTERS AVANI SARKAR AND Viral Modi both had daughters just a week apart four years ago. Both had lived in the US since an early age and in an immersive Hindu environment where maintaining their connection to India felt easy. "But," Sarkar told mycentraljersey.com, "We are raising first-generation Indian-American children. How would we ensure that our kids were connected and appreciative of their heritage and their faith? We didn't want to lose what was really important to us, really meaningful to us, and a big part of our dual identity."

Both sisters were part of the corporate world prior to the birth of their daughters. They

did not expect to become entrepreneurs, though they had applicable skills to do just that. Failing to find culturally relevant toys, they decided to make their own, resulting first in their plush, mantra-chanting Baby Ganesha. Now they also have a Hanuman and Krishna. Each has an accompanying book.

Sales, good from the start, have been enhanced by the pandemic. The sisters have added a musical crib mobile, a book on famous Hindu women past and present and more plush toys, including Goddess Saraswati. Sarkar told the website, "We realized that the problem we thought was unique to us was actually not unique to us at all. People realize

FOOD

Celebrating the Amazingly Multi-Functional Coconut

SEPTEMBER 2 IS WORLD COCONUT DAY, WE RECENTLY LEARNED from an article in the *Deccan Chronicle*. This is a most deserved honor for this versatile nut used in worship, cooking, cosmetics and medicines. Its surrounding fiber is made into ropes, brushes, rugs, mattress stuffing, potting mix, and even burned as insect repellent. The white flesh inside produces oil, flakes, flour and a non-dairy milk substitute. According to the report, doctors in olden times "used to burn the shells to prepare tooth powder, creams and ointments for burn wounds." If you happen to encounter "caprylic triglyceride" as an ingredient in an expensive cosmetic, know that's just coconut oil combined with glycerin.



Drinking coconuts: This Thai vendor's roasted coconut (at right) has a sweeter water and loose flesh inside—see bit.ly/roastedcoco

they want their kids to be really connected with all these other things, but also don't want them to lose sight of where they come from and all the things that

make them who they are — faith, culture, traditions. Parents want to be able to preserve that and pass it down." Their website is www.moditoys.com.



For their daughters: (left to right) Mantra-chanting Gods Ganesha, Krishna and Hanuman with their corresponding books

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK, WWW.MODITOYS.COM

Panpsychism: Science Tries To Explain Consciousness

SCIENTISTS ARE SERIOUSLY asking themselves a question the Hindu rishis asked and answered in the affirmative long ago: “Does consciousness pervade the universe?” An article by that title, published January 2020 in the prestigious *Scientific American* magazine (bit.ly/GoffPanpsychism), is an interview with Philip Goff, Associate Professor in Philosophy at Central European University in Budapest. Below is a short set of excerpts from the interview:

“In our standard view of things, consciousness exists only in the brains of highly evolved organisms, and hence consciousness exists only in a tiny part of the universe and only in very recent history. According to panpsychism, in contrast, consciousness pervades the universe and is a fundamental feature of it. This doesn’t mean that literally everything is conscious. The basic commitment is that the fundamental constituents of reality—perhaps electrons and

quarks—have incredibly simple forms of experience. And the very complex experience of the human or animal brain is somehow derived from the experience of the brain’s most basic parts.

“It might be important to clarify what I mean by ‘consciousness,’ as that word is actually quite ambiguous. Some people use it to mean something quite sophisticated, such as self-awareness or the capacity to reflect on one’s own existence. This is something we might be reluctant to ascribe to many nonhuman animals, never mind fundamental particles. But when I use the word *consciousness*, I simply mean experience: pleasure, pain, visual or auditory experience, et cetera.

“Human beings have a very rich and complex experience; horses less so; mice less so again. As we move to simpler and simpler forms of life, we find simpler and simpler forms of experience. Perhaps, at some point, the light switches off, and consciousness



Understanding consciousness: *Our brains are definitely part of the material world, but what we experience inside goes far beyond*

disappears. But it’s at least coherent to suppose that this continuum of consciousness, fading while never quite turning off, carries on into inorganic matter, with fundamental particles having almost unimaginably simple forms of experience to reflect their incredibly simple nature. That’s what panpsychists believe.

“Despite great progress in our scientific understanding of the brain, we still don’t have even the beginnings of an explanation

of how complex electrochemical signaling is somehow able to give rise to the inner subjective world of colors, sounds, smells and tastes that each of us knows in our own case. What panpsychism offers us is a beautifully simple, elegant way of integrating consciousness into our scientific worldview, of marrying what we know about ourselves from the inside and what science tells us about matter from the outside.”

served this mandir for hundreds of years. I will not abandon it.” The fate of the other half-dozen Hindu temples in Kabul has not been reported.

HINDUS IN COIMBATORE, TAMIL Nadu, were shocked by the early-morning demolition of seven temples on July 15, 2021, in Kumaraswamy Nagar. The demolition was part of a large redevelopment project, for which 2,400 homes have also been demolished. The residents were first provided new housing, according to the Coimbatore Municipal Corporation. News reports are unclear as to what efforts were made to relocate the temples, which is possible according to the *Agama* scriptures.

NEW CADETS JOINING THE HOUSTON Police Department were given an introduction to Hinduism in July by Thara Narasimhan and

Rasesh Dalal of the Hindus of Greater Houston. Explanations were given on Hindu philosophy and customs such as not wearing shoes inside the home. Also mentioned was the practice of wearing valuable jewelry on social and religious occasions—something that has resulted in brazen thefts in the past. Police in other cities in the US and UK have requested similar presentations from the Hindu community.

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HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Instilling Hindu Values

Hindu parents should teach their children to be both knowledgeable and proud of their religion

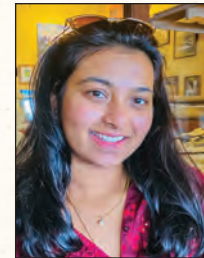
BY MANSA DEVAKI

I was fortunate to be born in an Indian Hindu family that is proud of its culture and religion. I was born in the Bay Area and raised there until I was twelve. Then we then moved to Maui, Hawaii. In California, my parents had taken my brother and me to the temple, like every other Hindu family. I enjoyed going there, meeting my regular temple friends and watching the fascinating pujas done by the priest. I loved to dress up in traditional Indian clothes and eat the prasadam after praying. While never forced to do religious rituals, as a dutiful daughter, I always did do them.

We had balanced lives, going to the temple but also being taken to the movie theater or park. Our parents understood that in today’s day and age, it is common for young people to waver from the right path if parents don’t listen to their questions and feelings. While many parents don’t explain the significance of Hindu rituals and prayers, mine would always tell us the reasons behind everything. They would buy us fun comics about the Hindu Gods that conveyed messages about our way of life. I applied these messages to life at school and home. I began to observe what other people were doing around me and the consequences they would face. This helped me build a stronger spiritual bond with the Supreme.

My family often travels to India to meet family and go on pilgrimages. Discovering our ancient religion through the temples there really grounded my brother and me and gave us a sense of belonging. We discovered there are real places behind the stories we’d read. For example, the *Ramayana* describes the floating stones of Rama Setu. I did not believe it until I saw these floating volcanic stones at Rameshwaram Temple.

Because I learned so much in my childhood about my roots, the transitions of my life have been easier. Whenever my peers in school ask me about India or Hinduism, I always have a proud answer ready. My family has always encouraged speaking



out, so I’m not shy to correct my teachers’ or friends’ occasional inaccuracies about my culture or religion. We studied Hinduism in middle school, and when the teacher stated an inaccuracy about the offerings we make at a havan, a fire ritual, I instantly raised my hand to correct it. I then had the opportunity to talk to my entire

class about Hinduism for the rest of the period. Everyone was impressed, and it was at that moment when I first realized that I am proud to be a Hindu.

It’s disappointing to see youth at our temples who do not understand what’s going on, or who seem ashamed or who even ridicule their own traditions. I believe it is a parent’s responsibility to instill Hindu values in their children, so they are not only aware of their culture, but proud of it. Religion helps stabilize a person’s identity and inner strength. So if parents encourage piano and tennis, why not emphasize the importance of discovering one’s true self in their religion and culture? Any questions, especially from children, should not be ignored.

Today, many people fail to understand the importance of religion and spirituality. In this yuga, violence and evil do exist; but our humanity does too, and keeping that alive is crucial. Hinduism teaches us to be dutiful, respectful and humane, which is crucial to this end. It has simple and logical beliefs that are not difficult to incorporate into our daily lives. Our philosophy of karma is a good example. If I am suffering today, then I should know that I have earned it and be more mindful in the future. This simple idea has a huge impact. We even see non-Hindus talking about karma, which should make us realize how fortunate we are to have this wisdom in our culture.

MANSA DEVAKI, 15, is a junior in high school in Maui, Hawaii. She is fond of teaching about the intricacies of Hinduism and loves to dance, sing, and spend time with family and friends. Email mansa@mansasys.com

BRIEFLY...

THE ROYAL MINT IN THE UK HAS

collaborated with the Shree Swaminarayan temple in Cardiff to produce a 20-gram (0.7 ounce) gold bar in honor of Diwali with the image of Goddess Lakshmi. The mint said the bar is a reflection of its continued commitment to diversity and inclusion of the UK’s varied cultural and religious traditions.

THE RECENT PEW REPORT OF THE

state of religion in India included useful information on fertility rates. The fertility rate in 2015, the most recent year data is available for, was 2.6 children per woman for Muslims and 2.1 for Hindus. In 1950, the average fertility rate for all of India was 5.9. The drop in rates in various

countries in recent decades generally tracks with the increase in women’s education.

THE NEW RAM TEMPLE IN AYODHYA

is expected to open to the public by December 2023. As of October 2021, engineers are close to completing a 39-foot-deep foundation pad covering 45 acres, containing an astounding 1.7 million cubic yards of concrete.

AFTER BEING INITIALLY BLOCKED

from leaving Afghanistan, many Sikhs and nearly all Hindus have fled the country. Pandit Rajesh Kumar, the last Hindu priest of the Rattan Nath Temple in Kabul, refused to go, stating, “My ancestors

How to Experience Your Innate Divinity

The *Upanishads* are clear, man is not man, man is God. But actually encountering that amazing reality takes work.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

THE CONCEPT THAT SACREDNESS RESIDES within each human being is foreign to many individuals, as the dominant activities in their experience are base emotions, such as anger and jealousy, and a confused intellect. Clearly, there is a lot going on within us that is not of a divine, or rarified, nature. However, just as the intellect is a higher state of mind than coarse emotions, there is a part of us that is a higher state than the intellect. It is called by many names, among them *intuition*, *superconsciousness*, *soul* and *atma*. Thus there are three aspects to our nature: physical/emotional, intellectual or mental and superconscious or spiritual.

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, describes them in this way: "When the outer, or lower, instinctive nature dominates, one is prone to anger, fear, greed, jealousy, hatred and backbiting. When the intellect is prominent, arrogance and analytical thinking preside. When the superconscious soul comes forth, the refined qualities are born—compassion, insight, modesty and the others. The animal instincts of the young soul are strong. The intellect, yet to be developed, is nonexistent to control these strong instinctive impulses. When the intellect is developed, the instinctive nature subsides. When the soul unfolds and overshadows the well-developed intellect, this mental harness is loosened and removed."

Finding Divinity in the Temple

Intellectually accepting that divinity is within us is, of course, only the first step. We need to find a way to actually experience that divinity. The simplest way presents itself when we visit a temple. A sincere devotee can experience divinity in and around the temple's murtis, the consecrated images of God and Gods. The Sanskrit term for this holy vibration is *sannidhya*. Learning to experience a temple's *sannidhya* may take some time, especially if we have not been raised to be sensitive to the energy that radiates out from a sacred image, or murti.

Gurudeva described this process: "The reality of the Mahadevas and their darshan [blessings] can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened ajna vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This darshan can be felt by all devotees, becoming stronger and more defined as devotion is perfected."

Here are three suggestions to help an individual become sensitive enough to experience the *sannidhya* radiating out from the murti.

1. Bring an offering for each shrine at which you worship. This can be a flower, a flower garland or fruit. The act of giving in this simple way makes you receptive to blessings.

2. Pay particular attention at the high point of the puja, during the arati, when a large lamp is waved

before the Deity and bells are rung loudly. The blessings of the Deity are strongest at this time.

3. Sit after puja for five minutes with the murti in view. Absorb the *sannidhya* emanating from the murti. Be like a sponge soaking up water. For this to work, you need to empty yourself of extraneous thoughts and focus only on the murti.

Sanctifying the Home Shrine

Once you are able to consistently experience the *sannidhya* in the temple, it is natural to take up the next level of practice. This is to

create a sacredness in your home shrine through performing each day a simple puja, such as to Lord Ganesha. Over a period of years, you can learn to invoke a stronger and stronger sanctity in the home shrine which eventually is powerful enough to radiate out to the other rooms in the home.

Seeking the Divine Within Yourself

Experiencing Divinity in the temple and then establishing it in the home shrine provide an excellent foundation for finding divinity within yourself. This can be done through three simple steps.

1. *Pranayama*: The first step is to regulate your breathing, which is called *pranayama*. An effective pranayama is to breathe in for nine counts, hold for one count, breathe out for nine counts and hold for one count. This will cause your thoughts to slow down. You will then experience greater alertness as your awareness becomes more subtle and refined.

2. *Pratyahara*: The next practice, called *pratyahara*, is to withdraw energy into the spine. On the first in-breath, bring awareness into the left leg, all the way to the toes, and on the out-breath slowly withdraw the energy from that leg into the spine. Repeat with the right leg, left arm (all the way to the fingertips), right arm and finally the torso.

3. *Merudanda*: The third practice is to feel the spiritual energy within the spine. Gurudeva gives this description: "The third step takes us deeper inside as we become dynamically aware in the spine. Feel the power within the spine, the powerhouse of energy that feeds out to the external nerves and muscles. Visualize the spine in your mind's eye. See it as a hollow yellow tube or channel through which white life energies flow. Feel it with your inner feeling. See it with your inner eyes. It's there—subtle and silent, yet



God within: Artist S. Rajam ingeniously depicts Divinity—Siva as the Lingam—within a meditator. The rudraksha beads the yogi wears have a single thread holding them together, representing pure consciousness or Satchidananda.

Identify yourself with this cosmic energy of Lord Siva and begin to live your true spiritual heritage on this earth." Paramaguru Yogaswami expressed the same idea in one of his letters: "You are not the body; you are not the mind, nor the intellect, nor the will. You are the atma. The atma is eternal. This is the conclusion at which great souls have arrived from their experience. Let this truth become well impressed on your mind."

Seeing God Everywhere

Once we are able to identify as an immortal soul and thus see divinity within ourself, it becomes possible to see it within everyone we meet. One practice to accomplish this is to look deeply into the eyes of another person. Look beyond the personality, go deeper than his or her intellect and see the pure life energy, which is God. This is described by the phrase "God is the Life of your life." This practice does not need to stop with people but can also include seeing the life energy in trees, birds and animals as God. A verse from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* states: "He who knows God as the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, he indeed comprehends fully the Cause of all causes."

Taking this one step deeper is to see yourself as the Divine in all beings. In other words, you are not looking at another person. You are looking at yourself. This is, of course, God's point of view, a state of universal or omnipresent consciousness called *Satchidananda*. When we are in this state, we know that we are all living beings, all of existence. The *Mrigendra Agama* tells us, "Pure consciousness, taking form as knowledge and action, is present in the soul everywhere and always, for the soul is universal in its unfettered state."

A japa mala traditionally consists of 108 beads strung on a cord. The beads can be compared to human beings, and the cord to Satchidananda. There is only one cord, and that same cord passes through each bead, connects each bead. Each human being can look within, through introspection, or meditation. When this inner viewing is done deeply enough, they can see the one thread of omnipresent consciousness that pervades everyone, indeed all life and form. Looking deeper, they see they are that thread.

Thus our search to experience the divine takes us step by step from being unaware of the Divine to seeing the Divine in a temple's murtis, in our home shrine, in ourself, in others and, finally, realizing that we are the Divine within all that is. Paramaguru Yogaswami has said it well: "You will find the attributes of the Divine in man. If you look a little more closely, you will find that man is himself the Divinity...It would not be an overstatement if I say that man is God."

totally intense. It is a simple, honest feeling. As you feel this hollow yellow spine filled with white energy, realize that you are more that energy than you are the physical body through which it flows, more that pure clear white energy than the emotions and the thought force.



LETTERS

Yoga and Human Biology

Thank you very much for an excellent article "Yoga's affect on human biology" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2021). I really enjoyed reading it and will be sharing it with my family and friends.

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Perspectives on the Swastika

With reference to the HPI (Hindu Press International) article "Re-Vilifying Swastika" (July 31, 2020): At Balmoral, Scotland, just outside the gates to the Scottish residence of the British Royal Family, there is a stone memorial to those fallen in the First World War. Around the three edges of the plinth are engraved myriads of small swastikas. There is no doubt that this was in deference to Britain's relationship with India, and the sacrifices of Indian troops and people in WWI.

Of course, the colonial occupation of India by the East India Company, and then the British Crown, has in recent years rightly come under much review for its profound injustices, exploitation and plundering of the nations resources. But, just after WWI, the British no doubt still viewed "British India" with rose-tinted spectacles, and the engraving of the swastikas is an act of respect.

When we lived in Scotland, I used occasionally to check if the engravings were still there. In these awful times of both discovering and negating historical truths and events, I feared that the swastikas would be removed to appease the "pc" brigade, for the same reasons that dreadfully selfish, misguided and narrow-minded American Christians are trying to vilify the swastika in educational documents. I am certain that Jesus would not have approved. We have moved a long way



From "Yoga and Human Biology":

Nadis are the channels through which life energies flow. Of the ten major ones, three are most important: Ida (relates to Brahma knot at muladhara chakra), Pingala (relates to Vishnu knot at the anahata chakra) and Sushmana (relates to Siva knot at the ajna chakra). When these nadis are blocked by knots, called

granthis, prana's flow is hindered. The cause of the knots are past samskaras and karmas. One of our jobs in yoga sadhana is to untie these knots that bind us to changing form rather than allowing us to rise through the chakras into unchanging consciousness.

Hinduism Today (Oct/Nov/Dec 2021)

from the truths propounded for the benefit of humanity by Him and Mohammed.

CLIVE & PUVANESWARY ROBERTS
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John Adams' View of Hinduism

This excellent article is evidentiary support that some of the greatest political minds America ever produced were not supporters of the biased exclusiveness that the uneducated dogmatists love to "flag wave" (Jul/Aug/

Sep, 2021). It is refreshing to see young bright Hindus lay claim to their country (America the beautiful) and help to enlighten it.

For me, as a Canadian by birth but raised in the United States, the power of Hindu thinking in my first year of college was a most liberating experience. My first course in Asian studies, with introductions to Gandhi, Tagore, and Vedic wisdom through the *Upnishads* collided with the Judaic Christian suggestions at the time. I found the profound

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



possibilities within these teachings more inspiring than anything I had ever been exposed to.

These all-inclusive Hindu perspectives were further supported in English literature with exposure to Emerson and Thoreau. I wondered how all this had escaped being mentioned in my earlier education and now applaud the relentless work of those who are committed to refashioning it.

DEVA SEYON
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I was looking for info on Hinduism in America's founding, and you provided it. Adams is one of our great founders, and I was glad to read his opinion on Hinduism. Likewise, your information on the Greeks being influenced by Hinduism was also super. Good job. Thanks for your work.

JEFF
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Along the Ganga

Dev Raj jee, I enjoyed so much reading your article "Along the Lesser-Known Ganga Below Haridwar" (Jul/Aug/Sept 2021). This is a great account. I deeply admire the way you articulated the customs, heritage and cultures which survived despite invasions. Each event you described has all dimensions, the

leisure, entertainment, yet the reverence to Ma Ganga, as you said. Devotion and honor in the minds of people can be so easily understood through your lucid descriptions. For example, the Pehran ceremony is so romantic yet so respecting. Thank you very much for this travelog!

GIRISH KALE
GIRISH.ELAK@GMAIL.COM

What a wonderful virtual journey! I love the way you connected the Ganga lore to the *Mahabharata*, bringing history to life. Thank you for your hard work, especially during a pandemic! Namaste.

SWAMINI VISHWA PRATIBHA
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Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is a special day. Every year I wish to be with my brother on this day but have not been able to in the past few years. Thanks for sharing the beautiful blog "Raksha Bandhan, the Family Festival" (Oct 1994).

RASHI
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Nepal Youth Speak Out

The article about Nepalese Hindus was well written (Apr/May/Jun 2021). I got to know a lot about Nepalese Hindus and their traditions. I am an Indian Hindu and I just recently

learned about HINDUISM TODAY magazine. I hope I'll glean more about Hinduism worldwide through this magazine in the future.

HARSHIT SRIVASTAVA
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Testimony on Satsang

The very well written article "How Satsang Made Me a Strong Hindu" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2020) reflects the thoughts of many Hindus. Kudos to the writer for being so humble

SAPNA KUMARASWAMY
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Paramahansa Yogananda

Thank you for the excellent synopsis of the life and teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda. It shows many years of research, which has been beautifully expressed here.

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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Diffusing Eternal Wisdom—Even Amid Changing Times

Help Hinduism remain the unshakable beacon, whatever winds may blow

On this page in previous issues our publisher Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami explained how modern trends are challenging the economics of the publishing industry. Below, he delineates two more major trends that make HINDUISM TODAY especially pertinent at this time, and worthy of your support.

As the world continues to change—faster and faster, it seems—our magazine needs to adapt also. There are two important contemporary trends that we are paying special attention to in order to stay ever vital and relevant.

One of them is the marked tendency among Hindus today, and especially the youth, to turn away from traditional religion in favor of self-assembled beliefs and practices. In articles we have published, many Indian and Nepali youth declare themselves "spiritual but not religious," preferring group meditations to temple worship, for instance. The late and distinguished Ram Swarup said insightfully, "Hinduism resides in all seeking hearts and, whenever one's seeking for God becomes spiritual, Hinduism automatically blooms. How could a man's innermost truth



be kept away from him? And for how long?" HINDUISM TODAY's articles on Sanatana Dharma's profound spirituality existing within oneself can provide useful guidance to sincere seekers as they discover in their own soul-searching that they hold the core Hindu beliefs in karma, reincarnation and all-pervasive Divinity.

Another major trend among Hindus is an aversion to daily practice. In our October/

November/December 2021 issue, Amar Shah, Hindu Chaplain at Northwestern University, wrote, "Practice what you post!" He explains that "sadhanas are manifold and multifaceted to suit our innumerable personalities: puja, japa, *dhyana* (meditation) and *svadhyaya* (self-study) are a few that come to mind. As my guru has so nicely put it—the array of Hindu sadhana is like a buffet! Just as South Indians will naturally gravitate toward fresh idli, and Northerners will eye the paneer-laden gravies, we all have natural compatibility with different sadhanas. With such a variety available, we must pick up at least one practice, sharpen ourselves, and speak from the depths of self-experience."

Here again, HINDUISM TODAY is helpful. It illuminates a variety of practices and complements them with personal testimonies by devotees who have found them meaningful.

You can help fortify HINDUISM TODAY's finances so that it will, even in these changing times, dynamically continue to be Hinduism's strong, clear voice at: bit.ly/help-HT.

Or contact us at:
+1-888-464-1008 • support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“Do not love leisure. Waste not a minute. Be bold. Realize the Truth here and now!”

Swami Sivananda (1887–1963)

All you want is to be happy. All your desires, whatever they may be, are longing for happiness. Basically, you wish yourself well...desire by itself is not wrong. It is life itself, the urge to grow in knowledge and experience. It is the choices you make that are wrong. To imagine that some little thing—food, sex, power, fame—will make you happy is to deceive oneself. Only something as vast and deep as your real Self can make you truly and lastingly happy.

Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981),
a guru of the *Inchagiri Sampradaya*

Seek the wisdom that will untie your knot. Seek the path that demands your whole being. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

We cannot live better than in seeking to become better. **Socrates** (469–399bce), *Athenian philosopher*

Desireless, wise, immortal, self-existent, full of bliss, lacking in nothing is the one who knows the wise, unaging, youthful soul within him. He fears not death! *Atharva Veda X.8.446*

The more deeply we perceive, the more striking becomes the evidence that a uniform plan links every form in manifold nature. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

He who runs after good fortune runs away from peace. *African proverb*

This is a wonderful day, I have never seen this one before. **Maya Angelou** (1928–2014), *American poet*

The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

I have learned you are never too small to make a difference. **Greta Thunberg**, *Swedish environmental activist*

He is light within you; to know how to reach Him is true path of becoming; if you know thus, you know contradiction none;

that is path supreme, your goal's end; they are but folks poor in spirit that know not merging. *Tirumantiram 1547*

The happiness of the world is transitory. The less you become attached to the world, the more you enjoy peace of mind. **Sarada Devi** (1853–1920)

There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting. **Gautama Buddha** (563–483bce)

Just as a lamp gets extinguished when the oil is exhausted, so the yogi extinguishes his former self when ego identification ceases to exist in perfect meditation. *Sarvajnanottara Agama, Yoga Pada, v51*

You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realize this and you will find strength. **Marcus Aurelius** (121–180), *Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher*

The quest after Truth and to be truthful is a human being's duty. Do your utmost to become anchored in Truth and spend

much time in the contemplation of the Lord in a quiet secluded place. Human beings have to be dwellers of the Inner Cave so that the Supreme Being who resides within may be revealed. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *yogini and mystic Bengali saint*

Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; seek what they sought. **Kukai** (774–835), *founder of Shingon Buddhism*

When two great forces oppose each other, the victory will go to the one that knows how to yield. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 bce), *author of Tao Te Ching*

Through giving to others and getting our mind more involved with other people, we become happier. Through being selfish and focusing on getting, happiness is always elusive. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*



So great is the Sanatana Dharma that it defies all who doubt it—all who disdain it, all who disregard it, all who degrade it—with personal realization of its Truth. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

Vedic Influences in Japan

WITH THE GRADUAL SPREAD OF Buddhism from ancient India to Tibet, China, South East Asia, Japan and elsewhere, it's little wonder that other aspects of Indian culture and Hinduism traveled in tandem. Hindu Deities have long been found in Tibet's Vedic-infused Vajrayana form of Buddhism, which long ago made its way into China and eventually to Korea and Japan.

In 804 a Japanese monk scholar, known as Kukai, traveled to China by ship. He began study at Ximing monastery under the tutelage of Huiguo, a Buddhist master of the Vajrayana tradition. Huiguo had translated many important Sanskrit texts. Kukai also learned from Pranja, a senior monk who had studied at the famed Nalanda University near Pataliputra in India. Upon his arrival, Kukai was immediately initiated by Huiguo and became the lineage's eighth successor, instructed to bring their teachings to Japan.

Kukai returned to Japan in 806, having learned Sanskrit and Siddham script. He

brought with him many Indian scriptures and would go on to found what is known today as Shingon Buddhism—the primary form of the Vajrayana tradition as it exists in Japan. You can now find many Shingon temple's throughout Japan's islands, their monks performing Vedic fire ceremonies and their shrines adorned with Vajrayana versions of Indian Deities.

There are now said to be over 250 Ganesha (Kangiten) temples in Japan, while other Hindu Gods such as Siva (Daikokuten), Lakshmi (Kichijoten), Sarasvati (Benzaitenno) and Skanda (Ida-Ten), can be also found in shrines and temples throughout the country.

.....
India to Japan: Statues of Benzaiten (Saraswati), Kangiten (Ganesha) and Bishamonten (Kubera) at the Daishoin temple in Hatsukaichi, Japan; Bishop of Miyata performs the fire ritual at Koyasan Temple (founded by Kukai) on Mount Koya.



BASICS

What Is Sadhana?

THERE ARE THREE DIMENSIONS TO OUR being: physical, emotional/intellectual and spiritual. All three need attention for optimum health. Exercise strengthens our physical body. Learning and practicing self control expands and enhances our emotional/mental capacity. Through sadhana, spiritual practice, we exercise our spiritual nature by taking time to experience it. Most of the time we are so wrapped up in our outer nature that we are hardly aware of our deep, glorious inner reality. This can go on life after life, as many people only begin to think of greater realities when nearing the point of death. We give time to our spiritual nature by performing religious activities, ideally as a daily vigil or spiritual exercise. During this quiet time alone, we focus on life's inner purpose, which is to make spiritual progress. Puja, japa, scriptural study, hatha yoga and meditation are all forms of sadhana. Some sadhanas are yearly, such as going on pilgrimage. Some may be assigned

by the guru as a one-time practice. A popular sadhana is chanting "AUM" 108 times each day. The ten-minute spiritual workout is becoming popular in today's busy world. These times of quiet retreat from life's hustle and bustle are underrated, their benefits overlooked. Sadhana builds willpower, faith and confidence in oneself and in God, Gods and guru. It harnesses our instinctive-intellectual nature, allowing unfoldment into the superconscious realizations and innate abilities of the soul. Gurudeva noted: "Through sadhana we learn to control the energies of the body and nerve system, and we experience that through the control of the breath the mind becomes peaceful. Sadhana is practiced in the home, in the forest, by a flowing river, under a favorite tree, in the temple, in gurukulas or wherever a pure, serene atmosphere can be found."

Drawn from the teachings of
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami





Just Released: A Magical Book For Children About Yoga and the Mind

Lion Sage is a child's version of the metaphysical masterpiece *Merging with Siva*. It teaches children how to face life's challenges, but most importantly informs them of their true identity.

Young ones are taught they are not the body which suffers now and then. They are not the emotions that well up in good times and not so good times. They are not the thinking mind. They are light and love; they are an immortal soul on a path of self-discovery. Knowing this one truth can alter a young life forever. As you take your children through these pages, you are providing a deep comprehension of life and values that few people have. You are teaching them to live in the now and not dwell on the past or worry about the future. You are giving them time-honored tools to create a happier, less stressful childhood.

I'm All Right, Right Now

Chapter 16, in which Lion Sage teaches our mouse how to be peaceful and unafraid no matter what challenges life may bring



Free PDF, Epub or Mobi Version Available at:
himalayanacademy.com/view/lion-sage

FROM THE UPANISHADS Comprehending Comprehension

A father's advice to a son eager for spiritual mastery

The following is a translation of the Chandogya Upanishad's chapter seven, from *The Principal Upanishads* by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad belongs to the Samaveda. Chapter Seven contains a dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaketu. The following verses have been edited for clarity.

17. Uddalaka Aruni: "When one understands, then he speaks the truth. One who does not understand does not speak the truth. Only he who understands speaks the truth. But one must desire to understand understanding." "Father, I desire to understand understanding," said Shvetaketu.
18. "When one thinks, then he understands, one who does not think does not understand. Only he who thinks understands. But one must desire to understand thinking." "Father, I desire to understand thinking."
19. "When one has faith, then he thinks. One who has not faith does not think. Only he who has faith thinks. But one must desire to understand faith." "Father, I desire to understand faith."
20. "When one has steadfastness, then one has faith. One who has not steadfastness does not have faith. Only he who has steadfastness has faith. But one must desire to understand steadfastness." "Father, I desire to understand steadfastness."
21. "When one is active, one has steadfastness. Without being active, one has not steadfastness. Only by activity does one have steadfastness. But one must desire to understand activity." "Father, I desire to understand activity."
22. "When one obtains happiness, then one is active. One who does not obtain happiness is not active. Only he who obtains happiness is active. But one must desire to understand happiness." "Father, I desire to understand happiness."
23. "The infinite is happiness. There is no happiness in anything small or finite. But one must desire to understand the infinite." "Father, I desire to understand the infinite."
- 24.1. "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the infinite. But where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the small, the finite. Verily, the infinite is the same as the immortal, the finite is the same as the mortal." "Father, on what is the infinite established?" Uddalaka: "On its own greatness or not even on greatness."
- 24.2. "Here on Earth men call cows and horses,



elephants and gold, slaves and wives, fields and houses 'greatness.' I do not speak thus," he said, "for in that case each thing is established in another.

- 25.1. "That infinite indeed is below. It is above. It is behind. It is in front. It is to the south, it is to the north. It is indeed all this world. In regards to the experience of one's true Self, I indeed, am below. I am above, I am behind, I am in front. I am to the south, I am to the north; I am all this world."
- 25.2. "Now further instruction in regard to the Self. The Self indeed is below, is above, is behind, is in front, is to the south, and is to the north. The Self, indeed, is all this world. Those who see this, who think this, who understand this—They have pleasure in the Self. They can delight in the Self. They have union in the Self. They experience joy in the Self. They are their own, an independent self-ruler. They have unlimited freedom in all worlds. But those who think differently from this are dependent on others, they have others for their rulers. They exist in perishable worlds between which they cannot travel."
- 26.1. "For one who understands this, life-breath springs from the Self, hope from the Self, memory from the Self, ether from the Self, heat from the Self, water from the Self, appearance and disappearance from the Self, food from the Self, strength from the Self, understanding from the Self, meditation from the Self, thought from the Self, determination from the Self, mind from the Self, speech from the Self, name from the Self, sacred hymns from the Self, sacred works from the Self, indeed, all existence from the Self."
- 26.2. "On this there is the following verse: 'He who sees this does not see death nor illness nor any sorrow. He who sees this sees everything and obtains everything everywhere. He is one, becomes threefold, fivefold, sevenfold and also ninefold. Then again he is called the elevenfold, also a hundred and elevenfold and also twenty thousandfold. When nourishment is pure, nature is pure. When nature is pure, memory becomes firm. When memory remains firm, there is release from all knots of the heart. To such a one who has his stains wiped away, the venerable Sanatkumara shows the further shore of darkness. Him they call Skanda.'"

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first vice president (1952–1962) and second president (1962–1967)



KESHAV PORAHOO

Meet the new generations charged with maintaining and enriching their religious identity in a multicultural island nation

BY SAVITA TIWARI, MAURITIUS

ON THE DARK EVENING OF NOVEMBER 2nd, 1834, thirty-six Indian laborers arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius, on the *Atlas*, the first ship to bring Indian indentured laborers to Mauritius. Apprehensive at the unknown lives that awaited them, they disembarked onto Mauritian soil, perhaps unknowingly embedding the footprint of Hinduism onto this foreign land. Together, they would create a cultural and religious impression that would last into the foreseeable future.

Each of these immigrants carried his or her bundle of personal possessions from the homeland: Indian clothing, scarce personal trinkets, and copies of the *Ramayana*—the classic story which would serve as a foundation and anchor for Hinduism in this new country. These books, some given as departing gifts from their family and elders, carried the message that even though you are leaving everything you know behind, you must never abandon your dharma.

Mauritius was named in 1598 by the Dutch after their Prince Maurice of Nassau. However, the Hindu folk tales by our Mauritian forebears have another version of the story. They call it *Marich Desh*, after the demon king Marich. It is said that Marich and Subahu were brothers, the sons of the demoness Tadaka. Marich was Ravana's maternal uncle, as Tadaka was the mother of both

Marich and Kaikasi. We all know the story where Ram killed demoness Tadaka and her son Subahu, but mistakenly shot a crooked arrow towards Marich. The arrow struck Marich's chest and threw him a hundred miles away, into the ocean.

In the *Ramayana* that story ends there; but in Mauritius it continues in the form of a folk tale. It says that Ram's arrow threw Marich to the island of Mauritius. Marich's life was spared, and he became a saintly person. He lived the life of an ascetic on this island, setting up an ashram and renouncing his demonic qualities. He began to realize his past mistakes and became a devotee of Ram. When Ravana approached Marich to help him with the abduction of Sita, Marich refused. Ravana threatened him with death, but Marich chose instead to die by the hand of Ram. When Ram killed Marich in the form of a golden deer, Marich accepted his sins, and Ram gave him a boon: his island would henceforth be called Marich Desh, Indians would one day come to the island with the *Ramayana*, and Ram's name would echo throughout the country. Thus, Marich died peacefully.

Our ancestors found solace in this story and considered that they were brought to this foreign land by the will of Ram.

The indentured immigrants lived challenging lives under English rule. Toiling all day in sugarcane fields, at night they took shelter in Ram's name and chanted the *Ramayana's* verses in groups, forgetting their pains of the day and the problems of tomorrow. That's how Hinduism survived those arduous old days in Mauritius.

Past and present: (opposite page) Keshav Porahoo, right, supports his friend during an annual kavadi procession for Lord Murugan; (below) a painting depicting the *Atlas*; a wide-angle view of the capital, Port Louis



SURVEYS

Mauritius Youth Reflect on Hinduism



SHUTTERSTOCK

Today, 187 years later, Hinduism is as heartfelt as when it arrived on the island. The newer generation is bringing forward the teachings and rituals of Hinduism in their own way.

AN EVOLVING HERITAGE

For this article I have talked to many Hindu youth. One thing is clear: the present generation of Mauritians are vastly different Hindus from their elders. While the elder generation largely thought of themselves as Indian Hindus, this generation identifies themselves as Mauritian Hindus. This fifth generation has accepted that, being born here, they are not Indian but Mauritian and that their way of practicing their religious tradition is distinct from Indian Hindus. Due to an early lack of means and facilities, the practices and traditions evolved in a unique way through those five generations, and today's youth consider the Mauritian practices as their heritage.

A COMPLEX CULTURE

Mauritius is well known as a rainbow nation. Its population is 50 percent Hindu, 16 percent Muslim and 24 percent Christian. These groups, each strong in matters of their faith, have lived in relative peace and harmony.

French Creole is spoken as a first language by 90 percent of islanders. In addition, substantial numbers speak one of six Indian languages, as their ancestors were brought from widely different parts of India. The majority, sailing from Calcutta, spoke Bhojpuri; Marathi speakers sailed from Mumbai;

speakers of Tamil and Telugu sailed from Madras (now Chennai). Hindi- and Gujarati-speaking laborers were also brought to the island. Each of these language groups included various subcultures. Another group, a small number of Indian merchants, would later sail to Mauritius from Surat, in Gujarat.

Hindus in Mauritius are classified based

"Our Hindu Mauritian ancestors did what they thought was right while so far from their cultural origins. They all knew they were a part of the larger Hindu community, and that they prayed to the same Gods."

SANJIVA NARASIMHA APPADOO

on language. Bhojpuri-speaking people whose ancestors came from the state of Bihar in India are simply called "Hindus," as are small communities like Gujaratis. Others have modifiers: for example, a Marathi speaker is called "Marathi Hindu" or just "Marathi." The same goes for other ethnic groups of Tamil and Telugu Hindus. Even government forms have the options of Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Hindu in the religion section.

These distinctions stem from the colonial days, when indentured laborers were brought to Mauritius from different parts of India. Once in Mauritius, each community

was split up, employed on different plantations across the island. Few people of any one community were employed together, to prevent the formation of organized groups. Even many husbands and wives who arrived together were separated in this way. All the Indian communities were mixed so that communication was difficult.

The first generation of these indentured laborers lived where the colonial powers forced them to. But the second generation—the first generation of Mauritius-born Hindus—understood the disadvantage of living apart from others of their same language and heritage. When the indenture laws were amended, giving more freedom, they formed their own communities, united by language and culture, the smaller groups calling themselves Tamil, Telugu, Marathi or Gujarati to distinguish themselves from the majority Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus. Mauritian Hindus have long come to accept these classifications in everyday life, while knowing we are all of the same core religion.

Some customs spread among the various

.....
Religious life in Mauritius: (left to right) Telegu scholar Sanjiva Narasimha Appadoo discusses the history of Mauritian Hindus on a local radio program; a boy greets the 108-foot-tall Durga Mata statue at the island's sacred lake of Ganga Talao; a young woman distributes laddu at a Ganesha festival; a family worships at Ganga Talao, the island's most sacred lake; (upper right) a Hanuman shrine outside someone's home

groups. Telegu scholar Sanjiva Narasimha Appadoo explains: "When Indians were brought to Mauritius, they lived together in mixed communities for a long time, so the culture and rituals got intertwined. For example the Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus brought the tradition of Hanuman Chautra, a shrine at one's home where an image of Lord Hanuman and two red flags are placed. The huts were so small that they made a shrine outside their huts. They placed a stone at the entrance of their huts and just like that the tradition of Hanuman Chautra at the entrance of the house started. The other Hindu communities from the south and west of India also adapted these traditions. So today the Hanuman Chautra can be seen in many Tamil, Telugu and Marathi families. Everyone changes the flags yearly by inviting priests for a prayer, and they also invite elders. If someone wants to make it big they organize this flag changing on their child's birthday."

Another notable cultural exchange happened in the cuisine. Today, most of our island's Hindu communities serve seven curry platters during marriages and other auspicious occasions. This tradition came from South Indian communities. Puri, the fried bread from North India, also made a place for itself in this platter as a staple along with rice.

Our Hindu Mauritian ancestors did what they thought was right while so far from their cultural origins. They all knew they were a part of the larger Hindu community, and that they prayed to the same Gods. But to preserve their culture and religion, each group cocooned itself, and each generation



SAVITA TIWARI

with which immigrants arrived in Mauritius weren't even noted on the papers. And the spellings of their first names were written in a distorted manner by the English officers. But people kept note of their own jati and family tradition as much as possible. At present caste only comes into the scene at the time of marriage. Though inter-caste marriages are a common phenomenon here, parents do urge their children to marry into their jati or at least their community, like a Tamil marrying a Tamil. Most of the interviewees said that although they do not pay much attention to caste, it does affect their personal or social life in some way.

HINDUISM AND THE MEDIA

Many Mauritians start their day listening to the religious songs played by the state-owned radio station. Radio always plays in the background while

people complete their morning household chores. The selection of songs depends on the day: Siva songs are played on Monday and Hanuman songs on Tuesday. Wednesday is reserved for Ganesha, Thursday for the guru, Friday for Lakshmi, Saturday for Venkateswara and Sunday for Surya songs. Every evening a 20-minute session plays a mix of bhajans. Acharyas and pundits are also invited to the studios to deliver discourses.

Every day at 5am, the state TV channel broadcasts the Aastha channel from India, showing Baba Ramdev's yoga programs. This one-hour show is popular among Mauritian Hindus. These radio and TV programs are an integral part of Mauritian Hindu life.

instilled in the next the need to protect our traditions and beliefs in this new land, and transfer our religion to the next generation.

The newer generations have found themselves in a larger and more connected world. They are emerging from these cocoons and simply calling themselves Hindus. None of my interviewees mentioned that they were Marathi Hindus, Tamil Hindus or any other. They are simply Hindu.

THE CASTE FACTOR

The Indian population is further divided into jatis. Most people think Mauritius is a casteless society, due to absence of caste-indicating surnames. The Indian surnames

Understanding the Past & Present



SANJIVA NARASIMHA APPADOO



SAVITA TIWARI



MANICK RAJEN



SHUTTERSTOCK

HINDUISM AND POLITICS

As half the population is Hindu, all Mauritian presidents but one and all prime ministers but one have been Hindus. Most Hindu celebrations are public holidays. The candidates in constituencies are selected on the basis of religion and jati. Because of this, some youth feel that government jobs and promotions are another area where their jati matters.

A government-appointed task force makes sure that state-observed holidays, festivals and fairs are organized in a smooth and safe manner. Aside from that, the government doesn't interfere much with the religious traditions and customs of any religion.

HINDU LIFE IN MAURITIUS

At the entrance and exit of almost every village in Mauritius is a Kali temple or shrine, a *Kali Maiyee*. Here Maa Kali is prayed to as Gram Devi, or Village Mother. Seven stones are placed under a tree or at the feet of the Goddess to represent the seven forms of Kali. In some of the older villages these stones were placed centuries ago by our ancestors. The present generation visits Kali Maiyee in notably good or bad times, making the obligatory offering of kheer-puri. You'll commonly find someone there after the birth of child or after a marriage, or when someone falls severely ill and recovers.

Once a year, a community prayer is

organized at these Kali Maiyee where all the residents of the village contribute and participate. In the early days, there was a custom of doing an animal sacrifice, but this has stopped because newer generations feel that such rituals do not belong in Hinduism. Different ethnic groups pray to the Goddess in

"When I was growing up, my idea of Hinduism was the daily prayer done by my mother at home. The special Siva Abhishekam that we do each Monday with the whole family holds a special place in my heart."

LAKSHMI DEVI HURDAY

different ways. The Telugu community prays to Her as Ammoru, meaning "mother of the village." At some temples there is a yearly tradition of the women walking in a procession from one temple to another carrying water pots above their heads.

Another common practice for Hindus on our island is to visit a brahmin or call him immediately after a child is born. The child's birth time is registered with the priest, and the first letter of their name is calculated

according to the horoscope.

When someone dies, the first call goes to the priest to check if *panchak nakshatras* are prevailing. Elders believe that if a person dies in this astrological time period, they will take four more people's lives with them. The youth are skeptical about these customs, but they will go obediently and check with the priest when told by elders to do so.

Almost all interviewees said that Hindu youth can be identified easily by strangers because most wear a red *raksha sutra* (sacred thread) on their wrist, tied by a priest during a prayer at their home or in the temple.

Hindu houses, too, are easily recognized here. Along with the home shrine inside the house, almost all have the aforementioned Hanuman Chautra—a Hanuman shrine adorned with two red flags. One can also see several bottles at the entrance, usually a transparent glass bottle such as a Coke bottle, filled with holy Ganga water from Ganga Talao of Mauritius. It is believed that the Ganga water keeps evil and negativity at bay.

YOUNG HINDUS OF MAURITIUS

A few common themes came to light while talking to the interviewees. Everyone seems to enjoy Hindu festivals. Even those who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious" joyfully participate in these festivals, enjoying getting together with extended

family on Rakhi or on colorful Holi. Mauritius provides a whole calendar year full of events. In the Satyanarayan Katha ceremony, performed at home, hundreds of family members and friends gather for the whole day to pray for someone's successful marriage. At Mahasivaratri, it seems like the whole island makes a pilgrimage to our most sacred lake, Ganga Talao. The young Hindus of Mauritius enjoy it all.

On the other hand, the youth do not like the tantric rituals some people perform. Sometimes they find a lemon with coins and red sindoor, and maybe even a sacrificed animal, outside someone's home. All the interviewees condemn these acts. They point out that the police don't seem to act on people's complaints about such activities.

Overall however, interviewees say they enjoy their religious traditions. Social life is very busy, with constant invitations for friends' and sisters' weddings, or to Ganesha Chaturthi Deity installations at friends' homes, to join in the traditional *jhakri* dance. Then there is the one month of being strict

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The youth of Mauritius: (left to right) Keshav Porahoo's family perform a *havana* for a departed loved one; Keshav, network specialist, during Holi; young Hindus display the *raksha sutra* on their wrists; Yadav Muneshar enjoying the surrounding Indian Ocean

vegetarian during the *kawaar* construction during Mahasivaratri, when a friend might participate in fire-walking kavadi and is in need of someone to cheer them on.

A young Hindu will be asked by their mother to light a lamp at their Hanuman shrine while dinner is being prepared at sunset. Some youth say they don't like to do it, but sure enough even when mom is not home, the lamp is still lit on time without anyone asking.

Our youth uphold the chanting of the *Ramayana* near the deceased until the body is cremated, but many dislike other practices, like covering all glass windows of the house with a bedsheet or other available cloth until the body is taken for cremation. They also condemn the treatment of widows, who are no longer allowed in many auspicious rituals.

So these are the young Hindus of Mauritius—enjoying, exploring, critiquing and transforming Hinduism all at once on this little piece of paradise called Mauritius.

I made a small questionnaire for our interviews in which the foremost question I asked of them is if they identify themselves as Hindu. If yes, the next question was, if a stranger could identify them as Hindu? Do they wear something that announces their religious identity? I also asked about 16 samskaras, and their two favorite festivals. I asked for two because I assumed their first favorite festival would always be our massive celebrations of Mahasivaratri. I also asked what they

like and don't like about Hindu customs in Mauritius, and about their take on caste as it presents itself here. From there I let them speak their mind.

KESHAV PORAHOO

Keshav Porahoo, 24, works as a network specialist at Orange Telecommunication. He comes from a very religious family and self identifies as Hindu, declining to categorize himself any further: "I believe in God and perform the rituals. In short, a believer." The samskaras he has done are namakarana, anaprasana, chudakarana, karnaveda, vedarambha, etc., and he is waiting for his next samskara, vivaha (marriage). His *raksha sutra* at the wrist and *rudraksha* at the neck identify him as Hindu.

His two favorite Hindu festivals are Mahasivaratri and Ganesha Chaturthi. Mahasivaratri for the amazing vibrating Siva bhakti atmosphere at Ganga Talao and all over the island. Ganesha Chaturthi for its high-voltage prayers with drums, other musical instruments and *jhakri* dance.

Jati, he said, is sometimes an issue in Mauritius. "During high-profile gatherings, I've witnessed the jati system and that the privileged ones get priorities. The politicians give preference in government jobs to people from their own jati. During marriage, also, parents bring up this topic. Other than that, jati does not much affect the common day-to-day life of young Hindus in Mauritius. I

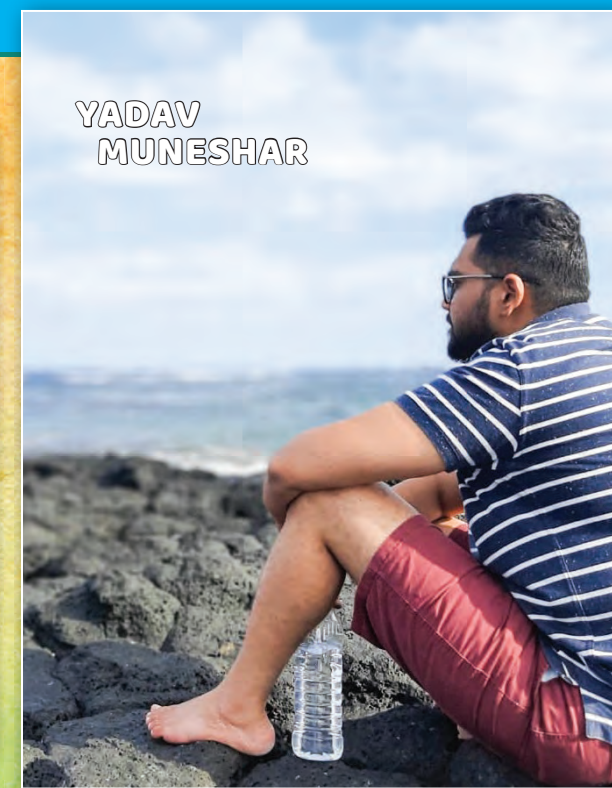
Let's Hear from a Country's Youth



KESHAV PORAHOO



SAVITA TIWARI



YADAV MUNESHAR

YADAV MUNESHAR

love the rituals of Hinduism, but I would like to change the way they are performed to look more appealing than boring. Music should be given more importance, to enhance the atmosphere of bhakti. The one thing I don't like about the Hindu community in Mauritius is that we are not united. The other religions on the island consider this vital, and they act as one."

YADAV MUNESHAR

I have known Yadav for the last 14 years. I have seen him as an obedient child sitting in prayers and as a mischievous teenager exploring spirituality by asking questions about every ritual during prayer, and eventually becoming an ardent Krishna devotee and a project head at their family business, Govinda's Veg Food.

"Definitely, I am a Hindu," he said. "A vegetarian Hindu," he emphasized with a laugh. I asked what's so funny, and he replied, "I see Hindus all around the world talking about compassion while eating non-vegetarian food. Those things don't go hand in hand. And that's the only part I don't like about Hinduism."

He continued, "I like pilgrimages. As an explorer, I really enjoy going on spiritual tours. As a Krishna devotee, I go regularly to Mathura and Vrindavan in India. I have also been to Badrinath, Kedarnath and many other places. My father has been to Kailash Manasarovar. Meeting new people in holy cities is an amazing experience.

"Hinduism does not affect me directly in

the day to day. But yes, I can feel the presence of Hindu identity in the background of my life. For example it is obligatory to do prayer at the home shrine, and my mother performs that duty with all her devotion. I sometimes feel it is too much hard work for her. I hardly participate in everyday prayer due to work, but I go to temple with them occasionally on Sunday evenings. We have darshan, sit in kirtan, meet friends, have prasad as dinner at

"I love our culture, and the only thing I want to change in Hindu society is the superstitious mindset of people toward religion."

SHYACHIN KUMAR ACHARAJ

the temple, and then come back home after participating in the shayan arati, the sleeping bhajan for Krishna. My mother can go to temple every day if time allows. My father visits Mathura-Vrindavan in India every time he goes on a business trip to Malaysia, once every two months. That's how religious my family is. I enjoy going to temples and participating in prayers. But I have carved a different space for myself.

"Yearly prayer at our house is obligatory, and we invite all family and friends. Mahaprasad, a seven-curry platter is served to

everyone. They come to our house and we go to their house for these yearly prayers. So the beauty of Hinduism is we participate together. Sometimes it feels too much, but the presence of friends makes it bearable.

"Of course I have friends outside my religion. Mauritius is a rainbow island with many religions and ethnic groups. Hinduism is flexible, so it is easy for us to mingle. When a friend says Allah is great, I agree that yes Allah is great. When a friend says, Jesus is great, I agree, yes Jesus is great. Hinduism taught me to respect all religions. But it is not the same with them; not everyone agrees that Bhagwan is great. It is also easy for me to ignore them. As Hinduism says, respect the views of others."

SHYACHIN KUMAR ACHARAJ

Shyachin Kumar Acharaj, a planter by profession, identifies as a Hindu and wears a red thread, raksha sutra, on his wrist so others identify him as Hindu.

"I come from an Arya Samaj family. We don't believe in idol worship, but it's common for an Arya Samajist in Mauritius to

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Interviewees: (left to right) Nitin Gookul, writer; Rakshita Kissoon and her friends on pilgrimage; students attend an annual Hindu blessing for their studies; Shyachin Kumar Acharaj, farmer; (upper right) young men carry kavar during the island's Mahasivaratri observances



SAVITA TIWARI

have Hanuman dhwaja at their house entrance. Arya Samaj only believes in the Vedas and the Vedic fire ceremony (havana), but the reading of Ramayana near a dead body until it is cremated is a tradition I have seen followed in my family as well."

He has performed namakarana, vidyarambha and vivaha samskara. "My family performs weekly and monthly havana at home. We don't ordinarily go to temple, but on New Year's, Mahasivaratri, Durga Puja and other festivals we go to the nearest temple with the whole family."

His favorite festivals are "Mahasivaratri

because of the strong bond that connects everyone when they go to Ganga Talao, and second is Diwali, because we go to everyone's houses to distribute sweets, which is like distributing happiness."

His favorite regular family custom is the monthly fire ceremony on Purnima, when the whole family sit together for a small fire ceremony. "My father has three brothers and my grandfather had two brothers. Now everyone lives individually but in the same compound, so whenever there is any function we are 60 or so people from the close family itself. You have your privacy, but you

are never alone. The monthly fire ceremony brings positive vibes in the house.

"I have nothing to dislike in my family Hindu custom, as we are free to skip the program if anything important comes. I love our culture, and the only thing I want to change in Hindu society is the superstitious mindset of people toward religion." Schyachin is also firm believer in Sai Baba. His motto is *sab-ka malik ek hai*—God is One. "We live on a small island with many communities. So it's important to respect all religions. As a planter, I also pray to Bhudevi, Mother Earth, when I reach my fields early in the morning."

NITIN GOOKUL

I decided to interview Nitin even though he is a couple of years over the age range of 18 to 28 which was set by my editor. I met him briefly last year when he launched his first book, *The Spiritual Science of Vedas*, which is written with a deep understanding of the subject.

"I am from a moderately religious family. We celebrate all the common festivals that are celebrated in Mauritius, like Durga Puja, Mahasivaratri, Hanuman Jayanti, etc. I self-identify as a Hindu, as I have done namakarana and annaprasana. We regularly have Vedic yajnas at home and Satya Narayan katha. We observe all religious festivals like Hindus.

"I won't call myself religious. I think I have already completed that phase of being religious in my life and now I have reached a stage where I call myself spiritual. By *spiritual*, I mean you have a real understanding of

Balancing Ancient and Modern Ways

NITIN GOOKUL



RAKSHITA KISSOON



RAJEN MANICK

SHYACHIN KUMAR ACHARAJ



SHYACHIN KUMAR ACHARAJ

your religion and now you are on your path to transcendent understanding.

"People can easily identify me as a Hindu. I wear Tulsi-mala neck beads, Narsimha Kavach, Rudraksh and red Raksha Sutra. Sometimes Vaishnava Tilak when going to Vishnu temple."

I pointed out that it's unusual to see young people with so many religious identities. "Yes, it's unusual for a Mauritian youth, but I don't wear them out of fashion or obligation. I wear them because they align with my energy."

Asked to categorize himself within Hinduism, he replies, "Spiritual, but believe in rituals, too, especially Vedic yajnas. Favorite Hindu festival is Deepavali, because I enjoy sharing sweets with the community and praying to Mother Lakshmi. Second favorite is Sri Krishna Janmashtami, because I enjoy kirtans, bhajan, pravachan at the temples.

"I like observing Ekadashi bi-monthly, because I enjoy the fast. But I don't enjoy the annual performance of *shraddha*, the worship done for deceased ancestors.

"I feel the caste system is present on the island, but this doesn't bother me, as I know the original caste system preached by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*."

"I don't want to change anything about Hindu society, except to introduce something. Mauritian youth are very religious, but they need proper guidance, a more systematic education in religion in the form of a gurukul.

All youth have a phase in their life when they are feeling alienated spiritually, but they don't have a place for systematic guidance. They are interested in spirituality for some time, but nobody does follow-up once they lose interest. Some of them eventually find their way

"Today in Mauritius, jati is more political than a society thing. There are some people who think they are from a high caste, even though their behavior may be low."

ISHAAN VISHAM

back into spirituality, but many are lost to peer pressure—and to addiction, which is the biggest problem for Mauritian youth these days."

RAKSHITA KISSOON

Rakshita Kissoon, 23, works as HR and administrative manager at Summerside Tots Nursery & Pre Primary and is pursuing her master's degree in Hindi language. She has just returned from India, where she went for higher studies in Hindi language to become a Hindi language teacher.

She says people can easily tell she is a

Hindu: "I always wear a black bindi on my forehead, and I have my raksha sutra." She categorizes herself as one who believes in God and rituals and customs.

Her favorite festival is Mahasivaratri. She loves the pilgrimage from home to Ganga Talao and back. "My family has been hosting the pilgrims at our residence for the last many years." She notes "the respect towards each other; people dress well, uniformly and more precisely; and some do service like providing food, first aid, etc. The atmosphere itself during this festival is unique and I truly feel blessed. Participating in four pahar pooja all night while praying without sleep gives another shakti in oneself."

Her second favorite is Deepavali: "During Deepavali, cleaning and painting the whole house is a common practice which every Hindu household follows. Cooking different types of sweets by watching YouTube videos is another plus. Although gateau banane (a Mauritian sweet dish made up of white flour and banana) is a compulsory dish, nowadays Mauritians are also exploring new

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Interviewees: (left to right) Rajeshwar Seetohul during a performance as Ravana; Rachna, social worker; Chandanee Senrondon performing Ganesha Visarjana with family and friends; Ishaan Visham; (upper right) two friends enjoy an island festival

dishes from the Internet. Sharing the sweets with neighbors and family, lighting lamps, making rangoli, spending time with family, new dress, gifts are all the things that make this festival my second favorite.

"My daily prayer consists of lighting lamps twice a day at our Hanuman shrines. One thing I hate in our culture is that my family still believes in caste while choosing a partner. I feel no one can decide where they will take birth. One more thing I feel bad about is that more and more families are becoming nuclear families, so we tend to lose the precious rituals that only grandparents can cultivate. Grandparents have better knowledge that the Internet cannot provide."

RAJESHWAR SEETOHUL

At 25, theater artist Rajeshwar Seetohul is the youngest theater director on Mauritius. He also runs his own film production company. Rajeshwar became famous by playing the negative character Ravana in the play *Raavan-Leela*.

Why Ravana?

"Earlier many people were playing Ram-Leela. Everyone was kind of bored watching the same thing again and again. They had already watched it on TV so many times. So to attract youth with a new angle to the same story, we started performing Ravana-Leela. The message is the same, victory of truth

over evil, but the story is depicted from Ravana's point of view.

"I am Hindu. I have done my nama-karana, annaprasana and chudakarana samskaras. People can tell I am a Hindu as I have my raksha sutra and always wear rudrakshas and an Aum bracelet. I would categorize myself as spiritual but not religious.

"Diwali is my favorite festival, because on this day the whole island is covered with lights and good vibes. All families come together to decorate the house and also for Lakshmi puja. Mauritius is a small island, so it's easier for everyone to get together, and we look forward to such occasions. Diwali is also the festival that marks victory of good over evil. My second favorite festival is Mahasivaratri, where we get to do service to the pilgrims. I also enjoy Holi.

"Concerning marriage, the issue of caste always comes from elders; but my parents are very open minded and treat everyone the same, so jati won't be such an issue.

I like the concept of karma in Hinduism. I find some of the rites and rituals senseless, like applying vermillion on a rock and worshipping it without knowing who they are really praying to."

RACHNA

A social worker by profession, Rachna's "paper name" is Lakshmi Devi Hurdad. She is 24 and a trainer at National Leadership Engine. A graduate in pedagogy, she has founded the Indigo Early Learning Center. She is associated with many NGOs.

"Mauritian Hindu youth normally have two names. The paper name is chosen according to horoscope. The other is chosen by the parents, not according to horoscope. Everyone knows us by the second name."

Balancing Ancient and Modern Ways



RAJESHWAR SEETOHUL

RAJESHWAR SEETOHUL

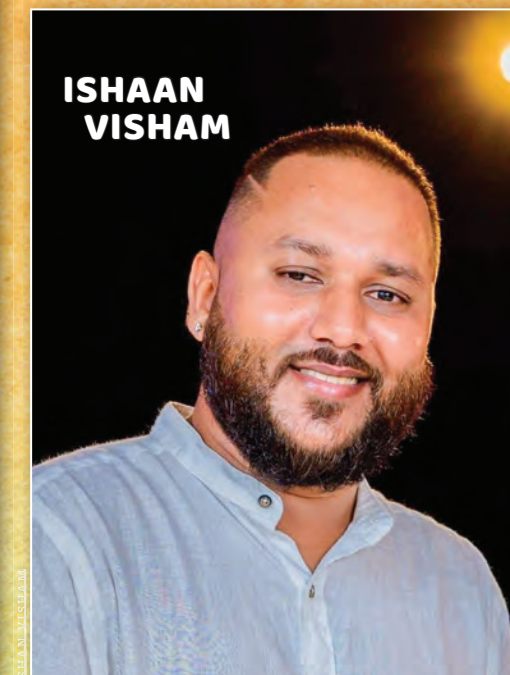


RACHNA

LAKSHMI DEVI HURDAD



CHANDANE SENRONDON



ISHAAN VISHAM

ISHAAN VISHAM

"When I was growing up, my idea of Hinduism was the daily prayer done by my mother at home. The special Siva Abhishekam that we do each Monday with the whole family holds a special place in my heart. If I don't participate in the prayer for some reason, I feel something is missing. I have performed the namakarana, an-naprasana and vidyarambha samskaras. I occasionally attend Ganesha puja and I wear raksha sutra."

At 16, she stopped regularly going to the temple and participating in prayers because of high school exams. But the regular rituals performed by family and friends have kept her involved with religion and rituals. "Sometimes there is Satyanarayan Katha at a family home. Marriage ceremonies, also, incorporate our customs and traditions. So there are so many things that keep us involved with religion and spirituality on the island."

"One thing that I feel is lacking in Mauritian Hindu society is the gurukulams, which are found in India and other countries but not yet in Mauritius. The caste system is an issue in Mauritius because some create their own groups, but I respect each individual."

ISHAAN VISHAM

"I come from a very religious family, but sometimes I feel there are many rituals that are not recognized by Hinduism. For example, my grandparents were participating in

an animal sacrifice at Kul Devi puja, which I don't approve of, yet at the same time they were using the auspicious *Ramayana*. I feel so conflicted. So I went to many swamis and

"The temple is my place to recharge. I have to visit regularly for peace of mind."

CHANDANEE SENRUNDON

babas to explore the subject. After many years, I decided to start a community digital channel, Tirtha Webcast. Here I try to explain to the viewers the important aspects of Hinduism, discussing the importance of rituals and why we do what we do.

"Today in Mauritius, jati is more political than a society thing. There are some people who think they are from a high caste, even though their behavior may be low. They pressure their children not to think of marrying in a lower caste than theirs."

A believer in reincarnation, Ishaan thinks youth don't understand the real essence of Hinduism. "They go to Mahasivaratri pilgrimage or temple just to socialize with their friends. They don't even care about religion or dharma. They will find a corner for themselves and will be smoking and talking rubbish. I am trying to change this."

CHANDANEE SENRUNDON

In Mauritian temples, it's common to have a **bhajan mandali**, a singing group. Most of the members of these groups are youth, although kids and elders are also involved. I have always seen Chandanee Senrundon singing Sanskrit stotras at the temple beside my house. Chandanee is a nurse in the government hospital of Mauritius. One Monday, after she sang Narmada Astak Stotra at the Siva Abhishekam puja at the temple, we sat down to chat. I asked why she comes to temple so regularly.

"The temple is my place to recharge. I have to visit regularly for peace of mind. Lighting lamps at our Hanuman shrine twice every day is part of my routine if I am at home. Any Monday when I am on leave, I make sure to visit the temple and participate in Siva abhishekam." (Every Siva temple on Mauritius performs special Siva Abhishekam puja on Monday evening.) "Along with Siva I also pray to Nandi, Bhairava, Hanuman and Maa Durga."

"Keeping my parents happy is my dharma," she said. I immediately asked if she would be OK with an arranged marriage. "I don't know; but I trust my parents, and my parents trust me. So whatever it will be, love or arranged, my parents will be happy with my choice and vice versa."

CONCLUSION

So we saw some youth have found the essence of Hinduism in book knowledge, some in vegetarianism, some in keeping their parents happy, some in serving the soil. Youth are seekers when it comes to religion and spirituality.

The youth of Mauritius are enjoying their dharma. Many festivals here are alive and vibrant because of youth and their unhesitating efforts to make them successful. Mauritian youth don't just participate, they feel proud of their religion. Their social media, full of religious content, is proof of their pride. During Mahasivaratri, the island's

biggest festival, hundreds of thousands of kawar (decorative frames carrying water pots) reach the holy pilgrimage site at Ganga Talao. And it's a known fact that 90 percent of kawartis—those who visit Ganga Talao on foot carrying a kawar—are youth under the age of twenty five.

One will hardly find any youth who hasn't gone to Ganga Talao on foot during Mahasivaratri, taken part in kavadi, or participated in Ganesha Visarjana on our beautiful blue beaches.

Mauritius is a small but multicultural society. There is no indigenous population. All the people were brought as slaves and indentured labor by the French and English colonizers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

They worked very hard to preserve their religious and cultural identity on this foreign soil. Small things, normally overlooked, were also given much attention, especially in religious matters. In the era before today's wealth of

communication resources, our forebears kept their dharma alive by putting their lives at risk in this foreign land. Each younger generation was taught to protect dharma and never take religion for granted. Respecting religion and taking pride in it is in the genes of our youth.

Today is a tough time for youth due to pressures from a continuously changing society, so one cannot predict the future; but the present Mauritian youth are a matter of pride for Hinduism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Savita Tiwari grew up in India and is now a resident of Mauritius. She is an avid journalist, blogger, writer and poet with a love of dharma and a penchant for learning more about Hinduism. Contact: savitapost@gmail.com.



Celebrating heritage: (left to right) The author and her husband Acharya Puran Tiwari at their temple, the Shiv Shakti Mandir in LaLaura, Mauritius; interviewee Chandanee Senrundon and her family; Hindu youth and their families attend Ganesha Chaturthi festivities at the Panchamukha Ganapati shrine at Pointe des Lascars Hindu Spiritual Park.

A Bright Future Forward



SAVITA TIWARI



CHANDANEE SENRUNDON

CHANDANEE SENRUNDON



RAJEN MAICK



PHILOSOPHY

Superb Hindu Teaching Aid Released

A review of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam's concise and authentic presentation of Sanatana Dharma's commonly held beliefs and practices

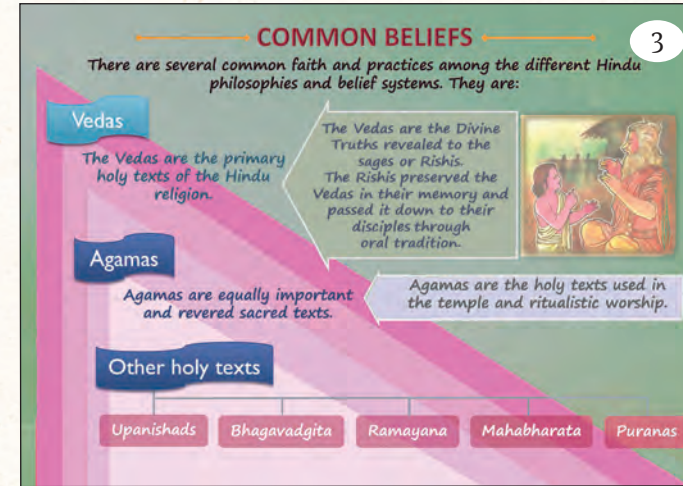
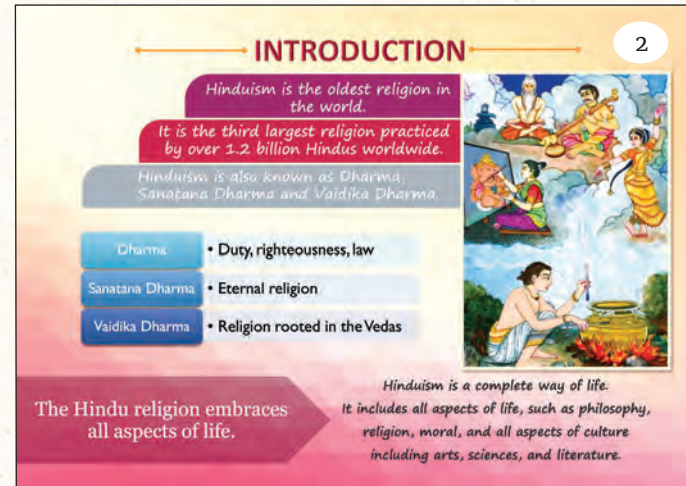
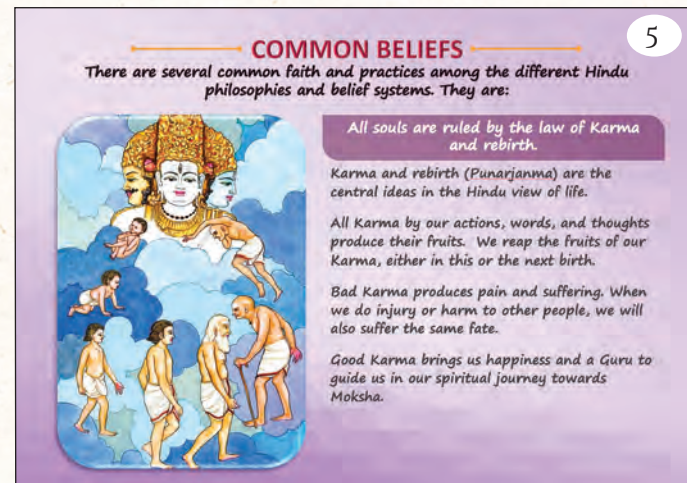
IN 2017 THE LEADERS OF THE MALAYSIA Hindu Sangam fearlessly tackled a common problem of Hindu communities worldwide: what exactly do we all believe? Other religions have clearly defined creeds or specific texts which spell out in precise detail what one is to believe and practice if they are born into or join the religion. While individual Hindu sects have achieved such clarity, and some (including HINDUISM TODAY) have strived to produce all-encompassing lists of beliefs and practices, the Sangam's effort, to be available in December at malaysiahindusangam.org, is among the best we have seen to date.

Their Hindu Advisory Board, under the direction of their president, Datuk Mohan Shan, took up the challenge four years back. Key roles were filled by Dr. K. Thilagawathi, a retired professor of Indian studies from the University of Malaysia, Swami Brahmajnanananda of the Divine Life Society, priest Sangaratna Sivasri A. P. Muthukumara Sivachariar, and Dr. Chandrakala, a school teacher with a PhD in English. Ranee Narundrath, whom we interviewed for this article, coordinated the project and assembled the graphics for the presentations in booklet, Powerpoint and video formats.

They were inspired by the works of Swami

Sivanananda, the Ramakrishna Mission and Himalayan Academy's "Nine Beliefs of Hinduism," first published in 1990. From these sources they developed a list of 20 beliefs, reduced that to nine, then changed their approach to a more comprehensive presentation, not limited to specific beliefs. In doing so, they appear to have taken to heart the introduction to Himalayan Academy's "Nine Beliefs of Hinduism," which summarized the thinking of Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami: "Our beliefs determine our thoughts and attitudes about life, which in turn direct our actions."

This was a breakthrough, it appears, be-



Understanding Hinduism: These pages show nine of the 16 pages of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam's presentation, "Hindu Religion, Common Faith and Practices"

cause in the lists of beliefs they had previously assembled, they had realized that not everything being stated was a "belief" as such. For example, the idea that the whole world is one family isn't a belief, it is an attitude based on the belief that we are all one in God. The Pancha Mahayanjnas, or five daily sacrifices, also aren't beliefs as such; they are actions based on beliefs.

In making the presentation, Ranee said, "There was a continuous process of reviewing, adding, removing and joining. The final selection included the most basic, easy-to-digest concepts that are common and prevalent among all Hindu sects. Also, we tried as much as possible to avoid controversies or displeasure."

The 16-page presentation lists about nine common beliefs on pages 3 through 7: in the Vedas, Agamas and other holy texts; that God is the Supreme Reality; that God mani-

fest as various divine forms such as Ganesha; in dharma, karma, reincarnation, etc.

Next in the presentation are the four ashramas—brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha



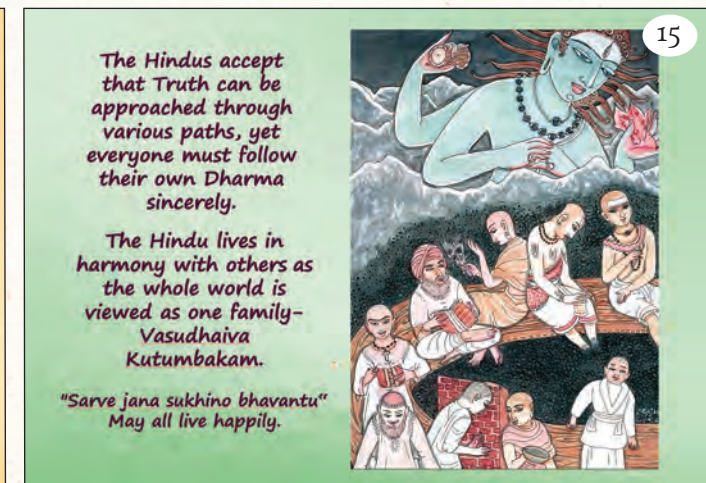
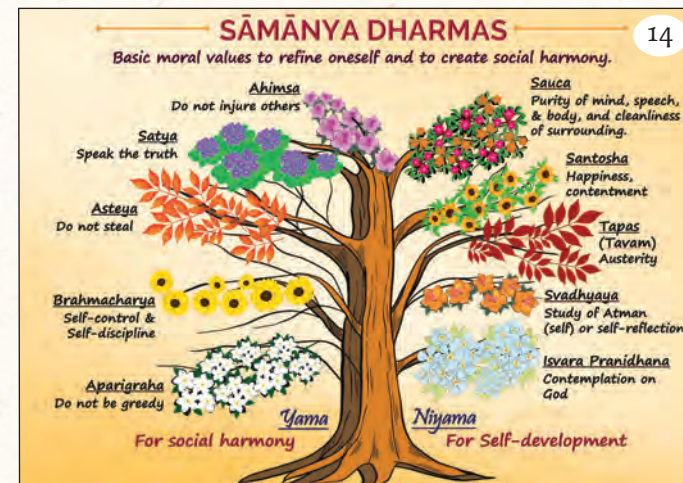
and sannyas, then the four aims of life, the five daily sacrifices, the samskaras (name giving, first feeding, ear piercing, beginning of study, marriage, etc.), devotional practices such as japa, pilgrimage, bhajan, tapas, etc., common symbols such as the Om, swastika, deepa lamp and cow; the basic yamas (non-violence, non-stealing, etc.) and niyamas (purity of mind, contentment, etc.), and acceptance "that truth can be approached through

various paths, yet everyone must follow their own dharma sincerely."

According to Renee, "The Sangam is targeting all types of audiences in Tamil, English, and Malay languages. These are the basics of Hinduism, for everyone, young and old."

For the next few years, all Sangam training and courses will be based on this presentation, including through their existing religious classes in schools and temples. They have already used the material in a 2019 Religious Teachers' Camp with more than 60 participants. Swami Brahmajnanananda also began a course for members of the Divine Life Society, but had to stop on account of the pandemic.

Overall, HINDUISM TODAY found the Sangam's "Hindu Religion, Common Faith and Practices" to be an outstanding presentation. It sets an excellent example for other organizations to follow, one which takes into account specific local religious traditions and customs while remaining true to the more universal understandings of all Hindus. The material is to be released at the Sangam's annual general meeting in December and should then be available on their website.



Join Us for Ganesha Chaturthi

It's one of our favorite holidays, bringing us all together as we prepare for and celebrate the advent of the beloved God

BY MUGDHA SHINDE, 13
CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

AS SUMMER COMES TO AN END, Ganesha Chaturthi planning starts in my house. The annual festival is a big celebration for my family, as big as Diwali. Its ten days are filled with the fragrant smell of incense sticks and the sound of bells during the arati offering of lit lamps. You would feel pleasant as soon as you entered our home. This is when we get to decorate the house, meet friends and family, eat sweets and, most importantly, worship Lord Ganesha on the day Goddess Parvati brought Him to life. Last year, due to the pandemic, we had to scale down some celebrations, but this year we invited people to take darshan of our Ganesha, and I enjoyed it immensely.

Three weeks before Ganesh Chaturthi, I start thinking about the decorations. Most people buy them at stores, but my family make ours by hand. We try to be eco-friendly, using paper and cardboard instead of foam boards, and even buying a clay murti. Ganesh Chaturthi is the one time in the year when my brother, my mom and I do a big art project; the excitement of "Ganapati Bappa" coming to our house inspires us to take on a big task.

The decoration process usually starts with my mom and I searching the Internet for ideas, and brainstorming some of our own. When we have a final design, we start collecting and buying things such as colored paper, cardboard, sequins, etc. My aunt, who lives in India, is really good at art, so she makes very elaborate decorations for her Ganesha. This year, she made a paper peacock and decorated the whole space where her murti sat.

In the week before Ganesh Chaturthi, we actually begin producing the decorations. My brother and I have started school by this point, so we try to work on the decorations mostly on the weekends. Sometimes we stay up till 11:00 pm to finish. And even with all the late-night decorating and planning on the weekends, on the day before Ganesh Chaturthi, we still have to stay up very late, putting on the final touches. A perfect example of this was last year, when I decided that I wanted to add a moon



ALL PHOTOS: MUGDHA SHINDE

onto the roof of our temple decorations at the last minute, and so stayed up late making it.

At last, Ganesh Chaturthi arrives. We go to the store in the evening and take our Ganapati home. We dress up to go to the store, and we see many other people as well. We chant "Ganapati Bappa Morya" as we bring the Ganapati up to the car. The drive home is full of my family's excitement for bringing home our Ganapati and doing puja. If you could see excitement, our car would be surrounded by it.

When we reach home, my dad or I carefully carry the Ganapati to the door. When the Ganapati has been set down on the *paat*, temporary altar, I am relieved, as I am always



afraid that I will somehow break it when I carry it. We then do puja of the Ganapati and then chant aratis. I like to recite three arati chants, not just the Ganesha arati, because that way the ceremony lasts longer. However, that is not always possible, as my brother and I have to go to school after doing arati in the morning.

At our house, we keep the Ganapati for ten days. Some people keep it for two days, or five days. However, my family, my mom in particular, really enjoys the Ganapati being in our house, so we keep it for as long as we can. The whole time, we visit people and invite them to our house, to take darshan of one another's Ganapati. I enjoy the weekends

during the Ganapati festival since that is when we see the most people. In the first two days, we try to go to every house where the Ganapati is kept for just two days. Then we visit the people who have the Ganapati for longer. I enjoy going to people's houses, because I get a change of scenery. Especially this year, because we had not visited anyone for over a year, and some people had moved during the pandemic, I was pleased to see a few new houses. We ourselves moved in the pandemic, and so almost every time someone visited our Ganapati, we gave a tour of our house as well.

Food is a big part of the festival. My mom often makes *modaks*, which are like dumplings stuffed with a sweet co-



ALL PHOTOS: MUGDHA SHINDE

Bringing Ganesha home: (clockwise from left) Mugdha, her brother Aaditya, 10, and mom; working on the blue background; her aunt worshipping; adding enhancements to the nearly finished decorations; the ecologically-aware clay Ganesha slowly returns to its original state in a bucket of water; modaka sweets—the God's favorite!; His festival meal features the sweet flatbread puran poli at upper right and aamras mango pulp at left, among other Maharashtrian favorites

conut filling. They can be steamed or fried, and my mom sometimes ends up making them two or three times during the festival. She also makes a big dinner, with puris and a sweet dish, on Ganesh Chaturthi. And this year, we bought samosas for all the guests visiting us.

As we start adding arati chants to our



daily routines, I start recalling all the aratis I memorized in previous years. By the second or third day, I have memorized all the aratis once again. I wish that this calming aura in our house would last forever. The week passes by quickly, however, and as all good things do, the Ganapati festival starts coming to an end. I start thinking about how it will feel after the festival is over, how the doorbell won't ring as often, how the smell of incense sticks will only be present in the evenings, and how the table holding the Ganapati murti will be empty.

Too soon, the tenth day arrives. I go to school knowing that we will have to do the visarjan farewell ceremony of the Ganapati murti in the evening. We chant three or five aratis in the evening, and my mom prepares a special meal of puran poli. We fill up a bucket with water to do the visarjan. I carefully pick up the murti and walk around, showing Ganapati the whole house. I come to



the bucket, dip Him in three times, and the third time, I release the murti into the water. I almost cry, thinking about how we won't have a big Ganesha murti in our house for a whole year.

After dinner, my mom and I like to watch the murti slowly dissolve into the water, and sometimes stay up after dinner just sitting there and watching the murti.

The Ganapati festival is one of my favorites. Even before Ganapati comes into our house, the celebratory feeling is there. It is one of the best feelings, looking at the Ganapati murti, and being in His presence.

Mugdha Shinde, 13, is an eighth-grade student at Cupertino Middle School in Cupertino, California. She plays the trombone in her school's advanced band and enjoys cooking and baking. mugdha.shinde29@gmail.com



Confronting Gender Stereotypes

Are they driven by religious beliefs, custom or societal forces?

BY SHAINA GROVER, CALIFORNIA

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THE ROLE OF women in society has constantly changed depending on the location, culture and time period. However, a recurring theme has been that, oftentimes, women would only be accorded the same rights as men much later, or not at all. Even in the United States, where “all men are created equal,” women did not have the right to vote until the 1920s.

There are certain stereotypes regarding different genders prevalent in today's society ranging from something as simple as blue being associated with boys and pink with girls, to the idea that women should stay home and handle the house while the men go to work to provide for the family. Or the idea that it is better to have a son rather than a daughter to carry on the family legacy. To truly understand these ideas, we must consider whether these beliefs stem from our religious identities and cultural traditions or if they are a product of societal expectations.

When it comes to Hindu society, religion plays a significant role in people's lives and plays a key role in their decisions, which is why questioning where these ideas originate is even more important.

Over the past few months, I had the opportunity to discuss gender stereotypes and Hindu culture with two people, each having a unique viewpoint. My first interview was with Anu Singh, 22, a unmarried Rice University graduate who plans on attending medical school soon. She amplifies the notion of identifying the “distinction between what is a societal problem and what is related to religion.” When it comes to Hinduism, she argues that there is a lot more representation for women in comparison to other cultures, pointing out that Hindus worship the Divine Mother (Devi). An example could be Navaratri, which occurs two times a year and is essentially nine days of celebrating the Divine Mother, with the last day being a ceremony to worship the daughters of the family. On the other hand, she agrees that there are issues in terms of gender stereotypes in Hindu society, but says we “cannot put the blame on Hinduism.” Furthermore, Singh mentions that prior to Mughal invasions in India, “women had a lot more rights.” When the Mughals invaded, they showed no mercy towards women and proceeded to mistreat



them, resulting in severe actions taken to keep them “protected.” They were expected to have no public life, nor were they allowed to get a job. Unfortunately, these restrictions were not lifted even after the collapse of the Mughal empire, and their influence can still be seen today.

When considering how the treatment of women has evolved, she said, “Women today have a lot more opportunities compared to our grandparents. It wasn't so common not long ago for a woman to go to a university or get a job. Society was different at that time and it was expected that a woman stayed home to take care of the children.” However, Singh's grandparents both had college degrees and her grandmother also had a job as a teacher, which was not common at the time; but nowadays, more women have an opportunity to join the workforce.

A standard topic that pops up when discussing gender stereotypes in Hindu society is dowry. Singh says that the intention of the dowry was to ensure “that the girl should get her share of the parent's property.” It wasn't originally a bribe, but rather a way to make sure that the girl could live comfortably in her husband's house. But, “this practice has degenerated and has led to some bad consequences.”

Essentially, Singh believes that viewing everything from a power dynamic and determining that there is an “oppressor” and an “oppressed” does not give a historically accurate account. In terms of the stories of the Gods and Goddesses, this type of lens does not portray the correct picture. Her belief is that it is not the fault of the religion but rather the social circumstances that have led to the different gender stereotypes present today.

My second interview was with Palak Malik, 35, a visual communication expert working for a Delhi-based creative agency. She is married and pursuing an advanced business degree. Malik shared, “The problem of gender stereotyping is deeply ingrained into society and has very much to do with the patriarchal structure, specifically in the environment I grew up in. It is difficult to break through these barriers even if you belong to a more educated family.” She says that there were some small restrictions that showed up in her life because of her gender, whether it was language, dress code or other aspects of her behavior. “It's literally in your face all the time.” She notes that the men have always been “custodians” in charge of “enforcing the patriarchal structures,” and a woman's dignity is attached to the reputation of the men in her family. As a result, women tend



COURTESY ANU SINGH



SHUTTERSTOCK

The woman's life: (clockwise from left) example of pallu covering and (inset) the ghunghat veil; applying sindoor to the bride's head during a wedding is a custom which dates back to Indus Valley; interviewees Palak Malik and Anu Singh

to follow at least some of the things being imposed upon them.

Malik believes that “Hinduism is a way of life and you are Hindu by being born in the religion,” which is why it's difficult to identify what exactly the ideal Hindu person is, as the ideal is different per each one. For example, while her grandfather's notion of Hinduism was intertwined with nationalism, her grandmother's notion of Hinduism was more ritualistic.

Like Singh, Malik believes that the patriarchal structure of Hinduism is a huge societal issue that stretches beyond religion, citing the example of gender stereotypes and the wage gap in the workspace. Furthermore, Bollywood and the media normalize these gender stereotypes because they provide millions of people with the “male gaze.”

We discussed the idea of location impacting the different gender stereotypes. Malik has lived in Delhi for approximately 30 years and says that because she lives in Delhi, if she sees a man looking at her while she's walking on the street, she will often assume that there is an intention to harm, simply because of where she lives. On the other hand, in Hyderabad or Mumbai, she knows that she can “go anywhere at any time alone and no one will bother her,... whereas in Delhi I have to think 5,000 times about whether or not I'm putting myself in danger.” It's important to consider the fact that many women

grow up in this kind of environment where they are scared to go out at night because of their gender, while men have more freedom. Moreover, when comparing her experiences as a member of a higher socioeconomic class to those in rural villages, she says that she “can't even imagine the amount of gender stereotyping in rural areas.”

On the topic of dowry, she shares a statistic that even though the practice of dowry has been illegal since 1961, it is a part of 95% of marriages in India. “There

are women who have to live in a *pallu* [end of sari draped over the head and partially covering the face] or *ghunghat* [a veil covering the face] for pretty much their entire life.”

In addition, Malik notes, even though women have more educational opportunities and there has been an increase in the participation of women in the workforce, many women still continue to drop out because of their “household responsibilities,” demonstrating that these gender stereotypes still exist. A key point that she makes is

that “what is true in India, the exact opposite is also true.” For example, while some women may drop out of school, more and more are getting jobs. Or while there may be equality in one region, the next might have a more patriarchal structure. The roles of women and men have evolved as people move away from the idea that men cannot do work at home or only the woman has to make sacrifices to take care of the kids. The increase in access to information and this new digital age have paved the way for more freedom and equality. However, “there is still a ways to go

before we get to some kind of real equality.”

In terms of the ritualistic portion of Hinduism, specifically with the visual aspect, when women are newly married, it is part of the culture that they wear a choora (set of bangles) to mark that they are taken and no longer single as if “everyone needs to know,” but there is no distinction for men. A married woman wears a bindi, sindoor in the part of her hair, etc., which creates a visual distinction between women that are married and those who are not, while there is nothing for men. Although there had been some cultural practices for men to indicate that they are married, those are not commonly seen today. For some, this may be a restriction on their freedom to express themselves through their clothing choices.

Malik pointed out that many women celebrate Karva Chauth, when they fast for the long life of their husbands. They conclude their fast by doing the arati of their husband and the Moon. Men on the other hand do not have to fast for their wives. Evidently, there is a distinction between what is expected of a Hindu woman and a man in a relationship. But, nowadays as people are more progressive, some men have also started fasting for their wives on Karva Chauth.

I personally believe that gender stereotyping is a huge societal issue that does not stem from religion. There may be some small examples of gender stereotypes or different expectations for men and women that can be found in Hindu religion as well, but there are also times when women are shown more respect than men in Hindu culture. In talking to some family members, I found that they have seen several examples of stereotyping with friends asking them why they didn't want to have a son after having two daughters, but the environment they grew up in didn't place any extra importance on the son in comparison to the daughter(s). Yet they all agree that gender stereotyping is more prevalent in society rather than religion. As more and more people adopt a modern way of thinking, there is more equality between men and women both in society and religion, even if there is still a long way to go before achieving true equality, regardless of where in the world you live.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Minnesota, Shaina Grover is a junior at Northwood High School in Irvine, California. She has an interest in STEM and enjoys traveling, dancing, reading and playing the violin. grover.shaina514@gmail.com



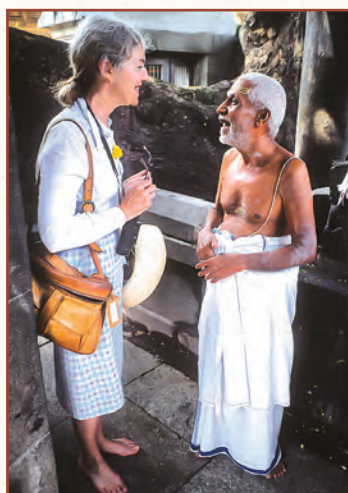
14 Questions People Ask About Hinduism

...and 14 tweetable answers!

Humanity's most profound faith is now a global phenomenon. Students, teachers, neighbors and friends are full of questions about cow worship, cremation, caste, many Gods, karma, reincarnation, idols, yoga & more. Here are fourteen answers you can use to set the record straight.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN PUT ON the spot with a provocative question about Hinduism, even one that really shouldn't be so hard to answer? If so, you are not alone. It takes some good preparation and a little attitude adjustment to confidently field queries on your faith—be they from friendly co-workers, students, passersby or especially from Christian evangelists. Back in the spring of 1990, a group of teens from the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, sent a request to HINDUISM TODAY for "official answers" to nine questions they were commonly asked by their peers. These questions had perplexed the Hindu youth themselves, and their parents had no convincing answers. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami took up the challenge and provided the following answers to the nine questions. We have since added five more questions, including a dialog on caste, since that is the most relentless criticism Hinduism faces today.

Let's begin with advice on the attitudes to hold when responding. First, ask yourself, "Who is asking the question?" Millions of people are sincerely interested in Hinduism and the many Asian religions. So, when asked about Hinduism, don't be defensive, even if the questioner seems confrontational. Instead, assume that the person really wants to learn. Of course, some only want to harass, badger and turn you to their view. If you sense this is the case, feel free to smile and courteously dismiss yourself without any attempt to answer, lest you simply



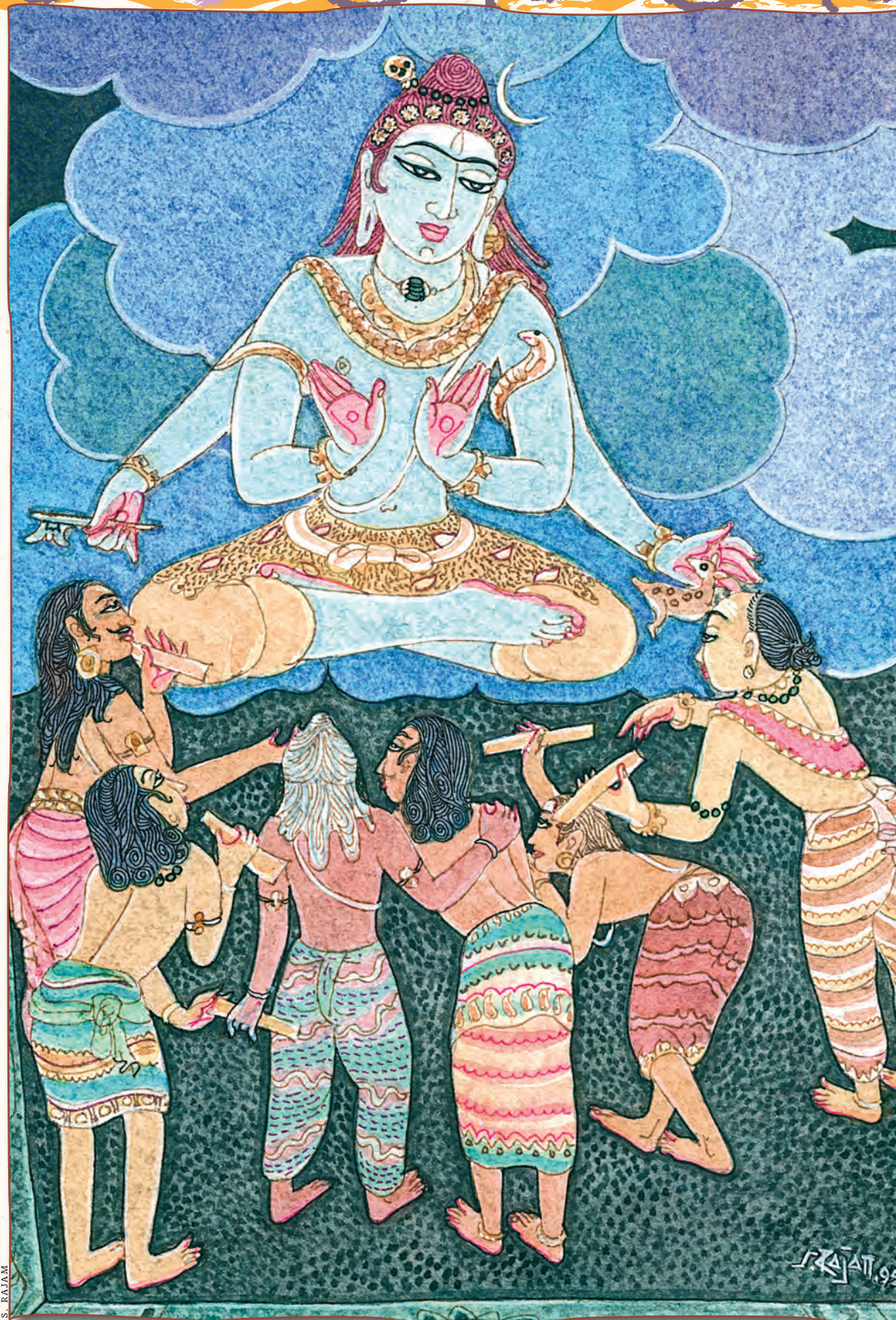
A visitor to India questions an elder about temple ceremonies and various Hindu customs

add fuel to his fires.

Bearing this in mind, it is still best never to answer a question about religion too boldly or too immediately. That might lead to confrontation. Offer a prologue first, then come to the question, guiding the inquirer toward understanding. Your poise and deliberateness gives assurance that you know what you are talking about. It also gives you a moment to think and draw on your intuitive knowing. Before going deeply into an answer, always ask the questioner what his religion is. Knowing that, you can address his particular frame of mind and make your answer most relevant. Another key: have confidence in yourself and your ability to give a meaningful and polite response. Even to say "I am sorry. I still have much to learn about my religion and

I don't yet know the answer to that" is a meaningful answer. Honesty is always appreciated. Never be afraid to admit what you don't know, for this lends credibility to what you do know.

Here are four prologues that can be used, according to the situation, before you begin to actually answer a question. 1) "I am really pleased that you are interested in my religion. You may not know that one out of every six people in the world is a Hindu." 2) "Many people have asked me about my tradition. I don't know everything, but I will try to answer your question." 3) "First, you should know that in Hinduism, it is not only belief and intellectual understanding that is important. Hindus place the greatest value on experiencing each of these



Lord Siva sits in His world of light, approached by petitioners who have scribed questions on palm leaves, as in the days of yore

truths personally." 4) The fourth type of prologue is to repeat the question to see if the person has actually stated what he wants to know. Repeat the question in your own words and ask if you have understood his query correctly. If it's a complicated question, you might begin by saying, "Philosophers have spent lifetimes discussing and pondering questions such as this, but I will do my best to explain."

Have courage. Speak from your inner mind. Sanatana Dharma is an experiential path, not a dogma, so your experience in answering questions will help your own spiritual unfoldment. You will learn from your answers if you listen to your inner mind speak. This can actually be a lot of fun. The attentive teacher always learns more than the student.

After the prologue, address the question without hesitation. If the person is sincere, you can ask, "Do you have any other questions?" If he wants to know more, then elaborate as best you can. Use easy, everyday examples. Share what enlightened souls and scriptures of Hinduism have said on the subject. Remember, we must not assume that someone who asks about Hinduism is insincere or is challenging our faith. Many are just being friendly or making conversation to get to know you; others, having reincarnated into a strange culture, are searching for the way back "home." So don't be on the defensive or take it all too seriously. Smile when you give your response. Be open. If the second or third question is on something you know nothing about, you can say, "I don't know. But if you'd like, I will find out and email you what I find out." Smile and have confidence as you give these answers. Don't be shy. Your birth karmas ensure that nobody can ask you a question to which you are unable to provide a fine answer that will fully satisfy the seeker. You may make lifelong friends in this way.

In the following pages, each question is addressed by a short response that can be committed to memory, a longer answer, and a detailed explanation. Many questioners will be content with the short, simple answer, so start with that first. Use the explanation as background information for yourself, or as a contingency response in case you end up in a deeper philosophical discussion.

To order additional copies of this Educational Insight and other Hindu literature, email: pamphlets@hindu.org. Additional resources can be found at: www.hinduismtoday.com/category/hindu-basics/.

1

Why does Hinduism have so many Gods?

Hindus all believe in one Supreme God who created the universe. He is all-pervasive. He created many Gods, highly advanced spiritual beings, to be His helpers.

CONTRARY TO PREVAILING MISCONCEPTIONS, HINDUS ALL worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names. This is because the peoples of India with different languages and cultures have understood the one God in their own distinct way. Through history there arose four principal Hindu denominations—Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Smartas—who see all Deities as reflections of the One God—the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. This liberal Smarta perspective is well known, but it is not the prevailing Hindu view. Due to this diversity, Hindus are profoundly tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has its own pathway to the one God.

One of the unique understandings in Hinduism is that God is not far away, living in a remote heaven, but is inside each and every soul, in the heart and consciousness, waiting to be discovered. This knowing that God is always with us gives us hope and courage. Knowing the One Great God in this intimate and experiential way is the goal of Hindu spirituality.

Elaboration: Hinduism is both monotheistic and henotheistic. Hindus were never polytheistic, in the sense that there are many equal Gods. Henotheism (literally “one God”) better defines the Hindu view. It means the worship of one God without denying the existence of other Gods. We Hindus believe in the one all-pervasive God who energizes the entire universe. We can see Him in the life shining out of the eyes of humans and all creatures. This view of God as existing in and giving life to all things is called panentheism. It is different from pantheism, which is the belief that God is the natural universe and nothing more. It is also different from strict theism which says God is only above the world, apart and transcendent. Panentheism is an all-encompassing concept. It says that God is both in the world and beyond it, both immanent and transcendent. That is the highest Hindu view.

Hindus also believe in many Gods who perform various functions, like executives in a large corporation. These should not be confused with the Supreme God. These Divinities are highly advanced beings who have specific duties and powers—not unlike the heavenly spirits, overlords or archangels revered in other faiths. Each denomination worships the Supreme God and its own pantheon of divine beings.

What is sometimes confusing to non-Hindus is that Hindus of various sects may call the one God by many different names, according to their denomination or regional tradition. Truth for the Hindu has many names, but that does not make for many truths. Hinduism gives us the freedom to approach God in our own way, encouraging a multiplicity of paths, not asking for conformity to just one.

There is much confusion about this subject, even among Hindus. Learn the right terms and the subtle differences in them, and you



Hindus all worship the One Supreme God, called by various names, depending on their denomination. They also revere a multitude of angelic beings, which they call Gods. Above, the central figure is Lord Siva, worshiped as the Supreme Being by Saivites and many other Hindus. Cradled in His hands are other great beings, known as Gods, including Lord Ganesha.

can explain the profound ways Hindus look at Divinity. Others will be delighted with the richness of the Indian concepts of God. You may wish to mention that some Hindus believe only in the formless Absolute Reality as God; others believe in God as personal Lord and Creator. This freedom makes the understanding of God in Hinduism, the oldest living religion, the richest in all of Earth's existing faiths.

2

Do Hindus believe in reincarnation?

Yes, we believe the soul is immortal and takes birth time and time again. Through this process, we have experiences, learn lessons and evolve spiritually. Finally we graduate from physical birth.

CARNATE MEANS “OF FLESH,” AND *reincarnate* MEANS TO “reenter the flesh.” Yes, Hindus believe in reincarnation. To us, it explains the natural way the soul evolves from immaturity to spiritual illumination. Life and death are realities for all of us. Hinduism believes that the soul is immortal, that it never dies, but inhabits one body after another on the Earth during its evolutionary journey. Like the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly, physical death is a most natural transition for the soul, which survives and, guided by karma, continues its long pilgrimage until it is one with God.

I myself have had many lives before this one and expect to have more. Finally, when I have it all worked out and all the lessons have been learned, I will attain enlightenment and moksha, liberation. This means I will still exist, but will no longer be pulled back to be born in a physical body.

Even modern science is discovering reincarnation. There have been many cases of individuals' remembering their past lives. These have been researched by scientists, psychiatrists and parapsychologists during the past decades and documented in good books and videos. Young children speak of vivid past-life memories, which fade as they grow older, as the veils of individuality shroud the soul's intuitive understanding. Great mystics speak of their past lives as well. So do our ancient scriptures, the *Vedas*, reveal the reality of reincarnation.

Reincarnation is believed in by the Jains and the Sikhs, by the Indians of the Americas, and by the Buddhists, certain Jewish sects, the Pagans and the many indigenous faiths. Even Christianity originally taught reincarnation, but formally renounced it in the twelfth century. It is, in fact, one of the most widely held articles of faith on planet Earth.

Elaboration: At death the soul leaves the physical body. But the soul does not die. It lives on in a subtle body called the astral body. The astral body exists in the nonphysical dimension called the astral plane, which is also the world we are in during our dreams at night when we sleep. Here we continue to have experiences until we are reborn again in another physical body as a baby. Each reincarnating soul chooses a home and a family which can best fulfill its next step of learning and maturation.

After many lifetimes of following dharma, the soul is fully matured in love, wisdom and knowledge of God. There is no longer a need for physical birth, for all lessons have been learned, all karmas fulfilled. That soul is then liberated, freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Evolution then continues in the more refined spiritual worlds.

Similarly, after we graduate from elementary school we never have to go back to the fifth grade. We have gone beyond that level in understanding. Thus, life's ultimate goal is not money, not clothes, not sex, not power, not food or any other of the instinctive needs. These are natural pursuits, but our real purpose on this Earth is to



Each soul evolves by experiencing many varied lives through reincarnation, called punarjanma in Sanskrit, the process wherein the soul repeatedly takes on a physical body through being born on Earth. Here, a soul, represented by the ray of light, is shown in seven successive lives. Reincarnation is a purposeful maturing process governed by the law of karma.

know, to love and to serve God and the Gods. That leads to the rare and priceless objects of life: enlightenment and liberation. This Hindu view of the soul's evolution answers many otherwise bewildering questions, removing the fear of death while giving assurance that each soul is evolving toward the same spiritual destiny, for the Hindu believes that karma and reincarnation are leading every single soul to God Realization.

3

What is karma?

Karma is the universal principle of cause and effect. Our actions, both good and bad, come back to us in the future, helping us to learn from life's lessons and become better people.

KARMA IS ONE OF THE NATURAL LAWS OF THE MIND, JUST AS gravity is a law of matter. Just as God created gravity to bring order to the physical world, He created karma as a divine system of justice that is self-governing and infinitely fair. It automatically creates the appropriate future experience in response to the current action. *Karma* simply means "action" or "cause and effect." When something happens to us that is apparently unfortunate or unjust, it is not God punishing us. It is the result of our own past actions.

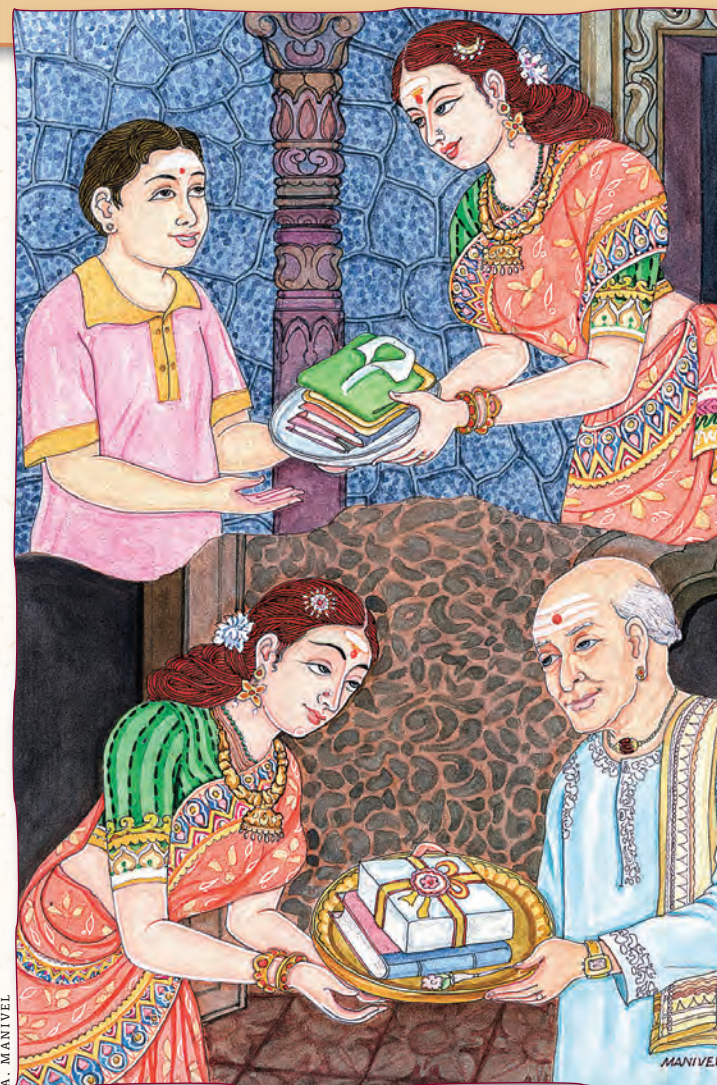
The *Vedas*, Hinduism's revealed scripture, tell us if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Thus we create our own destiny through thought and action. And the divine law is: whatever karma we are experiencing in our life is just what we need at the moment, and nothing can happen but that we have the strength to meet it. Even harsh karma, when faced in wisdom, can be the greatest catalyst for spiritual growth. Understanding the way karma works, we seek to live a good and virtuous life through right thought, right speech and right action. This is called dharma.

Elaboration: Karma is basically energy. I throw energy out through thoughts, words and deeds, and it comes back to me, in time, through other people. Karma is our best teacher, for we must always face the consequences of our actions and thus improve and refine our behavior, or suffer if we do not. We Hindus look at time as a circle, as things cycle around again. Professor Einstein came to the same conclusion. He saw time as a curve, and space as well. This would eventually make a circle.

Karma is a very just law which, like gravity, treats everyone the same. Because we Hindus understand karma, we do not hate or resent people who do us harm. We understand they are giving back the effects of the causes we set in motion at an earlier time. The law of karma puts man at the center of responsibility for everything he does and everything that is done to him.

Karma is a word we hear quite often on television. "This is my karma," or "It must have been something I did in a past life to bring such good karma to me." We hear karma simply defined as "What goes around, comes around." In some schools of Hinduism, karma is looked upon as something bad—perhaps because we are most aware of this law when we are facing difficult karma, and not so aware of it when life is going smoothly. Some Hindus even equate karma with sin, and this is what evangelical Christians preach that it means. Many people believe that karma means "fate," a preordained destiny over which one has no control, which is also untrue.

The process of action and reaction on all levels—physical, mental and spiritual—is karma. Here is an example. I say kind words to you, and you feel peaceful and happy. I say harsh words to you, and you become ruffled and upset. The kindness and the harshness will return to me, through others, at a later time. This is karma. An architect thinks creative, productive thoughts while drawing plans



One of the best examples of karma is that you can't give anything away but that generosity will return to you, with interest. Here, in the upper scene, a lady gives clothing to a youth. Below, she receives an unexpected gift from a neighbor as the karma of her good deed brings its natural reward. By wisely heeding karma's ways, we tread the path of dharma.

for a new building. But were he to think destructive, unproductive thoughts, he would soon not be able to accomplish any kind of positive task even if he desired to do so. This is karma, a natural law of the mind. We must also be very careful about our thoughts, because thought creates, and thoughts make karmas—good, bad and mixed.

4

Why do Hindus worship the cow?

Hindus don't worship cows. We respect, honor and adore the cow. By honoring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, we honor all creatures.

HINDUS REGARD ALL LIVING CREATURES AS SACRED—MAMMALS, fishes, birds and more. We acknowledge this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. At festivals we decorate and honor her, but we do not worship her in the sense that we worship the Deity.

To the Hindu, the cow symbolizes all other creatures. The cow is a symbol of the Earth, the nourisher, the ever-giving, undemanding provider. The cow represents life and the sustenance of life, providing manure for fertilizers and fuel for fires. The cow is so generous, taking nothing but water, grass and grain. It gives and gives and gives of its milk, as does the liberated soul give of his spiritual knowledge. The cow is so vital to life, the virtual sustainer of life, for many humans. The cow is a symbol of grace and abundance. Veneration of the cow instills in Hindus the virtues of gentleness, receptivity and connectedness with nature.

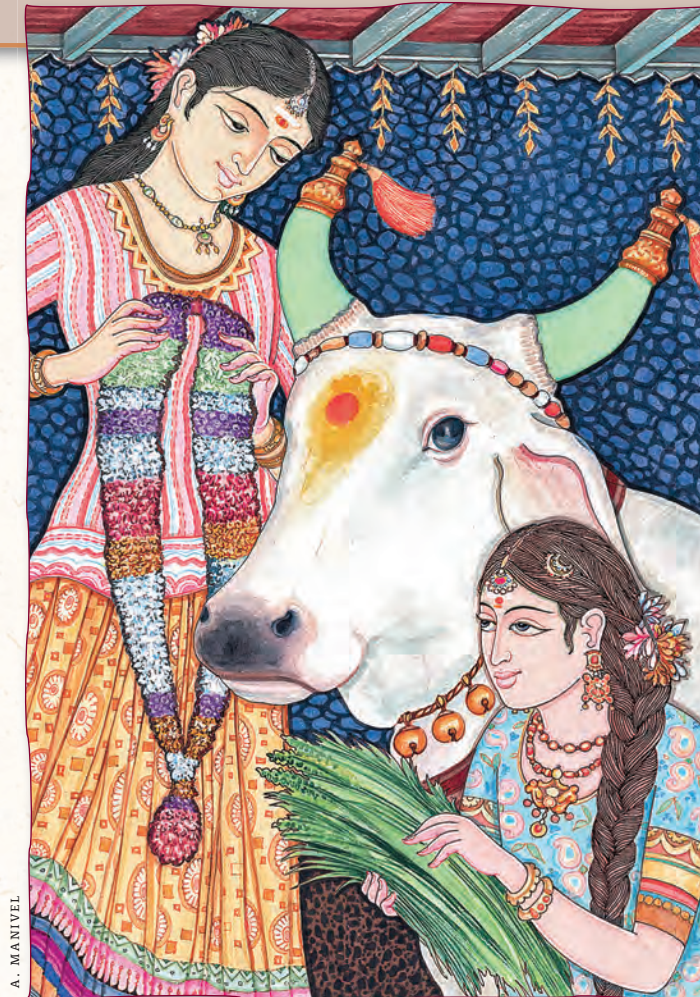
Elaboration: We are all aware of the remarkable value of the cow, how she provides milk and cream, yogurt and cheese, butter and ice cream, ghee and buttermilk. It would be hard to imagine the human diet without her gifts.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "One can measure the greatness of a nation and its moral progress by the way it treats its animals. Cow protection to me is not mere protection of the cow. It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world. The cow means the entire subhuman world." The only cow question for Hindus is, "Why don't more people respect and protect this remarkable creature?"

In the Hindu tradition, the cow is honored, garlanded and given special feedings at festivals all over India, most importantly the annual Gopashtami festival. Demonstrating how dearly Hindus love their cows, colorful cow jewelry and clothing is sold at fairs all over the Indian countryside. From a young age, Hindu children are taught to decorate the cow with garlands, paint and ornaments. Her nature is epitomized in Kamadhenu, the divine, wish-fulfilling cow. The cow and her sacred gifts—milk and ghee in particular—are essential elements in Hindu worship, penance and rites of passage. In India, more than 3,000 institutions called Gaushalas, maintained by charitable trusts, care for cows, especially the homeless ones. And while many Hindus are not vegetarians, most respect the still widely held code of abstaining from eating beef.

The Indian cow, *Bos indicus*, or Zebu, is regarded by her admirers as more a deva than a beast. The species is unique in both temperament and conformation. She boasts a large fatty hump at the shoulders, drooping ears, a pendulous fleshy dewlap at the throat and a special shape to the rump. Additionally, experts will point out a long streak down the spine, which is light in dark cows and dark in lighter ones. The Zebu, like the Jersey, gives a special form of milk, called A2, that is ideally suited to human consumption and health.

By her docile, tolerant nature, the cow exemplifies the cardinal virtue of Hinduism, noninjury, or *ahimsa*. The cow also symbolizes



Hindus do not worship cows, but they do revere them as the perfect example of Divinity in all forms of life. Here a girl garlands a cow whose horns are painted and adorned with brass tips and tassels. Her sister offers fresh grass. In India, the cow is honored, adored and protected as a symbol of wealth, strength, abundance, selfless giving and a full Earthly life.

dignity, strength, endurance, maternity and selfless service. In the *Vedas*, cows represent wealth and joyous Earthly life. From the *Rig Veda* (4.28.16) we read, "The cows have come and have brought us good fortune. In our stalls, contented, may they stay! May they bring forth calves for us, many-colored, giving milk for Indra each day. You make, O cows, the thin man sleek; to the unlovely you bring beauty. Rejoice our homestead with pleasant lowing. In our assemblies we laud your vigor."

5

Are Hindus idol worshipers?

Hindus do not worship a stone or metal “idol” as God. We worship God through the image. We invoke the presence of God from the higher, unseen worlds, into the image so that we can commune with Him and receive His blessings.

THE STONE OR METAL DEITY IMAGES IN HINDU TEMPLES AND shrines are not mere symbols of the Gods. They are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. We may liken this mystery to our ability to communicate with others through the telephone. We do not talk to the telephone; rather we use it as a means of communication with another person. Without the telephone, we could not converse across long distances; and without the sanctified icon in the temple, we cannot easily commune with the Deity.

Divinity can also be invoked and felt in a sacred fire, or in a tree, or in the enlightened person of a *satguru*. In our temples, God is invoked in the sanctum by highly trained priests. Through the practice of yoga, or meditation, we invoke God inside ourself. *Yoga* means to yoke oneself to God within. The image or icon of worship is a focus for our prayers and devotions.

Another way to explain icon worship is to acknowledge that Hindus believe God is everywhere, in all things, whether stone, wood, creatures or people. So, it is not surprising that they feel comfortable worshipping the Divine in His material manifestation. The Hindu can see God in stone and water, fire, air and ether, and inside his own soul. Indeed, there are Hindu temples which have in the sanctum sanctorum no image at all but a yantra, a symbolic or mystic diagram. However, the sight of the image enhances the devotee's worship.

Elaboration: In Hinduism one of the ultimate attainments is when the seeker transcends the need of all form and symbol. This is the yogi's goal. In this way Hinduism is the least idol-oriented of all the religions of the world. There is no religion that is more aware of the transcendent, timeless, formless, causeless Truth. Nor is there any religion which uses more symbols to represent Truth in preparation for that realization.

Humorously speaking, Hindus are not idle worshipers. I have never seen a Hindu worship in a lazy or idle way. They worship with great vigor and devotion, with unstinting regularity and constancy. There's nothing idle about our ways of worship! (A little humor never hurts.) But, of course, the question is about “graven images.”

All religions have their symbols of holiness through which the sacred flows into the mundane. To name a few: the Christian cross, or statues of Mother Mary, the holy Kaaba in Mecca, the Sikh *Adi Granth* enshrined in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Arc and Torah of the Jews, the image of a meditating Buddha, the totems of indigenous and Pagan faiths, and the artifacts of the holy men and women of all religions. Such icons, or graven images, are held in awe by the followers of the respective faiths. The question is, does this make all such religionists idol worshipers? The answer is, yes and no. From our perspective, idol worship is an intelligent, mystical practice shared by all of the world's great faiths.

The human mind releases itself from suffering through the use



A devotee looks within and beyond the bronze dancing Siva to behold God in His spiritual body of light. Dressed in traditional Hindu garb, the man is performing his daily puja in his home shrine—chanting Sanskrit mantras, offering fruit, water, flowers, incense and light—worshipping devoutly, beseeching God to send blessings through the enshrined image.

of forms and symbols that awaken reverence, evoke sanctity and spiritual wisdom. Even a fundamentalist Christian who rejects all forms of idol worship, including those of the Catholic and Episcopal churches, would resent someone who showed disrespect for his Bible. This is because he considers it sacred. His book and the Hindu's icon are much alike in this way.

6

Are Hindus forbidden to eat meat?

Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. But in today's world not all Hindus are vegetarians.

OUR RELIGION DOES NOT LAY DOWN RIGID “DO'S AND don'ts.” There are no commandments. Hinduism gives us the wisdom to make up our own mind on what we put in our body, for it is the only one we have—in this life, at least. Vegetarians are more numerous in the South of India than in the North. This is because of the North's cooler climactic conditions and past Islamic influence. Priests and religious leaders are definitely vegetarian, so as to maintain a high level of purity and spiritual consciousness to fulfill their responsibilities, and to awaken the refined areas of their nature. Soldiers and law-enforcement officers are generally not vegetarians, because they have to keep alive their aggressive forces in order to perform their work. To practice yoga and be successful in meditation, it is mandatory to be vegetarian. It is a matter of wisdom—the application of knowledge at any given moment. Today, roughly thirty percent of all Hindus are vegetarians.

Elaboration: This can be a touchy subject. There are several ways to respond, depending on who is asking and the background in which he was raised. But the overlying principle that defines the Hindu answer to this query is *ahimsa*—refraining from injuring, physically, mentally or emotionally, anyone or any living creature. The Hindu who wishes to strictly follow the path of noninjury naturally adopts a vegetarian diet. It's a matter of conscience more than anything else.

When we eat meat, fish, fowl and eggs, we absorb the vibration of the instinctive creatures into our nerve system. This chemically alters our consciousness and amplifies our lower nature, which is prone to fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, resentment and the like. Many Hindu swamis advise followers to be well-established vegetarians prior to initiation into mantra, and to remain vegetarian thereafter. But most do not insist upon vegetarianism for those not seeking initiation. Swamis have learned that families who are vegetarian have fewer problems than those who are not.

Poignant scriptural citations counsel against eating meat. The *Yajur Veda* (36.18) calls for kindness toward all creatures living on the Earth, in the air and in the water. The *Tirukural*, a 2,200-year-old masterpiece of ethics, states, “When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he will abstain from eating it” (257). The *Manu Dharma Shastras* state, “Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh,” and “When the diet is pure, the mind and heart are pure.” For guidance in this and all matters, Hindus also rely on their own guru, community elders, their own conscience and their knowledge of the benefits of abstaining from meat and enjoying a wholesome vegetarian diet. Of course, there are good Hindus who eat meat, and there are not-so-good Hindus who are vegetarians.

Today around the world millions of people are vegetarians because they want to live a long time and be healthy. Many feel a moral obligation to shun the mentality of violence to which meat-eating



Vendors at a market are selling fruits, vegetables, grains, spices and sweets—a potpourri of foods that great cooks creatively combine in one of the world's most sumptuous cuisines. Hindus understand the sound reasons against eating meat, and many abstain entirely. With such a savory and healthy diet, there is no need to consume flesh.

gives rise. There are good books on vegetarianism, such as *Diet for a New America*. There is also a fine magazine called *Vegetarian Times*. The booklet “How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater” is on-line at: www.himalayanacademy.com/view/the-meat-free-life_ei.

7

Do Hindus have a Bible?

Our “Bible” is called the *Veda*. The *Veda*, which means “wisdom,” is comprised of four ancient and holy scriptures which all Hindus revere as the revealed word of God.

LIKE THE TAOIST *TAO TE CHING*, THE BUDDHIST *DHAMMAPADA*, the Sikh *Adi Granth*, the Jewish *Torah*, the Christian *Bible* and the Muslim *Koran*—the *Veda* is the Hindu holy book. The four books of the *Vedas*—*Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*—include over 100,000 verses. The knowledge imparted by the *Vedas* ranges from earthy devotion to high philosophy. Their words and wisdom permeate Hindu thought, ritual and meditation.

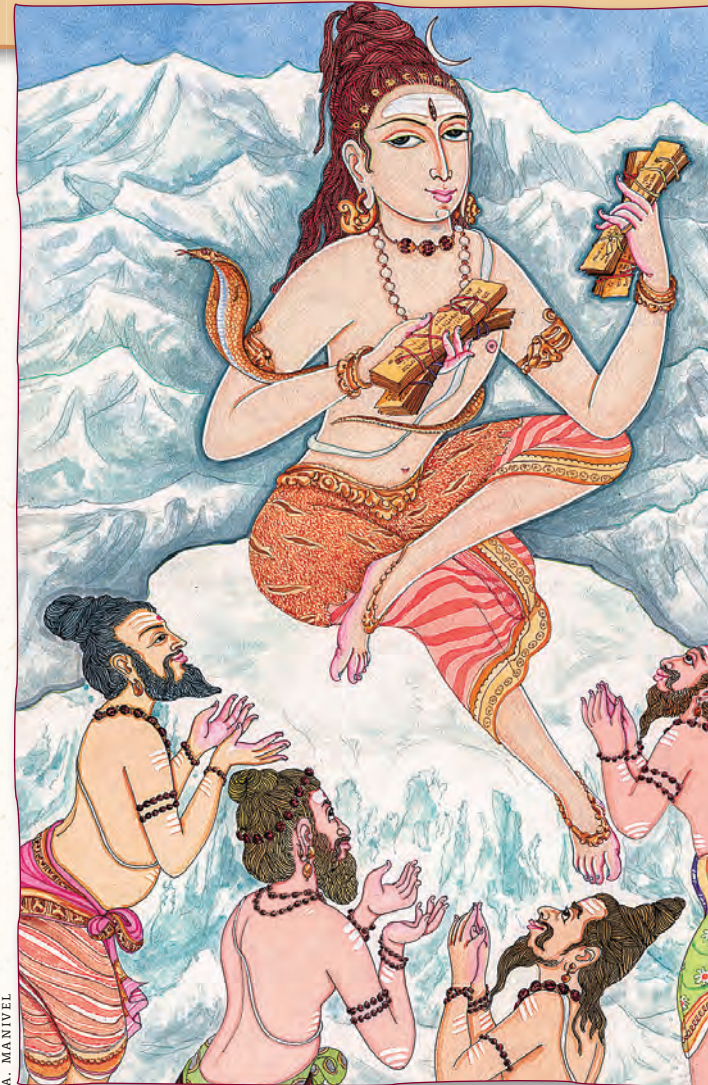
The *Vedas* are the ultimate scriptural authority for Hindus. Their oldest portions are said by some to date back as far as 6,000 BCE, orally transmitted for most of history and written down in Sanskrit in the last few millennia, making them the world’s longest and most ancient scripture. The *Vedas* open a rare window into ancient Indian society, proclaiming life’s sacredness and the way to oneness with God.

Elaboration: For untold centuries unto today, the *Vedas* have remained the sustaining force and authoritative doctrine, guiding followers in ways of worship, duty and enlightenment. The *Vedas* are the meditative and philosophical focus for millions of monks and a billion seekers. Their stanzas are chanted from memory by priests and laymen daily as liturgy in temple worship and domestic ritual. All Hindus wholeheartedly accept the *Vedas*, yet each draws selectively, interprets freely and amplifies abundantly. Over time, this tolerant allegiance has woven the varied tapestry of Indian Hindu Dharma.

Each of the four *Vedas* has four sections: *Samhitas* (hymn collections), *Brahmanas* (priestly manuals), *Aranyakas* (forest treatises) and *Upanishads* (enlightened discourses). The *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas* affirm that God is immanent and transcendent and prescribe ritual worship, mantra and devotional hymns to establish communication with the spiritual worlds. The hymns are invocations to the One Divine and to the Divinities of nature, such as the Sun, the Rain, the Wind, the Fire and the Dawn—as well as prayers for matrimony, progeny, prosperity, concord, protection, domestic rites and more.

The *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* outline the soul’s evolutionary journey, provide yogic philosophical training and propound realization of man’s oneness with God as the destiny of all souls. Today, the *Vedas* are published in Sanskrit, English, French, German and other languages. But it is the popular, metaphysical *Upanishads* that have been most amply and ably translated.

The *Vedas* advise: “Let there be no neglect of Truth. Let there be no neglect of dharma. Let there be no neglect of welfare. Let there be no neglect of prosperity. Let there be no neglect of study and teaching. Let there be no neglect of the duties to the Gods and the ancestors” (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 1.11.1). “United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be one, that you may long together dwell in unity and concord!” (*Rig Veda* 10.191.4). “There, where there is no darkness, nor night, nor day, nor being, nor non-being, there is the Auspicious One, alone, absolute and eternal. There is the glorious



The Vedas are revealed scripture, meaning they were issued forth by God through enlightened sages, or rishis. This divine transmission is depicted here as Lord Siva bestows the four books of the Veda to four rishis. The sacred knowledge, passed orally for most of history, was finally scribed in Sanskrit on palm leaves to share and preserve it.

splendor of that Light from whom in the beginning sprang ancient wisdom” (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 4.18). “Taking as a bow the great weapon of the *Upanishad*, one should put upon it an arrow sharpened by meditation. Stretching it with a thought directed to the essence of That, penetrate that Imperishable as the mark, my friend” (*Mundaka Upanishad* 2.2.3).

8

Why do many Hindus wear a dot near the middle of their forehead?

The dot worn on the forehead is a religious symbol. It represents divine sight and shows that one is a Hindu. For women, it is also a beauty mark.

THE DOT WORN BETWEEN THE EYES OR IN THE MIDDLE OF THE forehead is a sign that one is a Hindu. It is called the bindi in the Hindi language, bindu in Sanskrit and *pottu* in Tamil. In olden days, all Hindu men and women wore these marks, and they both also wore earrings. Today it is the women who are most faithful in wearing the bindi.

The dot has a mystical meaning. It represents the third eye of spiritual sight, which sees things the physical eyes cannot see. Hindus seek to awaken their inner sight through yoga. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate this spiritual vision to perceive and better understand life’s inner workings—to see things not just physically, but with the “mind’s eye” as well. The bindi is made of red powder (called *sindur*, traditionally made from powdered turmeric and fresh lime juice), sandalpaste or cosmetics.

In addition to the simple dot, there are many types of forehead marks, known as *tilaka* in Sanskrit. Each mark represents a particular sect or denomination of our vast religion. We have four major sects: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. Vaishnava Hindus, for example, wear a v-shaped tilaka made of white clay. Elaborate tilakas are worn by Hindus mainly at religious events, though many wear the simple bindi, indicating they are Hindu, even in the general public. By these marks we know what a person believes, and therefore know how to begin conversations.

For Hindu women, the forehead dot is also a beauty mark, not unlike the black mark European and American women once wore on the cheek. The red bindi is generally a sign of marriage. A black bindi is often worn before marriage to ward off the evil eye. As an exotic fashion statement, the dot’s color complements the color of a lady’s sari. Ornate bindis are even worn by actresses in popular movies and TV shows.

Elaboration: Men and women of a particular religion wishing to identify themselves to one another often do so by wearing distinctive religious symbols. Often these are blessed in their temples, churches or synagogues. Christians wear a cross on a necklace. Jewish boys wear small leather cases that hold scriptural passages, and the round cap called yarmulka. Sikh men wear their hair in a turban. In many countries, Muslim women cover their head with a scarf, called hijab.

Do not be ashamed to wear the bindi on your forehead in the United States, Canada, Europe or any country of the world. Wear it proudly. The forehead dot will distinguish you from all other people as a very special person, a Hindu, a knower of eternal truths. You will never be mistaken as belonging to another nationality or religion. The sacred forehead dot is an easy way of distinguishing Hindus from Muslims. And don’t be intimidated when people ask you what the dot means. Now you have lots of information to give a good answer, which will probably lead to more questions about your venerable religion.

For both boys and girls, men and women, the dot can be small or



Decorating the face and body with colorful paints is a universal human practice, often a cultural rite expressing one’s tribe, beliefs and identity. The forehead dot shows that one is proud to be a Hindu and bespeaks mystical seeing beyond the five senses. Here, in a simple, daily act, a woman obligingly applies a red bindi to her sister’s forehead.

large depending on the circumstance, but should always be there when appropriate. Naturally, we don’t want to flaunt our religion in the face of others. We observe that many Christian men and women take off or conceal their crosses in the corporate business world. Some communities and institutions disallow wearing religious symbols entirely.

9

Are the Gods of Hinduism really married?

It is true that God is often depicted with a spouse in our traditional stories. However, on a deeper philosophical level, the Supreme Being and the Gods are neither male nor female and are therefore not married.

IN POPULAR, VILLAGE HINDUISM GOD IS REPRESENTED AS MALE, and God's energy, or Shakti, is personified as His spouse—for example, Vishnu and Lakshmi. In Hindu temples, art and mythology, God is everywhere seen as the beloved, divine couple. Philosophically, however, the caution is always made that God and God's energy are One, and the metaphor of the inseparable divine couple serves only to illustrate this Oneness.

Hinduism is taught on many levels to many different people, and to uneducated people who are not able to understand high philosophy, Hinduism is taught in story form. Because the temple is the center of every Hindu community, and everyone is focused on the temple and the Gods within it, the Gods are the major players in these stories. Hindus who understand the higher philosophy seek to find God on the inside while also worshiping God in the temples. Simple folk strive to be like a God, or like a Goddess. These tales, called *Puranas*, have long been the basis of dance, plays and storytelling around the fire in the homes to children as they are growing up. The stories illustrate how a family should live, how they should raise their children, and much more. Before the printing press, there were few books, and Hinduism was conveyed orally through stories and parables. While these often violent children's tales should not be perpetuated, there remains much of value in the extensive writings of the *Puranas*.

Elaboration: Those who learn the higher Hindu philosophies know that Gods are neither male nor female. In fact, attaining to that Godly level of being is one of the mystical goals of yoga. This is accomplished by blending the feminine and masculine currents, *ida* and *pingala*, into the spiritual current, *sushumna*, in the center of the spine within each individual.

Hindus know that the Gods do not marry, that they are complete within themselves. This unity is depicted in the traditional icon of Ardhanarishvara, Siva as half man and half woman, and in the teaching that Siva and Shakti are one, that Shakti is Siva's energy. Siva is dearly loved as our Father-Mother God. Sexual gender and matrimonial relations are of the physical and emotional realms, whereas the Gods exist in a stratum that far supersedes these levels of life. For that matter, the soul itself is neither male nor female.

Some modern swamis now urge devotees not to pay any attention to Puranic stories about the Gods, saying that they have no relationship with the world today—that they are misleading and confusing and should no longer be taught to the children. Instead, they encourage followers to deepen themselves with the higher philosophies of the Vedic *Upanishads* and the realizations of Hindu seers.

Other faiths sometimes criticize the Hindu religion as a sort of comic-book religion, and we should not be part of perpetuating that image by passing on such misconceptions as the marriage of the Gods. Other religions move and adjust with the times. Hinduism must also do so. It must offer answers to the questions about God, soul and world—answers that are reasonable, that can be un-



Through history Hindus have depicted God as Ardhanarishvara, which literally means "half-female Lord"—Siva as male on the right and female on the left. This vision of the Divine as our Mother-Father God supersedes the popular, mythological notion of marriage of a God and Goddess, declaring that God and His energy are one.

derstood and accepted even by a child, that are coherent, sensible and strictly in accord with scripture and tradition. This is necessary in the technological age, necessary in order that Hinduism will be a religion of the future, not of the past.

10

What about caste and untouchability?

Caste is the hereditary division of Indian society based on occupation. The lowest class, deemed untouchables, suffer from discrimination and mistreatment. It is illegal in India to discriminate against, abuse or insult anyone on the basis of caste.

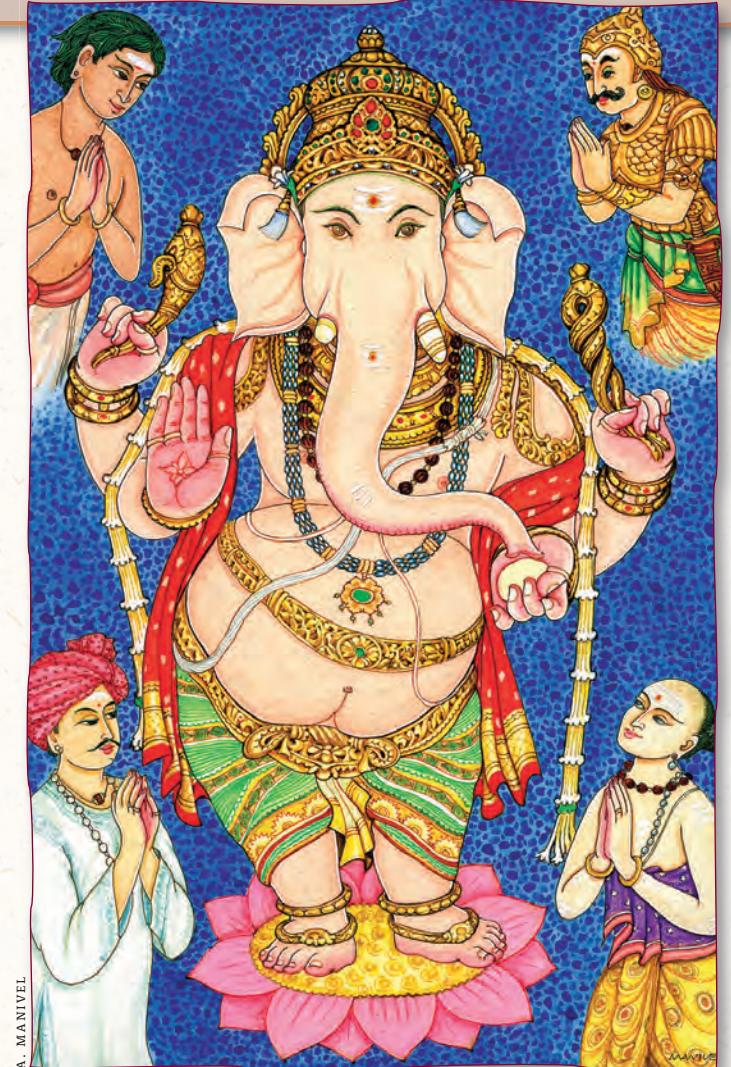
CASTE, FROM THE PORTUGUESE *casta*, MEANING "CLAN" OR "lineage," refers to two systems within Hindu society. The first is *varna*, the division of society into four groups: workers, business people, lawmakers/law enforcers and priests. The second is *jati*, the thousands of occupational guilds whose members follow a single profession. Jati members usually marry within their own jati and follow traditions associated with their jati. In urban areas they often enter other occupations, but still usually arrange marriages within the jati.

Wealth, especially in urban areas, often trumps caste. Industrialization and education have greatly altered India's jati system by eliminating or changing the professions upon which it was originally based, and opening new employment options. The jatis are evolving to function today less like guilds and more like large clans of related families. At the bottom are the so-called untouchables, who perform the dirtiest jobs and have suffered much like the black people of America, whose ancestors were freed from slavery in 1865. Strong laws have been passed in India to end caste-based discrimination. Modern Hindus rightly deplore caste abuse and are working to set matters right. Just as in the US, it is a difficult task that will take decades, especially in the villages.

Elaboration: Caste is, no doubt, the biggest stick that Hindus get beaten with. It is taught as the defining attribute, or fatal flaw, of Hinduism in Western schools. Untouchability as a formal system shocks Westerners. One response we can make is to separate social stratification from the issue of racial/class discrimination.

First issue: social stratification. India is one of the world's oldest societies. It has sustained a continuity of culture and religion for thousands of years. Europe, on the other hand, has seen millennia of upheaval. Still, one only has to go back to before the 17th-century industrial revolution to find a social system that is similar to caste. European society then comprised the landed elite (including royalty, a hereditary caste maintained to this day), merchants, artisans and peasants. The artisans formed guilds, occupation-based organizations that served both as closed unions and marketing monopolies. The guild legacy remains in Western surnames such as Smith, a metal worker. There was no public education system, and each generation learned at home the family occupation. There was little technological change, so jobs were static. Industrialization and public education altered (but did not destroy) this class system in the West, just as they are changing caste and jati in India today.

Second issue: racial/class discrimination. Most Indians are unfamiliar with the extent of discrimination in the West today. In America, for example, hundreds of thousands live destitute and homeless on city streets, as true "untouchables." US cities are more racially segregated than before the 1950s Civil Rights Movement because of "white flight" to the suburbs. Black Americans receive harsher sentences than white Americans for the same crime. Many Native American Indians live at the bottom of society, destitute and



Representatives of the four castes, or varnas, are shown here surrounding Lord Ganesha. They are: worker, businessman, law enforcer and priest. These are natural divisions which appear in all nations and societies as shown by the universal existence, in some form, of labor unions, businessmen's associations, armies and police forces, and religious ministers.

alcoholic, on barren Indian reservations. This kind of response—we can call it the "You're one, too" defense—doesn't mean Hindus should not work much harder to end caste discrimination. But it reminds others that no country in the world is yet free from racial discrimination.

11

Is yoga a Hindu practice?

Deeply rooted in Hindu scripture and belief, yoga is, and always was, a vital part of Hindu religion and culture. Today it is embraced by tens of millions of non-Hindus seeking its renowned benefits to physical, mental and spiritual health.

IN RECENT YEARS A VIGOROUS DEBATE HAS ARISEN AS TO WHETHER yoga is intrinsically a Hindu practice or a universal science. The word *yoga* has changed as the practice moved west. Its original meaning, "union with God," has been replaced with the more secular definition presented by upscale yoga studios around the world that teach a regimen of asanas along with basic breathing and a little meditation. A typical studio ad focuses on the physicality, stating that "yoga increases the circulation of oxygen-rich blood, nourishing and detoxifying the internal organs, musculature, cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, digestive, reproductive and nervous systems." The United States alone has over 36 million practitioners, and there are hundreds of millions worldwide.

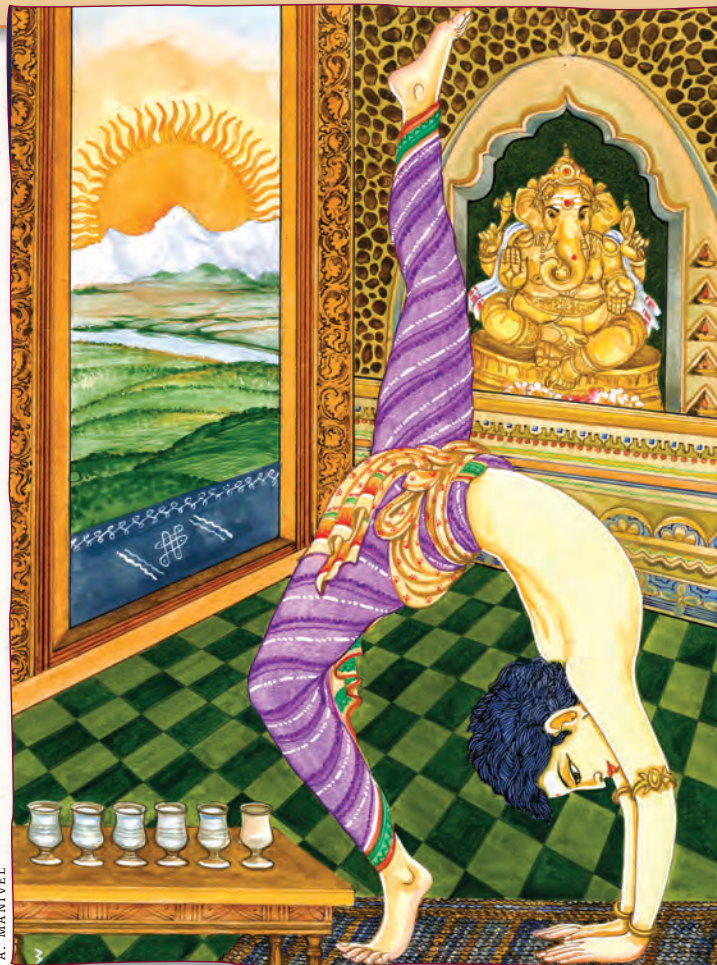
B.K.S. Iyengar, a renowned yoga teacher, gives a more traditional definition on his website: "Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means 'union.' On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self."

Elaboration: The term *yoga* actually refers to a wide range of Hindu practices; so it is important to specify what kind of yoga is being discussed. In common modern usage, *yoga* typically refers to hatha yoga—the performance of yoga postures, or asanas, which are drawn from ancient Hindu scriptures. Hatha yoga has always been performed by Hindus as a preparation for meditation; today, especially in the West, its health benefits commonly supersede the spiritual. Hatha yoga is just one facet of a broader body of knowledge and practice known as *ashtanga* yoga, which consists of eight stages. (*Ashta* means eight; *anga* means limb). The famous *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, who lived around 200 bce, is considered the first systematic presentation of the ancient tradition of yoga.

To appreciate yoga's spiritual and religious nature, one need only consider each of its eight limbs, or facets. The first is *yama*, the ethical restraints; of these, the most important is *ahimsa*, noninjury. The second is *niyama*, specific religious observances, including *puja* in one's home shrine and repeating mantras. The third is *asana*, the widely practiced hatha yoga postures. The remaining five limbs are all related to meditation: *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (illumination, or oneness with God).

Can those of other faiths benefit from the practice of yoga—without threatening their religion's beliefs? Certainly followers of liberal religious traditions can do so. However, clerics of conservative faith traditions have spoken against its practice for their adherents. For example, in 2008 the leading Islamic council in Malaysia issued an edict prohibiting the country's Muslims from practicing yoga. Council chairman Abdul Shukor Husim explained: "We are of the view that yoga, which originates in Hinduism... destroys a Muslim's faith. There are other ways to get exercise. You can go cycling, swimming, etc."

The Reverend Richard Farr, vicar of Saint Mary's Church in Hen-



At dawn a devotee practices an advanced hatha yoga asana as part of a series that will prepare him for meditation. Each day in his shrine room, he follows a one-hour spiritual routine of yoga, worship and meditation.

ham, England, commented in 2001: "I accept that for some people it is simply an exercise. But it is also often a gateway into other spiritualities, including Eastern mysticism." The Vatican has issued numerous edicts about the pursuit of yoga. In 1989 it warned that practices like Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer.

It is sometimes argued that yoga is not Hindu *per se*; only the roots are Hindu. The fact that yoga is pursued by many non-Hindus is irrelevant to its validity as a Hindu practice. The roots of yoga, its scriptural origins, are Hindu. The stem of yoga, its practice, is Hindu; and the flower of yoga, mystical union with God, is Hindu. Yoga, in its full glory, is entirely Hindu. Practice at your own risk!

12

How do Hindus view other religions?

Hindus honor all religious traditions and the people within them. While regarding our faith as uniquely endowed, we believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all.

IN INDIA, WHERE HINDUS ARE THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY, the rights of minority religions have always been honored. Hindus have welcomed, embraced and lived peacefully among other religions for centuries. During those same centuries, Hinduism itself evolved into hundreds of strains, and thus Hindus are fully at home with many different traditions and viewpoints within their own faith. Hence, they are naturally tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and not objecting when the doctrines of one conflict with those of another. Hindus readily accept the idea that it is not necessary, desirable or even possible for everyone to hold the same beliefs. And certainly such differences should never be cause for tension, criticism, intolerance or violence.

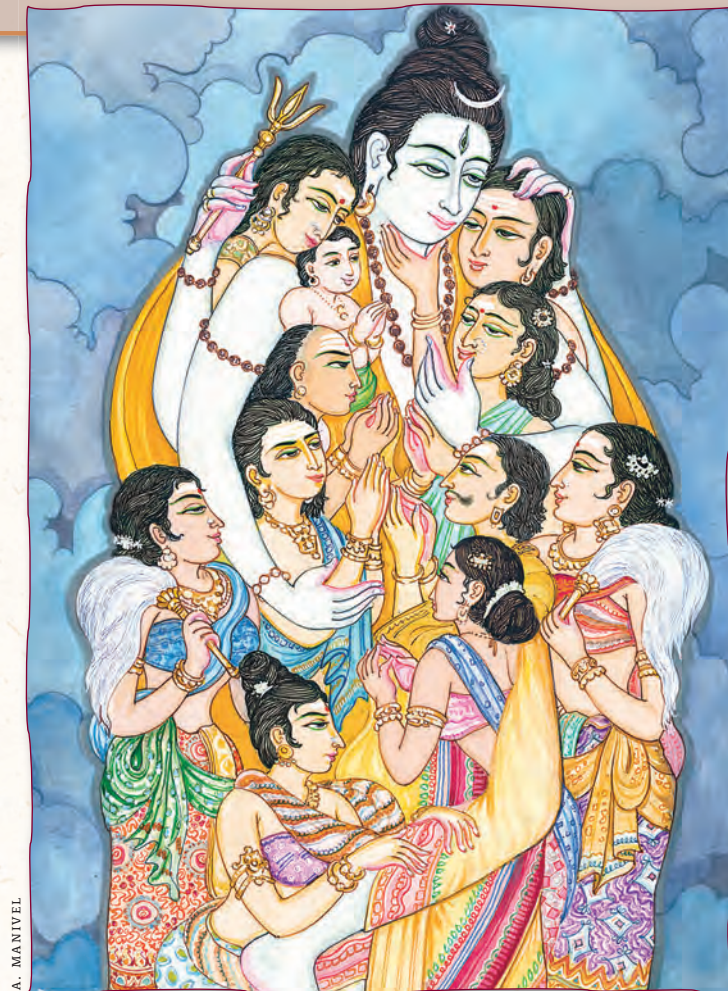
The ancient *Shiva Mahimna Stotram* summarizes the Hindu attitude: "As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

Hindus do not proselytize, meaning they do not try to convert members of other faiths to their own. Proselytizing is based upon the belief that one's religion is the only true religion and everyone else should join it. Hindus hold the view that all faiths are beneficial. A devout Hindu is supportive of all efforts that lead to a pure and virtuous life and would consider it unthinkable to dissuade a sincere devotee from his chosen faith. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. While encouraging others to follow their chosen path with dedication, Hindus hold Sanatana Dharma to be the fullest expression of religion, and do accept sincere souls who seek entrance into Hinduism.

Elaboration: When discussing other religions, Hindu leaders often quote a verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): "Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti," meaning "Truth is One, sages describe it variously." It conveys a core Hindu idea: that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former president of India, stressed this point: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it."

In expressing religious tolerance, Hindus sometimes cite the above verse to assert that all religions are the same. In reality, all religions are not the same, nor is that indicated by this verse. It simply says that all religions revere the One Truth; all believe in the One Supreme Being. Their beliefs and practices are different; their paths are distinct. Instead of saying, "All religions are the same," it is better to state that "all religions are good."

Hindus share values common to all faiths: piety, love of God, respect for tradition, a stress on duty, responsibility and basic human virtues, such as nonviolence, truthfulness, compassion and charity. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. They also acknowledge and



Here the artist depicts the intimate affection between God Siva and humanity. All are embraced, accepted and loved, whatever path they follow, whatever religion they profess.

honor the many ways that religions differ. For example, meditation and yoga are commonly practiced in Eastern religions but not usually in Western faiths.

The heart of a religion is its understanding of the soul's relationship to God. Hinduism and most Eastern religions believe that, at the highest level, God and soul are one, inseparable, while Western faiths maintain that Creator and creation are eternally distinct.

Hindus support and participate in ecumenical gatherings with other religions, while upholding their own traditions. They confidently defend their faith, proceed contentedly with their practices and avoid the enchantment of other ways, be they ancient or modern.

13

Why do some Hindu Gods have animal features?

In dreams and visions the inner-plane beings have revealed themselves to mankind to be of many forms, expressing many powers. Some appear human, and others, like Ganesha, have animal features.

THE VARIOUS GODS IN HINDUISM'S wide-ranging traditions possess distinct personalities and forms based on how they have been seen in visions and how they are depicted in stories and legends. Hindus feel no need to question the fact, for instance, that Lord Ganesha has the head of an elephant. They know He has been seen in this way by rishis and even by ordinary devotees. Did He choose that form to distinguish Himself as the Lord of Obstacles? No one really knows. The important fact is that millions of Hindus worship and receive blessings from the benevolent Elephant-Faced God every day. Many Hindus seeking an explanation hold that Ganesha is a real being who looks like an elephant. Others believe the elephant form is symbolic. Millions are content with the ancient stories in the *Puranas* that explain how He came to have an elephant head. Interestingly, and perhaps because of His endearing visage, Ganesha is the most popular of all the Hindu Deities. Numerous other Hindu Divinities have animal attributes, including Hanuman, Varuna, Kamadhenu, the Nagas, the *vahanas* (animal mounts of the Gods) and four of Vishnu's ten incarnations (fish, turtle, boar and half-man-half-lion).

Elaboration: An exploration of other ancient faiths shows that Hinduism is not alone in having Divinities with animal attributes. The ancient Greeks worshiped the God Pan, who has the hind-quarters, legs and horns of a goat, and the Sea Gods Ichthyocentaurs, with human heads and torsos, the front legs of a horse and the serpentine tails of fish. In Egypt's pantheon, Anubis (God of the Underworld) is a falcon-headed man, as is Ra (the Sun God). Thoth (Lord of Wisdom and of the Moon) has the head of an ibis or a baboon, and His consort, Bastet, has the form of a cat or a lioness. The Mesoamerican peoples worshiped Quetzalcoatl, a feathered serpent. The Assyrians feared the powerful serpent Goddess Tiamat and revered various winged beings. In Japan—where Buddhism and Shintoism are intertwined—Kitsune the fox and Tengu the bird man are powerful shape-shifters who can transform into human or inanimate shapes to trick humans. Many shrines there are guarded by a pair of magical lion-dogs known as the Koma-inu or Shishi.

In a discussion with Christians, who tend to ridicule Hinduism on this point, you can recall that winged angels are half-human and half-bird. Four-headed beings called the Cherubims were central in the early Christianity. In the Bible's *Book of Revelation*, John writes: "I saw a throne standing in heaven; and the One who was sitting on



Hanuman carries Iraivan Temple from India to Hawaii. With His monkey body, Hanuman is one of many non-human Deities in the Hindu pantheon. A devotee of Lord Rama, He is regarded as a powerful ally to all on the spiritual path, a symbol of strength and dedication.

the throne... In the center, grouped around the throne itself, were four animals with many eyes, in front and behind. The first animal was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third animal had a human face, and the fourth animal was like a flying eagle. Each of the four animals had six wings..." (4:1-8). The description matches an account by Jewish prophet Elijah centuries before. Importantly, these beings are the most powerful beings in the pantheon, closest to the Creator.

Over the millennia, worship and awareness of Deities with animal features was eclipsed in most cultures as the monotheistic religions grew into prominence. Were these beings mere myth and imagination, as depicted by modern scholars? Or were the peoples of ancient times aware of a mystical reality that has been sealed off? In most cultures, the old Gods have been put in exile. Only in Hinduism does such worship thrive in unbroken continuity.

One might note the obvious fact that *Homo sapiens*, too, is an animal species, one among many.

14

Why do Hindus cremate the dead?

Hindus arrange swift cremation of the dead, ideally within 24 hours. The fire and accompanying rites sever ties to earthly life and give momentum to the soul for its continuing spiritual journey.

HINDUS TRADITIONALLY CREMATE THEIR dead because a fiery dissolution of the body brings swifter, more complete release of the soul than burial, which preserves the soul's psychic connection to its just-ended earthly life. After death, the departed soul hovers close to the earth plane in its astral body, emotionally attached to the physical body and its old surroundings, still able to see this material world. The funeral rites and burning of the body signify spiritual release, notifying the soul that, in fact, death has come. Some of the funeral chants address the deceased, urging the soul to relinquish attachments and continue its spiritual journey. The Gods and devas are invoked to assist the soul in its transition. The fire severs ties to earthly life and gives momentum to the soul, granting at least momentary access to refined, heavenly realms. All attention is on a singular goal, as expressed in this prayer from the *Rig Veda*: "Release him again, O Agni, to the fathers. The one offered to you now proceeds to his destiny. Putting on new life, let him approach the surviving, let him reunite with a [new] body, All-Knowing One!" (10. 16. 5).

Elaboration: Hindus do not believe in bodily resurrection and the reuniting of each soul with its physical body, so they place no importance on preserving the corpse, which is one reason for burial in the Abrahamic religions. The Hindu belief in reincarnation gives assurance that death is merely the soul's release from the current life. An ancient text puts it simply, "Even as the snake sloughs off its skin, even as the bird leaves its shell, even as in its waking state the soul forgets happenings of the dream state, thus does the soul migrate from one body to another..." (*Tirumantiram* 2132).

Family and friends take an active part in releasing the departed soul: preparing the body, joining in the rituals, transporting the body to the cremation grounds and lighting the pyre. After cremation, the ashes are ceremoniously committed to a river (often the Ganga), lake or ocean, along with garlands and flowers. While the rites allow family a dignified farewell and an opportunity to express grief, all present know there will be other bodies, other lives. Mourning is never suppressed, but scriptures admonish against excessive lamentation and encourage joyous release. The departed soul feels the impact of emotional forces directed at him, and prolonged grieving can hold him in earthly consciousness, inhibiting full transition to the inner worlds. Hindus speak of death as the Great Departure, regarding it as life's most exalted moment. The death anniversary is called Liberation Day.



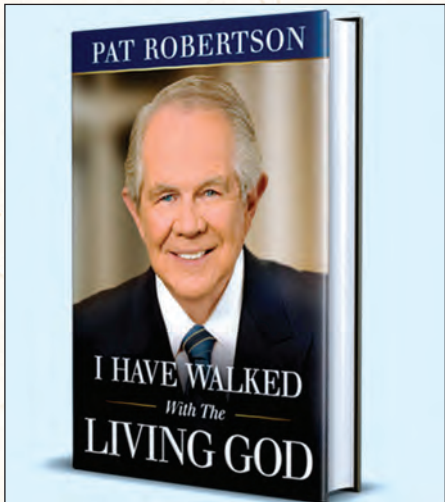
A body, wrapped in cotton cloth, is placed on a funeral pyre made of stacks of wood. Flames return the elements to nature, leaving purified ashes that will be placed in a river or other body of water.

Cremation is prescribed in the Vedic texts, and Hindu funeral customs are remarkably uniform throughout India. Cremation is also practiced by other Indic faiths, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism, and is becoming popular worldwide. Many believe the body should be disposed of as swiftly and cleanly as possible and that fire is the purest way to return the physical elements to their source. It is less expensive than burial, with a smaller impact on the environment. Recent figures show that cremations are chosen by 85% in India, 50% in the US, 75% in the UK, 99.9% in Japan, 68% in Canada and 45% in China.

Infants and small children, however, are buried in Hindu tradition. Another exception pertains to enlightened souls, for whom the body is often interred in a crypt filled with salt, and a shrine or temple is constructed at the site. Sacred texts assert their remarkable disciplines have endowed the physical body with immense spiritual power, which can radiate for generations, giving blessings through this sacred *samadhi*, especially if that soul remains aware of the Earth plane.



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CHARISMA HOUSE

E V A N G E L I S M

The Day Robertson Vilified Hinduism

Our 1995 story on the recently retired evangelist recounts how he labeled Hinduism as “demonic” and advocated keeping Hindus out of America

When the preacher Pat Robertson announced his retirement at age 91 in September, 2021, we felt compelled to rerun this article from our July 1995 issue recording his attitudes and efforts to impugn other religions—Hinduism in particular. Multi-millionaire Robertson is chairman of the Christian Broadcasting Network and chancellor of Regent University.

BY DR. JULIE RAJAN, NEW JERSEY
IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL FOR PAT ROBERTSON'S Christian TV show, "The 700 Club," to portray other religions in a less than complimentary light. Jews, Muslims and occasionally Hindus are singled out for a scathing recounting of their spiritual errors. Still, I was shocked to see Robertson on his March 23, 1995, show label Hinduism as "demonic" and

advocate keeping Hindus out of America. My concerns intensified when President Clinton later implicated hateful talk in the fatal Oklahoma City bombing in April, 1995. Robertson was already a well-known figure in the conservative Christian community when his 1988 bid for the US presidency shot him into national attention and effectively anointed him leader of the Christian right



CHRISTIANITY TODAY

wing. Talented and industrious, he is head or founder of numerous organizations, including a 1,400-student university. His political action group, the 1.4-million-member Christian Coalition, has decided influence in a Republican-controlled Congress.

Christian evangelists regularly slander Hinduism with little impact beyond their own flock [see HINDUISM TODAY, February, 1989]. But when a national figure like Robertson does it on a widely watched TV program, that's different. The March 23rd episode details Robertson's conversion of some Hindu people of Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh, India, to the Christian religion. In the course of the show, Robertson makes shameful, un-Christian accusations against the Hindu faith, the world's oldest religion. When contacted, Mr. Robertson's office told

us he was "unavailable for comment." To begin, Robertson's experiences in Rajahmundry are described by a narrator. The scene is of a poverty-stricken people, bathing in the river at the head of which rests a statue of Lord Siva. Water is pouring out of Siva's head and a snake is wrapped around his head as well. Robertson and his son are found in the midst of the scene, observing and mocking the early morning prayers of Hindus. As they witness the scene, they make incorrect reference to the river as "Siva's sperm," and claim that the people "were supposed to wash away their sins in the sperm of the God."

Robertson goes on to characterize Hinduism as having evil tendencies toward random spiritual worship and polytheism. Mr. Robertson's son and fellow evangelist, Gordon, stated disparagingly, "Whenever

Out to convert the world: (left to right) recent photo of the evangelist; his popular book; Indian Christians pray

[Hindus] feel any sort of inspiration, whether it's by a river or under a tree, on top of a hill, they figure that some God or spirit is responsible for that. And so they'll worship that tree, they'll worship that hill or they'll worship anything." What was even more regrettable was Robertson's assertion of some connection between idol worship and the poverty in India. Robertson does not deny his son's claim that "Wherever you find this type of idolatry, you'll find a grinding poverty. The land has been cursed."

But if the argument of poverty as the curse of India is not enough for the American au-

"The Hindu faith has absolutely nothing to do with God!"

After reading the above article from Hinduism Today's July, 1995, issue, Bharat J. Gajjar of Washington wrote to Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network protesting the vicious attacks by its star performer. He received the following apparently personal letter, dated August 4, 1995, from Robertson:

Dear Bharat,
Thank you for contacting CBN concerning our program presentation on Hinduism. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to you.
I'm sorry you objected to my comments. It is not my intent to offend anyone because of their religion, and I want you to clearly understand that I do believe in religious freedom. It is guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States and everyone has the right to believe as they wish. However, though I respect the rights of others, please understand that I have a responsibility to speak the truth. The truth is that the Hindu faith has absolutely nothing to do with God! The Bible tells us that there is only one way to hit the mark and that is to come to Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 14:6, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life:
NO MAN COMES TO THE FATHER, BUT BY ME.

I don't make the rules—God makes the rules. He said if you don't come through Jesus Christ, there is no entrance into heaven. Those who believe they can come to God any other way, whether it be by New Age, Hinduism, Mohammed, or through any other person or thinking, are being deceived.
It is our continual prayer at CBN for all people to come to a saving knowledge of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God is not willing that any should perish. Thank you again for this opportunity to respond to you.
Yours in Christ, Signed: Pat Robertson

The letter attracted the attention of Hindu renaissance leader Ram Swarup in India whose "A Reply to a Reply" was published in the December, 1995 issue of Hinduism Today (bit.ly/Swarup-Robertson). As with the original article, Swarup's commentary remains equally relevant today.

HINDUISM TODAY's coverage of Mr. Pat Robertson was comprehensive. While he deserved it for his importance in the public life of his country, it also helped the American Hindus to become better



HINDUISM TODAY

aware of the envioning ideological forces they would by habit have neglected.
Mr. Robertson invited many critical comments from the Hindus. To one such Hindu critic, Bharat J. Gajjar, Robertson replied. This reply is as important to the American Hindus as his earlier TV statement which HINDUISM TODAY reported. The reply is in some ways

Influential leaders: Ram Swarup had a long and productive association with Hinduism Today founder Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami—here pictured together in Delhi, 1995

more than a fulmination. It is a credo, an ideological statement and deserves a different kind of notice. Moreover, Robertson's mental blocks are not his alone but widely shared. Therefore, to discuss them would be all the more useful. I shall therefore reply to his reply here.
In his letter to Mr. Gajjar, Robertson says that he had no intent "to offend anyone," and that he wants it to be understood that he believes in "religious freedom"—this is reassuring after his previous performance. But he also adds that while he respects the rights of others, he has "a responsibility to speak the truth." He tells us that "the truth is that the Hindu faith has absolutely nothing to do with God!" He adds in lively Americanism that "there is only one way to hit the mark and that is to come to Jesus Christ. Those who believe they can come to God any other way, whether it be by New Age, Hinduism, Mohammed or through any other person or thinking—are being deceived." At the end, he modestly states, "I don't make the rules—God makes the rules."
The reply is brief but rich in traditional Christian theology. It reveals in a clear profile the unchanging face of Christianity, a Christianity which still lives in medieval times and refuses to

dience of “The 700 Club,” they next hear Hinduism boldly labeled “demonic.” Robertson says, “Siva [is] the God of Destruction, and his consort [is] the Goddess of death [Kali]—that black, ugly statue there with all those fierce eyes.” He then suggests that the evil tendencies of death and destruction can be found in those who worship the Deities: “I mean these people are out to kill other human beings in the name of their God.” They mention in support of this conclusion the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan, the eccentric Buddhist-based organization that was likely responsible for subway gas attacks in Tokyo earlier this year. Their icons, unfortunately, included Siva—sure proof, goes the Robertson thinking, of demons at work.

“Although Hinduism admits that different beings and entities can perform what we might consider evil acts,” corrects Dr. Arvind Sharma, Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University, Toronto, “there does not seem to be a single entity such as the Christian devil in Hinduism.” And since there is no practice of evil or concept of the devil in Hinduism, “To call Hinduism demonic,” concludes Dr. Sharma, “is really demonic.”

By accusing Hinduism of being demonic,



Robertson is merely reinforcing the age-old stereotype that has been placed on the Indian culture by the West. “That’s been standard operating procedure missionaries have used ever since they invaded India in the 19th century,” explains Dr. Gordon Melton, Director of the Institute for the Study of American Religions. “In approaching Eastern religions and African religions, it has been the stance of most conservative Christians that the deities of those religions are, in fact, personified demons. And that perspective goes back to the Jewish encounter with the Caananite culture millennia ago as described in the Bible.”

Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Director for the Project on Human Rights and Religion, sim-

ilarly observes that Robertson has employed “almost every negative image and cliché that has been used about Hinduism since the 18th century.”

As the show unfolds, we finally arrive at the real intention of Robertson’s missionary trip to India: to convert Hindus to the Christian faith. A narrator describes the scene of the conversion in which thousands of Hindus were “set free from a lifetime of fear and demonic oppression. The scene was overwhelming.” Actually, the scene is oddly over-dramatic. Why would thousands of people in a split second throw away their entire way of life that has been passed down over the centuries, because of a brief speech given by a stranger from another country? Although Robertson mentions the naturally deep devotion of the Hindus, he apparently fails to appreciate that any religious preacher in India gets the same reception, whether Christian, Hindu, Jain, Sikh or Buddhist—though it does help to be white, American, famous and rich.

It is also apparent he was frustrated with the Hindu ability to just absorb one more God. “I preached to them the second commandment about idolatry. You know, ‘They shall hold no other Gods before me,’ and

number two, ‘You shall not fall down or make any idols of anything.’ Many people accept Christ, but they still go with those processions down to those riverbanks. We followed along with the crowd and I said, ‘You’ve got to give that up.’”

Political Agenda

The program used common stereotypes of Hinduism (as well of as other prominent non-Christian religions in America) to create fear among the American people of non-Christian religions. What is the purpose behind those tactics?

Judging from Michael Little’s, President of the Christian Broadcasting Network, comments on the show—“There are so many opportunities for us to take programs which will reach the people of India,” and “Help us carry the light to a nation in darkness”—it is obvious that one strategy of “The 700 Club” is to gain support and money (so named after achieving its original goal of 700 donors). “Give us a hand on this [India],” pleads Robertson at one point, “because it’s a big one.” But that is just part of the plan.

Robertson’s true thinking is revealed in his 1991 book *The New World Order*. That novel



India as target: (left) This map by Mission India pinpoints India as having the most “unreached” peoples. Though not directly associated with Robertson, it is amply supported by funds from Christians of his ilk in Western nations. (below right) stained glass depiction of Jesus; (below left) artist’s concept of the Christian God; (far left) one of Mission India’s local churches

discloses a secret, nefarious plan being followed by the present political leaders of the world. Robertson labels that plan the “New

“I mean these [Hindu] people are out to kill other human beings in the name of their God.”

PAT ROBERTSON

World Order,” which he sees as the formation of a one world government, one police force, one judicial system, and one economic market. Robertson claims that in this “new world government no one could speak out

against the beliefs of a Muslim, a Hindu, or an animist. What we know as the freedom of religion would be taken away, and Christians would be muzzled.”

Robertson has another vision of the future, one in which “God sweeps away the pretense of the satanic and man-made counterfeits and announces His New World Order, and His anointed leader, Jesus the Messiah.”

Robertson stated in *The New World Order*: “The media challenged me. ‘You’re not going to bring atheists into the government? How dare you maintain that those who believe the Judeo-Christian values are better qualified to govern America than Hindus and Muslims?’ My simple an-

change. It gives in a few sentences the most important elements of Christian theology: a single or exclusive God, an equally single and exclusive channel of reaching him and a conception of truth which requires no self-preparation, a truth which is ready-made and can be had by simply looking up a particular book.

Biblical God

First, about Hindus having no God, though they have more often been accused of having too much of it, let us readily admit that Hindus do not have a God of the Biblical tradition, the God of Robertson’s familiarity. Their God is not Jehovah, an exclusive God, a jealous God, a God that denies other Gods. In the *Vedas*, the oldest scripture of the Hindus, Gods are often invited to “come together.” They are praised “conjunctly” and it does not offend any one of them. Vedic Gods live in friendliness, they do not deny each other.

This approach was shared by the Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and most other advanced cultures and peoples. The Greeks had no difficulty in recognizing their Gods in the Gods of the Hindus. It is the Semitic tradition which sees their devils in the Gods of others.

This negative view derives from another basic Biblical concept—that their God is the only one, the only true God. True, this view implies that there are other Gods, but it is freely and repeatedly stated that they are “false,” they are “abominations,” and they are to



be dethroned.

Hindus have no God of this description. True, they too often describe their God as one, *ekam*, but they also call Him many, *aneka*. Strictly speaking, Hindus do not believe in one God, they believe in one Reality, *ekam sat*. They do not say “there is only one God;” they say “God alone is.” The unity of Hindu God is spiritual, not numerical. He pervades all. He is one in all and the same in all. He is also beyond all. Semitic religions have no such concept. Hindu spirituality is mystical and theological, not credal and ideological.

Exclusive Intermediary

Now we turn from an exclusive God to an exclusive savior. The two stand together. In this too, Robertson is saying nothing new, but repeating the old Christian doctrine of “No salvation outside the Church,” now modified in this ecumenical age to “No salvation without Jesus Christ.” In his

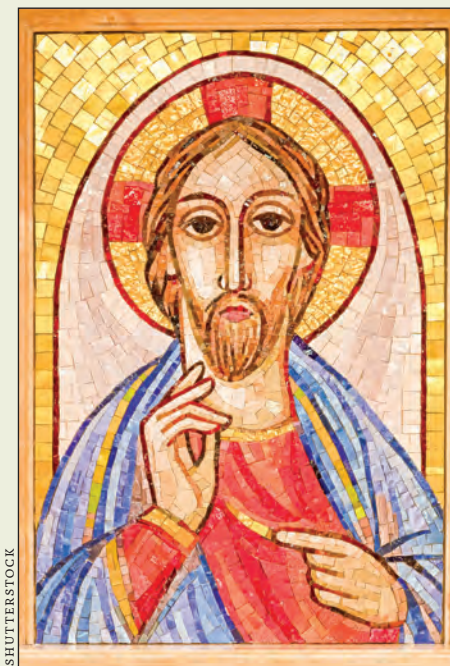
support, he quotes the Bible as his authority. This is a curious way of arguing. You assume what you have to prove, put it in your own book and then cite it as your authority. It would be considered dull-witted in a sophomore, but in a Christian preacher it makes a bright and clinching argument.

Revelatory religions work through mediators and intermediaries. In these ideologies, first there is a God of strong preferences and hatred. He chooses a people, but even to them He does not reveal

himself directly. He makes His will known to them through a favored intermediary who in turn has His apostles to broadcast His message. The next link in the chain are evangelists—read “televangelists” in the modern conditions. The message is received by one but preached and relayed by others who had no share in the revelation. Their merit is greater if they do it with strong hands and in perfect faith and are troubled by no intellectual scruples or conscience.

In this, too, the Hindu tradition differs completely. In this tradition, God resides in man’s heart, and He is accessible to all who seek Him in sincerity, truth and faith. In this tradition, God is man’s own innermost truth and the seeker finds Him in the cave of his heart. In this tradition, God reveals Himself directly to the seeker and needs no specially authorized savior, no go-betweens.

Here we may also make another point. Since Hindu spirituality recognizes God in man, it also recognizes great goodness in him. On the other hand, ideologies which deny man’s sacred Godliness also deny his essential goodness. They find man basically sinful, and unfortunately also treat him so. Of course, no one need deny that there is much in man which is not Godly, but let us not make it into a dogma of the depravity of human nature. Let us also become aware of man’s other dimension, his Godliness and goodness.



Soul

Searching Hinduism teaches that as one goes deeper into oneself, one meets deeper Gods. An external and impure mind gives only external Gods. This leads us to Robertson’s idea of truth and his responsibility to speak it. In Hindu conception, one’s truth cannot be greater than one’s seeking. In this conception, truth does not lie in some quotable passages of a book. It has to be known through a culture of the spirit, through great seeking, tapas, purity and self-inquiry. Let Robertson himself find whether he fulfills this condition.

Hindu spirituality is yogic. It is found everywhere, though not always equally developed. It is found among the wise men of Egypt, Greece, Mexico and China. Today, it is in its most preserved form in Hinduism. Hinduism preserves the ancient wisdom of many nations and cultures, their Gods and their insights which they lost under the onslaught of monolatrous creeds. Spiritual humanity needs nascent Hinduism for its self-revival.

Robertson wants to keep out Hindus from America. But would he be able to keep out Hinduism from the seeking humanity? Hinduism resides in all seeking hearts; and whenever man’s seeking for Gods becomes spiritual, Hinduism, or the tradition of Sanatana Dharma, automatically comes in. In what way and how long could man’s innermost truth be kept away from him?

swer is, 'Yes, they are.'"

Mr. David Cantor, Senior Research Analyst of the Anti-Defamation League, points out that such "religious tests for office are unconstitutional. It's not just a purely a religious statement. It's a political statement."

The Human Rights Issue

"In the discussion of human rights, there are different positions on the right to free speech or freedom of expression. The extreme position, that is sometimes called the 'American position,' is total freedom of speech," explains Dr. Pedersen. "As Americans, we believe that even the most offensive and the most incendiary statements should be allowed in the name of freedom of expression, because once you start to legally restrict the freedom of speech, you are on a slippery slope of restricting all kinds of speech on different political or ideological ground."

Dr. Pedersen feels that such anti-Hindu statements may refer back to the 1920s, at a time when the Ku Klux Klan (a Christian white-supremacist group advocating violence against Black Americans) was on the rise, and the national belief was that all Americans must be Christians. During the 1920s, immigration laws prevented European



MISSION INDIA

immigrants from entering the United States. Eventually Europeans were allowed to immigrate, and by 1965 Indians were included in immigrant quotas.

However, in the 1990s, some feel that the multicultural immigration has caused a backlash in American society in the form of racial discrimination between various cultural groups. In the wake of such discontent, Peter Brimelow has recently written a book called *Alien Nation* which attacks multiculturalism and its negative effects on American society. Something must be done, Brimelow advocates, to prevent white people from becoming a minority in America.

"What Robertson is really saying is that Hindus shouldn't be allowed to come to the

Targeting the kids: Mission India has specific programs aimed at children, based on their research that "four out of five people who believe in Jesus do so because of something that influenced them by the age of 14."

United States," evaluates Dr. Pedersen. "All of the Hindu engineers, doctors and computer experts who are living here should go home. This is a very big statement that he has made."

Even Christians are concerned with Robertson's manner of preaching Christianity. Sister Mary Elizabeth Moore, a Professor at Claremont's School of Theology, feels that Robertson may be overstepping his boundaries as a Christian. "I have been very distressed that Pat Robertson and others like him have used the gospel to preach condemnation of others, to judge harshly, to demonize people in other faiths and to demonize some Christians with whom they don't just happen to agree," expresses Sister Moore. "I think that's absolutely counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Hinduism is not the only religion under Robertson's extremist attack; *The New World Order* is filled with anti-Semitism. However,

What the Robertsons Said About Hinduism

Excerpts from the March 23, 1995, broadcast of the 700 Club:

Robertson: "India is breaking free from the old, and moving into the Western culture. But what that leaves is a spiritual vacuum. And there seems, finally in India, an opening to the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout this whole land. There is a huge population of teenagers. They're looking for something new and better."

Cohost: "We've seen in other countries where there's a certain period of vulnerability, or spiritual vulnerability. Now's the time to use the media to talk to them about what their future could really be like."

Robertson: "Of all of India's problems, one stands out from the rest. That problem is idol worship. It is said there are hundreds of millions of Hindu deities. All this has put a nation



in bondage to spiritual forces that have deceived many for thousands of years."

Gordon Robertson (Pat's son, pictured above):

"Wherever you find this type of idolatry, you'll find a grinding poverty. The land has been cursed. The Bible talks in terms of the land being cursed on behalf of what the inhabitants have done to it. You erect all these idols under every green tree, on top of every hill, you're going to curse your land. And

the oppression, we see it in evidence."

CBN Reporter: "[At the religious services Robertson conducted in India] they came, by the thousands, to a makeshift altar to confess their faith in Christ and receive a touch from heaven, and be set free from a lifetime of fear and demonic oppression."

Robertson: "I [told] them to renounce idolatry, but many people accept Christ and still go with those [Hindu] processions.

Cohost: "You said there's a connection between the New Age in America and Hinduism."

Robertson: "It's the same thing. The whole concept of Hindus is based on karma; that people have a karma attached to them when they are born, and they go through a cycle of life and they come back in the next world as something else. The whole thought of reincarnation is karma—you come back as a cow, a pig, a goat, a dog, a snake or an Untouchable. We're importing Hinduism into America. The whole thought of your karma, of meditation, of the fact that there's no end of life and there's this endless wheel of life, this is all Hinduism. Chanting too. Many of those chants are to Hindu Gods—Vishnu, Hare Krishna. The origin of it is all demonic. We can't let that stuff come into America. We've got the best defense, if you will—a good offense."



VITALY KHODYREV / SHUTTERSTOCK

Ms. Nancy Israel of the American Jewish Committee notes that Robertson is slowly transforming. "He's being very careful now," observes Ms. Israel, who is from the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Jewish Committee. "Up until now he's been able to say what he wanted to say. He's been forced to back off because of this public spotlight and because he's decided to make the Christian Coalition a more mainstream organization."

What Should We Do?

It is true that if our Hindu faith is challenged, perhaps we will become more aware of its teachings. If that is so, we can view "The 700 Club" attack on Hinduism as a blessing in disguise. "I would say that anytime we see the extreme of a religious community, we see warning signals that need to be taken seriously," agrees Sister Moore. "Those signals usually reveal something of the larger religion, something of the possibility of distortions that people need to worry about. These distortions can stir other people who have more whole views of the religion to express and live their faith more fully."

We should use this opportunity to profess and understand our Hindu faith more fully. We as Hindus need to respond to and erase Western stereotypes and hate speeches against our religion. There are many ways to accomplish that. We can articulate our complaints through letters, phone calls and petitions to the government offices, such as the Justice Department Hate Crimes Division. The Indian government could express its concern, as it did for Hindus in South Africa for years. And we can bring such statements into the light of public discussion by filing complaints with the Anti-Defamation League. The Anti-Defamation League was established in 1913 by B'nai B'rith, a Jewish service organization. The League and its parent organization defend human rights, promote intercultural relations, provide for the religious and cultural needs of Jewish college

students, sponsor Jewish education among adults and youth groups and carry on a broad program of community service and welfare. They confer with governments and the UN on civil rights, immigration, abuses of freedom by totalitarian states, the position of Israel and problems affecting Jews throughout the world.

Dr. Pedersen feels that perhaps we can form our own protection league: "I recommend the formation of a Hindu anti-defamation program which will monitor these kinds of statements in the press and the media, and will gather accurate information and will speak out when something should be protested." In that way, perhaps the entire Hindu public will be constantly made

"There are so many opportunities for us to take programs which will reach the people of India. Help us carry the light to a nation in darkness"

PAT ROBERTSON

aware of any false allegations made against our religion, and efforts to respond can be coordinated.

Dr. Jayaraman, executive director of Bharat Vidya Bhavan in New York, feels that the way to dispel Hindu stereotypes is to teach the common American man about our religion. "Indian philosophy should be taught methodically, either in the school system or by speakers prepared to go around the country to talk just like these missionaries," suggests Dr. Jayaraman. "In every city, in every state they should have such speakers, powerful speakers who can say with authority, 'This is Hinduism. What you are saying is wrong.'" Dr. Jayaraman also

And the families: Unidentified Western missionary prays with a family in India

suggests that small books discussing true Hindu philosophy be freely distributed to the public.

But the main way to break down anti-Hindu sentiments is by educating our children and ourselves more about Hinduism. Such understanding will place us in a better position to combat ignorant statements.

"Because Hindus take a generous view of other religions, they think that others will take a generous view of theirs," observes Dr. Sharma. "And even when others attack them, because of their basic nature, they don't take it to heart."

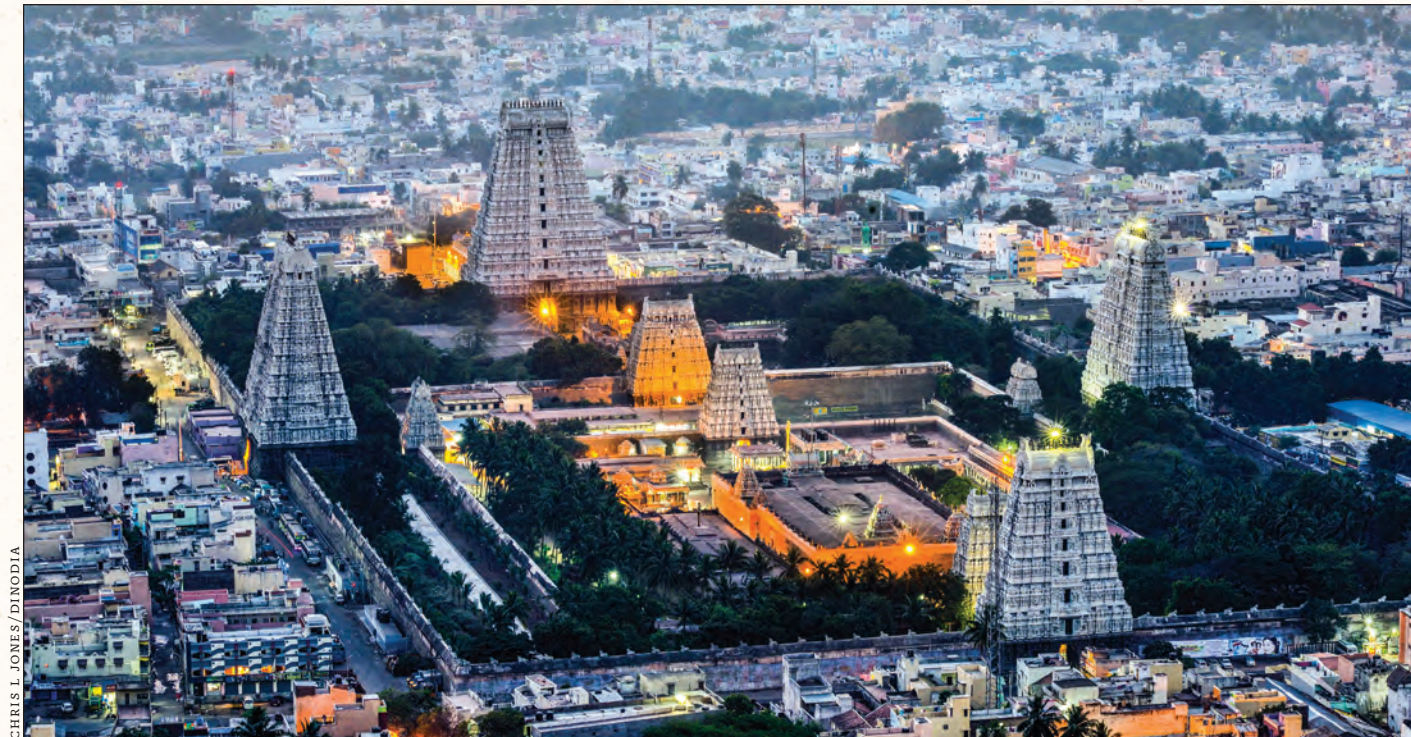
According to Dr. Pedersen, comments such as Robertson's should be taken seriously. During the annual dinner given by Human Rights Watch, an international panel monitored by Peter Jennings discussed whether hate speech should be restricted or banned. "The next step after this truly disgusting defamation [by Robertson] is what these human right activists on the panel call 'the speech of instigation,'" recounted Dr. Pedersen. The 'speech of instigation' is a build-up for murder and genocide. It happened in Rwanda. The press and media started to build up a rhetoric that so and so should be killed. After that went on for some months, so and so started getting killed. There is a line to be drawn somewhere on free speech, but we as Americans just don't know quite where yet."

Keeping that in mind, perhaps we should turn our thoughts to the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building. After the bombing, President Clinton spoke out against hate speeches, making a clear connection between hate speeches, propaganda and the bombing. The seeds of hate may blossom into the weeds of violence. Therefore, it is important that we take early and strong action against ignorant and hateful comments such as those made by Robertson. If we don't, we will one day face more than Mr. Robertson's hateful words.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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CHRIS L. JONES/DINODIA

SCRIPTURE

The Ancient *Agamas* Have Solutions for Modern Issues in Temple Administration

These detailed manuals cover everything from how to build temples to the worship rituals and every aspect of practical management

A marvelous new book has been published on temple management, based on the scriptures that govern temples. At right is a review of the whole book, and below is a summary of those aspects that apply directly to temple management and are most relevant today.

BY VIDYASAGAR TONTALAPUR, USA
HINDUISM REGARDS THE SIVA TEMPLE as the embodiment of God. The *garbhagriha*, or sanctum, of the temple is Siva's head. His lotus feet are at the magnificent entry tower, to which we bow before stepping in. The holiness of the temple springs from the idea that it is the body of the Divine, to be treated with the utmost sanctity, purity and respect. It is not God's home. It is God Himself.

Hindus believe the *Agama* scriptures originated from the five faces of God, Siva, at the time of creation. While *Vedas* are general, lyrical and symbolic, the *Agamas* focus on

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A management challenge: (top) the huge Annamalaiyar Siva Temple in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu has hundreds of staff

specifics, with devotional worship at their heart. They are rich in details of how to locate, design, build, worship, manage and maintain a temple. *Agamas*, like the *Vedas*, are part of the vast Hindu *shruti* ("that which is heard")—the authoritative scriptures.

Books on Hinduism written by nonpractitioners use a Western, and mostly Abrahamic, lens to analyze the tradition. Generally they aim to find fault with Hinduism, not understanding or caring about its subtle, profound philosophy. A recent book published by the Indic Academy, *Temple Management in the Agamas with Special Reference to Kamika Agama*, is much different. Its author, Dr. Deepa Duraiswamy, looks at the *Agamas* from a deep Hindu perspective.

Dr. Duraiswamy comes from a long lineage of Saiva priests. She grew up in a home next to the ancient Siva temple of Thirumazhisai, near Chennai in Tamil Nadu. As a young girl, she followed her learned grandfather all around the temple. The divine structure enchanted her in all its beauty and grandeur. Little did she know that one day she would return as an adult to study that same temple.

After studying engineering in Pune, she

earned a management degree at the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta. All the time, she had a strong desire to study the *Agamas* and understand the world of her forefathers. For her doctoral thesis, she decided to analyze the management of the temple as described in the *Kamika Agama*, hoping her research would bridge the world of tradition and modernity. Her book fulfills that hope and provides valuable insights into the inner workings of the temple.

When the *Agamas* were written, the kings managed the temples; today in India it is most often the local state government. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, over 40,000 temples, including most major ones, are under government control through the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department. This interference with Hindu temples by a supposedly secular government—which has made no corresponding attempt to control the religious institutions of Christianity and Islam—is a thorny issue within the Hindu community. There have been egregious examples of corruption in the temple finances and usurpation of

Continued on page 62

Book Review

BY SIDDHARTH SRIRAM, SINGAPORE

DR. DURAISWAMY OPENS HER FIRST CHAPTER WITH A CONCISE and clear account of the Saiva tradition and its internal traditions, as articulated in the *Saiva Agamas* themselves and in historical research. She explains the rationale behind the title of her book and introduces temple administration in the past and present, as well as concepts from the modern discipline of management that she has found useful in shaping her understanding of temple management.

From Chapter Two onwards, the book becomes a veritable concise manual for a traditional temple administrator, or *dharma-makarta*. Dr. Duraiswamy takes us on a deep dive into the daily ritual schedule, starting with the *pratistha*. The temple's day begins with this act of consecration, where the omnipresent Divine is "concentrated" and established at the temple with particular forms and names. The author then discusses the different types of puja. She brings to light scriptural passages that classify temples in a ninefold manner, from the simplest to the most complete, based on the level of resources and fullness of routine in the daily pujas.

A key feature of the book is the copious citation of quotes from primary sources, namely the *Agamas* themselves, which adds a strong element of authenticity. A pervasive problem in Hindu discourse is an inability to adduce a source for specific beliefs and practices. This book assures Hindus that although they may have taken for granted many aspects of the Agamic temple, these are rooted in a scriptural tradition that dates back more than ten centuries.

In Chapter Three, Dr. Duraiswamy discusses the temple's workforce. She starts by introducing the native terms for those involved in the running of the temple. She then does a rich survey of the historical backdrop, by citing epigraphic data of each of these members, including the *acharya*, *sadhaka*, *daivajna* (temple astrologer), *paricharaka* (assistant who performed services such as cooking food for the Deity), *silpi* artisans, *oduvar* singers of the sacred Tamil hymns and the gardeners who supply sacred flowers and leaves to the temple for ritual purposes.

We learn from Dr. Duraiswamy's copious citations from temple inscriptions that all of these groups were sustained by the king with land grants and other forms of remuneration. She includes a detailed survey of remuneration for different classes of temple staff based on *Agamas* and inscriptions.

Chapter Four covers the duties of various servitors of the temple. Historically, the administrator of the great temples in Tamil Nadu was the king. The king had to ensure that the temple adhered to an *Agama* consistently, starting with its ritual inception. It was also the king who had to appoint a competent *acharya* and *archakas*, and to take care of the wages of the priests as well as that of other groups, as covered in Chapter Three. Other key responsibilities included the planning of the annual festival (the *mahotsava*), temple expenditures, timely reconsecration, and atonement rites for any lapses in worship and defects or damages in the temple's physical structure. Even though the king has been long replaced by governmental or private administrative boards, the responsibilities remain the same.

After detailing the taxes that temples had once received from their lands as well as the donations, Dr. Duraiswamy sets out a graphic overview of the hierarchy of priests and the hierarchy of the temple staff, once again backed by citations from the *Agamas*. All the levels and classes of a temple's servitors are encompassed.

Chapter Five discusses the current reality of temple administration and reproduces a similar-looking organizational framework. On the surface, except for the removal of the king from the framework,

it may appear there are few major changes to the setup. This is far from the truth, as Dr. Duraiswamy points out as she takes us through case studies of actual Agamic temples. She surveys their daily ritual routine, their workforce, management and funding, and proceeds to examine the issues faced by different sections of the temple's servitors today. In this chapter, Dr. Duraiswamy also offers her recommendations on improvements that could be undertaken in today's temples.

In the sixth and final chapter, the author summarizes the discussion of the preceding five chapters and outlines the ideal temple's vision, goals and resources. Redefining the temple as an organization with vision, goals and resources may seem "modern" or "out of place" for some. But it has become imperative that we do so, given that many Hindus today are ignorant of the nature and role of an Agamic temple. As a student of the *Agama*, I especially appreciate the author's observation that the temple is primarily meant for *parartha* worship (the worship to be done by the *acharya* at stipulated times of the day) and not *kamyā* worship (the worship for particular individuals who visit the

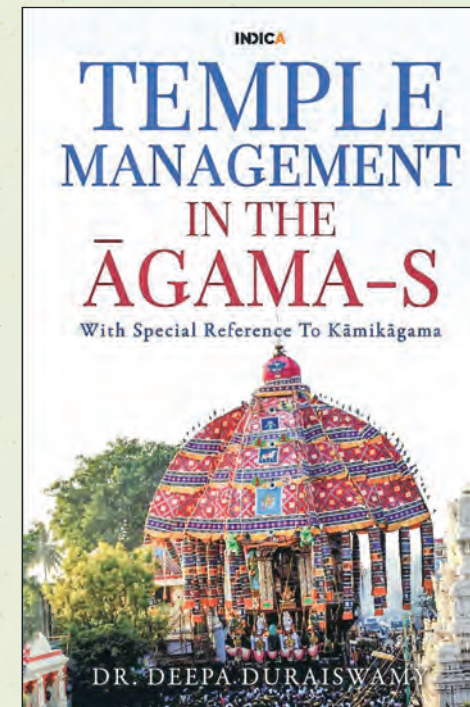
temple). While the latter is allowed at temples, it cannot happen at the expense of the former; and the former should never be abridged for the latter.

In this regard, to paraphrase what Dr. Duraiswamy wrote in an earlier chapter, the daily worship must be done without fail, even if not a single devotee shows up at the temple. A clearer understanding among Hindus of what the Agamic temple is truly about will be the first and critical step in a long process of getting these temples "back on track."

This brings me to Dr. Duraiswamy's most important point. The temple must be nourished by the people, yes. But it is equally important that the temple nourish the people. This review began with a brief observation about the place of the Agamic temple in the social and economic life of a people. The Agamic temple needs to reclaim that rightful place and continue to keep generations of Hindus enthralled with its rich and beautiful heritage. In order to reclaim that place, the temple must be allowed to play its traditional part in supporting the needs of Hindus in critical areas such as health, education and social welfare, as it did for several centuries.

Together with Dr. Duraiswamy, I hope that the Agamic temple, a priceless piece of Hindu heritage, once again becomes the focal point of Hindu life. I thank her as well as Indic Academy for bringing the Agamic temple to the limelight in an accessible book in English.

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Siddharth Sriram is a Singaporean Saiva Hindu, blessed to be a *Taittiriya* and a student of the precious Saiva Siddhanta teachings as revealed by Bhagavan Sadyojyoti, Narayanakantha, Ramakantha and Aghorasiva. He is a devotee of Tirujnanasambandhar.





UNKNOWN



REDDEES/SHUTTERSTOCK

endowment lands belonging to the temples. Dr. Duraiswamy's study compares how governments manage Hindu temples today, and how kings did in the medieval times, suggesting some solutions to the situation today.

A Great Hindu Institution

Temples are great institutions, and they have traditionally been central to Indian life. Historians note that every big village in ancient India featured an ornate temple at the center. While it is hard to date, the first temple appeared in India at least 2500 years ago. This was not only a place of worship. It filled a large place in the cultural and economic life of the people. Thanks to its all-encompassing nature, the temple was the largest employer in town. Multiple priests, florists, musicians, gardeners, cooks and sculptors worked for the temple. Tenant farmers earned a living tilling its lands. Temples built water reservoirs and canals. Studies show that temples were economic magnets, drawing groups of people from afar to settle nearby and benefit from the opportunities temples created.

Today, in most places, the temple remains an important social, cultural and economic center. It is a living tradition that still draws hundreds of thousands of devotees seeking the unique experience of divinity and spirituality offered by the temple. The systems and structures which support this experience make a temple an organization with its own management needs, and it is from this perspective the book is written.

A Modern Business Analysis

Duraiswamy categorizes the temple as what we now call a "knowledge industry." Its workers need specialized abilities, skills and training to make it a holy, welcoming place.

The *Agamas* enumerate in detail the human and physical resources required to make the temple function correctly. The author steps through these resources systematically, pointing out areas where the present government management falls short.

After her general introduction to Saivite religion and temples, Duraiswamy explains in detail the Agamic temple system, beginning in Chapter Two, "Worship Schedule of a Saiva Temple." She starts with a point people often overlook: the primary duty of a temple is to conduct worship for the welfare of the world. In *Karana Agama*, an important Saiva *Agama*, two types of puja are described: *at-martha* puja (for one's self) and the *parartha* puja (for the community). Individuals offer the former at home for their own protection and the latter at temples for the benefit of all living beings.

Devotees come to the temple to worship as part of a scheduled puja, and at other times to "have darshan," that is, sight, of the Deity.



BRADEN GUNEM/DINODIA

They will also do devotional singing, chant the names of God, walk around the temple clockwise (*pradakshina*) and meditate.

The most important activity in a temple is *nitya* puja, the daily worship, comprising rituals offered in a particular sequence and format. This is done for God, whether devotees are present or not. It is the reason a temple exists. The *nitya* puja is a set of rituals in which the priest invites and treats God as a guest. The rites closely resemble the reception extended to an esteemed guest. *Agamas* lay down rules for ritual bathing, decoration, food offering and other services. Worship is also offered for other Deities in the temple, for certain events, and at the request of devotees. The temple's annual festival involves the entire community and attracts people from far-off places.

The meaning of the Sanskrit word *nitya* is twofold: *daily* and also *eternal*. As a public institution, a temple "needs to function irrespective of if there are visitors or not," Duraiswamy states. The temple's schedule must revolve around the Deity and not around the devotees. Many devotees and temple administrators, she points out, seem to act as if temples exist for the devotees—and to collect donations. This excessive focus on revenue started in British times, when they found themselves in charge of temples after displacing the king, and still dominates the minds of many government-appointed temple administrators.

The Temple Workforce

In Chapter Three, on staffing, Duraiswamy points out that the present common nomenclature—the government "officials" and the "servants," meaning the priests and their assistants—does not reveal the nature of



M. AMIRTHAM/DINODIA



MADHUSUDAN TAWDE/DINODIA



QUARTZ INDIA

the services the priests perform, nor does it match the traditional view of the temple milieu. For instance, in the *Agamas* the acharya is the head priest, the functional and spiritual head of the temple, who hires other priests and assigns their work. In Pallava times, the priests and others who served at the temples were considered a family.

The modern temple administration, however, divides temple staff into two classes, officers and servants. The latter—including the acharya—are employees whom the government can hire or fire at will. The very functioning of the temple has been skewed and distorted by this subservience of the acharya—the spiritual and moral center of the temple—to the finance-oriented chief administrative officer.

Duraiswamy cites a 10th-century inscription from Chola times that lists 63 staff positions at one particular Durga temple. There was one acharya, four assistants, nine musicians, 24 dancers, two garland makers, three watchmen, one accountant, one potter, one washerman, one astrologer, one carpenter, one administrator and some families to grow flowers.

In the bigger temples in Tamil Nadu, according to historical records, several priests took turns conducting the main worship. These large temples also employed *oduvars* (devotional singers) and maintained spiritual theaters where various drama troupes performed.

As the book points out, the traditional temple workforce could be described as a pyramid, with the Deity at the top, then those who performed the core worship, their immediate helpers, secondary worship helpers, material supply, maintenance and administrative support. Most temples raised

cows and hired families to care for them. The *Agamas* also gave the artisans—architects, masons, sculptors, carpenters—important roles to play.

The *Agamas* divide priests into five categories—*acharya*, *archaka* (performs puja), *sadhaka* (worship assistant), *alankruta* (decorator), and *vachaka* (chanter). Musicians, managers, and other temple staff had specific titles based on their specialization. They were not employees in the typical sense. Each was in the service of God and had a special relationship with the Deity. The Deity and their interdependence bound them together. Even the managerial roles in the temple were authoritative only to ensure that all who served at the temple got their rightful share.

The *Agamas* categorize temple staff based on whether they received a salary. House-keeping and the managerial staff got a monthly salary. That mode of payment did not work well for priests, because of the nature of their service. The *Agamas* say that the spirit behind remunerating an acharya is one of honoring and seeing that he is satisfied. This is where the concept of *dakshina* or honorary payment had its origin. Land or grain grants satisfied the basic economic needs of the priests and others at temple service. In an agrarian economy where bartering was the predominant system of trading, this arrangement worked very well.

Honoring a priest for his service with gold, clothes and other valuables is what the *Agamas* recommend. This system broke down as India became poorer after centuries of looting by the foreign invaders. People started giving whatever they could and whatever they pleased as payment to the priests. This led to generations of poorly paid priests, high in learning but living in abject poverty.

Temple workings: (clockwise from far left) the annual Jagannath chariot festival in Puri requires immense organizational resources; daily temple donations can take dozens of people to count each day; the never-ending job of cleaning up; (top) silpi at working carving a Ganesha statue for worship; preparing sweet laddu offerings at Tirupati Temple; priest giving sacraments to a devotee after puja at a temple shrine

Despite this, thousands of priests continued to serve at the village temples, as they do to this day. They all believed serving the Deity was their God-given duty, regardless of the money they made. Until recently, most youth from priestly families did not take up other jobs. Even when the rest of the family migrated to cities seeking better prospects, one member would remain in the village to continue worship at the temple.

Temple Management Under the Kings

A chapter titled "The Role of Administration" analyzes how kings in India managed temples. Many rulers built grand temples as part of their legacy. When they won new territories, kings worshiped the resident Deity to please the locals. The temples themselves, however, remained politically neutral.

The *Agamas* ask the ruler of the land (not any specific king) to protect and support the temple. He is prescribed several duties: preserving the sanctity of the temple, protecting its tradition, giving resources and preserving and maintaining the temple structure. The king must enforce the temple rights to its land endowments. It is the king's duty to collect the temple's portion of the harvest and distribute it among the eligible people.



TUKARAM KARVE / SHUTTERSTOCK



NOMAD1988 / SHUTTERSTOCK



SRIPURAM

It was the king's responsibility to appoint a learned chief priest at the time of initial consecration of a new temple starting a hereditary succession. The king was also to ensure the temple performed all rituals at the right time using the right materials. It was his duty to see that the special festivals were conducted appropriately and the cleanliness, sanctity and purity of the temple premises maintained. Likewise, the king was to keep the temple adequately supplied with the various materials and instruments for worship.

Other principal responsibilities of the king included providing funds to the temple (either directly or through endowments), safeguarding the Deity and the temple structure from enemies, burglars and vandals, auditing the temple's finances and resolving disputes related to its earnings.

Epigraphic sources quoted in the book indicate these Agamic injunctions were closely followed in medieval times. The *Agamas* considered the Deity a living entity and the temple as His house. Just as a business owner would have an agent, so did the Deity. In Siva temples, Lord Chandeshvara (bit.ly/Chandeshvara) was the lawful agent of Siva, the proprietor. The medieval temples conducted purchase, lease or sale of temple land and other financial matters in Chandeshvara's name. In modern times, such transactions are in the name of the presiding Deity, whom the courts regard as a legal "person."

The king ensured the temple received regular income from properties it held as endowments. People who illegally occupied temple land or swindled its money faced penalties. This stands in stark contrast to the current state of affairs in India. Hindu groups allege that governments routinely close their eyes to the thousands of cases of tem-

ple land encroachment. Some governments, specifically the ones in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, seem to be in a rush to sell off temple lands and jewelry. Many Hindus believe a fierce anti-Hindu bias is behind these moves, as governments do not touch properties belonging to other religions.

Transition to Modern Times

The fifth, last and most important chapter of the book is titled "Current Management Practice." It opens by recounting that the rulers of the Vijayanagar empire were the last major royal patrons of temples in southern India. After Bahmani sultans defeated the empire and demolished its capital city in 1565, several regional rulers patronized temples not destroyed by the invaders.

When the British usurped power from these local rulers, they looked upon temples as lucrative sources of revenue. First, in 1925, they took control of large temples. Amidst protests from Hindu leaders, they established the Hindu Religious and Chari-



NILA NEWSOM / SHUTTERSTOCK

Many aspects of a temple: (clockwise from upper left) The local temple whose land these farmers work gets a share of the harvest; flower sellers; dancers; priests perform the daily ritual bath to Murugan; Madurai Meenakshi priests with the parade Deities; a student priest

table Endowments Board to oversee Hindu religious places. In 1942, a non-official committee recommended that the board should come under government administration.

Ironically, after independence in 1951, India's federal government continued the temple takeover by passing the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act. Then, in 1959, the state of Tamil Nadu enacted its own Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act and established the HR&CE department. Today, more than 40,000 temples, including 56 Hindu monasteries, 1,910 endowments and 17 Jain temples, are administered by the Tamil Nadu government, with complete control of their finances and land holdings. No Muslim (5.86% of the population) or Christian (6.12%) religious institutions come under government control in any state in India.

In the United States, for one example, it would be unthinkable for a government—state or federal—to control any religious institution. This makes it difficult to explain the situation in India to Americans, as they simply can't believe such a thing possible.

Hindu religious institutions in Tamil Nadu fall into four categories based on their reported revenue. With annual revenue exceeding US\$13,300, 182 temples feature in the first category. Earning between \$2,660 but less than \$13,300, 498 temples fall into the second group. The third category has 3,331



M AMIRTHAM / DINODIA



RUPINDER KHULLAR / DINODIA

temples with an income of \$133 to \$2,660. Temples with less than \$133 income, 34,470 of them, are in the last group. Officers of different grades manage these temples. An officer with the government rank of joint commissioner heads the biggest and richest ones.

The HR&CE department in Tamil Nadu appoints two members to the Board of Trustees of each major temple. This has been controversial. Andhra Pradesh governments, including the present one, have even appointed non-Hindus to the Tirumala Tirupati Venkateshwara Devasthanam Trust Board. This is believed to be the world's richest Hindu temple, with an annual income of \$160 million. This government meddling in temple affairs has angered adherents. It reflects the mindset of micromanaging a few temples with high income and neglecting the rest.

The temples' collective budget in Tamil Nadu for the year 2012-13 comprised a corpus fund of \$16.6 million, created using the funds from big temples. Public contribution of about \$1.06 million, a one-time government grant of \$8 million and a yearly renovation grant of \$4 million made up the rest of the budget. The board spent only about \$10.9 million in that year. Many people allege the government receives tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars from the temples but never discloses the actual amount collected.

The Temple Worshipers Society, based in Chennai, has pointed out that temples in Tamil Nadu own almost 500,000 acres of agricultural and other lands, plus 22,000 buildings and 33,000 commercial and home sites. From all of these, the HR&CE department collects just \$75 million per year. If the government were to collect all monies due the temple, the income should exceed \$8.08

billion. The society also states, "between 1986 and 2005 people have encroached over 47,000 acres of temple land and over 10 million square feet of plots belonging to Hindu temples."

The book presents four case studies, three from Tamil Nadu and one from the US. These give some fascinating data about the current state of temple management. Dr. Duraiswami herself studied Manonukulesvara Temple in Thirumazhisai, Amrtagatesvara Temple in Tirukadaiyur and Arunachaleswara Temple in Tiruvannamalai. All follow the *Kamika Agama*. The Manonukulesvara Temple follows a twice-a-day worship schedule and employs seven people, including the chief priest. Both Amrtagatesvara and the Arunachaleswara temples follow a six-times-a-day worship schedule and have 55 and over 200 workers, respectively. They also receive many visitors each day, and the money received in their collection boxes is an important component of their income.

A telling fact comes out of these case studies. Priests and cooks receive a monthly honorarium of \$13 to \$39, while guards at the temple make \$240 to \$266 a month. This extremely low pay is the major issue temple priests face today. Some priests have not even received pay for years. This poverty forces the worship staff to look for ways to increase their income to feed their families and discourages the next generation from continuing their traditional occupation.

To understand the temple dynamics, the author sought input from the priests. Their reports clearly pointed to their stifling monetary condition. Only a tiny number of priests in large urban temples flourish. Thousands of others live in poverty. The author points out that the general spirit of the traditional

Adisaiva community is to honor Siva as their family elder and continue worship. Under current conditions, though, the younger generation could become disillusioned and turn to better-paying professions.

The *Agamas* sanction and encourage the concept of *dakshina*—an amount given directly to the priest by the devotee in gratitude for his services. Several temples managed by the Tamil Nadu HR&CE department now carry a board in prominent places telling devotees not to offer money to the priests. Such an instruction from the government to the public demeans and disempowers the priests and hurts them deeply. It belittles the roles they play and demoralizes them. The temple singers, musicians and sculptors testify to a similar picture of poverty and disrespect. As a result, the younger generations of these communities are losing interest in their traditional occupations.

Collecting rental dues from temple properties and reclaiming lands from encroachers is a key step to improving the financial situation of temples and their employees. The author urges people to realize that meals, marriages and other benefits that temples offer come from money the temples themselves collect. They are not freebies from the government. Dr. Duraiswamy says the perception that the secular government spends its money on Hindu temples is wrong. Governments spend only a small portion of the income they get from temples on these social programs.

Recommendations for the Future

The author makes several specific recommendations for the future. First, instead of looking only at their revenue, she suggests we should use size, number of Deities, antiq-



How we all benefit: Devotees absorb the profound vibrations of the worship at Nattukotai Chettiar Temple in Malaysia

uity and historical value to classify temples. To help temples with little local income, she proposes pooling resources and allocating money where needed. This would help ancient and great temples with low revenue, allowing at least one daily puja at all temples. She advises that governments shed their "maximize revenue" approach and adopt a holistic management perspective to prioritize the temple's benefit to the community.

The book makes a strong point that in every temple, worship must happen at least three times a day—morning, noon and evening. The priests need years of initiation; musicians and singers require extensive training. The government and Hindu society as a whole should recognize and respect their traditional learning.

Temples must run teaching centers to teach time-tested spiritual values to the public. Discourses, stories, meditation, yoga and bhajan at temples help people lead a virtuous life. Every temple should have a calendar of spiritual events to engage the community.

The Vedas and Agamas contain a wealth of wisdom. Temples must study and spread this insight by establishing research and resource centers. Programs to help the surrounding communities will make temples the pivotal social centers they once were.

History shows that art advanced as temples developed. Temples must hire artisans to further develop the unique genre of temple art. Temple-run cultural centers, where experts in various arts and crafts can gather, work, perform, and share their ideas, can nurture the communities around them.

Preserving temple structures, sculptures, inscriptions, paintings and murals is an in-

vestment made to protect our future. All repair, restoration, or enhancement work must follow a well-crafted standard to safeguard the antiquity and architecture of the temple. A study is needed to map the temple workforce by profession, based on their education and training.

Dr. Duraiswamy writes that we can manage temples better with the help of a database of their name, location, antiquity, size, and name and number of Deities. Temple tanks, towers, artwork, worship schedule and annual budget could all be included. Disclosing full information on funds collected and spent and displaying this in all temples would increase transparency and public involvement.

The quality and precision of the worship must take precedence in the evaluation of the managerial staff. Then only should be considered the daily income, collection of rental dues, reclamation of encroached land, protection of the temple and its traditions—all of which support the worship. Rituals, singing of traditional Tamil devotional songs, music, dance, garland-making, cooking—all these are unique skills temples need. Lack of resources and apathy have caused decay in these disciplines.

The current governments seek to legitimize their control of temples by saying they are simply replacing the kings. But any entity replacing the kings must have devotion to the Agamas and the temple. We need a similar environment today for temples to thrive.

No temple administrator should ever be appointed who does not believe in temple worship. Administrators must have faith in worship's beneficial impact on the universe and respect people who serve and visit the temple. They must understand and appreciate

the Agamas and should preserve and protect the temple tradition.

The current legal standpoint is that management of temples is a secular function, rather than religious. This approach starkly contradicts Agamic prescriptions. As matters stand today, anyone who is not a Hindu, or who merely declares himself a Hindu, can be appointed to administer Hindu temples. This must change. People who are not Hindus and who do not believe in temple worship should not be in the temple's workforce. Surely, as the author clearly states, nobody can imagine that someone with no faith in the Deity would follow the Agamas or protect the temple.

In Conclusion

Dr. Deepa Duraiswamy urges people to adopt temples in their areas. It is essential that community members volunteer to help during special events and festivals and participate in the temple's administration and upkeep. She hopes people who believe in Hinduism and respect its traditions will study Agamas, as there is a need for several in-depth studies. Thousands of beautiful temples around us are reminders of our glorious past. They also are pointers to endless possibilities to make our future equally bright and noble. The supreme dedication and sacrifice made historically and still today by priests, sculptors, musicians, artists, singers and other workers to build and protect our temples must inspire us to act.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vidyasagar Tontalapur, a journalist turned software engineer, lives in Superior, Colorado. He is deeply interested in Sanathan Dharma, technology and its impact on society.

AYURVEDA

Avoiding Diabetes

Current medical advice isn't preventing this killing disease

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

DIABETES IS THE SIXTH LEADING CAUSE OF death in America. It is also the country's number one cause of blindness, non-traumatic amputations and renal failure. In this column and the next, we will discuss ways to avoid or lessen one's chances of developing the dreaded disease through adjustments to diet and lifestyle.

Diabetes is divided into several classifications, but in general we will talk about Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes' etiological factors can be genetics, autoimmune dysfunction due to gut flora imbalance, and viral diseases. It is treated with insulin, because the pancreas, which normally produces insulin, is nonfunctional. Children who are introduced to cow's milk at less than three months of age have 15 times more chance of getting Type 1 diabetes than those who are breast fed. Another dietary cause of Type 1 diabetes is nitrates from water or smoked meat, which have been shown to destroy the pancreas due to oxidation. Type 1 diabetes is relatively rare, impacting less than ten percent of diabetics (statistics refer to the US, but are typical of industrialized countries).

The rest of those afflicted, 90%, have Type 2 diabetes. People with Type 2 diabetes don't have less insulin; rather they are unable to utilize insulin. This is called insulin resistance. It can happen due to many factors, such as excessive eating of sugars or trans fatty acids, exposure to chemicals causing oxidation, and drugs such as beta-blockers given for hypertension and heart disease.

Other contributors to diabetes and many other chronic diseases are lack of essential nutrients such as chromium, a lack of essential fatty acids, such as fish oils or oils from different nuts and seeds, increased consumption of coffee or other caffeine products and increased alcohol consumption.

But obesity is single-handedly the major risk factor for diabetes. Findings from the US government's third National Health and Nutritional Exam Survey (NHANES III) make it quite clear that diabetes is a disease of diet and lifestyle. For example, the Pima Indians live on both sides of our border with Mexico. Those in Arizona, living on a typical American diet, have a 70% rate of obesity. Twenty-two percent of the population have diabetes. Their cousins across the border, living on a more natural diet, have a rate of 10% obesity and just one percent incidence of diabetes. In 1983, only 15% of the US population met the definition of obesity. By 2000, 32% were obese. Today it is 40%. The number of obese children is increasing at an alarming rate, as is their rate of Type 2 diabetes.

According to the NHANES III study, among individuals with Type 2 diabetes, 69% did not exercise, 62% ate fewer than five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, 65% consumed more than 30% daily calories from fat and 10% of total calories from saturated fat, and 82% were either overweight or obese.



Harvard researchers studied 42,000 physicians. They divided them into two major groups according to diet. One group consisted of those with a relatively higher consumption of vegetables, fruits, fish, poultry and whole grains. The other group followed a typical Western diet, with higher consumption of red meat, processed meat, french fries, high-fat dairy products, refined grains, sweets and deserts. The Western diet alone increased the risk of Type 2 diabetes 50%. When diet was combined with low physical activity, the risk of Type 2 diabetes nearly doubled. If obesity was present, the risk jumped eleven times more!

As many as 128 million Americans are obese. Our nutritional habits are horrible, and we shun exercise. Corporate America may see this as a trillion-dollar business opportunity to cash in on, but the bottom line is we have to fix it ourselves. The government cannot stop us from eating the wrong foods and won't arrest us for not exercising. I personally believe that the American Diabetic Association and American Medical Association have completely failed their responsibilities in preventing diabetes. We are boasting new drug treatments, but the results are not changing.

One of the most famous books mentioning the link between diet and chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease is *Western Diseases: Their Emergence and Prevention* by Denis Burkitt, MD, and Hugh Trowell, MD, first published in 1981.

It was based on extensive studies examining the rate of diseases in various world populations and on observations of indigenous cultures. They formulated the following sequence of events. In the first stage, cultures consume a traditional diet consisting of whole, unprocessed foods. The rate of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer is quite low. In the second stage, when cultures start eating a more Western diet, there is a sharp rise in obesity and diabetes. In the third stage, as people abandon their traditional diet, complications such as constipation, hemorrhoids, varicose veins and appendicitis become more prevalent. In the fourth stage, with the full Westernization of the diet, more chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout become extremely common.

The average American consumes 100 pounds of sucrose each year. This sugar addiction probably plays a major role in the high prevalence of poor health and chronic diseases in the United States. Foods containing sugars in the form of sucrose, glucose, maltose, lactose, fructose, corn syrup or fruit juices make the body's blood sugars go higher, and put a strain on the balance of sugar. Research in the last two decades has provided us new information on refined carbohydrates (sugars and low-fiber starchy foods) and faulty blood-glucose control. New terminologies, such as "Syndrome X" and "impaired glucose tolerance" have been used to define blood-sugar imbalance, along with lipid disorders, elevated blood sugars and inflammation. The invention of packaged food containing harmful oils, additives and substances never before consumed by humans has compounded the problem.

In the next article we discuss how to change your diet and lifestyle to lessen your chances of developing diabetes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Virender Sodhi holds an M.D. (Ayurveda) from India and a N.D. from Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, USA. E-mail: drvsodhi@ayurvedicscience.com. Web: www.ayurvedicscience.com.

India Cultural Center and Temple



KOTILINGALINGITA

POORNA KAILASA PRASTHARAM

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ICCT is pleased, excited and proud to announce an undertaking of a historic and remarkable project, Kotilingalingita Poorna Kailasa Prastharam (Kotilinga Kshetram) for universal peace, prosperity and creates positive energy in the nature. Kotilinga Kshetram consists of 10 million Bana Lingams of various sizes over a three-dimensional Srichakra of 416(L) x 416(W) x 108(H) feet, also known as Poorna Kailasa Prastharam in Srividya literature. At the top of Srichakra (Bindu) sits a 18'ft gold-plated bronze vigraha of Maha Kameswara and Maha Kameswari in sitting posture.

Significance & Importance of Linga Pratishtha:

According to Shiva Puranam, consecration of a Shiva Lingam will erase countless number of sins from numerous past lives of the devotee. The great epic Ramayana tells us, Lord Rama installed 10 million Shiva Lingams all over India to get rid of his Brahmahatya Patakam (Great sin of killing a Brahmnani - Ravana).

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<https://bit.ly/3jo3blz>,
for Kotilinga Kshetram video.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

Family Finds Their Company Has a Matching Gift Program

Please inform everyone you know!" Anil and Devajyothi Kondapi urged our staff after discovering that the company Anil works for, Intel, has a matching gifts program, "For ten years, we had no idea the company was prepared to give an equal amount each time we donated to Hinduism Today. If only we'd known! We're now doing all we can to spread the word, so others don't miss out as we did."

In a matching gift program a company will donate to an eligible nonprofit organization in response to gifts made by employees to that organization. Most often, the gift is matched dollar for dollar, but some companies double, triple, or even quadruple it!

"We encourage your readers to check with the company they work for," urges Anil, "See if they have such a program and take full advantage of it if they do." The practice is more widespread than one might imagine. Sixty-five percent of Fortune 500 companies offer matching gifts. At doublethedonation.com/matching-gifts/intel-corporation, you can download a list of the 20 companies best known for their matching gifts and get a lot of other useful information. Or you can search "matching gifts" on your own company's website.



"Many companies such as ours, Intel, state that they will not match gifts made to religious organizations. At first, we were thrown. But looking deeper, we were overjoyed to find that Himalayan Academy was already registered as eligible with the company; therefore so was Hinduism Today, the journal it publishes."



Anil and Devajyothi Kondapi

Himalayan Academy was founded in 1957 as an educational institution dedicated to sharing the teachings of Sanatana Dharma as a public service. Your company may already have it registered as a qualified recipient. If not, ask them to do so. You can then donate to Himalayan Academy, have your company do the same, then send a note to books@hindu.org to direct the gifts to Hinduism Today, to other Academy publications or—most helpful of all—to the Hinduism Today Production Fund.

Devajyothi and Anil, who live in Portland, Oregon, have generously supported Hinduism Today since they discovered it ten years ago. "It has reawakened in us the philosophy of our heritage. The world needs a sound philosophy, today perhaps more than ever. Support our magazine and have your company join in—they, too, want to give and uplift the world. Don't deny them the opportunity."

It is wise to consult with your tax professionals if you are contemplating a charitable gift. Start your estate plan by downloading the pdf file at www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml.

For information on establishing a fund at Hindu Heritage Endowment, contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, ext. 6, or hhe@hindu.org.

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment			
Roshan Harilela	US\$375.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.68
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.63	Gowri Nadason	72.66
Thanneermalai Lakshmanan	101.00	Ram Ramamoorthy	30.00
Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Aran Sambandar	48.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	52.50	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	35.68
Hitesvara Saravan	42.00	Vayudeva Varadan	36.00
Anonymous	798.59	Total	267.40
Total	1,490.72		
Iraivan Temple Endowment			
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	700.00
Terrill Silke	300.00		
Narendra Singh	200.00	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam	
Bageshwari & Achla Sinha	108.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00
Sornavanita Sutherland	108.00	Anonymous	324.00
Anonymous	218.40	Total	374.00
Total	1,064.40		
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			
Vani Chenganna	430.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund	
Sumathi Krishnan	80.44	Devi Ravindraraj	108.00
Logadhasan Murugesu	47.75	Andrew Schoenbaum	10.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	33.32	Anonymous	5,175.00
Thangaratnam Sanmugam	201.00	Total	5,293.00
Patudeva Sivaceyon	0.83		
Saguna Skanda	18.66	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment	
Shailes Skanda	9.33	Thulasidas	225.00
Vamadeva Thungavelu	22.79	Mano Navaratnarajah	50.00
Riorita Tkatchenko	863.99	Anonymous	40.00
Anonymous	2,058.00	Total	315.00
Total	3,766.11		
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			
Yuvaraj Athur	299.00	Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund	
Akhila K. Balaram	299.00	Murali Balaji	251.00
Ashwini Bennett	299.00		
Ajay Bhargava	299.00	Hinduism Today Production Fund	
Vani Chenganna	215.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	9.84
Sanjay Devnani	299.00	Hiranya Gowda	62.00
Lavanya Gill	299.00	Ian Johnson	60.00
Matthew Grier	299.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00
Chander Kavalipati	299.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.68
David Kempster	299.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	33.34
Juhivaasana Koothan	6.86	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	11.48
Ashwini Maureemootoo	17.10	Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	4.56	Aran Sambandar	48.00
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	4.56	Anonymous	84.60
Udeyadeva Moorghen	4.56	Total	417.94
Oceane Parker	299.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	
Shesh Parlapalli	299.00	Benevity	806.00
Manoj Patel	299.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.92
Madi Rathinavelu	299.00	Tamnash J. Gupta	216.00
Vigneshwaran Sanmugam	299.00	Roshan Harilela	375.00
MD Sharma	299.00	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.63
Patudeva Sivaceyon	182.36	Chamundi Sabanathan	52.50
Saumil Vyas	299.00	Hitesvara Saravan	24.00
Anonymous	526.10	Rodney & Ilene Standen	20.00
Total	5,745.10	Michael Zimmermann	5.00
		Anonymous	237.00
		Total	1,787.05
Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund			
Vel Mahalingum	9.12	Hindu Education Endowment	
Anonymous	54.00	Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00
Total	63.12	Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00
		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	35.68
		Total	210.68
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			
Umasankaran Mohambourame	118.29	Hindu Press International Endowment	
Gowri Nadason	84.28	Hiranya Gowda	42.00
Parimala Selvaraj	62.00		
Bala Sivaceyon	34.31	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Sornavanita Sutherland	108.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	22.00
Krishna Vjih	51.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Anonymous	526.00	Total	172.00
Total	983.88		
Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund			
Shyamadeva Dandapani	24.00	Positive Discipline Endowment	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.38	Vinaya Alahan	22.00
		Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund	
		Sathyainkara Balendra	2.00
		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	11.48
		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00
		Total	43.48
		Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
		Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00
		Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
		Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
		Thulasidas	325.00
		Dinanatha Borzunov	50.00
		Shaddick Butte	100.00
		Lutcheemee Curpen	609.00
		Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00
		Chellappa Deva	25.00
		Amey Surendra & Amruta Gangal	11.00
		Debashis Ghosh	200.00
		Roudhranee Jugurnauth	22.63
		Gunasekaran Kandasamy	46.63
		Murugesu Kandasamy	23.42
		Amravadee Kownden	67.89
		Vel Mahalingum	2.98
		Gaurav Malhotra	501.00
		Ashwini Maureemootoo	2.26
		Tiviapragassen Maureemootoo	33.94
		Dasarathi Minjur	10.00
		Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	11.64
		Hitesvar Skandanatha Murugesu	5.89
		Rishitaa Murugesu	5.89
		Mano Navaratnarajah	100.00
		Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	11.48
		Sumathi Raja	450.00
		Suresh Ramamurthi	508.00
		Brian Rosenberg	100.00
		Aran Sambandar	72.00
		Hitesvara Saravan	108.00
		Aran Sendan	108.00
		Muthukumar Shanmugam	22.81
		Kavitha Darshini & Amitpal Singh	148.00
		Egambrum Sinsamy	113.15
		Logavalli Sinsamy	113.15
		Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00
		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	47.60
		Ramesh Sivanathan	12.03
		Adi Srikantha	51.00
		Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.92
		Vayudeva Varadan	42.00
		John Wahlen	36.69
		Michael Wasylkiw	432.00
		Anonymous	4,279.26
		Total	10,438.26
		Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
		Benevity	52.50
		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00
		Jaganmohan Vemulappali	116.00
		Total	218.50
		Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired	
		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00
		Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
		Shyamal Chandra Debnath	100.00
		Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
		Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00
		Bala Sivaceyon	34.31
		Nutanaya Sivaceyon	11.38
		Total	95.69
		Taos Hanuman Fund	
		Anonymous	108.36
		Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
		Muthukumar Jeyapalan	1,000.00
		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Rajiv Verma	50.00	Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Total	1,100.00	Anonymous	1,009.00	Sathyainkara Balendra	2.00
		Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00
Steven Lee	20.00	Anonymous	21.60	Anonymous	108.36
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00			Total	160.36
Total	70.00				
		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	200.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	Rachana Gupta	25.00
Riorita Tkatchenko	36.00	Anonymous	40.00		
Vayudeva Varadan	336.00	Total	206.00	Digital Dharma Endowment	
				Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.38
		India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00
Anonymous	21.60	Anonymous	40.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.68
		Total	206.00	Anonymous	416.27
				Total	590.33
		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	200.00	Hiranya Gowda	66.00	Anandkumar Ayyachamy	50.00
Riorita Tkatchenko	100.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	100.00	Dheeptha Baskaran	100.00
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00	Anonymous	40.00	Rajul & Heidi Gandhi	500.00
Total	336.00	Total	206.00	Raj Kapoor	920.00
				Subbiah Mathiarasu	21.00
		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Agumbarum Mootoosamy	108.00
Hiranya Gowda	66.00	Anonymous	40.00	Sivakami Murugan	108.00
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	100.00	Total	206.00	Amisha Patel	25.00
Anonymous	40.00			Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Total	206.00			Sonal Sahay	108.00
		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Nat Natraj	216.00	Nat Natraj	216.00	Salone Shahi	188.00
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00
Venkateswara R. Sola	111.99	Venkateswara R. Sola	111.99	Bala Sivaceyon	34.31
Total	357.99	Total	357.99	Devaladevi Sivaceyon	34.32
				Nandi Devi Sivanathan	35.68
		Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Carolyn Stewart	120.00
Rama Reddy	101.00	Rama Reddy	101.00	Subatra Dewi Veeriah	15.00
				Jaganmohan Vemulappali	500.00
		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Saravan Veylan	216.00
Arun Aarooren	75.00	Arun Aarooren	75.00	Ravi & Vinitha Vodela	101.00
Krishna Akundi	501.00	Muthukumar Jeyapalan	1,000.00	Anonymous	1,201.00
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	Steven Lee	20.00	Total	4,652.31
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.38	Subramaniam Pennathur	33.34		
Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00	Yogini Ratnasabapathy	100.00	Total Contributions	\$48,219.06
Luke Labella	100.00	Efrain Raul Eduardo Roman-Abarca	62.00	Funds at Market Value, Sep 30, 2021	
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	250.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	100.00		
Natraj Narayanswami	11.00	Venkateswara R. Sola	119.99	Total Endowment Funds	\$21,124,625.16
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Saravana Vigneswaran	100.00		
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00	Anonymous	1,088.59		
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Total	2,898.92		
Aishwarya Vashishtha	20.00				
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Siva Poomi School Trust			
Ravi & Vinitha Vodela	101.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	100.00		
Anonymous	116.48	Sharukaa Uthayasekaran	75.00		
Total	1,681.86	Total	175.00		

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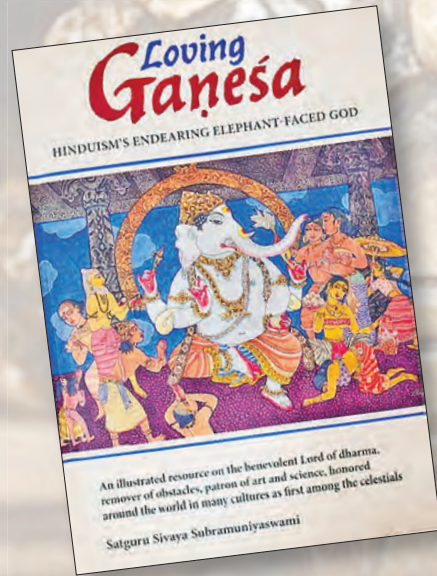
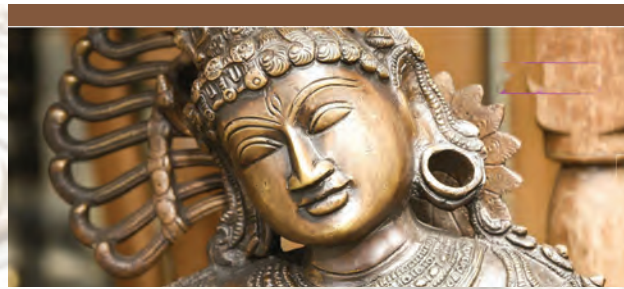
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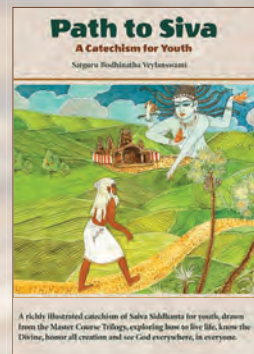
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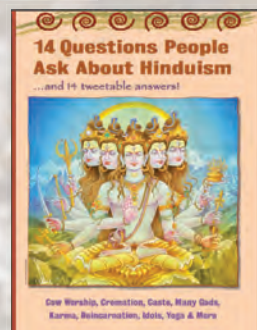


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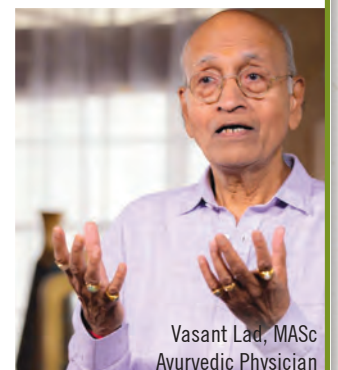
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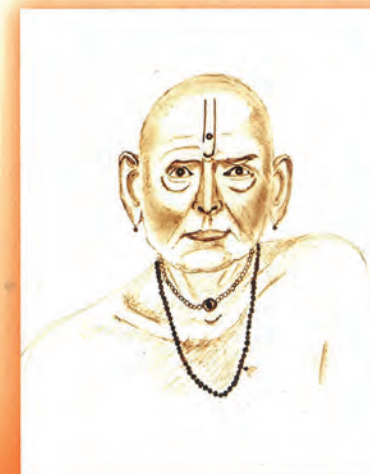
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and has no relationship**

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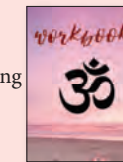
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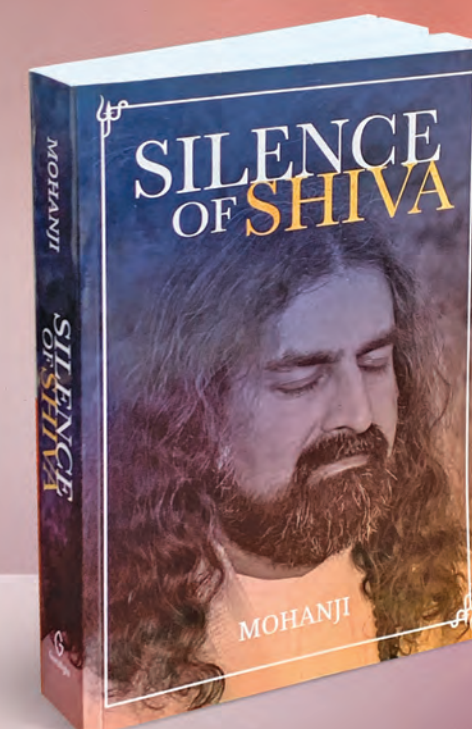
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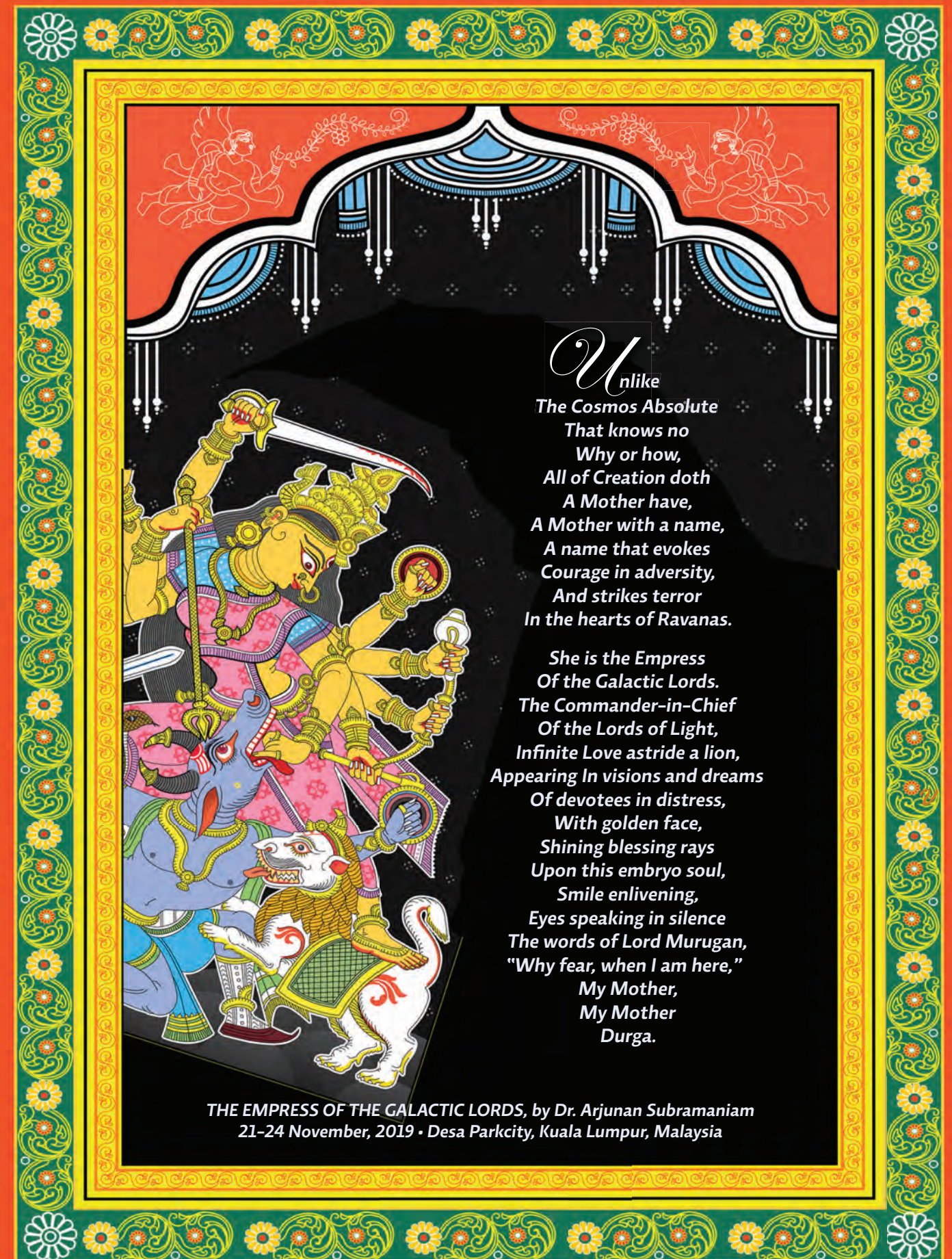
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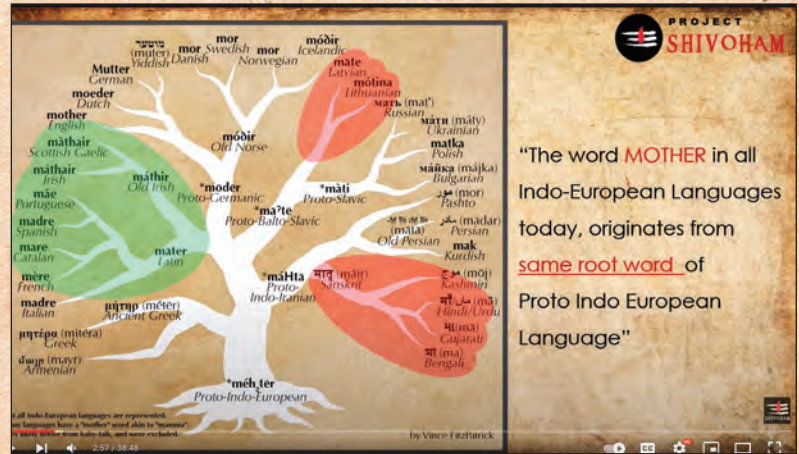
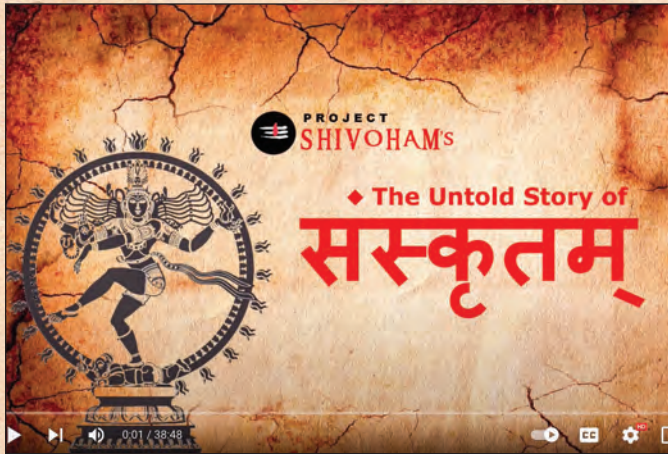
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DOCUMENTARY

The Story of Sanskrit

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BY RATNAVATHY SIVALINGAM-
CHANDRASEGARAN, MALAYSIA

GUESS HOW MANY OF THESE ENGLISH words are rooted in the Sanskrit language: “Seven royal cows voice sweet myths, creating anonymous, loving smiles.”

The answer: all of them! Surprised? It is understandable if you are. Indeed, words traced to Sanskrit can be identified in the lexical collection of approximately 1,700 languages, including those of the Indian sub-continent, Greek, Latin, Persian, Lithuanian, Baltic and English. Most individuals simply recognize Sanskrit as an ancient language commonly used in Vedic Hindu rituals and Indian scriptures. But did you know that Sanskrit—translated as “the well-perfected” language—has within its grammatical complexities a foundation in mathematics, and that it even holds parallels to modern-day computer science?

The “Untold Story of Sanskrit” is a succinct and finely-crafted documentary produced by the Project Shivoam YouTube channel. This micro-documentary channel is centered on contributing to the preservation of the glorious yet forgotten heritage of India, busting common myths and bringing this heritage as authentically as possible to viewers. The channel places paramount importance on extensive research of ancient scriptures to provide evidence for their claims.

I have always known Sanskrit is an archaic language and that it contributed immensely

to the vocabulary of other languages. But I was oblivious to the extent to which Sanskrit applies to other fields. Through an engaging visual chronology, an uplifting background score and good narration, we are taken on a journey through the origins of Sanskrit and its global contributions.

The documentary, opening with a powerful image of Lord Nataraja, is in three sections: the history of the language, its relationship to the world of computing and the reasons for learning Sanskrit.

The documentary then takes us back in time to the origins of Sanskrit and how it diverged and evolved across continents in the world. Drawing references from modern history, academic articles and print publications, the narration tells of Sanskrit’s influence on both the linguistic and cultural aspects of other ancient traditions. We also gain insight into the brilliance of the early authorities of Sanskrit, beginning with Panini Maharishi. His grammatical treatise *Astadhyayi*, is recognized as the oldest and the most comprehensive work on linguistics ever known. The basis for *Astadhyayi* is the *Siva Sutras*—Rishi Nandinatha’s 14 principles forming the foundation of human speech which, the narrators explain, proceeded all known Indian languages. We are also introduced to other Sanskrit scholars who further researched and elaborated upon Panini’s work: They include:

- Pingala—author of *Chandahshastra*, a framework for constructing Sanskrit poems,

which includes the first known instance of the binary number system and Combinatorics (The Fibonacci Series).

- Katyayana—author of *Varttikakara*, an elaboration of Panini’s work and the founder of mensuration and other geometrical principals.

- Patanjali—author of *Yoga Sutras* and of *Mahabhasya*, an explanation of Panini’s *Astadhyayi*

I applaud the production team on this work. The simple, yet detailed narration and accompanying visuals help viewers easily comprehend how Sanskrit’s astonishing grammatical structures relate to the fields of mathematics, computer science and technology. “The Untold Story of Sanskrit” can be found here:



https://youtu.be/eQqJkm_q93k

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