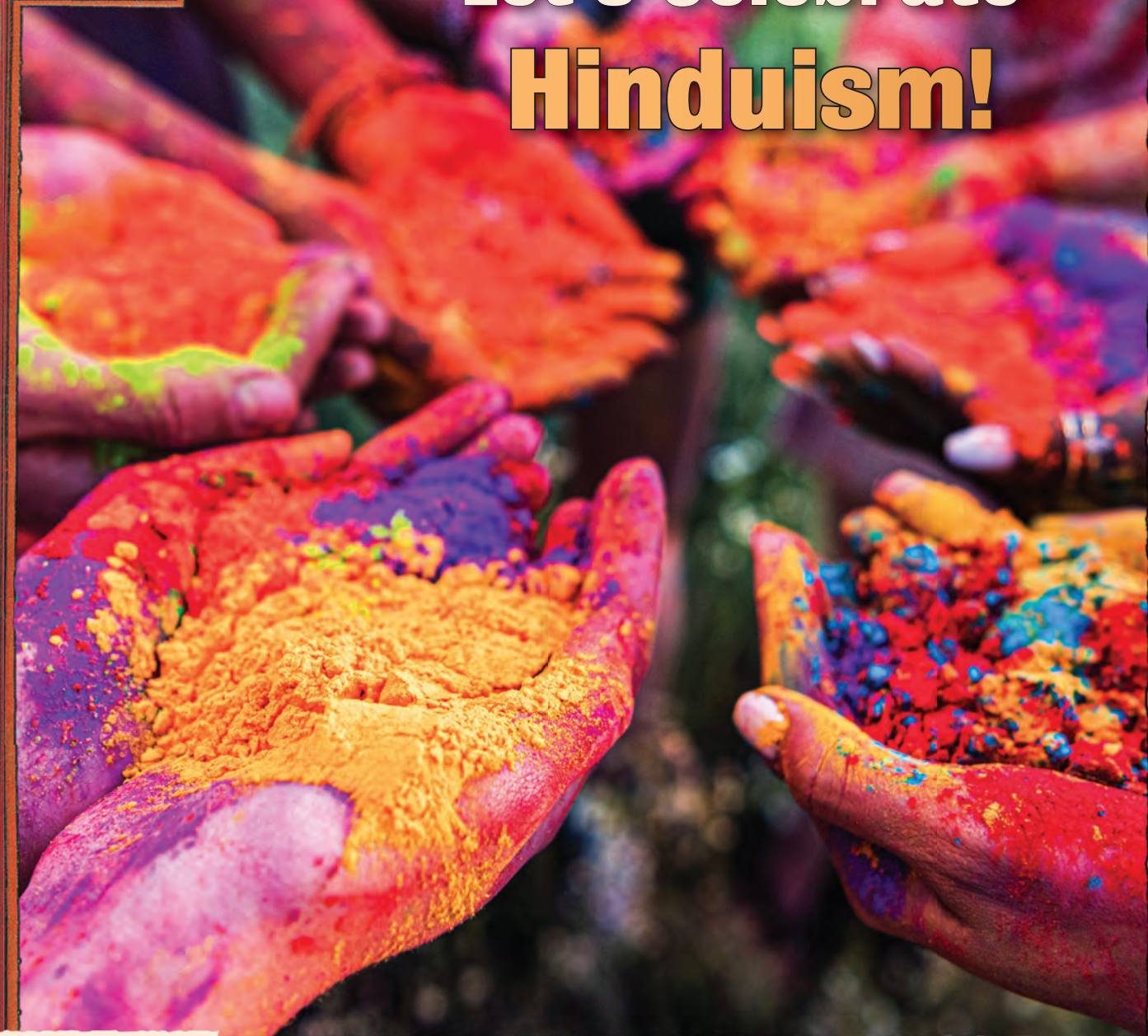


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(Cover) Holi revellers scoop up handfuls of colored powders and get ready for their next target; (above) a few of the dozens of new shrines being added to the Tiruketeeswaram Temple in Sri Lanka as part of a massive project to rebuild the ancient structure

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Mumbai's Mouthwatering Street Foods

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GLOBAL DHARMA

BALI

Bali Bans the Commercial Use of Sacred Dances

IN SEPTEMBER 2019 THE BALI-nese government made a move to help prevent Bali's cultural and religious traditions from being commercialized. The island nation has banned the commercial use of 127 sacred dances, because these were starting to be used for tourism rather than worship. A joint statement by the government and several concerned institutions read: "We prohibit all parties from demonstrating/showing/staging/performing all kinds of sacred Balinese dances beyond the sacred purposes of Hindu ceremonies."

This statement is meant as a nation-wide agreement, not a punishable regulation. Its purpose is to make clear to all

Balinese that the sacredness of these dances is to be protected.

Balinese cultural agencies have identified three major categories of Balinese dances. Dances in the Wali and Bebeli category have religious meaning and come under this ban, while dances of the Balih Balihan type are meant as entertainment and may continue to be performed as such.

As stated by Bali deputy governor Tjokorda Oka Artha Ardhana Sukawati (a dancer himself), "I never think about how many people will watch me dancing. I never think whether people will applaud me or not. For me, it's all about sincerity—a 100 percent offering to God."



Perpetuating heritage: Balinese dancers perform a traditional dance during a local festival



A moving God: local devotees and the head priest of Maviddapuram Kandaswamy Kovil pull one of the temple's chariots through the streets of this holy village in northern Sri Lanka

SRI LANKA

A Renewed Chariot Festival at a Time-Honored Temple

ON JULY 30, 2019, FOR THE first time in 29 years, devotees at the Maviddapuram Kandaswamy Kovil's Chariot Festival joyously paraded Lords Ganapathy, Sivan, Muthukumaraswami, Murugan (as Arumugaswamy) and Sandikeswarar through the streets of Maviddapuram on their respective chariots.

Thousands of devotees flocked to this holy village for the festival. They came from all over the island and even from other continents to receive the blessings of Skanda, Lord of Yogic Discipline. (Skanda is one of Lord Murugan's many names.)

This is an annual 25-day festival, with the parade being held on the 24th day; but the last time all five chariots were paraded together was in July of

1990, not long before all local residents were forcibly removed from the area due to the civil war. The temple itself was damaged by artillery and its contents looted; but like many temples throughout the Jaffna peninsula, it is being returned to its former glory through repairs and new construction, partially sponsored by the Tamil diaspora.

The beautiful construction of Lord Murugan's newly built chariot delighted pilgrims attending its inaugural parade. Its base is covered with nuanced carvings from the *Skandapurana*. In its middle level, Arumugaswamy sat on His throne, surrounded by meticulously painted wooden pillars, bright fabric and a silver cap piece.

See: mavaikandan.com

INDIA

Another Blow to the Unlikely Aryan Invasion Theory

A NEWLY PUBLISHED PAPER, available at the National Center for Biotechnology Information's website, reports that the skeletal remains of a 5,000-year-old woman (from around 2800 bce) were recently found at a Harappan site. Miraculously, one bone from the inner ear held usable DNA. The DNA was found to be unique to the Indian subcontinent. This finding disputes the common theory that the original inhabitants of India came from the West. Much more likely, it seems, people migrated from India to the West.

The introduction of the original paper speaks for itself: "We report an ancient genome

from the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC). The individual we sequenced fits as a mixture of people related to ancient Iranians (the largest component) and Southeast Asian hunter-gatherers, a unique profile that matches ancient DNA from 11 genetic outliers from sites in Iran and Turkmenistan in cultural communication with the IVC. These individuals had little if any [Eurasian] Steppe pastoralist-derived ancestry, showing that it was not ubiquitous in northwest South Asia during the IVC as it is today. The Iranian-related ancestry in the IVC derives from a lineage leading to early Iranian farmers, herders and hunter



Discovering the past: archeologists excavate skeletal remains at Rakhigarhi in Haryana, one of several Indus Valley sites. Bones such as these may hold important genetic markers helping us to discover more about human migrations in the area

gatherers before their ancestors separated, contradicting the hypothesis that the shared ancestry between early Iranians and South Asians reflects a large-scale spread of western Iranian farmers east. Instead,

sampled ancient genomes from the Iranian plateau and IVC descend from different groups of hunter-gatherers who began farming without being connected by substantial movement of people."



Religious recognition: State officials and religious leaders meet at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi to commemorate the initiative

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Legal Validity for Temples

IN ANOTHER SMALL MOVE towards religious tolerance, the United Arab Emirates has granted official recognition to a Hindu temple, along with 17 Christian places of worship. A ceremony was held in late September at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi to commemorate the event. Dr. Mugheer Al Khaili, chairman of the city's Department of Community Development, which held the event, stated, "The UAE is

keen on embracing unity and promoting the inclusion of everyone who has contributed to the development of the country... With this new initiative, places of worship will now be working and operating under one umbrella." According to these new policies, members of all religions can practice their faith freely within the laws of the Emirates. The UAE, population 9.4 million, is 76% Muslim, 13% Christian and 7% Hindu.

ITALY

Two Thousand People at Italy's Ganesha Festival

IN AUGUST 2019, THOUSANDS of devotees once again joined together in the Altare region of Northwest Italy to celebrate Ganesha Chaturthi. The bulk of the celebrations took place at Gitananda Ashram and were carried out at their Shri Lalita Mahatripurasundari Temple.

The event drew devotees

from many parts of Italy, Switzerland and France, many of them originally from India and Sri Lanka. Together they paraded Ganesha on a palanquin, observed a traditional homa and enjoyed Indian dance, while singing and worshiping throughout the day.



Honoring Ganapati: A homa at the Gitananda Ashram in Altare, Italy, celebrates the Lord of Obstacles

A New Animated Series Full of Hindu Gods and Goddesses

NETFLIX HAS RECENTLY announced a new animated series, "Ghee Happy." This light-hearted, beautifully animated story is meant for young children. It follows the adventures of the "Bala" versions of Hindu Gods, placing them as youngsters in a daycare while they discover their powers together.

The project comes from artist Sanjay Patel, who has long worked with Pixar Animation and helped create such well-known films as *Ratatouille* and *The Incredibles*. You may have seen Sanjay's short film titled "Sanjay's Super Team," which was

nominated for Best Animated Short Film at the 2016 Academy Awards. Sanjay told NBC News that part of his drive is to help young people of similar cultural descent. Here they can "see themselves normalized in pop culture and recognize that they matter and are included." He explained that "for me, growing up between two cultural identities, it felt enormously important to see that I wasn't alone in that experience." The series will be produced at Netflix's animation studio in Los Angeles and will likely start streaming within the next few years.



Ghee Happy: The new children's show will follow the stories of Hindu Gods in their childhood forms as they play and discover their powers. Left to right: Saraswati, Ganesha, a Sage, Kali and Krishna.

INDIA

Giving Space to Pilgrims

IN A NEW PROJECT UNDERWAY at the ancient city of Varanasi, 525,000 square feet of land leading from the banks of the Ganga to the famed Kashi Vishwanath Temple has been acquired by the Uttar Pradesh government. With supervision from India's central government, the project's goal is to create an open corridor for pilgrims and local worshippers to replace the narrow streets, houses and shops that had been there prior.

According to an article in *Fortune India*, the buildings purchased for the project

included the homes of nearly 250 families as well as 100 small businesses. The pilgrim corridor will include museums, eateries, public restrooms, a library and abundant open space. It will help immensely with the large annual festivals which take place at the temple. Previously during these events, thousands of pilgrims would stand in line for hours without basic amenities. For a full 3D layout of the plan by Gujarat-based architecture firm, HCP Design, see: bit.ly/kashi-corridor

Subhash Kapoor. This is part of an effort by India's government to recover tens of thousands of sacred relics that have been plundered over the last century.

IN 2006, THE HIMACHAL PRADESH government, led by Virbhadr Singh, became the first Congress-ruled state to pass an anti-conversion law. In late August of 2019, the state House unanimously passed a bill that increases the punishment for the crime of religious conversion. As State Chief Minister Jai

Ram Thakur said, "the earlier law was just cosmetic."

GLOBAL DHARMA
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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

The Goddess in Your Pocket

A Hindu view of wealth, elevating our appreciation of abundance to the level of the Divine

BY NAVIN JANI

When I pass a penny on the street, I always pick it up. Its spending power hardly justifies the effort, but I do it out of respect. Although I didn't fully understand the reason behind my family's Diwali traditions, I did appreciate that there was a connection between the silver dollars we bathed in milk and the divine lady pictured on our altar, surrounded by white elephants and dropping gold from each of Her four hands.

In the modern West, money is a thing—cold, inert, and meant for our manipulation. But the Hindu concept is dramatically different: Money is personified as Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune and chaste wife of Lord Vishnu. We should thus treat Her as a queen.

For starters, this means not wasting money. If we have a bank balance, we have the honor of hosting a Goddess and should deal with Her appropriately. If we use our wealth to acquire unnecessary gadgets or indulge in superfluous luxuries, however, we are instead making Lakshmi our servant. We wouldn't order a house guest to make us a sandwich or clip our toenails, would we?

At the same time, the other extreme—hoarding—is no more desirable. Lakshmi is not meant to be our prisoner, locked up for us to simply behold. When there are necessary and legitimate expenditures to be made, we must not avoid them under the pretense of being frugal. We should allow Lakshmi to do something productive.

So how do we utilize our wealth in a way that honors its true identity as the Goddess of Fortune Herself? The best host is one who fulfills the desires of their guest. In like manner, we should help Lakshmi do what She wants, which is to serve Lord Vishnu. This includes financially supporting His direct worship, such as donating to our local temple or maintaining a nice puja standard at home. But it also means taking care of our basic needs and those of others—including paying the mortgage; purchasing food, clothing, and transportation; and even participat-



ing in some recreation. After all, Lakshmi is also our mother. And part of Her duties is caring for the children. We just have to be careful to not get carried away.

A useful guide in honoring Lakshmi by navigating the poles of underspending and overspending is to dovetail personal expenditures with the promotion of our spiritual progress. We

should ask ourselves with every purchase: "Will this help me to become a better person and the world to become a better place?"

Odds are, we can find a way to satisfy our desires that also lets us answer yes—even when we have difficulty doing so. ("It may not bring about global peace, but that laddu behind the glass sure looks good!") The endeavor to be conscious of the connection between our money and God is itself salutary.

If we instead forget the position of God and try to enjoy Lakshmi separately, we follow the path of Ravana. He kidnapped Sita Devi, an incarnation of Lakshmi, and was destroyed as a result. Those who try to seize Lakshmi without the right consciousness and motives can similarly expect Her to evade their grasp. For them, She will remain one who is fickle and flickers, never remaining in one place for long.

For Hindus, money is a person, and using it brings us into a relationship with the Goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi. We should neither abuse Her through capricious expenditure nor stymie Her through miserly reserve. Instead, we should engage Her in the service to God and all his children (including ourselves). By thus offering money the respect due to a queen—even that lowly penny on the street—we can count on receiving love from Her like a mother, and are sure to enjoy prosperity both in this world and the next.

NAVIN JANI currently lives in Dallas, Texas. He is a federal attorney and writer with an avid interest in Hinduism and Vedic thought. email: navin108@gmail.com

BRIEFLY...

AFTER TEN YEARS IN CONSTRUCTION, one of Europe's largest Hindu temple complexes has been completed. In early September, the temple in The Hague, Netherlands, observed a festive opening. The complex includes a temple, large kitchen, and cultural center for the wider Hindu community. Around 200,000 Hindus currently

live in the Netherlands, many having moved there from Suriname, a former Dutch colony.

SINCE 1990, NEW YORK'S METROPOLITAN Museum of Art has acquired 15 antiquities that are now under investigation. The pieces may have been part of a looting by the infamous Manhattan art dealer and smuggler

"Mom, Dad, I'm an Atheist."

Hinduism has never opposed the idea of disbelief, but its profound understandings of God make atheism more difficult

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IN MANY OF MY TALKS OVER THE YEARS, I have spoken about the idea of the secularizing influence of modern universities on our Hindu youth. Surprisingly, almost none of the parents and teachers present have heard of this erosive phenomenon. I explain that in the university environment reason and science dominate, and religion is presented as a lesser subject. Some academics argue that the concept of religion has outlived its purpose and should be abandoned. As a result of years of exposure to intellectual secularism, there is a strong trend among university students to reject the religion in which they were raised. This applies to young men and women of all faiths, with few exceptions. This rejection takes several forms. The three most common are: 1) converting to the beliefs of atheism; 2) adopting secular humanism or 3) becoming "Spiritual But Not Religious." The topics of "Spiritual But Not Religious" and secular humanism have been covered in previous Publisher's Desks. Here we explore the third outcome, atheism.

I personally know Hindu families whose son or daughter has returned from university studies and confronted mom and dad with a statement such as the following: "At the university I was taught to believe in the scientific method, that everything needs to be provable. There is no proof for the existence of God. Therefore, I no longer believe in God. I am an atheist." Most parents are shocked by such a statement and have no idea what to say or do in response.

My advice to parents is to first recognize and accept their offspring's newfound philosophical position. Then later find the opportunity to share more about the nature of God in the Hindu tradition as being broader and more mystical than in Western faiths, the ground in which atheism is rooted. Explain that when most people think of God, which the youth has rejected, they think of Him or Her as a person. This is the view of many academics. However, in Hinduism and other Eastern faiths, God also exists as omnipresent consciousness and the transcendent source of that consciousness.

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, described these three aspects of Divinity as follows. 1) God is transcendent as the unmanifest, the ineffable That which lies beyond time, form and space. 2) God is immanent as the substratum or primal substance and pure consciousness flowing through all form. 3) And God is also immanent as the Primal Soul who performs the five divine actions of creation, preservation, destruction, veiling and revealing. Though God is a singular and sacred mystery, we understand Him through these three perfections. Thus God is far more than a personal Lord.

Phase two of responding to your offspring's

newfound atheism is to bring the concept of Divinity down to a personal level. We can say, "It may seem strange, but you can practice Hinduism without believing in a personal God. All you need to believe in is you, yourself. Ask yourself the question, 'Do I exist?' The answer to that, of course, is yes. In Hindu thought, focusing on one's own existence and its nature is called 'knowing thyself.' The second question to ask yourself is: 'Am I aware that I experience various states of consciousness?—positive ones such as confidence, and negative ones such as inferiority, fear, anger and worry?' Perhaps you are fortunate enough to experience creative states in which you produce something new—an invention, a poem or a song. Again, the natural answer is 'Yes.'"

Imagine these states of consciousness as a mercury thermometer, the creative states are toward the top and the negative ones are at the bottom. The goal of the path of "knowing thyself" is to learn to control the mercury so that awareness always resides near the top. When we get good at that, then the absolute top of the thermometer becomes reachable. That is divine, omnipresent consciousness. As it turns out, that consciousness is within everyone and, yes, even within God. In fact, it is often described as God.

In Hinduism, this approach to the Divine is called *advaita*, meaning nondualism, or *ekavada*, meaning monism. Omnipresent consciousness is often referred to in Sanskrit as Satchidananda, which literally means "existence-consciousness-bliss."

My guru gave this description: "Satchidananda is Lord Siva's Divine Mind and simultaneously the pure superconscious mind of each individual soul. Satchidananda is perfect love and omniscient, omnipotent consciousness, the fountainhead of all existence, yet containing and permeating all existence. Also called pure consciousness, pure form, substratum of existence, and more. One of the goals of the meditator or yogi is to experience the natural state of the mind, Satchidananda, holding back the *vrittis* (mental activity) through yogic practices. Satchidananda can be experienced by the diligent yogi or meditator as a merging in, or identification with, the underlying oneness flowing through all form. This experience is called *savikalpa samadhi*." Paramaguru Yogaswami described this state in the following way: "Sat Chit Ananda. That is one thing. Satchidananda. Sat is you are. Chit is omnipresence, Prakasa, light as from the sun, all-knowing. Ananda is bliss. They are three, but they are one. That is your nature." In other words, in Hindu thought we



Confounded: Many belief systems look upon the world as all there is. These include atheism and materialism. Here a man is beset with doubts about life and the Gods, yet all the while they are nearby, guiding his path toward the certainty that comes of personal spiritual experience.

proposed here assumes that non-dual Awareness is foundational to the universe, not arising from the interactions or structures of higher level phenomena. The framework allows comparison and integration of views from the three investigative domains concerned with understanding the nature of consciousness: science, philosophy and metaphysics. In this framework, Awareness is the underlying reality, not reducible to anything else. Awareness and existence are the same. As such, the universe is non-material, self-organizing throughout, a holarchy of complementary, process-driven, recursive interactions. The universe is both its own first observer and subject. Considering the world to be non-material and comprised, a priori, of Awareness is to privilege information over materiality, action over agency and to understand that qualia are not a 'hard problem,' but the foundational elements of all existence. These views fully reflect mainstream Western philosophical traditions, insights from culturally diverse contemplative and mystical traditions, and are in keeping with current scientific thinking, expressible mathematically." For those readers not familiar with the terms *qualia* and *holarchy*, qualia are the internal and subjective component of sense perceptions, arising from stimulation of the senses by phenomena. A holarchy is a connection between holons, where a holon is both a part and a whole.

The viewpoint in the article by Theise and Kafatos is indeed encouraging, showing that a change is gradually taking place in the scientific world regarding the nature of God and how it relates to modern physics. It is our hope that in the not-too-distant future, the university experience of Hindu youth will lead to new affirmative conclusions, and upon returning home from university, they will declare to their parents, "The Hindu view that God is the underlying substratum of the universe is now proved by modern scientific thinking and is expressible mathematically. Our Hindu rishis had it right thousands of years ago!"

Until such a shift happens, it is important for parents and teachers of Hinduism to have a strategy for preparing their youth for the secular, anti-religious university experience. I suggest emphasizing how Hinduism is about understanding and harnessing our states of consciousness. It has many practices within it for overcoming negative states, such as anger, fear, worry and self-doubt. Additionally, it provides meditation techniques through which we can experience the inner happiness and contentment of higher consciousness, which can eventually lead to discovering the one, omnipresent divine mind permeating everyone and everything. As stated by a rishi long ago in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, "He is God, hidden in all beings, their inmost soul who is in all. He watches the works of creation, lives in all things, watches all things. He is pure consciousness, beyond the three conditions of nature."

can personally prove the existence of God as omnipresent consciousness, Satchidananda, through our experience of it. This is the mystical approach to proving the existence of God. It is not based on the shifting sands of belief. From Yogaswami's point of view, since he asserts that God is everyone's innermost essence, to not believe in God is the equivalent of not believing in oneself. Who would want to do that?

The state of Satchidananda can also be described with the terms *non-dual awareness* and *fundamental awareness*, and some scientific papers are putting forth the theory that non-dual awareness is foundational to the universe. For example, in their 2016 paper "Fundamental Awareness: A framework for integrating science, philosophy and metaphysics," Neil D. Theise, MD, and Menas C. Kafatos, Professor of Computational Physics, summarize their ideas in the opening abstract: "The ontologic framework of Fundamental Awareness



LETTERS

Politics in Your Magazine

Regarding "India's Historic 2019 Election" by Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (HINDUISM TODAY, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2019), I am a firm believer in the benefits of "Separation of church and state," keeping religion and country's governance at a distance. This article looks at the recent election from a religious angle and endorses political party BJP and PM Modi, even though the magazine's primary focus is Hinduism and not politics. The only justification could be that this government seems to be promoting Hinduism in India and is trying to make India a Hindu country! How much of it is true and how many Hindus in India want a Hindu state is up for debate. I believe readers of this magazine are from different political beliefs, but are practicing Hindus who are proud of their religion. For the same reason, I feel it is distasteful to run a one-page advertisement in the same edition welcoming PM Modi to Houston. It is my humble opinion that accepting and running such advertisements, and publishing such articles dilutes the main goal of the magazine and divides Hindus on political lines, which I assume is not what the magazine would like to happen.

RAVI GOGULA, ILLINOIS, USA
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✓ We agree with the principle of keeping church and state separate, and have done so avidly for the last 40 years. But here we relented a bit, judging that Vamadeva Shastri's analysis of the impact of the recent Indian elections on the Hindu religion in India was of value to our readers. Our editors thought it was in line with purpose six of the publication listed on page 13: "to nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance," which, in Shastri's

view was definitely impacted by the election. As for the ad, it was for an event put on by the Hindu of Greater Houston, "representing over 30 temples and religious organizations," and billed as a community gathering. Granted, the final event had more politics than anyone expected, but that wasn't known at the time of our publishing the ad, nor indicated in the ad itself.

Compassion for Cows

My family and I learn so much about Hinduism from HINDUISM TODAY. Thank you so much for spreading the Wisdom and Eternal Truth of life.

The article "Do Hindus Have a Milk Problem?" (Jul/Aug/Sep, 2019) is thought provoking. Panshula Ganeshan is absolutely right when he writes, "Many vegans equate milk with meat, because once the cows stops producing milk, they are slaughtered." Gandhi wrote, "Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species." This comes to my mind when I see milk in temples and superstores in the United States.

For Hindus, *ahimsa paramo dharma*—nonviolence is the highest dharma. This article will make sure American Hindus realize the violent environment of milk-producing cows in the United States and other countries. Gandhi says, "The greatness of a country and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." My heart overflows with sadness as I vividly remember seeing cows induced with oxytocin hormone to produce more milk in Indian villages. Cows in Western countries are treated as "milking

machines." Fortunately, there are a few compassionate and slaughter-free shelters for cows. Cows are treated lovingly and don't end in slaughterhouse once they stop producing milk. I hope Hindu Americans explore these options and help cows to lead a normal life.

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Hinduism Never a Threat

Regarding the article "Why Do Christian Missionaries Dislike Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh?" (HINDUISM TODAY, Apr/May/Jun, 2019), Christian missionaries destroyed native culture wherever they went. Giving false hopes to the poor and the downtrodden, they converted them to Christianity by their brainwashing techniques. Hinduism is the most tolerant religion. In the history of India, Hinduism never posed a threat to any religion. Hindus do not impose their faith on anyone.

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Mindfulness Is Common Sense

I enjoyed reading your article, "A Hindu View of Mindfulness" (HINDUISM TODAY, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2019). To me, mindfulness is not only a part of a spiritual path, it can also be justified simply based on common sense and common knowledge. If "mindfulness is attention in the here and now," we can easily understand why it is necessary to pay close attention to the task at hand, not only to get the task completed efficiently and effectively but also to enjoy doing that task. It's hard to enjoy listening to music, or watching a movie,

or even eating if one is constantly interrupted by someone who is trying to talk to you. Just as you can't chase two rabbits at the same time, you cannot do two tasks at the same time. Scientific studies have proven that multitasking is inefficient, ineffective and unproductive.

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Refugee Sindhis of Bhopal

It is really heart-touching to read the article, "72 Years After Partition, Hindus Still Flee" (HINDUISM TODAY, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2019). We were spellbound and filled with emotion after reading the sub-heading, "Bhopal, Where Sindhis Have Thrived Since 1947," which focused on the worst experiences and tough challenges faced by Sindhi communities in Bairagarh (now known as Sant Hirdaram Nagar) post-partition. The noble endeavors run by Jeev Sewa Sansthan and its dedicated team of core volunteers have been excellently presented, awakening readers and inspiring them to make a visit at least once in their lifetime to "Sant Nagari," better called as "Pilgrimage of Service."

MAHESH DAYARAMANI
JEEV SEWA SANSTHAN

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Scarcely Available Materials

It was a wonderful article on the Sindis of Bhupal. It is indeed a good addition to the scarce written material on the subject.

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A Query About BAPS Temples

During my recent visit to USA, I worshiped at all the Hindu temples around the Northeast area where my children live. This helped me study the progress and development of the Hindu community. I also have visited Jain temples, Sikh gurudwaras and three BAPS temples. The recent article, "Akshar-Purushottam School of Vedanta" (HINDUISM TODAY, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2019), helped me to know about the philosophy and origin of the BAPS gurus and disciples.

But I have one basic and vital doubt made from observations during my temple visits. In all their temples, the central and presiding Deities are Parabrahman Bhagwan Swami Narayan and next to him his disciple Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. These

murtis are richly made in marble or metal and adorned lavishly, richly and beautifully.

Meanwhile, Ganesha, Vishnu, Siva, Sakti and a few other Hindu Deities are placed in the flank on both sides of the main Deities, like *parivara devimgal*, or secondary status in size and placement. The article gives no clue about these other Deities in the BAPS temples. Can anyone please clarify my doubt to know the inner meaning of that concept and arrangement?

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✓ This is a common question about Bocharanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) temples. The editors of HINDUISM TODAY invite insights and comments from readers who may be more familiar with the BAPS temple pantheon.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



Science and Religion Agree: Giving Is Good for You

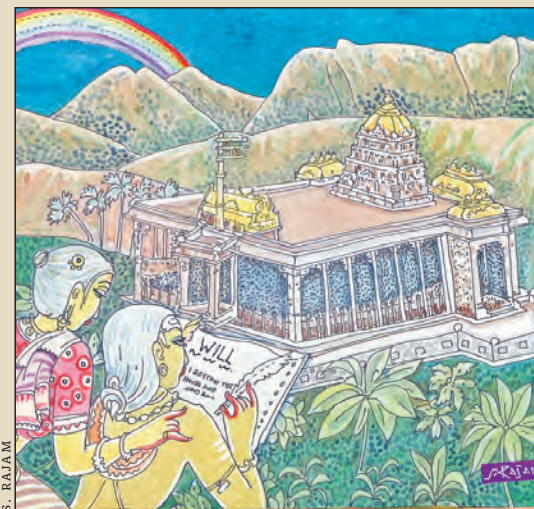
How generous souls bless the world and themselves at the same time

The wise ones knew it all along, but now scientists have proved it to be true—giving is good for you.

"Giving affects our brain chemistry," reports Arthur Brooks in *The New York Sun*. "It induces endorphins that produce very mild euphoric sensations... Charity also lowers the stress hormones that cause unhappiness.

"Generous people were found to have dramatically lower levels of the stress hormones cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine in their brains. The bottom line is that giving is not just good for your favorite cause; it's good for you, too. For relief from stress and depression, it's probably more cost-effective than whatever your doctor might prescribe. And it's not illegal or fattening..."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, HINDUISM TODAY's founder, taught that "You can't give anything away but that it comes back to you, in one form or another, tenfold. That is the law." He explained that the door that opens within you when you give is the same door that lets abundance in.



Creating a will and keeping it updated is the way to craft your life's mission statement and uplift whatever you deem most worthy

When you have cracked open that one door, it is cracked open. When you leave it open wide, it is open wide. The guru was giving us

a great gift with those words.

He established the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund as a channel for those who would share the magazine's vision, and want to keep it alive and thriving. We invite you to join those noble ones and keep that door to good fortune flung wide open by giving generously to the Production Fund. If you have given before, please give again.

An especially potent way to give is to include the Fund in your estate plan. Estate planning offers many varied ways of giving, some of which you will find to be just right for you, even beneficial. They can lead to substantial tax savings, for example. See our website www.hheonline.org and click on "ways to give" for a clear and simple overview of planned giving's many opportunities.

Contact us anytime at hhe@hindu.org or 1-808-634-5407. You can also request our informative Hindu Heritage Endowment and Production Fund newsletters at gurudeva.org/email-news.

QUOTES & QUIPS

“There is a voice that doesn’t use words. Listen.”

Rumi (1207-1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

I have learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet, strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers.

Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), *Lebanese-American writer, poet and artist*

When you see with your inner eye, then you realize that you are God and not different from Him. **Sai Baba of Shirdi** (1838–1918)

When people are truly dedicated to the Divine, there is no difference between action and prayer. **Mother Meera**, *Indian spiritual leader*

You think that you are the doer and fall into the trap of bondage. But everything was accomplished long ago. **Yogaswami of Jaffna** (1872–1964)

A boat cannot go forward if each rows his own way. *Tanzanian Proverb*

Knowing it, the ignorant man becomes wise, and the wise man becomes speechless and silent, The worshiper is utterly inebriated, His wisdom and his detachment are made perfect; he drinks from the cup of the inbreathings and the outbreathings of love. **Saint Kabir** (1440–1518)

Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 bce), *Chinese philosopher*

If you first fortify yourself with the true knowledge of the Universal Self, and then live in the midst of wealth and worldliness, surely they will in no way affect you. **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950), *South Indian mystic*

There is no treasure equal to contentment and no virtue equal to fortitude. **Sarada Devi** (1853–1920)

Sweet are the uses of adversity.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Live each present moment completely and the future will take care of itself. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), *founder of Self-Realization Fellowship*

God has created lands with lakes and rivers for man to live. And the desert so that he can find his soul. *Tuareg Proverb*

Stop wearing your wishbone where your backbone ought to be. **Elizabeth Gilbert**, *American author*

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

Not hammer-strokes, but dance of the water, sings the pebbles into perfection. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941)



The most super superfood: The flowers, seed pods and leaves of this amazing plant are all edible and extremely nutritious

DID YOU KNOW?

The World’s Most Nutritious Plant?

THE MORINGA TREE, ALSO KNOWN AS THE drumstick tree because of its slender pods, has been consumed in Southeast Asia for ages, and it’s no wonder why. This scraggly tree has over 92 known nutrients, 46 antioxidants and more than 300 recorded medical uses. A single ounce of moringa contains four times more calcium than milk, more vitamin C than seven oranges, and twice as much protein and three times as much potassium as a banana. The leaves alone have nearly 30 percent protein by dry weight—that’s more than legumes—and are also about 30 percent fiber.

All this makes moringa the most comprehensive natural multivitamin and antioxidant on Earth. It has nearly every vitamin found in other fruits and vegetables and

usually in a larger proportion, including 18 amino acids and 9 essential amino acids. Virtually every part of this amazing tree is useful as food and medicine, including its leaves, pods, seeds, flowers and roots.

Studies have shown its potential for lowering cortisol and raising testosterone, and its high antioxidant content makes it great for defense against free radicals, reducing oxidative stress and cell damage. Another study showed potential for the plant’s ability to reduce weight gain and insulin resistance, making it potentially useful for diabetics. It also has natural antibiotic and antibacterial properties which are good for gut health. Finally, much like turmeric, it has been shown to significantly lower cellular inflammation.

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it. **Steve Jobs**, (1955–2011), *founder of Apple, Inc.*

Every moment there is creation, every moment destruction. There is no absolute creation, no absolute destruction. Both are movement, and that is eternal. **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950), *South Indian mystic*

All generalizations are false, including this one. **Mark Twain** (1835–1910), *American writer*

He Himself becomes the worlds in all directions, the souls living in those worlds, the occupied bodies and the occupying souls, the tattvas which enable the souls to function while in embodied state and

becomes the oceans, mountains and all other parts of the world. Even though He appears as all these things, His supreme Lordship is not lost; He exists ever as the One and Only Master of the worlds. *Tirumantiram 412*

If you can explain your realization, you know it’s not the highest one. Very simple. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of Hinduism Today*

Unfoldment doesn’t take a lot of time. It just takes a lot of willpower. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of Hinduism Today*



“Oh, you’re a Hindu? Great! We offer some nice non-prophet discounts.”

B A S I C S

What Is Shakti?

From Sivaya Subramuniyaswami’s Dancing with Siva

IN A FEW WORDS, SHAKTI CAN BE described as “power” or “energy.” In the Agamic perspective Shakti pervades all of existence as the active power or manifest energy of Siva. Its most refined aspect is *Parashakti*, or *Satchidananda*, the pure consciousness and primal substratum of all form. This pristine, divine energy unfolds as *iccha shakti* (the power of desire, will and love), *kriya shakti* (the power of action) and *jnana shakti* (the power of wisdom and knowing), also represented as the three prongs of Siva’s trishula, or trident. From these arise the five powers of revelation, concealment, dissolution, preservation and creation.

In the ancient perspective of Saiva Siddhanta, Siva is All, and His divine energy, Shakti, is inseparable from Him. This unity is symbolized in the image of Ardhanarishvara, “half-female God.” In popular, village Hinduism, the unity of Siva and Shakti is replaced with the concept of

Siva and Shakti as separate entities. Shakti is represented as female, and Siva as male. In Hindu temples, art and mythology, they are everywhere seen as the divine couple. This depiction has its source in the folk-narrative sections of the *Puranas*, where it is given elaborate expression. Shakti is personified in many forms as the consorts of the Gods. For example, the Goddesses Parvati, Lakshmi and Sarasvati are the respective mythological consorts of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma. Philosophically, however, the caution is made that God and God’s energy are One, and the metaphor of the inseparable divine couple serves only to illustrate this Oneness.

Within the Shakta tradition, the worship of the Goddess is paramount, in Her many fierce and benign forms. Shakti is the Divine Mother of manifest creation, visualized as a female form, and Siva is specifically the Unmanifest Absolute. The fierce or black (*asita*) forms of the Goddess include Kali, Durga, Chandi, Chamundi, Bhadrakali and Bhairavi. The benign or white (*sita*) forms include Uma, Gauri, Ambika, Parvati, Maheshvari, Lalita and Annapurna. As Rajarajeshvari (divine “Queen of kings”) She is the presiding Deity of the Sri Chakra yantra. She is also worshiped as the ten Mahavidyas, manifestations of the highest



knowledge. While some Shaktas view these as individual beings, most revere them as manifestations of the singular Devi. There are also numerous minor Goddess forms, in the category of village Deities.

In the yoga mysticism of all traditions, divine energy, Shakti, is experienced within the human body in three aspects: 1) the feminine force, *ida shakti*, 2) the masculine force, *pingala shakti*, and 3) the pure androgynous force, *kundalini shakti*, that flows through the *sushumna nadi*.

Shakti is most easily experienced by devotees as the sublime, bliss-inspiring energy that emanates from a holy person or sanctified Hindu temple.



(left) The main entrance, with new construction in progress to the left and right. The original Nandi sits in the small shrine in front; (top) Selvanathan Sthapati with wife Ponni stand beside the temple's original Sivalingam; (bottom) silpis at work with hammer and chisel shaping one of the new beams.

Tiruketheeswaram Temple

Four hundred years after its destruction, the temple extolled by the ancient Tamil saints rises once again in ornate granite

FEW HINDU TEMPLES ARE AS TIED INTO HINDU RELIGIOUS history as Tiruketheeswaram. It is named after the planetary being Ketu, who performed penance here for stealing the Gods' *amrita*, the nectar of immortality produced during Samudra Mantham, the churning of the ocean. Ram Setu, the land bridge connecting India and Lanka, built by Lord Rama's army of monkeys to rescue Sita from Ravana, reaches Lanka at this point. And, aptly for our story, this place is associated with Vishwakarma, the Divine Architect responsible

for all construction—from houses, cities and forts to the great temples throughout India and Lanka. His tradition lives on today in the sthapatins (master builders) and silpis (artisans) responsible for erecting and repairing the holy shrines. Though its historicity and sanctity are undisputed, Tiruketheeswaram Temple was totally obliterated by the Portuguese in 1589. Even its location was all but forgotten until the advent of Arumuga Navalar in the 19th century. Join our reporter, Anuradha Goyal, as she visits this ancient place and reports on the efforts to rebuild the great temple.

BY ANURADHA GOYAL

REPORTING FROM MANNAR, SRI LANKA

ON AN EARLY JUNE MORNING IN 2019, I am at the Sri Tiruketheeswaram Temple at Mannar in Sri Lanka, very close to the southern end of Ram Setu, which joins Rameshwaram in India to Sri Lanka. A team of silpis, who have been brought here from nearby Tamil Nadu, India's southernmost state, are sculpting the hard granite stone in various hues of grey. One uses a hammer with a spiked metallic pattern to give the machine-cut stone a matte finish. Another uses a similarly fashioned flat-headed chisel, tapping it with a small mallet to smooth the rough stone into the finish that will endure for centuries to come. Other artisans are using small or large electric grinders to cut the granite, while still others are chipping off bits of stone with hammer and chisel. All work in harmony to fulfill the designs laid out by Selvanathan Sthapati, the temple's chief architect who flies here from India to oversee the project.

Tiruketheeswaram is one of the five ancient Iswarams, or great Siva temples, along the shores of Sri Lanka: Naguleswaram on the north coast, Koneswaram on the east coast, Thondeswaram in the south, Munneswaram on the west coast and here, Ketheeswaram, also on the western coast toward Jaffna. These five ancient temples were all demolished by Portuguese soldiers when they conquered the island in the 16th century. All of them except Thondeswaram

have been rebuilt by the devout Hindus of Sri Lanka. The very location of Tiruketheeswaram was lost; its rediscovery in 1894 was the result of intense efforts by the Jaffna Tamil community to find and resurrect it. Helpful in this effort were the songs of the early Tamil saints, including Sambandar and Sundarar, whose images now adorn two of the temple's eight new pillars leading to the main sanctum. Thondeswaram, similarly lost, is thought to have been located in the Galle area at the southern tip of Sri Lanka. But little more is known.

The Tamil Hindu community began serious efforts to reconstruct Tiruketheeswaram in the early 1900s. Recently, the Indian government has generously contributed to the project, supplying funds and expertise to replace several key parts with granite stone (much preferred over concrete). India is uniquely endowed with the knowledge and skills to build Hindu temples, and this project is one that is dear to Sri Lanka's three million Hindus. But before we describe the current project, let us go back in history to the origins of this sacred place.

In Scripture and Historical Record

The temple's scriptural origins trace back to the story of the Samudra Manthan, the Churning of the Ocean, which is recounted in the *Bhagavat Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* as well as the *Mahabharata*. Among the many treasures yielded by the churning, the most prized is *amrita*, the nectar of im-

mortality, which was claimed by the devas after a victorious battle with the asuras. But during the nectar's distribution, some was surreptitiously consumed by an asura named Rahuketu.

He was caught in the act, and the Goddess Mohini cut off his head with the Sudarshana Chakra. Rahuketu remained immortal, but in two pieces. His head was called Rahu and the serpent-like body was named Ketu. In Hindu astrology, these two beings are the north and south lunar nodes—the points where the Moon's orbital path crosses the apparent path of the Sun against the sky, a time when eclipses can occur. Ketu resolved to perform penance for stealing the *amrita*, and chose to do so eight miles north of Mannar city. Lord Siva was pleased with Ketu's severe austerity. In commemoration, the place was named Tiruketheeswaram, "the holy place where Ketu worshiped Siva"—just as *Rameshwaram*, the temple on India's southern shores,

.....
Legends: (counterclockwise from below) The churning of the ocean which yielded *amrita*, the elixir of immortality stolen by Ketu; Vishwakarma, the divine master craftsman; the monkey army inscribes Rama's name on each rock of the bridge to Lanka to make it float; an unusual Thai depiction of the building of the bridge, with Ravana's palace at top, and in the foreground the monkey army enlisting large fish to haul the stones



WAT PHRA KAEW TEMPLE, THAILAND

Divine Origins of Tiruketheeswaram and Environs



WIKIMEDIA



UNKNOWN



UNKNOWN

means “where Rama worshiped Siva.”

The area of Mannar, or Mathoddam as it was once known, is also said to be the land of Vishwakarma, the Divine Architect, whose five sons were the progenitors of five artisan clans—Manu for blacksmiths, Maya or Mayan for wood craft, Twashta for metal craft, Silpi for stone craft and Viswajna for goldsmiths.

Nala Setu, Lord Rama’s engineer for the monkey-built Ram Setu land bridge to Sri Lanka, was a descendant of Vishwakarma. Selvanathan Sthapati, Tiruketeeswaram’s chief architect, also traces his ancestry to this place. He shared with me that working on this project has been a great fulfillment of his life.

Mandodari, the chief queen of Ravana in the epic *Ramayana*, is thought to be the daughter of Mayan, who lived in Mannar and built Ravana’s golden capital, Lanka-puri. Sculptures of Mandodari can be seen at many places in the rebuilt Tiruketeeswaram Temple, including on one of the entrance tower pillars. The *Ramayana* relates that she prevented Ravana from killing Sita for refusing to marry him.

Mannar is traditionally associated with the serpent-worshiping Naga people, thought to be an aboriginal tribe of Lanka that was eventually absorbed into Tamil society. Serpent symbols are seen everywhere in the region. In the temples many Deities are shown standing or sitting under a cobra

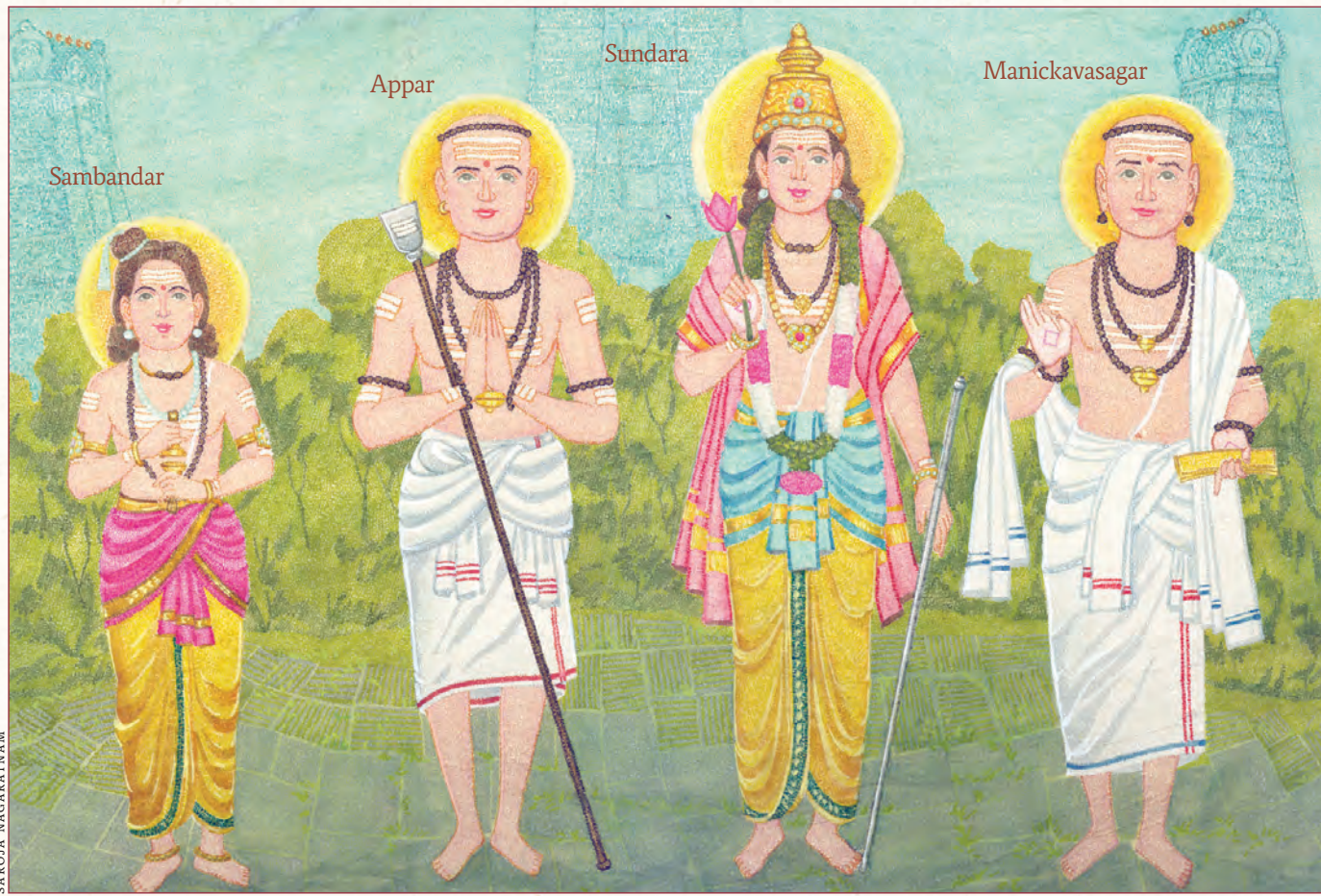


hood (see photo of Ketu on page 28). Historically, most Sri Lankan kings married Naga princesses from this area.

Mannar was Lanka’s main sea port until relatively recent times, frequented by Chinese traders from the east and the Greeks and Romans from the west. Ptolemy’s first-century map of Sri Lanka, then called Taprobana, shows Mannar as Margana to the north on the western coast. This was a natural trading center, due to its location at one end of Ram Setu (called “Adam’s Bridge” by tenth-century Muslims). Ships coming from east or west could not proceed past Ram Setu. Sailing completely around Sri Lanka was possible but impractical. Half the year, the wind took ships in one direction, the

other half in reverse, meaning ships might have to wait precious months for the wind to change. Until the development of modern navigation methods, it was far more practical for ships from China and other eastern ports to unload at Mannar and trade there for goods coming from Europe, the Middle East and western India. It became a central marketplace for international trade for many centuries.

Temple records in South India indicate that until 1480, when a massive cyclone broke it apart, one could cross Ram Setu on foot. Between such land travel and the abundant fishing fleets, it was easy for pilgrims to reach Lanka. Thus it is not surprising that the earliest written records of Tiruketh-



Ancient Trading Routes



In olden days: (counterclockwise from left) ancient map of Sri Lanka (attributed to Ptolemy), then called Taprobana, showing Mannar, then called Margana; a Tunisian tile mosaic of an ocean-going Roman ship; a map showing 10th century trade routes, with the Silk

Road(s) in red to the north, and the sea routes in blue to the south; the Nalvars, four great Tamil saints, all sang of the divine power of Tiruketeeswaram; a satellite view of South India, Sri Lanka and Ram Setu

Saints of South India Sing Lanka’s Praises



eeswaram are found in the songs of the Tamil saints, starting with Tirunavukkarasar (Appar), who lived during the reign of the Pallava king Mahendra Varman I (580–630). Appar mentions the temple in his song, *Tiruthandakam*: “The holy ash shines on His golden hue. He wears the sacred thread. The fiery serpent adorns His form. He is our Lord, Shankar by name. He dwells in Keteeswaram there, He of Ketharam and Veeraddanam in the North.” (Ketharam is modern Kedarnath in the Himalayas; Veeraddanam is the Tiruveeraddanam Siva Temple in the Kadalur District of Tamil Nadu.)

Seventh-century saint Tirugnana Sambandar from Seerkali in Tamil Nadu sang of the glories of the Lord of Tiruketheeswaram in eleven of his devotional Thevaram songs (youtu.be/_rYeie9DvzI): “Our Lord loves this shrine for the sake of His devout worshippers, worshipping in love and truth. He has taken residence at Tiruketheeswaram for the sake of devas who seek spiritual comradeship with Him. Worshipers at Tiruketheeswaram are immensely blessed. They are liberated from the law of karmic effect and bestowed with supreme wisdom and bliss.”

The eighth-century poet Sundarar sang ten songs about this temple (youtu.be/tDGdYqY5L-k). In one, he mentions its sacred tank Palavi, the abundance of pearls in the sea and the busy port: “Hail! O Lord of Tiruketheeswaram! Hail to You, O Lord, who presides with the beautiful consort Umadevi, on the celebrated banks of Palavi at Mannar, by the sea which abounds with pearls.”

Mannar repeatedly finds mention as a vital port in various chronicles from the early centuries ce. It was known by various names in addition to Mathoddam—Thuvadda, Mahathuvadda, Mattodai and Mahatitta. Keerimalai, north of Jaffna, was the main city and



SUTHANANTH KETHEESWARANATHAN

within sight of land. Mannar’s periodic pummeling by severe cyclones, such as the one that breached Ram Setu, was probably another factor in its decline.

The port town is today something of a buried treasure. Storms occasionally reveal coins, beads and other artifacts from the time of abundant trade with Arabs, Persians, Romans, Greeks, Indians in the west and with Chinese, Javanese and Burmese in the east. The cosmopolitan nature of the port must have been like that of Puhar in South India, described in the early Tamil poem, *The Ankle Bracelet*, or like that of Florence during the European renaissance.

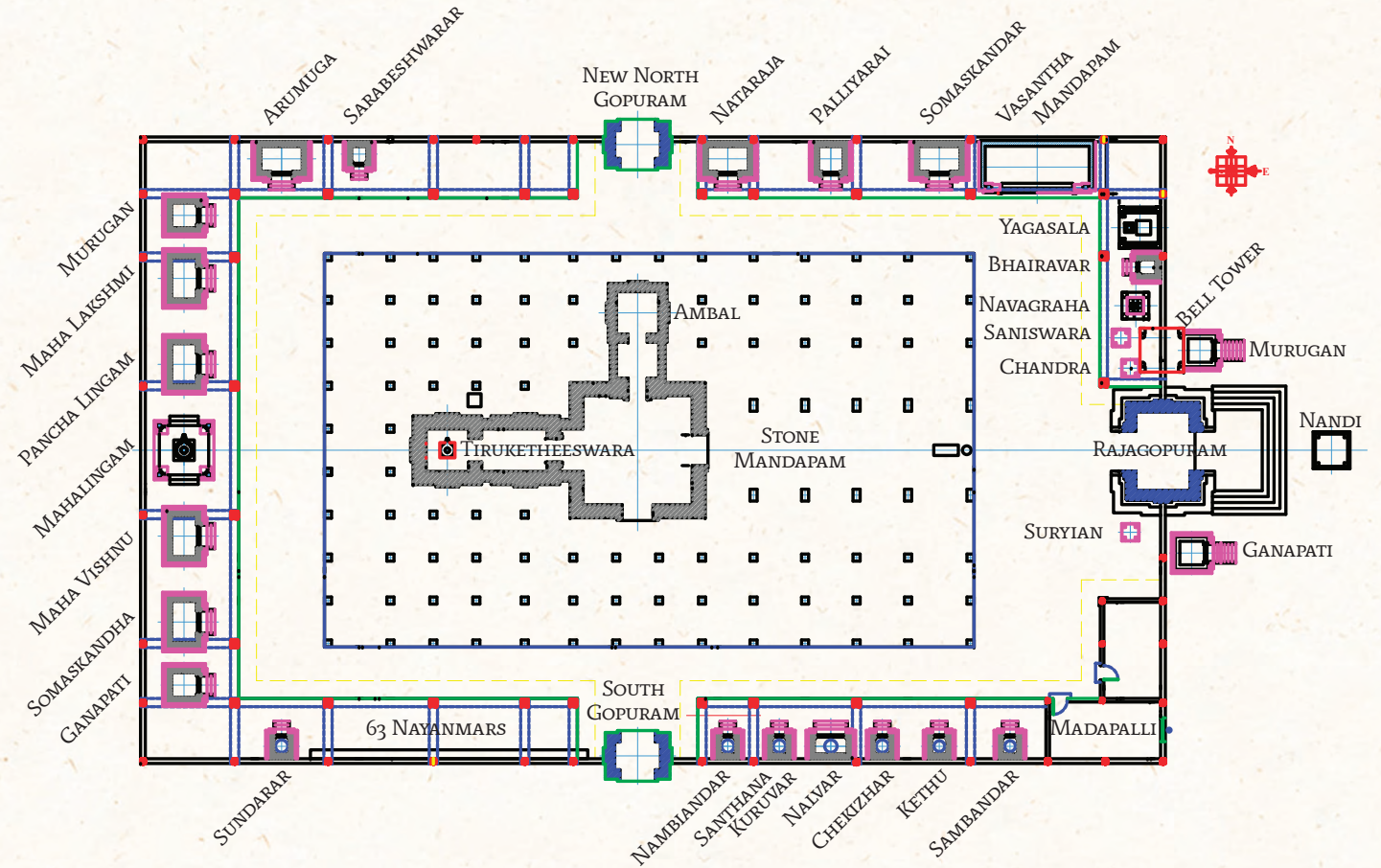
The arrival of the Portuguese in 1505 spelled complete disaster for not only Tiruketheeswaram, but nearly all of Sri Lanka’s Hindu temples. These archeological and religious treasures were systematically destroyed and their building materials reused for forts and churches. The story of the blowing up of Koneshwara Temple is well known; Tiruketheeswaram Temple met with a similar fate, though the details are lost to history. The last known puja in the temple was in 1589; its total destruction was recorded in

Mannar was the primary port.

The South Indian kingdoms dominated Sri Lanka for much of this period, which was also the golden age of temple architecture. The temple was improved upon and expanded by various rulers, including the Cholas and Pandyas. A mid-13th century inscription at Chidambaram Temple in South India describes the rebuilding of Tiruketheeswaram Temple in Pandyan style.

Mannar remained Sri Lanka’s main port until the 16th century, when the Portuguese developed Colombo’s natural harbor, which had been used for shipping on a small scale from ancient times. Mannar’s prominence also diminished as navigation methods improved and ships no longer needed to sail

.....
According to plan: (clockwise from above) the Yagasala, Navagraha, Bhairava and Sani shrines next to the bell tower; the floor plan; Google Earth view; Pandi silpi executes intricate carving on the Kabothaga koodu; seal of the Arumuga Navalar School in Chidambaram, India, depicting the reformist



1590. British records chronicle that the temple was as big and as revered as the one in Rameshwaram across Ram Setu. It boasted seven prakarams, successively larger enclosure walls, with three moats and multiple gopurams and shrines. Pilgrims from all over India used to visit.

After the Portuguese came the Dutch, who

by 1660 gained control of all of Lanka except Kandy. In what Hindus might call karmic justice, the Protestant Dutch persecuted the Catholic Portuguese but left Hindus and others mostly alone. For example, Jaffna’s Nallur Temple, destroyed in 1624 by the Portuguese, was rebuilt by the Hindu community in 1734 during Dutch rule. Then, in 1815, the British

gained complete control of Lanka. They took a hands-off approach to religious issues. All during British occupation, Hinduism and its temples remained active but subdued.

Lanka's Hindu Renaissance

In the mid-19th century a young man from Jaffna, Arumuga Navalar (1822–1879), stud-

Arumuga Navalar Sets in Motion Lanka’s Hindu Renaissance



ARUMUGA NAVALAR SECONDARY SCHOOL



SUTHANANTH KETHEESWARANATHAN

Developing the Outer Courtyard



GOOGLE EARTH

ied Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, bought a printing press and started publishing books on Hinduism. His main focus was to bring back the worship of the Sivalingam and the singing of the Tamil holy hymns, Tevaram and Tiruvagasam, in temples. He regaled saints Sambandar and Sundarar, who described the Lord of Tiruketheeswaram, and became determined to rebuild the original temple. Its location in Mannar—today a small and remote fishing hamlet—was known to be in an overgrown jungle area.

Arumugam passed away in 1879, but by then he had built up a movement that his extended family and followers carried on with great zeal. In 1889, 400 years after the Portuguese destruction in 1589, they started the process of acquiring from the British government 44 acres of land where a large but damaged Sivalingam from the Chola period, a Nandi statue, a Ganesh statue and a Somaskanda in bronze had been unearthed. These treasures can be seen on the grounds today. Coins, jewelry, beads and gemstones have also been unearthed.

On June 27, 1903, a shrine was consecrated on the land, with a new Sivalingam called Kriya Lingam and an image of the Goddess Gowri, brought from Kashi via Rameswaram. Because of its damaged state, the old Sivalingam could not be reinstalled in the central sanctum, so it was kept to one side and worshiped regularly as "Mahalingam." During the following seven years, a small temple was built around the main Deities. A

kumbhabhishekam was performed in June, 1910—109 years prior to my visit. The local Nagarathar community was handed the responsibility to run temple activities and initially to perform the worship. Traditional brahmin priests were hired later to perform the puja worship.

In 1948, the Tiruketheeswaram Temple



Restoration Society (TTRS) was formally established. Its first president was Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan (1896–1965) of Kopy, a respected civil servant and politician. One of the group's first accomplishments was the 1949 revival of Palavi Teertham, the temple water reservoir. A huge festival was held in which, after a lapse of 400 years, the ritual of taking the Deity to the water, about 200 meters south of the temple, was resumed. The large lake is surrounded by green trees and hosts many birds. A second, smaller tank is located in front of the temple near the gos-hala (cow shelter).

In the 1950s the TTRS set the ambitious

task of rebuilding the entire temple. They hired two sthapatis, traditional temple architects, from Karaikudi—M. Sellakannu Sthapati and his brother M. Vaidyanatha Sthapati—Selvanathan Sthapati's grandfather. Plans were drawn to expand the temple adding a prakaram or enclosing wall to contain smaller shrines within this outer area. Granite stone was acquired from Vavuniya, about 50 miles inland from Mannar. The foundation for these improvements was laid in 1953. Many parts were built in concrete.

New shrines were erected for the Goddess, worshiped here as Gowri Ambal; Nataraja, the dancing form of Siva; Dakshinamurti, Siva as the silent teacher; Skanda, Vishnu and others along with the 63 Tamil Saiva saints, Nayanmars, and the divine being Ketu, who founded the temple. These new shrines were dedicated in 1960.

The following year a large temple bell imported from England was installed in a tower at the front entrance. A tower with

.....
Getting the work done: (clockwise from above) shielded against the dust, a silpi works on an ornate pillar for Mahalingam mandapa shrine; view of the Sri Somaskandar shrine and the Palliyarai, divine bed chamber; this modern replacement for the elephant does the heavy lifting; central Siva vimana and at right the Goddess shrine vimana; silpi chiseling the kandam part of a stone; the main sanctum and adjoining pillar hall

a European bell has been a unique feature of Sri Lankan temples ever since one was installed at Nallur Temple, the first temple rebuilt after the end of Portuguese rule. The priest here tells us they are easy to ring and can be heard from a long distance.

A gurukulam (priest training school) opened in 1962, offering a five-year program. Six years later a five-tiered raja gopuram (entry tower) was built at the main entrance. Reconstruction of the primary shrines for Siva and the Goddess began in 1971; these were dedicated in 1976. Marriage facilities boosted the temple's popularity, and last rites were regularly performed at Palavi Tank.

Rest houses were built nearby to host pilgrims from Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and other countries. Most of those coming from India took the ferry that then operated between Rameswaram and Mannar, a voyage of 46 miles. Some flew from Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu to Jaffna. In the early 1980s, TTRS planned to rebuild the covered area around the central sanctum with stone pillars and create a larger entry tower. But history intervened.

War Intervenes

With the 1983 outbreak of civil war between aggrieved Tamils and the Sri Lankan government, all plans for the temple were put on hold. The Sri Lanka army soon secured Mannar, along with other coastal areas in the north that were subject to infiltration



from India. By 1990 people living around the temple moved to less restricted areas, and eventually even the priests and their families fled. The army secured the temple in 1990 and did not allow priests or devotees access again until 2002. Though not deliberately damaged, the temple was deserted.

Mrs. Abhirami Kailasapillai, the joint secretary of TTRS, affirms that the army was respectful of the temple. They would light a lamp and not step inside with shoes on. However, neglect took a terrible toll on the temple. As many as 20 of the 27 pilgrim rest houses were damaged or lost. When the TTRS revisited the temple in 2003, the army was still in control and they had to pass through many checkpoints before entering. Even the windows of the bus they traveled in were papered over, according to local news

reports. This situation continued until 2009. Several permissions were required to visit the temple, no private vehicles were allowed and every activity required advance permission from the army.

With the war's end in May 2009, Mrs. Kailasapillai, president of the All-Ceylon Hindu Congress, and others could once again travel freely to the temple, which by then had become enveloped in tall grass and shrubs. Signs of the war were everywhere, but the temple itself was intact. It was finally time, they felt, to bring it back to life. A small reconsecration was performed, and daily pujas resumed. The following year devotees regained free access, and the construction projects

abandoned in the 1980s could be started anew, this time with assistance from India.

Reconstruction Resumes

In June 2010 India and Sri Lanka issued a Joint Declaration laying out numerous policies and projects to address the reconstruction of northern Sri Lanka following nearly three decades of war. In addition to generous amounts of humanitarian aid and major infrastructure repair, one item specifically called for the restoration of Tiruketheeswaram Temple. The Archaeological Survey of India and the College of Architecture and Sculpture at Mamallapuram would coordinate with the Department of Archaeology of Sri Lanka. In 2011 a formal MoU was signed between the two governments and TTRS. Financial aid to the tune of us\$3.2

Bringing Beauty from Granite and Concrete



million was provided to cover both labor and material. The dual-nation effort was launched in August 2012 by Kumari Seilja, then India's minister for culture.

The plan called for three structures: the mahamandapam (the area around the central sanctum), the prakara mandapam or inner courtyard area, and the vasanth mandapam where the parade Deities are kept—a total area of 11,370 square feet. The existing mahamandapam, made of concrete, was to be demolished and rebuilt in granite. A hundred pillars, carved at the Government College under Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati's guidance in the late 1980s, were shipped along with other stones to Sri Lanka. Dr. M. Gunasegaran, his successor at the college, oversaw their installation. They included six huge pillars, which are now positioned in front of the main sanctum, carved with life-size statues of King Rajaraja Chola, his son Rajendran Chola, Mandodari, Kethu, Sambandar and Sundarar. Dr. Gunasegaran retired from the college while the work was still in progress, but TTRS continued to engage him with oversight by the Archeological Society of India. This first stage of this restoration plan was funded by India and completed in 2017; subsequent work has been funded by TTRS from investments and donations.

The second stage for the temple includes reconstructing the vimanas, elaborate towers, over the main Siva and Gowri Ambal sanctums and the surrounding 24 subsidiary

shrines, *sannithis*, all in stone. This will bring about a uniformity in architecture and design to match the Mahamandapam, which was completed in stage one.

According to Mrs. Kailasapillai, funds raised prior to and during the civil war were invested in stocks, the proceeds of which are today a major financial strength for the restoration. At the same time, she said, there are major challenges in terms of paperwork and permissions required for the project.

The immediate goal of TTRS is to finish the ongoing restoration work and perform a kumbhabhishekam. Presently the central sanctum is closed, and worship is performed in the *balalayam*, a temporary chamber just outside the Rajagopuram. After the rededication, the premises will be returned to its previous use as a wedding hall, and the normal functions of six pujas a day and major festivals will be resumed.

The project has been fraught with challenges. In an unusual incident on Sivaratri day, 2019, a temple gateway spanning the road to the temple near a Catholic church was torn down. A YouTube video (youtu.be/38LoFLbUKTc) shows church parishioners, including several women, tearing down the sign while priests from the church look on. The Catholic Church in Jaffna apologized for the incident, which is now in the courts. But it was a reminder that Mannar is a

Catholic majority area. Hindus are struggling to rebuild it and have had no relief from authorities in the area.

The Present Work

Visiting the temple today, we feel the time-

The carvers' art: (clockwise from above) Selvanathan marks a stone for the sculptors; Sri Mahalakshmi, Murugan and Arumuga shrines in the northwest corner; Silpi Sarath embellishing part of the Mandapam Pothial in cement; Ketu, after whom the temple is named; ceiling sculptures (the nine planets at top and zodiac at bottom); Vinadhara Dakshinamurti, a form of Siva playing the vina



SUTHANANTH KETHEESWARANATHAN

lessness of an ancient Siva temple and the steady pace of the remaining work: the kumbhabhishekam is scheduled for next year, and there is much yet to be done.

Sthapati R. Selvanathan of Chennai, India, one of the foremost traditional temple architects living today, has been retained by the temple to complete the project, which include the central prakaram (with 24 shrines) and vasanth mandapams. As already mentioned, Selvanathan is the nephew and disciple of Ganapati Sthapati, grandson of Vaithianathan and grand nephew of Sellakannu—the two architects first hired to rebuild the temple in the 1950s. Coming from the Sthapatya lineage, Selvanathan is proud to be associated with the temple that his guru also worked on.

Sthapati strongly believes that we must focus on restoring our existing temples in India and Sri Lanka instead of building new ones. He has worked on many such sites in India. Outside of India, he's worked on many new temples around the world, including Iraivan Temple at Kauai's Hindu Monastery, home of HINDUISM TODAY, which was originally designed by Ganapati Sthapati.

Selvanathan explains that there are four types of temple restoration or *jeernodhar*, as laid out in the *Silpa Shastras*. First is the regular maintenance done every 12 years to rejuvenate, renew and expand the temple. Second is renovating or restoring of an abandoned temple after it has stopped pujas. Third is



SELVANATHAN STHAPATI

Attention to Detail Guides the Project at Every Turn



ALL PHOTOS BELOW: SUTHANANTH KETHEESWARANATHAN



building a new temple. The fourth is rejuvenating or re-energizing the temple's divine vibrations following natural or man-made disturbances, such as tsunamis, earthquakes or war. In each case the extensive ceremonies of kumbhabhishekam are performed.

Forty silpis from India are working at the Mannar site. Local Sri Lankans help, but there is no guild of silpi carvers in this small nation. All around the temple, stones are being cut, dressed and sculpted to form the shrines lining the courtyard wall. The finished capstones for these shrines are ready to lift into place. A sense of the action can be seen in this recent YouTube video: youtu.be/oZ55l-hbt7c.

Ponni, wife of Sthapati Selvanathan, proudly recalls what Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati used to say—the temple is not the home of the God, it is the form of the God. With that intent, they sculpt every stone as if they are composing the body of God Himself. Selvanathan explains the importance of measurement in the repair and renovation of a temple and how the temple must expand in proportion to a specific base unit. He quotes a Sanskrit verse that means, "If the measure goes down, the pride goes down; if the measure goes up, it hurts the patron." The measurements have to be perfect for the energy to vibrate in a way that is beneficial for everyone.

The walls of the temple office are plastered with architectural drawings and the artistic impressions of how the temple will look. Sthapati is preserving the Pandiyan and Chola stylistic elements which play such an important part in the legacy of the temple. We are witnessing the conceptions on paper taking shape in stone.

Outside is the granite that has been

sourced from nearby Vavuniya. The quality of the stone is judged by the "note" it sounds when struck with a hammer. The intended form, Selvanathan explains, is already present inside the stone; the silpis need only chip off the unneeded parts to reveal it. A prized work is the three-tiered capstone, vimana, of



the Siva and Ambal sanctums that is replacing the earlier brick and mortar one.

The most precious artifact here is the Mahalingam, dated to the Chola period and regarded as the site's Adi Dev or first Deity. When discovered during excavations in the area, it showed slight damage on the bottom. As well, the base in which it would have been set was missing. A damaged Deity cannot be reinstalled in the central sanctum,

hence a new Lingam was commissioned for the 1910 reconstruction work. The Mahalingam, now set in a new base behind the central sanctum, remains a holy and highly regarded connection with the past. Pilgrims treasure the opportunity to personally pour water over the ancient form, something only the priests can do for the Lingam in the central sanctum. Given the icon's popularity with devotees, the TTRS decided to build a small shrine with ornate pillars around it. During our visit, we have the opportunity to watch the silpis working on the stones for this shrine.

Current Status

The plan of the temple takes the visiting devotee first to the Chola-period Nandi, recovered during excavation and installed outside the Raja Gopuram. Then visitors proceed to the Ganesha shrines enclosing two ancient murtis discovered during the excavation of the old temple plus a new one carved on site.

For the demanding schedule of worship, the temple employs three priests. Thyagaraja Iyer Karunanda Kurukal, 46, is the chief priest. His father, Sri Panjachar Balasubramanya Gurukal Shivacharya, 72, handed over the position to his son upon the death of his wife, as a widower can no longer be a chief

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A sacred place: (counter-clockwise from below) the bronze parade Deities in their temporary home during construction; Palavi tank on the southern side; view of the end of Mannar island looking toward India across Ram Setu; Somakalathara Gurukkal gives prasadam to a devotee; a Chola era soldier is immortalized in stone

priest in the Sivachariyar tradition. Recently, Sivasri Somakalathara Kurukkal has joined the staff. All are of Sri Lankan origin.

Balasubramanya received his training in the nearby Sivananda Gurukula for Vedic Agamas. The school was a casualty of the war; the TTRS has plans to restart it, but for now, most priests are trained in India at private gurukulas. A major concern for him is that few youngsters are wanting to enter the priesthood today.

Balasubramanya recalls how he held on to the Sivalingas and refused to leave the temple during the civil unrest until he was confronted with a simple choice: stay and die or keep himself alive so that when the war ended, he could come back and restart the pujas. He chose to leave.

The round of rituals is done according to *Karana Agama*, following a typical schedule, with the first pujas at 4:30 am, again at 7:30, then noon, after which the doors are closed until 4 pm when it opens for late afternoon and evening pujas. A cow shelter on the premises supplies milk for the daily worship.

Balasubramanya explains that pilgrims come from all over Sri Lanka, especially during the annual Mahasivaratri festival. This festival is always well attended at Siva temples big and small, everywhere in the world. Here it is attended by half a million devotees from all across the island. They will first take a ceremonial bath in the Palavi tank, then carry a pitcher of water while circumambulating the Deities and finally perform abhishekam of the Mahalingam. The festival's

popularity is enhanced with lectures, concerts and Vedic chanting—all broadcast live on the radio.

The second most popular celebration here is the ten-day annual festival around the full-moon day in the month of Vaikasi (May/June). At other temples, each day of the fes-



tival is sponsored by a particular family, but here each day is sponsored by a particular school. The students will take up a collection, come by bus on their day, carry the Deity around the sanctum, cook food and participate in every aspect of the worship. Other major festivals include Navaratri, Ganesha Chaturthi and Skanda Shashthi.

The most devout few visit Tiruketheeswaram on a daily basis. There are buses every 30 minutes from Mannar, which in turn is well connected by road and rail to all major cities in Sri Lanka. Ceremonies here are best known to counter inauspicious astrology caused by Ketu, Rahu or Shani (Sat-

urn). It's also a popular place for weddings; in fact, we encounter a simple wedding ceremony in progress during our visit.

The story of Tiruketheeswaram Temple illustrates the adage that what goes down will come up again. The Nalvar's poetry tells us of the temple as it existed a millennium ago, and colonial records chronicle its destruction 500 years ago. Recent history starts with its rediscovery 130 years ago, followed by its slow and steady reconstruction—temporarily halted by decades of civil unrest in the region, but now, at last, nearing completion. The holy consecration rites, kumbhabhishekam, are scheduled for 2020. With prayers, hard work and the blessings of God and the Gods, this sacred home of God Siva will once again reach the glory that inspires poetry.

The TTRS is far from finished with its work. Going forward, in addition to restarting the gurukulam, they plan to build four large gopurams around the temple so that it may be seen from afar.

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The Deities Await Their New Home



A View Into the Past and Future



The Recluse Khaptad Baba

Originally a doctor, he meditated for 50 years in Nepal's icy, isolated Himalayan foothills

BY KAPIL BISHT, NEPAL

KHAPTAD BABA (1880-1996), IF HE were still around, would have loved the fact that few people know of him today. He cherished solitude and anonymity, which is why he chose to live in Khaptad, a wilderness in the Himalayan foothills of west Nepal. The area is 460 miles by road, then two days walk from Kathmandu—but it feels separated by centuries, not miles, from the rest of Nepal.

Baba's solitary hut was the only building in the 87-square-mile realm until 1984, when it was declared a national park. The Nepal Army stationed a platoon there to protect its animals, which include the musk deer, a quarry coveted by poachers for its musk pod. It is a prized trekker's destination in summer, but only soldiers now live in Khaptad year round.

It's not hard to imagine what it must have been like some 70 years ago, when Khaptad Baba, returning from a pilgrimage to Manasarovar Lake in Tibet, first arrived around age 60. Khaptad's remoteness and its long, harsh winters guaranteed solitude, which was vital to Baba's goal of finding Ultimate Truth.

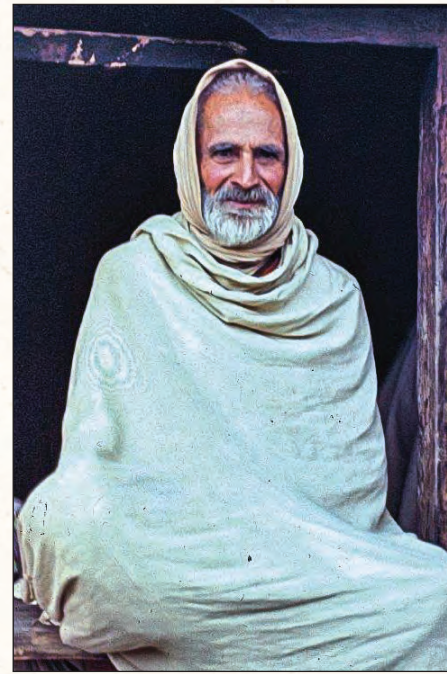
Living here for five decades, Khaptad Baba surfaced periodically with his haul of wisdom after long, exploratory dives in the spiritual sea. He then poured his accumulated wisdom into his numerous books. A versatile writer born in Kashmir and educated as a doctor, he expounded on a multitude of subjects such as meditation, rectitude, health, theology and spirituality. He wrote in Urdu, Hindi and English. *The Science of Yoga* is his best-selling work.

He loathed preaching and never spoke into a microphone. The classic ascetic, he always shunned attention and fame. Though he lived in seclusion, Khaptad wasn't aloof from the world around him. His mind may have been shut to external worldly distractions, but his heart was always open to the needy. For the people from the neighboring villages, he was the country doctor, and his hermitage their sole source of medicines. Those who came to him seeking a cure for their ailments

were administered medicines from his vast collection of unmarked pouches. Implicitly by concocting medicines from the forests of Khaptad and using them to cure the locals, and explicitly through the many volumes he wrote, he expounded nature's curative powers. Even all those decades ago, Khaptad Baba was calling for a "back to nature" approach in medication.

Those who knew Baba remember him as cheerful, amiable and humble. He loved debating and would always entertain questions, except on matters of his past or age. His specialty was in explaining complex topics in a way that could be readily understood. In his company wisdom wasn't a goal; it was more often a by-product. "In the company of Khaptad Baba I learned about enlightenment in two years. If I were taught by an erudite brahmin, the same thing would take me 20 years to learn," says Nepal Army Major General (Ret.) Bharat Keshar Simha.

For most people of his time, Khaptad Baba—his life and spiritual practice—remained something of an enigma. But his writing revealed bits of it. In *Essentials of Vedanta*, he tantalizes spiritualists with anecdotes from his own journey: "During the course of practice, one day you will feel that you have separated yourself from the body. How you leave the body remains unknown at the outset. You are suddenly startled, when you have completely separated and when you enter into the new plane, sometimes with blue-colored sphere around, sometimes with



partial illumination mixed with darkness or with golden light. You have an airy ethereal feeling. By chance, through effort, you are able to separate from the body once in a month in the course of sadhana. If you plod on with patience, perseverance and firmness, you will be able to leave the body at will and stay for a longer time in the new plane with the new subtle body. Silence and solitude alone is sine qua non to achieving this end. Too much talk is simply a waste of energy."

Khaptad Baba was often asked about his views on religion. His answer was always "Get rid of the feeling that religion is something ancient, orthodox, belonging to the 13th century. Religion is a science."

KAPIL BISHT is a freelance writer based in Kathmandu whose grandfather told him many stories about Khaptad Baba.



A remote life: (above) Khaptad Baba; (right) his hermitage during a harsh Himalayan winter.

OPINION

Should Indian Education Be Secular?

Not when it results in a neglect of India's historically important knowledge in math, astronomy, medicine, construction and more

A RETIRED COMPUTER SCIENTIST WHO REGULARLY visits an Indian institution of higher education recently told me how, in the course of his schooling in erstwhile Yugoslavia, he had studied the outline of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. He was shocked when I answered that Indian schools can do no such thing: anyone attempting to do so would immediately be branded "communal" and accused of undermining the "secular" principles of Indian education.

Who determined these principles? In tune with most of India's freedom fighters, whose idea of India was far removed from our nebulous and hypocritical concept of secularism, most pre-Independence thinkers had a clear vision of what a genuinely Indian education should be.

Tagore, for instance, reviled the cultural disconnect Indian students suffered from: "Their education is a chariot that does not carry them in it, but drags them behind it. The sight is pitiful and very often comic.... The education which we receive from our universities takes it for granted that it is for cultivating a hopeless desert, and that not only the mental outlook and the knowledge, but also the whole language must bodily be imported from across the sea."

Gandhi echoed this view: "I find daily proof of the increasing and continuing wrong being done to the millions by our false de-Indianizing education. These graduates ... flounder when they have to give expression to their innermost thoughts. They are strangers in their own homes." The great art critic and Indologist Ananda Coomaraswamy added: "The most crushing indictment of this education is the fact that it destroys, in the great majority of those upon whom it is inflicted, all capacity for the appreciation of Indian culture."

Indeed, as early as in 1908, having served as the first principal of Bengal National College, Sri Aurobindo had defined the problem lucidly: "In India ... we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition.... National education ... [is] the education, which starting with the past and making full use of the present, builds up a great nation. Whoever wishes to cut off the nation from its past is no friend of our national growth. Whoever fails to take advantage of the present is losing us the battle of life. We must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that Europe can give her and assimilate it to her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonize into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self-reliance so as to build up men and not machines."

Did independent India take steps to remedy the ailment and implement this program? Quite the contrary, it gradually took deculturalization to greater heights, in a way that even our colonial masters would not have dreamed of. Today's school and college student is profoundly ignorant of India's cultural, intellectual, artistic, scientific and technological heritage. Sanskrit—indeed, all Indian



languages—has been relegated to the status of a suspicious oddity. When, in 1994, "secular" groups approached the Supreme Court to prevent the national Central Board of Secondary Education (with 20,299 affiliated schools in India) from offering Sanskrit as an elective, Justices Kuldeep Singh (a Sikh, incidentally) and B. L. Hansaria rejected the whole perverse argument and asserted that "The stream of our culture would get dried if we were to discourage the study of Sanskrit."

Of late, the media have generously ridiculed statements by various ministers rejecting Darwin's theory of evolution or asserting that India

had in the Mahabharata age an Internet of its own and satellite communications. Indeed, many more such silly misconceptions could be produced from pseudo-scholarly literature. But the central point has been invariably missed by our equally ignorant media: why should there be such a total neglect of ancient India's genuine, well-researched and well-documented knowledge systems in the first place? Why should an Indian student be allowed to learn nothing of ancient Indian mathematics, astronomy, medicine, water management, town planning, construction techniques, agriculture, environmental conservation, martial arts or board games? Nothing of Indian systems of philosophy, of psychology based on methods of self-exploration and self-fulfilment that go by the name of yoga? Nothing of systems of governance, polity, education, business, management, trade practices, ethics?

Any decent book on Mesopotamia or classical Greece will have a few chapters on the science and technology created by those civilizations; standard books of Indian history have nothing comparable. Our philosophy departments teach mostly Western philosophy; psychology departments blank out the whole yogic view of the human being; Bangalore University's MSc program in mathematics has a module on the history of mathematics which includes (as it should) Greek and Arab developments, but not a word on Indian ones (or Chinese ones, for that matter). And why has India not lobbied for kabaddi to be recognized an Olympic sport, when beach volleyball can be one? The list goes on endlessly and can be summed up in a single sentence: The entire "Indian" system of education conveys the message that India never produced any knowledge worth teaching.

There may be much that needs to be discarded from India's past, but there is also much of timeless value. We rightly complain about the vulgarization and loss of values in Indian society, but refuse to address one of their chief causes: the misconceived secularization of education, which, in the Indian context, has resulted in cultural nihilism.

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Am I Spiritual? Am I Religious? Neither? Both?

A London doctor reflects on how her upbringing was about being religious but not spiritual, and how that changed for her

BY RAMAI SANTHIRAPALA

IN 2017, HINDUISM TODAY REPORTED A TREND AMONG THE YOUTH in America: describing themselves as SBNR, “spiritual but not religious.” That is, they believe in a divine essence while not defining themselves as belonging to any of the world’s faiths. As a Hindu growing up across the Atlantic in London, I propose that there is a reverse standpoint among certain youth; that of being religious but not spiritual (RBNS). Let me explain.

London has a dense community of Sri Lankan Tamils; and with that arises a network of temples revering Saivism, specifically Saiva Siddhanta. I grew up as a second generation Tamil Saivite immersed in a community centered on temple worship, while making the best of life in the West. As a child, I remember family members reverently insisting that temple worship was not optional. Rituals, such as visiting the shrine room daily, observation of puja and especially festivals such as Mahasivaratri, applying holy ash, performing *seva* and praying for one’s needs all became familiar from a young age. This means one grows up with an early identity as a Hindu—as being religious. Undeniably, this religious foundation has been a firm identity for those of my generation who remain close to the traditions rooted in the northern territory of Sri Lanka, Jaffna. However, as I discovered later, what makes religion come alive is spirituality—the personal experience of God.

The simple act of observing puja becomes a rich new experience once one has a clear understanding of the mystical communion occurring. Otherwise, it can well be conceived as merely a series of rituals. My guru’s guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, describes how “the temples bring the Three Worlds together.” He is referring to the world of the Gods, the world of the devas (angelic beings) and this earthly world, which for many is the only reality. Speaking of darshan, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami goes on to clarify “Darshan coming from the great temples of our Great Gods can change the pattern dating back many past lives.”

It was not until I read these teachings that I came to understand the inner significance of temple worship. I learned that through temple worship one comes to know our Great Gods; or rather They come to know you and guide your life in mystical ways.

Elders often ask, how do we bring youth into the Saivite faith? London, like many Western cities, has the challenge of making Saivism appealing to youth. I feel the answer is centered on finding ways for them to identify themselves as a spiritual being who is also religious. Through a religious upbringing, one rightly reveres the great beings of light that we call the Gods. However, through personal spiritual practice one comes to understand the same light within them exists within oneself, and our small knowing voice becomes louder. The question then naturally arises, how does one nurture spirituality while not losing sight of the religion?

One strength of today’s younger generation is that they think for themselves; and in my community they have been educated in Western ways. As a result, they follow the path of reason and hold the standpoint if it isn’t reasonable, then it cannot exist. The intellectual mind is strong. Growing up, when youth ask why a specific ritual is observed the response is often “because my father (or mother) did it that way.” While this is honorable, it does not satisfy the cravings of the intellectual mind, especially for those educated in the West or attending the growing number of international schools. For me, the fulfillment of the desire for a firm philosophical and intellectual basis came through the formal study of Saivism through the Master Course; a two-year program offered by Himalayan Academy. What became apparent was that the instructive stories my parents shared about life in Jaffna (Sri Lanka) became my own. I was able to read, digest and relate the words for myself. This brings me back to the importance of personal experience; it is personal experience which convinces the intellect of spirituality, resulting in intuitive breakthroughs.

In first reclaiming one’s spiritual identity as a RBNS, one finds that the devotional aspects learned through temple and home worship naturally lead to internalized worship, *sivadhyana*, or meditation. Meditation is the process of revealing one’s true self; “a long pilgrimage, a journey into the mind.” In London, meditation has become synonymous with yogic breathing, visualization, mantra recitation and mindfulness, to name a few. Offering a clear definition, my guru explains that meditation is akin to using a GPS to locate a destination. One needs a map of the mind, with markers leading toward the inner light. It is not so much which route one follows into meditation, but more so choosing one authentic method and consistently practicing it. Reflecting on what has worked for seekers within my community, an app which guides meditation (in this case an app called Spiritual Workout), in addition to practice on a regular basis, has been successful. Authenticity and accessibility are key in deciphering from the many apps available. It has been imperative to me that the underlying philosophy reflects Hinduism.

Meditation helps the mind see its own light. In simple terms, it helps one get out of one’s own head into the reality of what actually is. There is a misconception that meditation involves a process of retreating from life; and I have observed a fear around its incorporation into religious practice. It seemingly conflicts with parental

desires for a highly productive and successful child. To the contrary, I can say from personal experience that meditation makes one more productive. One of the appeals of Saivism in its entirety is it doesn’t ask one to retreat into a cave for six months, but rather emphasizes living your life, doing each task to the best of your ability, whether seemingly spiritual or secular. Meditation enables attention and concentration, which are key to this and not something to fear.

Part of my transition from RBNS to being religious and spiritual was undoing a fear-based superstition that surrounds ritualistic practice. “If you don’t pray to x or y on this day and in this manner, then something bad will happen.” “Don’t get too close to Siva, for He can be wrathful.” Nothing is further from the truth. Anbe Sivam—God Siva is Immanent Love—has been one of the greatest teachings Saivism has given me. How does one affirm this to one’s mind? I suggest looking around and finding role models. Those who are religious in the temple and unconditionally loving in life are the best of exemplars. Inconsistent character does not sit well with youth. While perfection in character is an impossible aim, know there are those looking to you to understand what it is to be religious. The subtleties of your character will imprint on impressionable youth. Be the example of love and your love will naturally unlock love in others—towards themselves and others. This comes naturally through regular spiritual practice. The path of love is one of the greatest boons of Hinduism, including Saivism, and the person

Youth on the march: Young UK Hindus take part in the Temple Chariot Festival at the London Sivan Kovil

who meticulously follows that path becomes a beacon for youth and a role model.

The key that unlocked my transition from a RBNS to a more complete experience of God and my innermost Self was the formal study of Saivism through the Himalayan Academy Master Course. For those searching for answers, whether young or young at heart, I cannot recommend it enough. Knowing oneself takes time and energy—it is so easy to be distracted by life’s many conflicting priorities. However, being a more complete person only means those around you benefit. So, allow yourself, or youth you are guiding, to dedicate time towards this. It can be just ten minutes a day using an app such as Spiritual Workout. Give them the beauty of religious practice, but also be supportive of exploring their spiritual nature. One has to experience It to know It.

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VASANTH VLOGGER



TEMPLES

The Mother Goddess of Mumbai City

Once the fishermen's protector, today Mumbadevi reigns over India's financial hub

BY CHOODIE SIVARAM, BENGALURU

MUMBAI: SYNONYMOUS WITH BOLLYWOOD, industrialists, Gateway of India, the Bombay Stock Exchange and the Reserve Bank of India. The 12th wealthiest city in the world, it accounts for 87% of the Maharashtra state economy. Though best known as India's financial capital, Mumbai is also one of India's major migrant magnets, the ultimate big-city dream for small-town Indians wanting to prosper. Mumbai is home to countless success stories from across the generations, with innumerable celebrities who came here penniless and hit the jackpot.

And yet, very few know of the Goddess Mumbadevi, from Whom the city derives its name. Who protects and watches over Her people. "Our presiding Deity of Mumbai ensures that anyone who comes to Her abode seeking success is not deprived of realizing their dreams. She not only fulfills dreams but is the protector of this city from calam-

ity," Hemant Jadhav, manager of the Mumbadevi temple, told me during my visit.

Umesh Bajpai, a local businessman, put it this way: "No one who comes to Mumbai seeking a better life remains unsuccessful. Whether they stay on the footpath or in mansions, the Goddess gives them their bread and butter. She is a wish-fulfilling Goddess. I myself met with a terrible accident some years ago and had to go through some surgeries. My family prayed to Mumbadevi and I recovered completely. Now the doctors say I'm absolutely fit, and ever since I haven't had to take any medications."

Jadhav relates, "A lot of people, even those living here for generations, are not aware of this ancient Mumbadevi temple. I have met so many people who are in their sixties and seventies who are coming here for the first time despite being in Mumbai from birth."

In fact, one of my friends, Mahabala Bhat, a native of Karnataka who has lived in Mumbai for decades, heard about the temple for

the first time when I expressed my desire to visit it.

The Temple's Story

Locals narrate a legend where the Goddess killed a demon named Mumbarak and to honor his death-bed wish She agreed to join his name with Hers; and hence the name *Mumbadevi*. Her temple was originally built 500 years ago by the Koli fisherman community, when what is now Mumbai was a collection of seven islands with just 10,000 residents. She was their presiding Deity. The present murti is made of sand and is believed to be over 400 years old.

Around 1737, when the Bombay Government began enlarging the fortifications of the old town, the original temple was demolished. That first location is unknown, but in the 1800s Mumbadevi temple was in Bori Bunder where the Chatrapathi Shivaji Terminus railway station stands today. In 1845 a large reclamation project consolidated the



PHOTOS: CHOODIE SIVARAM

Visiting the city's guardian: (left to right): the temple is in one of the most congested parts of Mumbai; some of the 15,000 visitors a day; Mumbadevi on Her lion mount

seven islands into a single landmass. Thereafter the population grew rapidly.

In 1853 the British built a railway station at Bori Bunder, which also served as the headquarters of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. The temple continued to exist on the railway platform.

In 1888 the magnificent architectural structure Victoria Terminus (now Chatrapathi Shivaji) railway station was built to replace the Bori Bunder station. The Mumbadevi temple was shifted to nearby Phansi Talao in the Esplanade. Subsequently the Esplanade was acquired by the British for parades and the temple moved to Dhobi Talao. At last, in the late 1800s, it made one final move to its current location. It now stands two miles north of the "Gateway of India" in the midst of Zaveri Bazar, Asia's biggest jewelry market, which receives the majority of the country's gold and rough diamond imports. The temple is also surrounded by the lucrative cloth, steel and iron markets.

The construction and management of the new ornate temple was entrusted to Pandushet Sonar, a merchant of considerable influence with the then government in Bombay. He took care of the temple, and his family inherited its management. Through the decades, management of the temple changed hands several times. As Mumbai expanded and its population grew, shops and houses mushroomed in the modest lanes around the temple.

In 1952 the Charity Commissioner took over the temple's affairs, and by court order a management trust was registered. The nine-member trust board is presently comprised of solicitors, chartered accountants, doctors and an industrialist. About 15,000 people visit daily, with the number going to over 25,000 on festival days.

Despite the cramped location and huge crowds, the temple is well maintained, clean and organized. As soon as one enters, it is impossible not to connect with the Goddess. Mumbadevi sits majestically on Her lion, infusing power and confidence in Her devotees as they surrender to Her. Adjoining the sanctum sanctorum of Mumbadevi is the imposing shrine of Jagadamba with Annapoorneshwari (both forms of the Goddess), showering benevolence on worshipers. The ornate walls with exquisite paintings of Gods and Goddesses blend into the divinely charged ambience.

The temple is open from 6:30am to 10 pm. As in all Devi temples, the celebration of Navaratri is of primacy. At Mumbadevi, four navaratri are celebrated in a year. Besides the Chaitra Navaratri (March/April) and Sharad Ashwin Navaratri (September/October), the lesser known Gupta Navaratri during Maagh (January/February) and Ashaada (June/July) are also celebrated.

The temple is one of the richest in the city. Its income is used to administer the temple and conduct festivities. "We are handling



public money. We engage in charity and run an old age home in Ahmedabad. We provide scholarships to deserving students and medical aid to the poor. We also help other institutions engaged in social service," confirms Jadhav.

A few years back the temple ran into a controversy with reports of a government takeover. An investigation into the temple's finances and administration by the Charity Commission found nothing amiss, and the issue was dropped. Following the infamous bomb blasts in 1993, three of which were in the vicinity of the temple, Mumbai police have greatly increased security in the area.

One devotee, Sushma Baadakar, told me of two great miracles in her life she attributes to the Goddess. The first, a property dispute, was resolved shortly after a chance visit to the temple in 2012 with her brother. She said, "The visit brought me under the protection of the Goddess." Later, faced with cancer, she recounts, "At every stage of my treatment I saw miracles that left the doctors baffled. I still feel Mumbadevi is always with me, guiding every moment of my life."

Whether Mumbai residents are aware of Mumbadevi or not, whether they visit her shrine or not, it is strongly believed that She protects anyone who comes to Her land. From the Ambanis to Bollywood stars and singers, innumerable people who came to this city seeking greener pastures, many of them with humble beginnings staying on pavements and railway platforms, have become rich and famous. Mumbadevi has remained true to Her legend as the wish-fulfilling Goddess who protects Her people.

Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World



A satguru's unequivocating insights on the Earth's oldest living faith

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

Religion is man's association with the Divine, and the ultimate objective of religion is realization of Truth. Forms which symbolize Truth are only indications; they are not Truth itself, which transcends all conceptualization. The mind in its efforts to understand Truth through reasoning must always fail, for Truth transcends the very mind which seeks to embrace it. Hinduism is unique among the world's religions. I boldly proclaim it the greatest religion in the world. To begin with, it is mankind's oldest spiritual declaration, the very fountainhead of faith on the planet. Hinduism's venerable age has seasoned it to maturity. It is the only religion, to my knowledge, which is not founded in a single historic event or prophet, but which itself precedes recorded history. Hinduism has been called the "cradle of spirituality," and the "mother of all religions," partially because it has influenced virtually every major religion and partly because it can absorb all other religions, honor and embrace their scriptures, their saints, their philosophy. This is possible because Hinduism looks compassionately on all genuine spiritual effort and knows unmistakably that all souls are evolving toward union with the Divine, and all are destined, without exception, to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation in this or a future life. ¶Of course, any religion in the world is a mind stratum within people, isn't it? It is a group of people who think consciously, subconsciously and subsuperconsciously alike and who are guided by their own superconsciousness and the superconsciousness of their leaders which make up the force field which we call a religion. It does not exist outside the mind. People of a certain religion have all been impressed with the same experiences. They have all accepted the same or similar beliefs and attitudes, and their mutual concurrence creates the bonds of fellowship and purpose, of doctrine and communion.

Holy oblations: Priests offer milk to the five-metal parade murti of Lord Shanmukha at the Tirupparankunram Temple near Madurai in Tamil Nadu



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The people who are Hinduism share a mind structure. They can understand, acknowledge, accept and love the peoples of all religions, encompass them within their mind as being fine religious people. The Hindu truly believes that there is a single Eternal Path, but he does not believe that any one religion is the only valid religion or the only religion that will lead the soul to salvation. Rather, the Eternal Path is seen reflected in all religions.

To put it another way, the will of God or the Gods is at work in all genuine worship and service. It is said in Hindu scripture that "Truth is one. Paths are many." The search for Truth, for God, is called the Sanatana Dharma, or the Eternal Path, because it is inherent in the soul itself, where religion begins. This path, this return to the Source, is ever existent in man, and is at work whether he is aware of the processes or not. There is not this man's search and that man's search. Where does the impetus come from? It comes from the inside of man himself. Thus, Hinduism is ever vibrant and alive, for it depends on this original source of inspiration, this first impulse of the spirit within, giving it an energy and a vibrancy that is renewable eternally in the now.

Naturally, the Hindu feels that his faith is the broadest, the most practical and effective instrument of spiritual unfoldment, but he includes in his Hindu mind all the religions of the world as expressions of the one Eternal Path and understands each proportionately in accordance with its doctrines and dogma. He knows that certain beliefs and inner attitudes are more conducive to spiritual growth than others, and that all religions are, therefore, not the same. They differ in important ways. Yet, there is no sense whatsoever in Hinduism of an "only path." 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. This is the Hindu mind, and this is what we teach, what we practice and what we offer aspirants on the path.

Clockwise: Prof. E. Chamuramoki, reviews precious scriptures at the Oriental Research Institute, Tirupati; the Porram Festival in Thrissur, Kerala, led by 15 gold-caparisoned elephants; a woman rings the bell as she enters the Gadhikalika temple in sacred Ujjain city, signalling her presence to the angelic hosts

We often send people back to their own religion, for Hindu doctrine would consider it an unseemly karma to draw someone away simply because he believed differently. To the Hindu, conduct and the inner processes of the soul's maturation are more essential than the particular religion one may be by the accidents of birth, culture or geography. The Hindu knows that he might unknowingly disturb the dharma of the individual if he pulls him away from his religious roots, and that would cause an unsavory karma for them both. He knows, too, that it is not necessary that all people believe exactly the same way or call God by the same name.

A Religion of Experience

Still, Hinduism is also extremely sectarian, altogether adamant in its beliefs. Its doctrines of karma and reincarnation, its philosophy of nonviolence and compassion, its certainty of mystical realities and experience and its universality are held with unshakable conviction. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Hinduism is a religion more of experience than of doctrine. It prefers to say to its followers, "This is the nature of Truth, and these are the means by which that Truth may be realized. Here are the traditions which have withstood time and proved most effective. Now you may test them in your own life, prove them to yourself. And we will help as we can." Hinduism will never say, "You must do or believe thusly or be condemned." In Hinduism it is believed that none is eternally condemned. That loving acceptance and unrelenting faith in the goodness of life is another reason I boldly say that Hinduism is the greatest religion in the world.

Within Hinduism, as within every religious system, are the practical means of attaining the purity, the knowledge and the serenity of life. Each Hindu is enjoined to attend a puja every day, preferably at a certain and consistent time. He must observe the laws of virtue and the codes of ethics. He must serve others, support religion within his community. He should occasionally pilgrimage to sacred shrines and temples and partake in the sacraments. If he is more advanced, an older soul, then he is expected, expects of himself, to undertake certain forms of *sadhana* and *tapas*, of discipline and asceticism.

Though it is broad and open in the freedom of the mind to inquire, Hinduism is narrowly strict in its expectations of devotees—the more

The Joys of Hinduism

Tonight we want to speak on the joys and happiness found in Hinduism, our ancient religion which brings forth the wonderful feelings of a belief in the cosmic processes of reincarnation coupled with knowledge of the laws of karma and the wisdom of dharma in which everyone has his rightful place and purpose in life. It brings the broadmindedness of total acceptance of all other religions as expressions of the One God's creation, the blessing of a complete devotional path revolving around powerful temples, the fulfillment of a profound mystical teaching founded on yoga and brought forth by the seers and saints and gurus, and so much more. Our religion is so strong, so rich and varied that very few can claim to understand it in its completeness. It is immense, an immense religion, so immense that we have difficulty sometimes explaining it to those who hold to a simpler doctrine, especially if they have been subjected to erroneous concepts about our religion promulgated by invaders and missionaries of a score of alien religions. It is time that the world knew of the greatness of Hinduism, knew it as it is. Of course, we cannot explain it in an evening. My satguru, the great Siva Yogaswami of Columbuthurai, would say, "The time is short and the subject is vast." But we can have a look at some of the aspects of Hinduism that bring such joys and happiness to over a billion devotees around the world.

Each Hindu's belief in reincarnation is so strong that it totally eliminates the fear and dread of death. No true Hindu really fears death; nor does he look forward to it. The word *death* in the vocabulary of the Hindu holds a different meaning. He does not take death to be the end of existence; nor does he look upon life as a singular opportunity to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is merely transition, simultaneously an end and a new beginning. Over two thousand years ago, Saint Tiruvalluvar wrote, "Death is like falling asleep, and birth is like awakening from that sleep" (*Tirukural* 339). In one of the ancient languages of our religion, the phys-

ical body had a name which literally meant "that which is always dropping off." The Hindu's knowledge of reincarnation gives him

the hope of attaining a future birth and in that birth making further progress toward the perfection that he intuitively knows is his



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awakened the soul, the higher the demands and responsibilities placed upon him. And though other systems of belief are fully acceptable mind structures within the structure of the higher mind, there is no way out of Hinduism. There is no excommunication. There is no means of severance. There's no leaving Hinduism once you have formally accepted and been accepted. Why is that? That is because Hinduism contains the whole of religion within itself. There is no "other religion" which one can adopt by leaving Hinduism, only other aspects of the one religion which is the sum of them all, the Eternal Path, the Sanatana Dharma.

I would say that, if it lacked all the qualities of open-mindedness and compassion and tolerance just mentioned, Hinduism would be the greatest religion on the basis of its profound mysticism alone. No other faith boasts such a deep and enduring comprehension of the mysteries of existence, or possesses so vast a metaphysical system. The storehouse of religious revelations in Hinduism cannot be reckoned. I know of its equal nowhere. It contains the entire system of yoga, of meditation and contemplation and Self Realization. Nowhere else is there such insightful revelation of the inner bodies of man, the subtle pranas and the chakras, or psychic centers within the nerve system. Inner states of superconsciousness are explored and mapped fully in Hinduism, from the clear white light to the sights and sounds which flood the awakened inner consciousness of man. In the West it is the mystically awakened soul who is drawn to Hinduism for understanding of inner states of consciousness, discovering after ardent seeking that Hinduism possesses answers which do not exist elsewhere and is capable of guiding awareness into ever-deepening mind strata.

Hinduism's Unbounded Tolerance

In apparent conflict, the scriptures written thousands of years ago explain how we should live, and saints and rishis and seers throughout the ages have told us that it is impossible to live that way. So, Hinduism has a great tolerance for those who strive and a great forgiveness for those who fail. It looks in awe at those who succeed in living a life according to its own strict ethics. In Hinduism, we have many, many saints. You don't have to die to be acknowledged a saint in our religion, you have to live. The Hindus, perhaps beyond all other people on the

earth, realize the difficulties of living in a human body and look in awe at those who achieve true spirituality.

The Hindu believes in reincarnation. He believes that he is not the body in which he lives, but the soul or awareness which takes on a body for a definite purpose. He believes he is going to get a better body in a better birth, that the process does not begin and end in a single life, that the process is continuous, reaching beyond the limits that one life may impose on inner progress. Of course, his belief in karma assures him that a better birth, that progress inwardly will come only if he behaves in a certain way. He knows that if he does not behave according to the natural laws, to the Hindu ethics, that he will suffer for his transgressions in a future life, or future lives, that he may by his own actions earn the necessity of a so-called inferior birth, earn the right to start over where he left off in the birth in which he failed.

The belief in karma and reincarnation is exclusively Hindu, and yet many people in the world today, whether they call themselves religious or not, are coming to the same conclusions, not from being told to believe but in a natural way, from the inside out. This belief in more than a single life brings to the Hindu a great sense of peace. He knows that the maturity of the soul takes many lives, perhaps hundreds of lives. If he is not perfect right now, then at least he knows that he is progressing, that there will be many opportunities for learning and growing. This eliminates anxiety, gives the serene perception that everything is all right as it is. There is no sense of a time limit, of an impending end or an ultimate judgment of his actions and attitudes. This understanding that the soul evolves gives the Hindu remarkable insight into the human condition and appreciation for all men in all stages of spiritual development.

Hinduism is so broad. Within it there is a place for the insane and

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Sacred omnipresence: (clockwise from left) At a temple in Kerala, a Theyyam dancer prepares to perform the sacred drama of the Deities; pilgrims touch the silver sandals at a guru shrine in Northern Sri Lanka; shaven-headed aspirants await the auspicious moment of brahmachari (celibacy) initiation and entry into an order of world-renouncing sadhus



atman, his soul. He is working in this life to gain enough good merit, enough *punya*, to deserve welcome into a fine religious family as a good soul that will not upset the family but add to its love and harmony and productivity. That is one aim ever on the mind of the devout Hindu, to live well that he may live even more perfectly in a future life on this planet. That is our aim; and our other beliefs, our accumulated knowledge and the many facets of our religion, give us the strength and the wisdom to believe in such a far-reaching way, to look beyond the immediate day-to-day concerns into our ultimate objective, which is realization and liberation, moksha. ¶Nor is this belief in the cycles of earthly existence, in reincarnation, merely a belief. It is a certain knowledge for those who have had even a tiny glimpse into their origins to the point



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of remembering another life or just intuiting that the soul did not come into existence just before one's birth. The Hindu believes that the

soul undertakes many sojourns on the planet. We see the wisdom in this cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Karma Is Always Just: We see reincarnation as an explanation for many of the apparent inequalities observed in life. Thus we understand the fairness even in a bad birth, say a birth as a cripple or a child who dies in infancy. To the Hindu this is not an accident, but is a natural event brought forth by the soul itself through the karma of unseemly acts and desires in a previous life. To the Hindu there is not one force in the universe at work to make all things good and an opposing force trying to destroy the soul. No. All is God's work. All karma is natural and worthy of the soul to which it comes. ¶The Hindu knows that it is the younger souls who lack understanding, who can-

not live in harmony with others and who shun the higher forms of culture and faith. Rather than inheriting eternal suffering for their acts, they earn instead another opportunity for experience, for learning, for evolving. The ideas of sin and evil are different in Hinduism from the concepts held by Abrahamic religions. If there is such a thing as sin to the Hindu, it is the breaking of the natural laws, a lapse in the patterns of karma and dharma, and that transgression brings its own punishment in the form of an additional karma created to then be worked out. Thus the Hindu does not live in fear of sin or under the notion of original sin. We do not look upon humanity as inherently sinful, but inherently perfect and striving to

unfold that perfection from within. The Hindu knows that we will have as many opportunities as needed to refine and evolve our



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nature—a thousand lives or more if needed. We don't have to think that we only have a single chance, a one life in which everything must be accomplished and all desires must be fulfilled. Therefore, we are not in a hurry. We are patient. We exhibit more patience with circumstances than do those who believe in a one life, and we are more forgiving of ourselves when we fall short. Thus it is that Hinduism offers a great joy to its followers—a blessing of fearlessness in the face of death, an assurance of the continuation of consciousness after physical death, another assurance that each soul creates its own karma and that such karma is just and right, even when it seems that

a place for the saint. There is a place for the beggar and for those who support beggars. There is a place for the intelligent person and plenty of room for the fool. The beauty of Hinduism is that it does not demand of every soul perfection in this life, a necessary conclusion for those who believe in a single lifetime during which human perfection or grace must be achieved. Belief in reincarnation gives the Hindu an acceptance of every level of humanity. Some souls are simply older souls than others, but all are inherently the same, inherently immortal and of the nature of the Divine.

Hindu Views of the Divine

In Hinduism it is believed that the Gods are living, thinking, dynamic beings who live in a different world, in an inner world in the microcosm within this world in which there exists a greater macrocosm than this visible macrocosm. For the Hindu, surrender to the Divine Will that created and pervades and guides the universe is essential. The Hindu believes that these beings guide our experiences on Earth, actually consciously guide the evolutionary processes. Therefore, he worships these beings as greater beings than himself, and he maintains a subjective attitude toward them, wondering if he is attuned with these grand forces of the universe, if his personal will is in phase with what these great beings would have him do. This gives birth to a great culture, a great attitude, a great tolerance and kindness one to another. It gives rise to humility in the approach to life—not a weak or false humility, but a strong and mature sense of the grand presence and purpose of life before which the head naturally bows.

There are said to be millions of Gods in the Hindu pantheon, though only a few major Deities are actually worshiped in the temples. That God may be worshiped as the Divine Father or a Sainted Mother or the King of kings is one of the blessings of Hinduism. It offers to each a personal and significant contact, and each Hindu will choose that aspect of the Deity which most appeals to his inner needs and sensibilities. That can be confusing to some, but not to the Hindu. Within his religion is monism and dualism, monotheism and polytheism, and a rich array of other theological views.

God in Hinduism is accepted as both transcendent and immanent, both beyond the mind and the very substratum of the mind. The ideal

of the Hindu is to think of God always, every moment, and to be ever conscious of God's presence. This does not mean the transcendent God, the Absolute Lord. That is for the yogi to ponder in his contemplative discipline. That is for the well-perfected Hindu who has worshiped faithfully in the temples, studied deeply the scriptures and found his *satguru*.

For most Hindus, God means the Gods, one of the many personal devas and Mahadevas which prevail in our religion. This means a personal great soul which may never have known physical birth, a being which pervades the planet, pervades form with His mind and Being, and which guides evolution. Such a God is capable of offering protection and direction to the followers of Hinduism. The Hindu is supposed to think of God every minute of every day, to see God everywhere. Of course, most of us don't think of God even one minute a day. That's the reason that each Hindu is obliged to conduct or attend at least one religious service, one puja or ceremony, every day in his temple or home shrine. This turns his mind inward to God and the Gods.

Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, is an Eastern religion, and the Eastern religions are very different from those of the West. For one thing, they are more introspective. Hinduism gave birth to Buddhism, for Buddha was born and died a good Hindu. And it gave birth to other religions of the East, to Taoism, to Jainism, to Sikhism and others.

Three Pillars: Temples, Philosophy, Preceptors

There are three distinct aspects of Hinduism: the temples, the philosophy and the *satguru*. It is very fortunate that in the last two decades Hindu temples have nearly circumferenced the world. There are temples in Europe, in North America, in South America, Australia, in Africa and throughout Southeast Asia. The Hindu temple and stone

Community worship: (clockwise from right) devotees in Mumbai pull a huge murti of Lord Ganesha through the streets during the annual Ganesha Chaturthi festival; women in India perform the *sadhana* of counting mantrams on the beads of their concealed malas; a bronze of Siva as Sadasiva, with five faces and ten arms holding symbols of his cosmic powers



some people are less fortunate than others and that fate has unfairly given all the advantages to a few. All these things are bestowed on Hindus simply because they understand the doctrine of reincarnation. ¶Hinduism is a hopeful and comforting religion. Hope for a future life makes this life worthwhile, joyous, contented and happy, because the Hindu can live and deal with current problems knowing that they are transitory problems, that they will not last forever; nor will they affect us forever. They are problems; we cannot deny that. But they are problems to be worked out with a positive attitude and a high energy and a helping hand from our Gods.

The World as Our Teacher: The Hindu also wants to improve conditions in the world, in the physical world. We do not look upon all that happens to us as unreal.



That is a misconception. It is real. Life is real. It is through life that we progress. Life is the means provided by the Primordial God for finding Reality. True, it is maya. But it is maya in the form of mind, in the form of form. Maya, or form, or mind, is created for a purpose, to help man evolve, not to bind him in illusion. The Hindu understands this. We want to help humanity, and simultaneously we know that we may well return in another physical body. So we are working not only for ourselves, but for our loved ones, not only now, but in the future as well. We are improving the world for future generations in which we will play a part. ¶Through our knowledge of reincarnation, we have a great love and understanding for every human being, for they have been our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters, our grandparents and companions in many past lives, or perhaps will be in a future incarnation.

This expanded knowledge of the inter-relatedness of humanity brings with it a deepened appreciation, helping us to understand why it is that some people seem so close to us though we hardly know them and others are strangers or even enemies after years of close association. To the Hindu, everyone younger is his brother or sister. Everyone older is his mother or father, and he maintains a deep respect for others. We have this knowledge by having lived through many hundreds of lives on this planet and having been associated with many thousands of people. We know that in our current pattern in this life we often attract those to us whom we have been with in past lives. So we have a great joy and happiness in meeting them again and a deep knowledge of our relationships, our psychic relationships,



with them in past lives. ¶The Hindu believes in the law of karma, the ability to earn one's rewards as well as punishments. All this we can do ourselves with the help of our Gods and our personal relationship with our Ishta Devata, the individual God that we have cho-

sen, or rather that God who has chosen to love, guide and protect us through an incarnation. ¶In Hinduism, there is no priest standing between the devotee and God. The priest is a servant of the God, just as is every other devotee. Even the *satguru*, the spiritual teacher, does not stand between the disciple and God, but seeks instead to strengthen the devotee's direct experiential relationship with the Divine. The Hindu thus finds a great joy in his relationship with God and the Gods. It is his relationship, and he alone is able to perpetuate it. No one can do this work for him or on his behalf. There is a great happiness there between the devotee and the God resident in the Hindu temple, which is the communication point with the God, as is the sacred home shrine. **The Joy of Pilgrimage:** In our religious



HARI MAHIDHAR

images in it work as a channel for the Deity, for the Gods, who hover over the stone image and, in their subtle etheric forms, change people's lives through changing the nerve currents within them through their darshana. People come to a sanctified temple and go away, and in that process they are slowly changed from the inside out. They have changed because their very life force has changed, their mind has been changed and their emotions have undergone a subtle transformation. The temples of Hinduism are magnificent in their immensity and in their ability to canalize the three worlds, the First World of physical, outer existence and the inner Second and Third Worlds.

Hindu temples are not centered around a priest or minister, though there may be a holy man associated with a temple whose advice is cautiously and quietly sought. There is no sermon, no mediator, no director to guide the worship of pilgrims. The temple is the home of the Deities, and each devotee goes according to his own timing and for his own particular needs. Some may go to weep and seek consolation in times of sorrow, while simultaneously others will be there to rejoice in their good fortune and to sing God's name in thanksgiving. Naturally, the sacraments of name-giving and marriage and so forth are closely associated with the temple. One has only to attend a Hindu temple during festival days to capture the great energy and vitality of this ancient religion.

In its second section, philosophy, Hinduism has influenced the deep religious thinkers of all cultures through known history. There is not a single philosophy which can be labeled "Hinduism." Rather, it is a network of many philosophies, some seeming to impertinently contradict the validity of others, yet on deeper reflection are seen as integral aspects of a single, radiant mind flow. In the area of philosophy must be included the enormous array of scripture, hymns, mantras, devotional

Pilgrimage: (clockwise from left) Bridges connecting the banks of Narmada at Mandla, Madhya Pradesh, built solely for pedestrians during the Maha Kumbh held in 2011 to celebrate social harmony; an exuberant crowd showers turmeric powder, coloring everyone in the yellow kinship of devotion during the festival of Holi; women at a marketplace in Nepal.

bhajana and philosophical texts which are certainly unequalled in the world.

In the natural order of things, temple worship precedes philosophy. It all starts with the temple, with this sacred house of the Deities, this sanctified site where the three worlds communicate, where the inner and outer mesh and merge. It is there that devotees change. They become more like the perfect beings that live in the temple, become the voice of the Deity, writing down what is taught them from the inside, and their writings, if they are faithful to the superconscious message of the God, become scripture and make up the philosophies of Hinduism. The philosophies then stand alone as the voice of the religion. They are taught in the universities, discussed among scholars, meditated upon by yogis and devout seekers. It is possible to be a good Hindu by only learning the philosophy and never going to the temple, or by simply going to the temple and never hearing of the deeper philosophies.

Hinduism has still another section within it, and that is the guru—the teacher, the illuminator, the spiritual preceptor. The guru is the remover of darkness. He is one who knows the philosophy, who knows the inner workings of the temple, and who in himself is the philosopher and the temple. The guru is he who can enliven the spirit within people. Like the temple and the philosophy, he stands alone, apart from the institutions of learning, apart from sites of pilgrimage. He is himself the source of knowledge, and he is himself the pilgrim's destination.

Should all the temples be destroyed, they would spring up again from the seeds of philosophy, or from the presence of a realized man. And if all the scriptures and philosophical treatises were burned, they would be written again from the same source. So Hinduism cannot be destroyed. It can never be destroyed. It exists as the spirit of religion within each being. Its three aspects, the temple, the philosophy and the satguru, individually proficient, taken together make Hinduism the most vital and abundant religion in the world.

Hinduism's Fathomless Diversity

Hinduism has a grand diversity among its many sects. That diversity is itself a strength, showing how broad and encompassing Hinduism is. It does not seek to have all devotees believe exactly alike. In fact, it

life, one of the most fulfilling aspects is pilgrimage. We have a joy in looking forward to a spiritual journey, and we experience a contentment while on our pilgrimage and later bask in the glowing aftermath of the pujas. It is like going to see a great friend, a devotee's most loved friend—the Ishta Devata. We travel to the far-off temple where this great friend is eminently present. At that particular temple, this personal God performs a certain function, offers a specific type of blessing to pilgrims who make the pilgrimage to that home. In this way, different temples become famous for answering certain types of prayers, such as requests for financial help, or prayers for the right mate in marriage, prayers to be entrusted with



THOMAS KELLY

the raising of high-souled children, or help in matters of yoga, or help in inspiring bhakti and love. ¶The Hindu does not have the feeling of having to take a vacation to "get away from it

all." We don't lead a life of mental confusions, religious contradictions and the frustrations that result from modern hurried living. We lead a moderate life, a religious life. In living a moderate life, we then look at our pilgrimage as a special moment, a cherished time of setting ordinary concerns aside and giving full stage to our religious longings. It is a time to take problems and prayers to our personal God. ¶Unlike the proud "free thinkers" who deem themselves emancipated, above the religious life, we Hindus feel that receiving the darshana from the Gods and the help that comes therein invigorates our being and inspires us to be even more diligent in our spiritual life. Unlike the rationalists who feel confident that within themselves lie

all the resources to meet all needs, and that praying to Gods for help is a pathetic exercise in futility, the Hindu wisely submits to the Divine and thus avoids the abyss of disbelief. ¶All in life that one would want to "get away from" the Hindu takes with him on a pilgrimage to the temple, to the feet of his personal God, to the inner-plane being or Mahadeva, who needs no physical body with which to communicate with people—to the God who has a nerve system so sensitive and well developed that as it hovers over the stone image, which looks similar to how the Deity would look on the inner planes, this being of light can communicate with the pilgrims who visit the temple. This being of light, this Mahadeva, can and does absorb all of the dross the devotees have to offer, and gives back blessings which bring happiness

and release to them. Thus, the pilgrimage is not travel in the ordinary sense of travel, but rather going to see a personal friend, one who



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is nearest and dearest, but does not live in a physical body. ¶The Hindu has another great joy—the certainty of liberation. Even in difficult times, we are solaced in the knowledge of our religion which tells us that no soul that ever existed or ever will exist in future extrapolations of time and space will ever fail to attain liberation. The Hindu knows that all souls will one day merge into God; and he knows that God, who created all souls, slowly guides our maturing into His likeness, brings us back to Himself, which is not separate from ourselves. The Hindu, through striving and personal development in this life on this planet, knows that liberation into God is the final goal. This knowing and this belief release us from any ego, from any superiority by which one person considers himself or herself as especially meriting God's grace

has no central authority, no single organized institution which could ever proclaim or enforce such sameness. There is an immense inner unity, but the real strength and wisdom of Hinduism is its diversity, its variety. There are so many sects within Hinduism that you could spend a lifetime studying them and never begin to assess them all. More is there than any single human being could assimilate in a single lifetime. Hinduism, therefore, has the magnetism to draw us back into its immensity life after life. Each sect may be said to be a full religion in its own right, with all the increments of faith, with no necessary part missing. Therefore, each sect works for the individuals within it completely, and each tolerates all the other sects. It does not totally divorce itself from the other sects, denying their beliefs, but simply separates to stress or expound a limited area of the vast philosophy, apart from all others, to be understood by the limited faculties of man.

These various sects and divisions within Hinduism all spring from a one source. Most Hindus believe in the transcendental God as well as the personal Lord or God, and yet there is within the boundaries of the faith room for the non-believer, for the atheist or for the agnostic who is assessing and developing his beliefs. This brings another unique asset to our religion—the absence of heresy. There is no such thing as a heretic in Hinduism, for there is no single right perspective or belief. Doctrine and *sadhana* are not considered absolutes, but the means to an absolute end, and they can be tailored to individual needs and natures. My *satguru* would say that different prescriptions are required for different ailments.

In Hinduism there is no person or spiritual authority who stands between man and God. In fact, Hinduism teaches just the opposite. The priests in the temples are the servants of the Deity, the helper, the keeper of the Gods' house. He prepares and purifies the atmosphere of the temple, but he does not intervene between the devotee and his God—whichever of the many Gods within our religion that he may be worshipping. Without a mediator, responsibility is placed fully upon the individual. There is no one to intercede on his behalf. He is responsible for his actions, for his thoughts, for his emotions, for his relationship with his God. He must work out his beliefs from the inside, without undue dependence upon external influences. Of course, there is much help, as much as may be needed, from those who have previ-

ously gone through what he is now going through. It is not enough that he adopts an authorized dogma. He must study and bring the teachings to life from within himself.

Within the philosophy, each philosopher proclaims that God can be found within man if man practices the proper precepts of yoga and delves within himself through his kundalini force. The guru himself teaches the awakening of that force and how God can be realized in His transcendental as well as His personal aspect within the sphere of one's own personal experience in this very lifetime if he but pursues the path and is obedient.

Hinduism is unique because God and man, mind and God, instinctive mind, intellectual mind and superconscious mind, can merge as one, according to the evolution of the individual. Each one, according to his own self-created karma, has his own fulfillment. Those in the first stages of evolution, whose interests and experiences are basically instinctive, who possess little intellect or mental prowess, are guided by their emotions and impulses, are generally fearful. They have a personal experience of the Deity in the temple, but it is generally a fearful experience. They are afraid of God. Alongside of them during a puja is a great rishi who has had many hundreds of lives on this planet. He has his own personal experience of God, but it is an experience of love, of oneness and of union. There they are, side by side. Each experience of God is as real to one as to the other. There is no one in-between, no arbitrator of the experience to compel the one to see God exactly as the other one does.

Within Hinduism Is a Place for Everyone

Hinduism is as broad as humanity is, as diverse as people are diverse. It is for the rich and the poor, for the mystic and the materialist. It is for

Lavish ceremonies: Priests perform a homa ritual, chanting from scripture and placing offerings into the fire at the opening ceremony of Serdang, Malaysia's Sri Maha Kaliamman Temple in 2010; a couple walk barefoot in the precincts of the Sri Ekambaranathar Siva Temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu; a bride and groom are joined in matrimony through the multi-day vivaha samskara



while others are lost. For the Hindu, there is an assurance that all souls will eventually enjoy liberation, and that includes ourselves and all of our friends and family. We need never fear otherwise.

The Joy of Mysticism: Then there is the joy of the mysticism of Hinduism. It is the world's most magical religion, offering worlds within worlds of esoteric discovery and perception. The inner worlds are what Hindu mystics tell of in the greatest richness and freedom of expression that exists on the planet. Mysticism in Hinduism is more out-front than in all the other religions of the world. As a result, it is enjoyed by more of the people in our religion. Mysticism is discussed more broadly and not limited to a few great souls or a handful of pandits. The mysticism



of Hinduism is for all the people; yet, too, in its esoteric aspect it is protected at its core and kept sacred by being kept secret. How grand is the Hindu mystical tradition, with

its sadhanas and yogas, with its wealth of understanding of the etheric bodies, of the nadis and the chakras, of the aura and the pranas, of the various states of consciousness and levels of existence, and so much more. No other religion on the Earth can ever begin to equal Hinduism's mystical teachings; all that wealth is the rightful inheritance of each Hindu. ¶The Hindu enjoys all the facets of life as transmuted into a religious expression in art. The Hindu's art is a religious art—drawing, painting and sculpture of the Gods, the devas, and the saints of our religion. The music is devotional and depicts the tones of the higher chakras, echoes the voices of the Gods; and the dance emulates the movements of the Gods. We are never far away from sights, sounds

and symbols of our religion. A mountaintop represents Lord Siva; a hill represents Lord Murugan, Karttikeya; and sugarcane fields represent Lord Ganesha. Everything that one sees on the planet represents something religious. Art is not merely for egotistical and existential self-expression, but for spiritual expression, done consciously in service to the Divine. That is why one seldom sees or even knows the name of the artist of the great Hindu artistic creations. The artist is not creating in order to become famous or rich. He is surrendering his talents, serving his Gods and his religion through his art, and his art takes on a certain sacredness. ¶One great joy that the Hindu has is the appreciation for all other religions. Hinduism is theocentric, that means God-centric; whereas most other religions are prophet-centric, revolving around the personality of some living person or some person who once lived



in history and interpreted religion to his culture in his time. Hinduism has no founder. It was never founded. It has neither a beginning nor an end. It is coexistent with man himself. That is why it is called the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Path. It is not one man's teaching or interpretation. It is not limited to a single facet of religion, but consists of the entire spectrum, seen in its various components as if through a prism. It does not say that this religion is wrong and this one right. It sees God everywhere, manifesting all the great religions. The Hindu can appreciate Buddha without becoming a Buddhist. He can understand Jesus without becoming a Christian. Therefore, the joys of all the religions of the world become the joys of the Hindu. ¶But as Hindus, we must first think of the joys and happiness within our own religion. Consider our blessings. Come closer to the Gods of our religion. The many Gods are

the sage and the fool. None is excluded. In a Hindu temple you can find every variety of humanity. The man of accumulated wealth is there, supporting the institutions that have grown up around the temple, seeking to spend his abundance wisely and for its best purpose so that good merit may be earned for his next life. The pauper is there, begging in hopes that perhaps he will eat tomorrow and the God will inspire some devotee to give him a coin or two. So, a Hindu temple is a reflection of life, set in the midst of the life of the community. It is not making an effort to be better than the life of the village, only to serve that life and direct it to its next stage of evolution. The same Hindu mind which can consume within it all the religions of the world can and does consume within it all of the peoples of the world who are drawn to the temple by the shakti, the power, of the temple. Such is the great, embracing compassion of our religion.

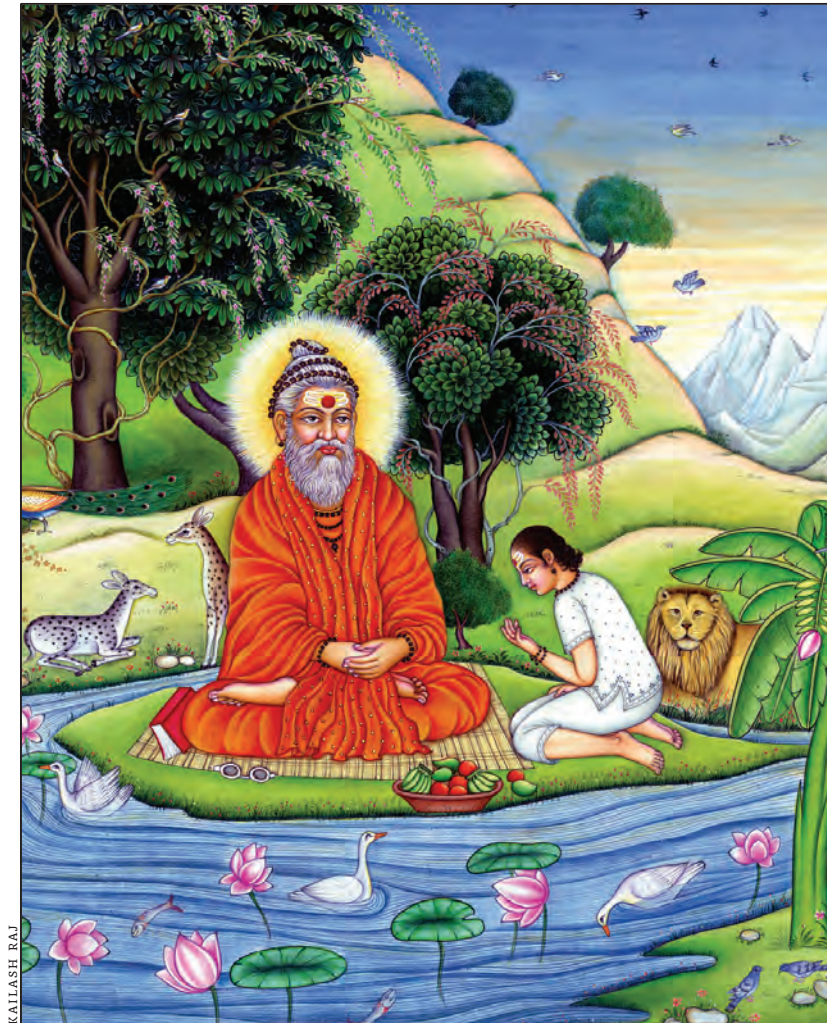
The greatness of Hinduism cannot be compared with other religions. There is no basis for comparison. Hinduism, the Eternal way or Sanatana Dharma, has no beginning, therefore will certainly have no end. It was never created, and therefore it cannot be destroyed. It is a God-centric religion. The center of it is God. All of the other religions are prophet-centric. The center of those religions is a great saint or sage, a prophet, a messenger or messiah, some God-Realized person who has lived on Earth and died. Perhaps he was born to create that particular sect, that particular religion, needed by the people of a certain part of the world at a certain time in history. The Hindus acknowledge this and recognize all of the world's religious leaders as great prophets, as great souls, as great incarnations, perhaps, of the Gods, or as great beings who have through their realization and inward practices incarnated themselves into, or transformed themselves into, eminent religious leaders and attracted devotees to them to give forth the precepts of life all over again and thus guide a tribe or a nation or a race into a better



ARUN MISHRA

way of life.

The Hindu mind can encompass this, appreciate it, for it is firmly settled in a God-centric religion. The center of Hinduism is the Absolute, the timeless, formless, spaceless God who manifests as Pure Consciousness and as the most perfect form conceivable, the Primal Soul. He radiates out from that form as a myriad of Gods and Goddesses who inhabit the temples and bless the people, inspire the scriptures, inspire the spiritual leaders and uplift humanity in general. It is a one God in many forms. We recently heard a sannyasini at the Ganesha Temple in New York describe this in a most wonderful and profound way, "Siva is the fire. Shakti is the heat of that fire. Ganesha is the red color of that



KAILASH RAJ

Seeing God in all: (Clockwise from far left) A boy in Rajasthan comforts a Desi calf during the nine-day Gounavaratri festival at Pathmeda Goshala, sanctuary for 125,000 cows; artist Kilash Raj shows a devotional seeker approaching a guru seated on an island in a lush valley; during the Raksha Bandhan festival, a girl ties a woven bracelet on her brother's wrist. It betokens her love and prayers for his welfare, and his commitment to protect her; a worshiper holds hands in anjali mudra, gesturing love and adulation for the Deity.

fire. Murugan is the light of that fire."

There are nearly a billion Hindus in the world today. That's roughly four times the population of the entire United States. Every sixth person on the planet is a Hindu. Hinduism attends to the needs of each one. It is the only religion that has such breadth and depth. Hinduism contains the Deities and the sanctified temples, the esoteric knowledge of inner states of consciousness, yoga and the disciplines of meditation. It possesses a gentle compassion and a genuine tolerance and appreciation for other religions. It remains undogmatic and open to inquiry. It believes in a just world in which every soul is guided by karma to the ultimate goal of Self Realization, leading to moksha, freedom from rebirth. It rests content in the knowledge of the divine origin of the soul, its passage through one life and another until maturity has been reached. It offers guidance to all who take refuge in it, from the nonbeliever to the most evolved maharishi. It cherishes the largest storehouse of scripture and philosophy on the earth, and the oldest. It is endowed with a tradition of saints and sages, of realized men and women, unrivaled on the earth. It is the sum of these, and more, which makes me boldly declare that Hinduism is the greatest religion in the world.

in the Western world now and have circumferenced the planet with their shakti of radiant rays that penetrate with spiritual power, bringing harmony and culture, balancing out the dharma of the planet. Hinduism is such a great religion. All practicing Hindus are very proud of their religion. Unfortunately, these days too many born into the religion are not all that proud to be Hindus, but this is slowly changing. Hindus are now welcoming into their religion others who are, of their own volition, adopting or converting into the Sanatana Dharma. They are proud enough of their faith to want others to share its wisdom, its mysticism, its scriptures, its broadmindedness, its magnificent temples and its final conclusions for all mankind. To all Hindus, who today are found in every country on the Earth, I say: Courage!

Courage! Courage! Have the courage to know beyond a doubt that Hinduism is the greatest religion in the world. We must be proud of this.

Hinduism Cannot Be Destroyed: It is false to think that one has to be born a Hindu in order to be a Hindu. That is a concept postulat-



THOMAS KELLY

ed by certain caste-based Hindu lineages and reinforced by the Christians in their effort to hinder the growth of our religion, to deprive it of new life, to hold it down while they in turn try to convert Hindus en masse to their religion. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a Hindu monk and missionary who wrote extensively on the Hindu Dharma, when confronted by this same issue in the West would explain how Hindus who have been converted by force should not be denied an opportunity of returning to their ancestral religion. As for the case of those not born into Hinduism who might be interested to join it, he simply said, "Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on." Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), the distinguished Hindu philosopher who became the

second president of India, confirms this view in writing, "In a sense, Hinduism may be regarded as the first example in the world of a missionary religion. Only its missionary spirit is different from that associated with the proselytizing creeds. It did not regard as its mission to convert humanity to one opinion. For what counts is conduct and not belief. The ancient practice of *vratyastoma*, described fully in the *Tandya Brahmana*, shows that not only individuals but whole tribes were absorbed into Hinduism." During the era of India's domination by alien religions, when Hinduism was scheduled to be destroyed, the attack was to be carried out in three ways. The first strategy was to convince the women to abandon their age-old *stri* dharma—of maintaining the home, its purity and ways of worship—thus draw-

ing them away from the household in order to receive a so-called "higher education" or to teach in alien religious schools, thus denying future generations the mother's religious



HINDUISM TODAY

counsel and grounding in the dharma. The second strategy was to overtly break down the various castes of temple priests by enticing them to accept other, often higher paying, occupations, thus leaving the temples unattended. The third strategy was to convince Hindus that they had inherited a crude and outdated religion. This last attack was accomplished mainly through ridicule, by ridiculing every aspect of the religion that could possibly be ridiculed. For example, those who slandered Hinduism claimed it has no sacraments. Why, Hinduism has more sacraments, more sacred rites and ceremonies for its members, than perhaps any other religion in the world. These sacraments include the *namakarana samska-*

Where Hindus Live

While India is home to 94 percent of the world's nearly one billion Hindus, nearly 57 million are scattered widely across the globe. This map shows larger communities, with smaller ones listed to the right. Below are estimated world populations for the various faiths.

WORLD POPULATION 2019

- Christian.....2.4 billion
 - Roman Catholic1.2 billion
 - Protestant800 million
 - Other Christian400 million
- Muslim1.8 billion
- Hindu.....1.1 billion
- Buddhist600 million
- Confucian.....200 million
- Taoist.....150 million
- Tribal100 million
- Shinto.....100 million
- Sikh.....25 million
- Jewish.....15 million
- Jain.....7 million
- Zoroastrian.....190,000
- Other Faiths.....14 million
- Unaffiliated1.2 billion
- Total7.7 billion**



- Algeria.....600
- Barbados100
- Brunei.....500
- Cameroon.....60
- C. African Rep. .20
- Czech Republic and Slovakia...150
- Chad20
- Chile20
- China170
- Congo100
- Colombia.....60
- Cuba100
- Ecuador600
- Finland.....100
- Gabon.....100
- Ghana.....600
- Guinea50
- Hungary50
- Iceland7
- Ireland20
- Israel200
- Ivory Coast ..1,000
- Zambia.....600
- Jordan.....1,000
- Lebanon.....100
- Liberia500
- Laos600
- Libya500
- Mexico50
- Morocco.....60
- Mozambique .600
- Panama600
- Poland.....100
- Qatar500
- Senegal.....100
- Seychelles600
- Sierra Leone ..500
- South Korea60
- Sudan500
- Syria100
- Tunisia100
- Turkey100
- Upper Volta ...100
- Yemen, North .100
- Zaire (Congo) .500

ra, name-giving sacrament; *annaprashana*, first feeding; *karnavedha*, ear-piercing; *vidy-arambha*, commencement of learning; *vivaha*, marriage; and many others. ¶Though India was politically dominated for generations by adherents of alien faiths, and though every attempt was made to discourage, weaken and crush the native religion, the carefully calculated, systematic assault failed to destroy Hinduism. Hinduism cannot be destroyed. It is the venerable eternal religion, the Sanatana Dharma. But it was an effective campaign that has left in its wake deep *samskaric* patterns, deep subconscious impressions, which still persist in the minds of the Indian people. It is going to be difficult to completely eradicate these impressions, but with the help of all the millions of Hindus throughout the world, in adhering to and extolling the benefits and joys of Hinduism and



SUNDER RAJ

the gifts which it holds for mankind, this is possible and feasible, within the range of accomplishment, perhaps within this very generation. **Bringing in Ardent Seekers:** Hindus should freely welcome sincere devotees into

their religion, not those who already have a firm religion and are content, but those who are seeking, who believe, as millions in the West already believe, in the laws of karma and reincarnation and the existence of the ever-present God that permeates this planet and the universe. Hindus should freely embrace those who believe in the Gods and all we have been speaking about earlier, for whom other religious avenues have proved empty and fruitless. There are certain matured souls for whom the Sanatana Dharma can be the only true religion, who have no other religion and who will seek and seek until they come upon its pro-

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Raising Youth: (left) Hindu school girls in Bengaluru, India; (right) boys attending Rameshbhai Oza's Hindu school at Sandipani Vidyanyiketan near Porbandar, Gujarat

found truths, perhaps in an old scripture, or in a temple sanctum during puja or in the eyes of an awakened siddha yogi. These souls we must help. We must teach them of our religion and allow them to fully accept or reject it, to accept it because they know it, or to reject it because they know it and are not ready to meet Maha Ganapati and humbly sit at the feet of this most profound Lord. ¶There are many lost souls on the planet today who die in the physical world—lose their physical body—wander on the astral plane a short time and are caught up immediately in another womb. They have no knowledge of other states of existence or of the workings of reincarnation. They have no time for the bliss of these in-between, astral states. They have no time for assessing their last life and preparing for the next, which they could then enter with new knowledge, no



SAT SAHITYA PRAKASHAN TRUST

time for inner attunement with the Gods in the inner worlds between death and birth. Instead, they are caught in a constant cycle of flesh, making flesh and living in flesh, with the soul being immersed in ignorance and the dark-

ness of the consciousness of flesh. Hinduism eradicates this cycle by offering knowledge of the states between life and death and then life again. It creates deep impressions within the mind of these individuals, which then bring them out of this syndrome so that they can enjoy months, years, in fact, of education and knowledge in the inner planes of consciousness between births, so that they can come back into a physical body a more awakened soul than when they left their last physical sheath at death. ¶We must not be reluctant to welcome these sincere Hindu souls and to assist them in finding the answers they seek and do not find elsewhere. It is our dharma to help them. Hinduism has always welcomed adoptives and converts. Bring in new people to the religion. Teach them. Help them. Counsel them. Proceed with confidence. Have courage, courage, courage.



PILGRIMAGE

Finding Siva in Varanasi

Follow Savita Tiwari to the banks of the Ganga in Kashi, where she offers us a Mauritian's perspective of this holy city, said to be the world's oldest

BY SAVITA TIWARI, MAURITIUS
Savita, 36, 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. Email: savitapost@gmail.com

TRAVELING IS TRAVELING, WHETHER you travel in the outside world or inside your own soul. I've found that when taking a pilgrimage within, the vista is far vaster than what you'll find outside of yourself. Externally, one's body goes from place to place, but internally, we traverse different levels of consciousness to finally reach a place where the dividing line between internal and external is blurred. Then comes an introduction to one's true self. Varanasi is a place that can take a person on this inner journey. Speaking for myself as a non-resident Indian Hindu, every step of such a journey is taken with great passion. I am from Mauritius—an island where the echo of the *Ramayana* still rings through the air. This journey is an important pilgrimage for me.

Kashi is the city of 88 ghats—large steps

leading down to the river. To some, it is still Banaras. The official name is Varanasi, because it is situated between the Varuna and Assi ghats. I prefer the name Kashi, as it is the beloved city of Mahadev Siva. Not only does the Ganga flow through this city, but the origins of much of Indian culture find root here. Kashi is the city where Siva Himself gives the *tarak mantra*—the mantra of liberation—to every person whose body is brought to the Manikarnika Ghat for cremation.

This is my first-ever visit to Kashi, and it came about rather unexpectedly. I was invited to participate in Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) 2019, an event held by the Indian government to celebrate the achievements of non-resident Indians. I reach the city at night. Just after exiting the airport, I come upon the whole of Kashi bathed in its evening, tri-colored lights. We are accommodated by the Uttar Pradesh government in a high-class tent-city. A friend of mine is accommodated with a family in Kashi, as there is no space left in the hotels. I kind of wish I were in the same situation. Then I could see authentic Kashi culture closely—something nowhere to be seen in the crowds of the tent city.

The next morning the convention takes off with great enthusiasm, due to the presence of two prime ministers—India's Narendra Modi and the chief guest, Mauritius' Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, who was the inspiration for having 400 delegates from Mauritius participate in the convention. We Mauritians are the event's second biggest delegation after Malaysia. PM Modi welcomes all five thousand event guests by saying: "Welcome to the oldest inhabited city on the earth, Varanasi!" At that moment I realize how fortunate I am to be able to visit the sacred city.

The Mauritian prime minister's speech is special. While on the stage, he seems to be viewed more as a migrant Indian figure than a prime minister. He says, "If India is incredible, then Indianism is unique. Being associated with India in any way makes you special." I cannot agree more.

The next two days pass in networking and attending various sessions. Everyone is busy making cultural, social and economic ties with delegates of various countries. We run between the tent city and the Trade Facilitation Centre, where the convention is organized. In all this chaos I am dying to see the

real Kashi, the city of Mahadev, a city from which the river of Hinduism has originated.

On the third day all delegates are taken three hours outside Varanasi, to the river Prayag, for a sacred dip. All transport, accommodation and food has been arranged by the Uttar Pradesh government. As a member of a foreign media delegation, I am tempted to simply enjoy VIP treatment, but that would mean missing the real Kashi. After fighting with my outer mind, I decide to stay back in Varanasi and explore the oldest city on earth. I'm so glad I did.

The next morning, I check out of the tent city and make my way into the real city. I have already booked online at the Shanti Guest House, a small place with low budget rooms for longer stays, just over 200 yards from the famous Manikarnika Ghat. Each day I am there I see a beautiful scene from the building's terrace. The river Ganga shines with sunlight; before it, the smoke of the cremation ground's pyres rises up, dispersing into the Indian sky.

The car from the tent city leaves me at Manikarnika Gate on Gaudhuliya Road, which runs parallel to the river. The area is crowded with small buildings separated by a maze of densely populated, narrow lanes. No vehicles can fit down these ancient city streets. To reach my lodging, I have to walk about half a mile through shoulder-to-shoulder crowds, making my way around people, cows and funeral processions. Due to an early-morning rainfall, the streets are slippery with an aromatic mixture of earth, water and cow dung. Diving headfirst into the real Kashi, I find myself a little intimidated.

Arriving at my place of stay, I settle my luggage in my room and order a strong cup of coffee. When I feel confident enough to walk again on the slippery streets, I venture out to the nearest riverbank at the Manikarnika Ghat. This ghat is the most renowned in Kashi. Here, the whole of Kashi delivers its deceased for cremation. If one is cremated here, it is said that the soul is liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

The narrow lanes cannot easily accommodate a full funeral procession, so often a body is taken to the nearest ghat and then transported to Manikarnika by a special boat called *shav-vahini*. These are run by charitable trusts and are free of cost.

The whole market near this ghat is piled to the rooftops with firewood, which hundreds of shops sell for cremations. Manikarnika receives around 250 bodies every day and is thus known as *maha shamshan*, "where the fire is never quenched."

As Mauritians, being in Kashi is even more overwhelming for me and others of our 400-member delegation. Kashi is the birthplace of *Ramacharitamanas*—the *Ramayana*—which has been a guide for Hinduism on our small island for as long as Hindus have resided there. In 1832, the first 32 Indian indentured labors were brought to Mauritius by French sugar-estate owners. Other than the clothes they wore and a few meager possessions, the laborers had with them several copies of the *Ramayana*, the great epic authored by poet Tulsidas. Without Hindu swamis or priests to guide them, these workers anchored themselves in this renowned text, keeping Hinduism alive through the generations. It was the *Ramayana* that provided

values and became the axis of religious life for Mauritian Hindus. Kashi is not only the place where it was written. As the story goes, it is here that Mahadev Himself approved the book by placing His trident mark upon it. Hence Kashi is a place of worship for all Mauritian Hindus. The couplets of the *Ramayana* can be heard here in the early morning hours, accompanied only by the sounds of the waves of Mother Ganga. Hearing these couplets makes this place feel like home.

My next stop is Tulsi Ghat. The best thing about Kashi is that you won't find any transport once you enter these small lanes. You have to walk around and experience everything on the human level. All the ghats are connected with each other, lined up along the river's edge. You can walk from one ghat to another on their riverside steps. At the Tulsi Ghat, a tourist tells me about the original 16th-century copy of the *Ramayana*, penned by Tulsidas himself. It was stolen in 2011 from the Hanuman temple on Tulsi Ghat, but was fortunately recovered six months later. Since then the treasure is brought out of its safe only once a year, on Tulsidas Jayanti. I'm not there on the right day to see the text, but simply visiting the room where Baba Tulsidas composed it still gives me goose bumps. As far as we writers are concerned, I consider Tulsidas the eldest member of our community and myself one of the youngest.

After a whole morning of adventure and eating sweet prasad at every temple, my stomach wants something more nutritious. I am guided to Kachori Gali—a whole lane dedicated to different Varanasi delicacies. I make my way to a shop with the smallest crowd. The staff are elderly, but clearly mas-

A priceless experience: (left) The ghats of Varanasi glisten as the sun rises over the horizon; (below) author Savita Tiwari takes a boat ride along the River Ganga





SHUTTERSTOCK

with a smile, "This is normal in Kashi. Now you eat, or else the kachori will go cold." It takes me a whole two minutes to comprehend what just happened. As I collect myself, I think, "Welcome to Kashi: a place where you can eat food in front of a funeral procession as if nothing happened; a city that is beyond birth and death, for they not only celebrate birth here but also death."

I finish my kachori and return to my hotel, as I've experienced too much in one day to digest it all. Early

terful cooks. There is no place to sit; you stand in the busy lane to eat what is served. I don't like to stand and eat, but no one else is bothered by it, so I also start my meal.

After just a few bites, I hear a group of people chanting a mantra over and over. I can't make out a word of it, but it sounds quite familiar. The sound grows louder, and I soon realize the words are "Ram naam satya hai." It is a funeral procession. The group appears around the street corner and is coming right at me. I am shocked to see a funeral procession from such close proximity, as this is not something you'd see where I'm from. My shock is intensified as it comes closer and closer. Here on this small street, there is nowhere to go to escape. I look around and realize nobody else is freaking out; all are enjoying their food. I duck to the side and close my eyes as the procession passes, the dead body being lifted just over my head. The owner of the shop, who is also the main cook, notices my situation. Trying to comfort me, he says

the next morning I decide to take a holy dip in the river Ganga. My hotel manager, who is also a part-time priest and yoga teacher, tells me Dashashwamedh Ghat is the best place for a holy bath. I walk until I reach Kashi Vishwanath, Gate no. 4, and take a shared electric taxi.

My co-passenger is a college girl from Banaras Hindu University. With the PBD badges still around my neck, we quickly strike up a conversation, as we are both part of the convention. I ask about her studies and future plans. She says she wants to move to the city and find success after completing her studies. I remember myself 15 years back. It seems every youth wants to explore the world. It's interesting, because someone from Varanasi would never find this kind of peace anywhere else. I just smile and wish her the best of luck for her future, adding, "May you also find peace and happiness, along with money." She gives me that look of "please don't lecture me, I've had that enough." May-

A timeless city: (above) The narrow streets through Varanasi; (left) a funeral procession, a common sight in Varanasi

be I would have done the same in my teens. Every age has different priorities.

The taxi leaves me at Godhuliya market, so I have to walk a little over half a mile to reach the ghat. While walking, it seems as though the early morning is just for me. Many earlier risers have already done their worship or sold all their flowers and are heading home. The whole walk is accented by the many fragrances of flowers, mixed with the resounding bells from the temples and melodic hymns by devotees. The whole scene is so palpably divine. Along the way I find the Kashi Vishwanath temple trust counter near the ghat. I decide to sponsor a puja at the main shrine, and I get a booking for 5 pm.

Dashashwamedh Ghat is full of people bathing in the cold water with ease. I find myself a relatively private corner on the bank of the river, just in case I let out a shout while plunging into the cold water. It takes me 15 minutes to sheepishly take four slow steps, until the water is to my knees. Then I notice a woman sitting comfortably halfway in the water chanting mantras. She registers my trepidation and says, "It will be a one time shock, just jump in!" I smile and think, "easier said than done." But then I remember Mauritianus, and how I used to bow in front of the sea and think to myself that some part of the Ganga was mixed into those waters, having drifted to where I stood from Mother India. "Now here I am, knee deep in the real Ganga, in Kashi, and I am too hesitant to take a dip!?" With my confidence boosted, I let out a loud scream of "Om Namah Shivaya!!!" I plunge underwater, and come out with a powerful



feeling (and with some cold-water-induced numbness), having dived into the lap of Ma Ganga. The woman then tells me, "Take seven dips. It's auspicious." I respond, "I am a devotee, but not that amazing of one. I'll try three dips instead." She argues, "Do at least five then." I muster up my courage and do the five dips, each time shouting "Aum Namah Shivaya!"

When I think I'm done, the lady says with a grin, "Only two more and you'll complete the seven. Go for it, and you will be free from the cycle of birth and death." This lady would surely make a great salesperson! Ignoring my numbness, I do two more. While performing my seventh and final dip, I have the sudden thought: "What if this woman is Ma Ganga Herself, here just to make me take all seven dips. Maybe she will magically disappear when I get out of the water." But when I come up, there she is, with a crooked smile saying, "See, I have made you take seven dips." I smile at my innocent thought that God might appear for me.

I pass the rest of the day walking from one ghat to another. I do a little shopping for sarees and souvenirs, and I spend some time talking to the saints and babas on the ghats. I ask them silly questions like, "Have you ever seen Mahadev?" And I listen to their long expositions on universal oneness, the history of Kashi and other stories about the city, Mahadev and Ma Annapurna.

At 4 pm I reach the main Kashi Vishwanath Temple gate and show my puja ticket to the guard, who then takes me inside the temple. The puja is being done in a hall in front of the main Jyotirlingam. Puja starts at 5 pm and ends at 6:30. Sitting in front of a Jyotirlingam for a Siva abhishekam is something I never thought I would get a chance to do in my life. Before beginning the puja, the priest tells me to stay afterwards for the 7pm Sapta Rishi Arati, which I do. The arati starts, and a group of priests settle in front of the Jyotirlingam, while singing Shiv Nirajanam in sri raga, a classic North Indian tempo. I am sitting just outside the sanctum gate. As soon as the puja reaches its zenith, all the priests start ringing bells and passing five-fold lamps before the Jyotirlingam. Others start playing drums, the energy levels begin to rise and everyone seems to enter another world.

Some find Siva while sitting on the banks of Ganga; some can even find Him in the darkness of the narrow lanes or in the burning bodies at Manikarnika. Others find Him on the steps of ghats, and some see Him in the divine Ganga Arati. I find Him in the Sapta Rishi Arati at Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple. In the middle of the arati one tear starts to fall from my eye and just like that, I find Him. I feel His presence. It is a feeling which cannot be expressed, just felt. Everyone has their own way of finding Him. I suppose mine is



GOVT OF UTTAR PRADESH

श्री काशी विश्वनाथ मन्दिर-वाराणसी

Divinity in all: (above) Funeral pyres burn along the Manikarnika Ghat; priests perform worship to the Siva Lingam in Kashi Vishwanath temple

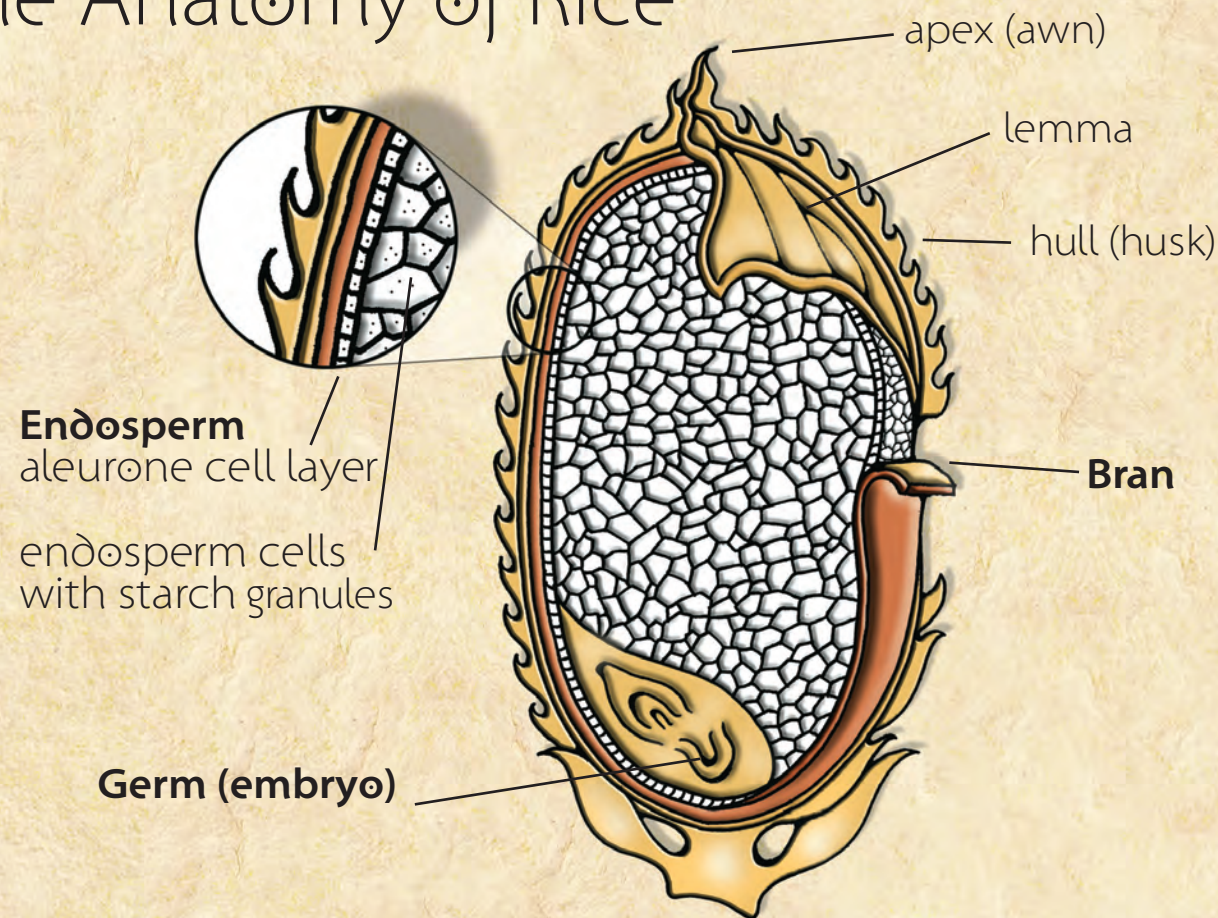
through the power of this ancient temple and the divine music being played.

In Mauritius, Mahasivaratri is our biggest festival. We are worshipers of Siva. I once heard from our acharyas that Siva never leaves Kashi. I understand the meaning of that while walking the ancient streets of Kashi and especially at the Manikarnika Ghat where "Ram Naam satya hai" endlessly resonates. In this city, people address one another by the name "bhole" (devotee of Siva)

and "Mahadev." Kashi has all the grace of Siva, because here, death—our great journey from one world to another—is a celebration.

This Kashi yatra will remain intact in my mind in the same way Kashi has remained vibrant and alive for ages. My deepest salutation to Baba Vishwanath's city of Kashi and to Mother India, from a Mauritian traveler who swam through this great ocean of spirituality before finally landing ashore on this pristine strand of divinity.

The Anatomy of Rice



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HINDUISM TODAY / PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK



Paḍḍy Rice

Right off the stalk, rice has an inedible outer husk. The more than 100,000 varieties of rice come in many different shapes, sizes and colors.



Brown Rice

With minimal processing by machine, hand pounding or, in some areas, putting the rice on the road and letting traffic drive over it, the husk is separated from the grain and then removed by winnowing. What's left is brown rice.



White Rice

After the husk is removed, the rice is milled to remove the bran and the germ or embryo (the life of a rice kernel which grows into a rice plant). In the milling process, machinery rubs the rice together under pressure. All rice is brown rice before it is processed, which strips out nutrients along with most of the fiber.

FOOD

Why Brown Rice Is Healthier

Almost everyone eats white rice—but should they?

CAN YOU GUESS WHICH HIGHLY PROCESSED and very popular food contributes to diabetes and, if it wasn't fortified with vitamins by the manufacturer, a deadly disease—beriberi? That's right. It's white rice.

The vast majority of rice eaters won't touch brown rice. They consider it peasant's food or animal feed. Yet, the modern health food movement has proven unprocessed grains, including brown rice, to be healthier than their refined counterparts. Certainly, for thousands of years everyone ate brown rice, for the complex processing equipment needed to make white rice was invented only in 1860, in Scotland.

So what's the reasoning behind white rice? HINDUISM TODAY asked Tim O'Donnell, vice president of sales and marketing at Lundberg Family Farms, a Californian company dedicated to organic rice. He said the main reason is shelf life. White rice keeps much longer than brown rice and therefore makes companies more money.

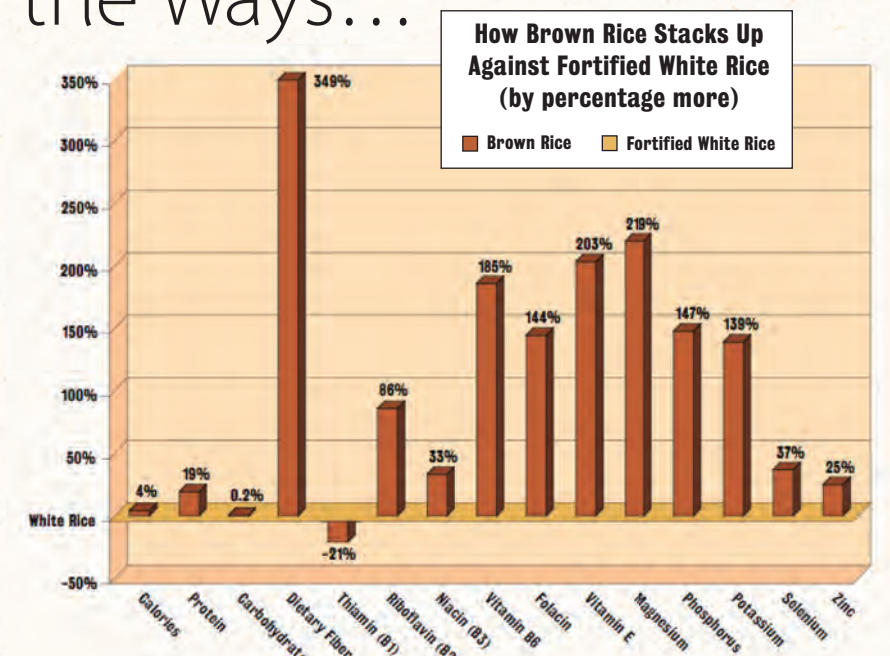
Over the last century, too, people have come to like the texture of white rice, as well as its shorter cooking time. White rice is also cheaper, because factories are optimized to produce it. Switching the equipment to make brown rice would cost extra money. But the Lundberg factory, which is set up to produce only brown rice, can match the price of

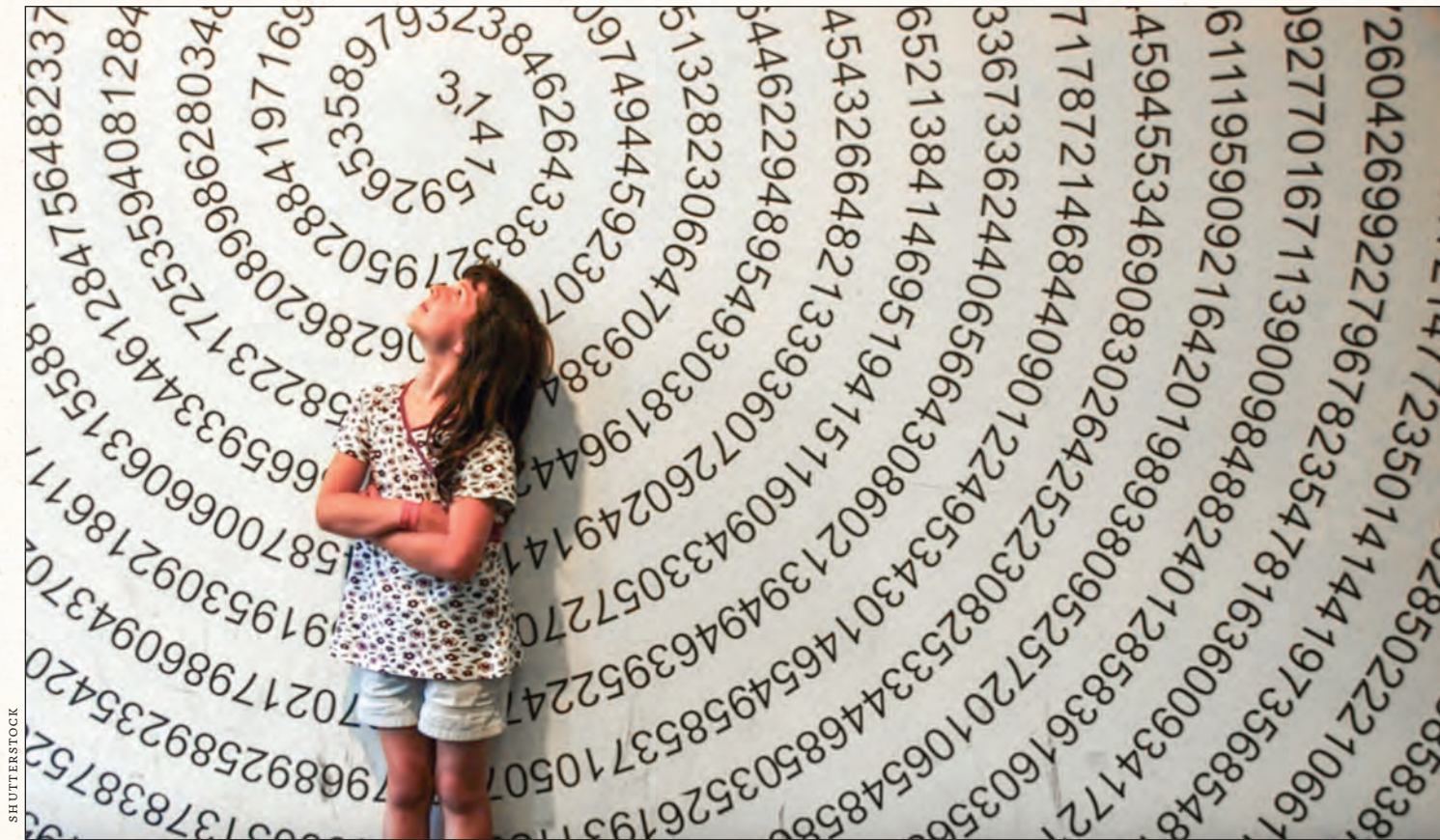
white rice, according to O'Donnell.

White rice got off to a rough start when, in 1897, it was found to be the cause of beriberi, a potentially deadly disease caused by lack of vitamin B₁, which is stripped out in the refining processing. Companies responded, under government pressure, by enriching the rice. They put back the naturally occurring vitamins, but not the phytochemical nutrients, nor the all-important fiber. Another hazard of white rice is that it can contribute to diabetes. And, for those already diabetic, white rice is less safe than brown rice because it breaks down into glucose more quickly than brown rice, causing a more drastic insulin reaction.

Let Us Count the Ways...

The chart at right shows the dramatic differences in nutritional value between enriched processed white rice and unenriched, unprocessed brown rice. Even with the enrichment required by law in most countries, including India, there are still vast differences. Brown rice has 349% more fiber, 203% more Vitamin E, 185% more B₆ and 219% more magnesium. With 19% more protein, brown rice is a more balanced food. White rice does include 21% more thiamin, B₁, which is added in the enrichment process. It is noteworthy that brown rice has a low Glycemic Index, 55 compared to white rice's 70, or even more with additional processing, such as parboiling, which posts an 87. For reference, a donut is 76. The development of diabetes later in life has been linked to the overconsumption of foods with a high Glycemic Index.





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SCIENCE

The Mysteries of Memory

Our teenage correspondent explores the extremes of the human ability to remember, finding that some of the greatest accomplishments may belong to India

BY MAYURESH VISSWANATHAN, CALIFORNIA

MEMORY IS AMONG THE MOST powerful attributes of mankind. It is the sum of all experiences, knowledge and habits that we possess. It is what allows us to do something as simple as tying a shoe or as complex and astonishing as accurately chanting long sections of scripture. Memory allows extraordinary people to speak fluently in dozens of languages and recall tens of thousands of digits, words, routes, names, and much more with perfect accuracy. It also provides the enduring structure that allows for individual and cultural history and identity. From ancient times, humanity has performed mind-boggling feats of memory that continue to expand the known boundaries of the human brain.

Historically, one of the most impressive feats involving long-term memory is the oral recitation of the *Vedas*. This central scripture of Hinduism comprises four main parts, namely: *Rig Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Sama Veda*, each consisting of 40,000 to

100,000 words. Before the *Veda* was written down, it was passed orally from generation to generation.

In most cultures that rely on oral traditions, the content tends to change slightly through each generation. This becomes obvious only when there are multiple variations in existence. In order to ensure that the *Veda* would remain unchanged during oral transmission from one generation to the next, strict systems of teaching the *Veda* were created, including remembering the full text.

In ancient India, many male children went to a gurukula, an ancient form of schooling in which students live on the same premises as their guru, or teacher. The schools were commonly located in secluded, pastoral areas, rather than in large villages or cities with worldly distractions. Students began formal education at the age of five, living primarily at the gurukula until their late teen or early adult years. To retain the child's focus, contact with parents was limited. Students were required to perform both physical and mental tasks as part of their daily curriculum.

Learning the *Veda* was a core part of education in those days. It could take up to 12 years to master just one of the four *Vedas*, so students spent many hours a day reciting and memorizing. Accuracy was taken seriously. These same techniques are being used in India to memorize the *Veda* even today, though societal investment in the importance of this study has diminished greatly over the centuries. (www.quora.com/Before-the-Vedas-were-written-down-how-were-they-memorised)

James Hartzell, a researcher from Basque Center on Cognition, Brain and Language, studied professionally trained Sanskrit pandits. While observing the pandits perform a recitation, he noted that if one of them made a mistake, they all stopped. They would restart the entire recitation, repeating it from the beginning. In this way, it was ensured that the verses in the *Vedas* are passed down with maximum accuracy. Hartzell's 2016 study (blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/a-neuroscientist-explores-the-sanskrit-effect/) revealed the amazing ef-

fects such memorization had on the pandits' brains. On average, the brains of the pandits had ten percent more mass than the control group, who were otherwise comparable in gender, age and other factors. The extra mass was due to increased thickness of the temporal cortex region and the right hippocampus. The right hippocampus is responsible for memory of auditory and visual patterns, and the temporal cortex is responsible for speech, speech rhythm and voice recognition. Increased thickness in these areas correlates with enhancement of these functions. This is understandable, considering that the pandits spent years mastering the auditory imprinting of the *Vedas*. Although the brain isn't anatomically a muscle, it could presumably have been prompted to grow as an effect of the rigorous mental exertion practiced over many years. One of the brain's abilities, known as neuroplasticity, describes a process in which existing neurons "sprout" new dendrites and form new synapses, causing the brain to increase in size. It is theorized that as the priests perform their intensive memorization, they provoke increased neuroplasticity and their brains therefore exhibit increased thickness in certain areas.

Dominating the US Spelling Bee

Fast forward to the 21st century. Some of the most popular showcases of memory in modern day include spelling bees. The Scripps National Spelling Bee is an American event

in which over ten million young children, ages up to 15, compete in spelling some of the most difficult words in the English language. Winning words are uncommon and considered difficult by even the most educated. This year's winning words included: *erysipelas*, *bougainvillea*, *aiguillette*, *pendeloque*, *cernuous* and *odylic*. In order to prepare for these intense contests, the children study for hours every day, developing mental discipline to master the spelling of tens of thousands of words. In addition to pure memorization, they study the structure and source of words, such as *nunatak's* roots in the Inuit language. Though only one percent of Americans are of Indian heritage, kids of Indian descent have dominated the contest, winning 18 of the last 21 contests. This year, seven of the eight co-champions hailed from Indian families! (www.cbsnews.com/news/breaking-the-bee-filmmaker-on-why-indian-americans-dominate-spelling-bees/)

3.141592653589793238462...

The memorization of digits of pi is a stunning modern display of memory's raw power. The top two official record holders recited pi around 70,000 digits from memory without error, and there are unofficial accounts of people reciting over 100,000 digits of pi. This task requires near superhuman skill. Guinness rules require that competitors spend no more than 15 seconds between two digits, and their digit count stops at the

first error. There are no lunch breaks or toilet breaks during what can be a 10- or 12-hour ordeal. The current Guinness world record holder, Rajveer Meena, took around 10 hours to accurately recite 70,000 digits. It took Chao Lu, a previous record holder, 24 hours to recite 67,890 digits. The ability to accurately recall from memory tens of thousands of digits, even after many hours of hunger and exhaustion, is spectacular.

To perform this feat, many competitors use traditional memory techniques. Among the most common is spatial visualization. Applying this method here, participants assign three or more numbers to an object—perhaps an apple, glass of water, light switch, chair or horse. Often using flashcards and recitation, they spend hours each day memorizing the numbers that are assigned to each object. Next they create a story out of the many objects, thus linking number series together in proper sequence. As they go

Notable feats: (Opposite) A girl contemplates the first few thousand digits of pi; (right) in May these eight youth spelled every word thrown at them, and went away from the US National Spelling Bee as co-champions—a first in the history of the contest: Shruthika Padhy, 13; Erin Howard, 14; Rishik Gandhasri, 13; Christopher Serrao, 13; Saketh Sundar, 13; Sohun Sukhatankar, 13; Rohan Raja, 13; Abhijay Kodali, 12



SCRIPPS

Pi World Ranking List

You can sort the list by ranking, last name, country and continent by clicking on the title of that column. To change the ascending/descending sorting please click the title of the column again. If you scroll down, the title bar will stay at the top of the viewport, so you can change the sorting at any time.

Ranking	Name	Country	Continent	Digits	Date	Notes
1	Sharma, Suresh Kumar	India	Asia	70030	21 October 2015	World Record 2015; 17 hr 14 min
2	Meena, Rajveer	India	Asia	70000	21 March 2015	World Record 2015; ~10 hrs
3	Lu, Chao	China	Asia	67890	20 November 2005	<u>world record 2005-2015</u>
4	Dwivedi, Sudhir	India	Asia	45000	25 March 2013	6 hrs
5	Chahal, Krishan	India	Asia	43000	19 June 2006	<u>details</u>
6	Goto, Hiroyuki	Japan	Asia	42195	18 February 1995	<u>World Record 1995-2005</u>
7	Tomoyori, Hideaki	Japan	Asia	40000	10 March 1987	<u>World Record 1987 - 1995</u>
8	Mahadevan, Rajan	India	Asia	31811	5 July 1981	World Record 1981 - 1987

through the story in their mind and observe the objects, they are able to recite the numbers they associated with each item. (www.livescience.com/50134-pi-day-memory-experts.html)

A surprising percentage of world memorization record setters are of Asian heritage (see the Pi World Ranking List above). This is probably not due to genetic predisposition, though some have argued that thousands of years of selection for Vedic memory skills in India may have resulted in unique abilities. Many who have won the spelling bees and set world memory records are not geniuses and do not have innately strong memory. Psychology professor Anders Ericsson of Florida State University analyzed the performance of Guinness record holder Chao Lu, who accurately recited 67,890 digits of pi. Ericsson found that Lu's digit span—the number of digits one can recite without stopping—was relatively short, at only 8.83, while the average digit span of the group was 9.27. Researchers concluded that Lu did not have a genetically gifted memory, but rather had to work extremely hard to develop his memory prowess.

Professor Ericsson has mentioned that even normal people can accomplish these feats, but they must dedicate years to master such long streams of data. Through many hours of blood, sweat and tears, some people do sacrifice years to strengthen their memory to an elite level. In the documentary "Breaking the Bee," an Indian spelling bee competitor asserts that their success could be attributed to "90 percent hard work, 10 percent other." This is similar to an athlete who aspires to compete at the highest professional level. The genetic capability of the athlete only gives him a marginal advantage over other competitors who have risen to the

As Indian as mango pi: (above) Five of the world's top performers (some not verified by Guinness) are from India. The last column also shows how long they took to complete the recitation; (right) Suresh Kumar Sharma; (below) brain neurons from the hippocampus, which manages spatial memory.

elite level through hard work, sacrifice and dedication. Even the most genetically endowed individuals must work as hard as they can in order to make it to the highest level.

UK Cabbies

London taxicab drivers provide a compelling example improving memory through hard work. London, founded in 50 ce, has been a highly populated area for much of its colorful history. Its roads are convoluted. The city was not set up in a grid-like fashion like most, but evolved organically. The roads are intricate, narrow, winding, and have been compared to a bowl of noodles: the bowl is London and the noodles are the meandering streets that intertwine within it. Cab drivers must pass an exam that tests them on thousands of roads and locations. Studying for this exam, which qualifies them as a licensed cabbie, typically requires three to four years (though this test is less critical in the age of Uber and Google Maps). In a study from University College London Institute of Neurology, published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Current Biology*, researchers mapped the brains of London taxicab drivers who passed the exam and those who failed. All were of average IQ. The subjects that did not pass displayed no increase in grey matter in the brain over their years of study. However, subjects who did pass showed a significant increase in grey matter. Most of the brain changes were located in the hippocampus. Predictably, the hippocampus (we each have two, one on either side of the brain) is

mainly responsible for long-term memory and spatial navigation. The researchers concluded that certain conditions can induce the growth of brain matter, contributing to the idea that nurture may support the development of greater memory than what nature genetically bestows on us. Turns out, London cabbies have, on average, the largest hippocampi of us all. (www.wired.com/2011/12/london-taxi-driver-memory/)



Unforgettable

We all know about photographic memory, which is image recall in excruciating detail. See something once, and remember it forever. Another form of exceptional memory—very rare, with only six known cases—is called hyperthymesia. Those with this ability can recall events and details from almost every day of their life. They can remember who won the 1992 World Series or what was in the headlines on June 20, 1978—even what the weather was like that day and what they were wearing. There are also musical savants who can hear a full concerto once and play it back, note for note. Tony DeBlois can play over 8,000 musical works from memory. And, of course, there are the World Memory Championships, the Extreme Memory Tournament, the Grand Master of Memory and more that we can't recall just now.

Keeping Memory Strong

Often people look for simple ways to enhance their memory, or for ways to avoid crippling brain diseases. One of the lead researchers in understanding and treating Alzheimer's disease is Dr. Rudolph Tanzi, Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School and Co-Director of the MassGeneral Institute for Neurodegenerative Disease at Massachusetts General Hospital. According to Dr. Tanzi, there are many ways one can enhance memory and delay the progression of brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's. Certain dietary supple-

ments may help. Huperzine A, a naturally occurring compound in *Huperzia serrata* (a club moss used in traditional Chinese medicine) increases levels of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter associated with memory and learning. Theoretically, increased levels of this neurotransmitter work to enhance memory and learning abilities. Many testimonials support the idea that this supplement actually works (beware of most claims). Additionally, supplements such as Percepta which, according to Dr. Tanzi, "remove the bad stuff in the brain: the pathology that accumulates with age that impairs your memory." These supplements work to enhance the brain and rid it of pathological debris.

In the progression of Alzheimer's, the brain loses synapses (linkages between nerve cells—in effect, memory pathways). But when we learn something new, our brain forms new synapses that are connected to older synapses, effectively reinforcing them and building up "synaptic reserve." Hence, to prevent the progression of Alzheimer's, it is important to continue active learning. Dr. Tanzi describes learning as "associating something new with what you already know. All learning is based on association." Theoretically, active learning—the constant formation of new synapses—should slow the progression

of the disease, since the new synapses and the reinforcement of older ones will offset the rate at which synapses are lost. Furthermore, Dr. Tanzi notes, "the more synapses you have, the more you can lose before you lose it." In other words, if you have many synapses—memory pathways—pertaining to a particular memory, you will likely retain the ability to access that memory even if a few of those pathways are lost.

The human brain continues to showcase its talent in everyday life. Our brain helps our body to perform many voluntary and involuntary tasks, all well coordinated. We can perform amazing tasks, like the accurate memorization of thousands of words or digits, or the memorization of languages, intricate, complex maps and routes. Although not everyone has the time, will or ability to perform amazing mental feats, we can all celebrate our brains as a blessing and a direct result of a perfect wave of evolution.



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ALL PHOTOS: SUGUMARAN SUPPIAH

MALAYSIA

A Visit to Amma Lucy's Siva Temple

A psychic Chinese girl in Malaysia grew up loving all things Indian/Hindu. Following her destiny, she created a temple and became its priest.

BY KAMALAVALI NAGAPPAN, MALAYSIA

AMMALUCY CHENG BEE HWA WAS born to Chinese Taoist parents on March 3, 1958, in Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia. Located on the Strait of Malacca, the gateway between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the area has been a cultural melting pot from time immemorial.

From six years old, Lucy would be glued to the black and white TV, watching Indian movies with subtitles. "In school I always gravitated towards things Indian—including mixing with Indian friends." Though her parents had followed a modern Chinese tendency to give their babies Christian names regardless of their own religion, her father was angry about her daughter's interest in all things Indian.

Fascinated by the full moon, six-year-old Lucy watched it the whole night from her window and still went to school the next day. "My sister would inform my father the next day and he would beat me with rattan." Now 61, she is still faithful to her moon watching.

"As an infant, I was sickly and I had a foot deformation, so I dragged one foot while walking. This defect corrected itself naturally at six years old when I became drawn to Siva." She also had eczema on her legs, so she wore knee-length socks to school. "My mother would drag me from one traditional healer to another for treatment. At 8 years old, an Indian healer told my mother that I would become a Hindu when I grew up. My mother assumed this meant I would marry a Hindu. She would not have been able to bear the truth, so the healer did not tell her that I would remain unmarried and be a Hindu priest. This healer advised that I not eat meat, as it would aggravate my eczema. This advice was followed and my eczema cleared up."

Lucy shared with me that she has psychic powers and channels messages from Siva. "I had the sixth sense in me from a young age. I will know if some danger is about to happen. I will inform the person concerned to be careful or not to go to a particular place on a certain day."

Until the age of 40, she led a relatively normal life. She moved north to nearby Muar in Johor Bahru, Malaysia's fourth largest city, a picturesque port on the estuary of the large Muar River. Its recorded history goes back to the 14th century; it is a popular tourist attraction and in 2017 was voted the cleanest city of South Asia. Lucy worked at Raja Specialist Maternity Gynaecological Centre in Muar; she has 23 years' experience as a nurse.

In 1997, while still working as a nurse, she started doing personal readings to help people who were having marital or other life problems, referring to a Chinese horoscope book and utilizing her psychic communication with Lord Siva. In 1998 she registered a company called Sivan Horoscope Muar, which she operated from a two-story house in a residential area. Eventually Lucy resigned her nursing job due to constantly falling sick. She became fully committed to vegetarianism, which helped in her recovery. She has never been interested in married life.

Kasi comes to Malaysia:

(Left) Devotees attend puja at the Kasi Visvanath temple in Sungai Abong; (right) Amma Lucy does an abhishekam to the Siva Lingam she acquired in Varanasi

Lord Siva Calls from Varanasi

In 2003, at age 45, Lucy's lifelong interest in Hindu religion and culture called her to Varanasi. She signed up with an ordinary tour group, which also included two Malaysian gurukul priests who were making the pilgrimage to the holy city. "My father wondered why I, being Chinese, wanted to go to a poor country like India, and that, too, to Varanasi." To this day, Lucy herself can't understand how she was drawn to Siva to the extent that feels her soul belongs not to her but to Siva.

Amma recounts her experience at the security counter at Varanasi's famed Kashi Vishvanath Temple, "The gurukals were let in. But I was given a thorough checkup, as they assumed I was an Uyghur national, though I was dressed in a sari and had my head covered in the Hindu style. I told them I was a Malaysian Chinese Buddhist Hindu. They were perplexed and asked me what on earth that meant. They were so suspicious, they checked my compact powder case for explosives."

All she knew was that she could not leave Varanasi without bringing back a Siva Lingam, which she bought at one of the shops. Arriving back in Muar, she placed the Lingam at her home altar. Once it was situated, she could not help but do the pujas daily. She also bought a framed picture of Siva in a shop in Muar to place in her house. As the power of the shrine grew, family and relatives began dropping by to join her early morning worship. "People also came to talk about their problems, and I did what I could to help them by encouraging them to think positively."

A Temple Is Born

She says "Slowly the group grew, and I had to think of moving into bigger, more proper premises." Using an inheritance from her father, in 2008 she bought several shop-lot units at Jalan Haji Abdullah, Sungai Abong, fifteen minutes from the center of Muar. On June 8 of that year, she had the groundbreaking ceremony for her new place of worship. For this ceremony it was necessary to have the founder's horoscope reading. The priest told her this was her last birth, and on her death she will "merge with the fire." She hired architect Sabathiar R. Pakrisamy from



Nalladal, Tamil Nadu to convert the existing structure into the temple. Three years later, on February 2, 2011, the consecration ceremony was held. She has been operating the temple ever since.

"Built along the lines of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, India, the Sri Kasi Visvanath temple in Sungai Abong resembles the Varanasi temple but with some adaptations. I wanted to put a marble Linga in the garbhagriha (womb chamber), but as this represented the northern style, I was advised against doing so by the locals. Hence I opted for the stone Lingam," says Amma.

Breaking into the male-dominated field of Indian priesthood is a difficult feat even for an Indian woman; what more for a Chinese? "There was a lot of resistance to take me on initially, but I persisted; and with the support of the other gurukals and of my favorite stars, Rahu-Ketu, I succeeded."

The temple itself is 22 feet wide by 69 feet long. The ornate main sanctum is centered towards the back. In the left rear corner is Amma Lucy's consultation room with a Vasuki Naga seat. This is often where she

sleeps. The second and third floors are used for meditation and gatherings.

Alone among all temples in Malaysia, this Sivan temple offers a dawn service on Mondays, Amavasya (new moon day) and Purnima (full moon day), starting with abhishekam at 4am and finishing with arati between 5:30 and 6:00. On other days, services start at 5:30am. Amma Lucy readily admits that she only knows one mantra—*Aum Namah Shivaya Namaha*, which means "I bow down to Shiva." Yet, with just this one phrase, she fills the hall with her mesmerizing voice. She also calls out devotees to sing songs during prayers. Speaking in the Malay language, she will ask those present—Tamil, Chinese and a handful of North Indian followers—to pray to Siva together so that Malaysia does well and the people live in good health and harmony. Devotees also practice the *adhi patham* walk in the temple—walking slowly, step by step, with one foot in front of the next.

Amma Lucy's place has become famous. Busloads of visitors from Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand throng to the temple during weekends, public holidays and other auspicious days. Amma says, "They learn about



Priestess and life coach: (clockwise from left) Amma Lucy on her Naga Vasuki seat where she counsels devotees; situated on the third floor, a seven-foot-tall Ardhanarishvara (Half-Female Lord) in the typical Kasi pose; the sleeping quarters for Siva on the second floor; a view of the three-story temple building

the importance of being silent during prayers. If someone talks during prayers, it affects the flow of things, and disturbs the person doing the puja, so they will get a good scolding. Those who come late will also be reprimanded after puja.

For Muruga Govinda Rajoo, 61, a retired teacher in Muar, going to the temple for the dawn prayers has become a routine affair. He said that initially the idea of dawn prayers every Monday morning was frowned upon and thought to be absurd, but now he feels a great loss if he is absent. "For the past four years I have never missed a single Monday morning puja. I found myself immersing in the ambience, vibrations and peace of the temple. I feel proud to be associated with this temple. Amma maintains a high standard of self-discipline. No noise, no cell phone ringtones. The slightest whisper can be heard by Amma, and devotees are always reminded to be silent."

Amma believes in a participatory approach, so devotees help in the rituals, for instance passing the puja light and flowers to Amma as she moves around the temple during puja times. She also prepares select devotees for full puja duties. Volunteers regularly help in preparing for puja, packing sweets and rice to be given out as prasadam, and cleaning the temple. When there is a shortage of hands, Amma does not hesitate to grab a mop and do the cleaning herself. She balks at cooking, though: "When I was young, I never learned to cook, as we had a kitchen helper at home. In the temple, the volunteers help in the kitchen. And my brother also often prepares dishes for me." Amma stresses that serving the temple in any way increases one's good karma and positive energy.

Kailasam Muthusamy, 72, another retired teacher, first came to the shop building before it was converted into a temple. "I am not a ritual person; I am more into welfare work. I am active in various NGOs, such as the Hindu Sangam, the Cancer Support group and Kiwanis Cub. Sivan Amma was helping poor people and guiding them spiritually. I don't come for the dawn prayers. It is



the needy that attract me, so I come to help whenever social activities are held. She used to have chanting sessions for adults and also for school children. I used to guide the school children in whichever way I can."

Amma Lucy's Consultations

Lucy holds consultations seated on the Vasuki Naga seat in the back room. "I don't do *jatagam* (horoscope) reading as such, as I have no training in this. When I began my company, Sivan Horoscope Muar, I did not know I would be building a temple. I did not know what other name to use for the company. When people bring their birth charts, I tell them I do not do that type of reading, but if they want they can tell me their problems and I will help them with advice and by seeking Sivan's help."

Kho Lai Heng, 73, a veterinarian, came for consultations with Amma Lucy in 2008 concerning a kidney stone. "She told me everything will be OK. True enough, later, when I went for my check-up, the doctor said I did not need an operation. After my first consultation with Amma, I became a volunteer. I am a free thinker, so I was attracted to this unique temple and the way she conducts things. She is strict on discipline, and as long as you follow the system, it is ok. I help prepare items for abhishekam, as well as registration of those who come for the dawn prayers." He says that if one observes Amma carefully during consultations one can notice Siva's presence in her. "You can see a subtle change for an instant as she seeks Sivan's help."

Amma Lucy advises against making vows, instead encouraging visitors to pray for everyone's health. "If one makes a vow and does not fulfill it, the curse will fall not only on



the person concerned but also on their future generations," she said. "This is why the Pradosam and Ammavasya prayers are good, as we can pray for our ancestors to negate any bad karma that has befallen us."

During personal readings, she advises devotees on how to progress in life and move on to greater heights. "Praying to Goddess Vasuki helps to reduce one's karma and to forgive the sins of our forefathers who did not fulfill vows they had made. One also prays to Vasuki for a peaceful life for the dead and to beseech their protection for the family," she explains. "I just use my innate powers to help people struggling in day-to-day life and to set them

onto the spiritual path. I don't like people dwelling too much on negative things. I tell them stay away from black magic, and asuras. If you are involved in magic, then don't come here. Referencing a Sanskrit phrase, Amma proclaims, there is just *matha* (mother), *pitha* (father), *guru* (teacher), *devam* (God)."

She urges devotees to be strong and take control of their life. "Thinking negative things is asuran's style. If your business is not good, don't think someone is casting a spell. Rather, work things out logically to overcome the situation. If you think otherwise, then it defeats using the vibhuti (sacred ash used in Hindu ritual). One must think positively."

us through word of mouth. I am something of a curiosity, which drives people from near and far to come and see me. Hearing me talk in Malay in the temple after puja is peculiar and unique for them. It leaves them baffled! She lets out a hefty laugh, "Sometimes, I can see the perplexed look on the faces of foreign visitors. They are perplexed that I, a Chinese lady, am doing prayers for the Hindu God Siva? 'And she is talking to us in Malay. Does

Siva understand Malay?' The Divine Being understands all languages, just as do souls."

She maintains a strict dress code. Attire must be veshti for men, and sari or a Punjabi suit for women, complete with shawl. If she sees men not wearing a veshti or women not wearing a shawl, they will get a stern warning in Malay. Some Indian women bring extra shawls, as inevitably someone will have forgotten theirs. She also reiterates



Mumbai's Street Food Rocks!

Join our correspondent as she savors the culinary delights lining the roads

By LAVINA MELWANI

A BILLION PEOPLE CAN'T BE WRONG—they swear by the tangy, sour-sweet, spicy street foods of India. And perhaps no city has more varied street foods than Mumbai, which gets its name from Mumbadevi, the Goddess worshiped by the Koli tribes of fishermen who originally inhabited the islands [see Her story p. 36-37].

Indeed, there is something homey and comforting about the street foods of India, almost like the hug of a mother. Not surprisingly, many of these treats are an indelible and long-standing part of Indian tradition. According to K. T. Achaya, author of *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, many of the street foods of today can be traced back at least to 1129 CE, when the Sanskrit work *Manasollasa*, attributed to King Somesh-

wara, mentions many of the delights. *Purana* was the puran poli flatbread of today, *sevika* our sev spiced potatoes and onions; *dhosa*—our dosa rice crepe and *idarika* was our idli, steamed rice cakes. The South's famed roasted vadas and bajjis (both fried snacks, often with onions or potatoes) are described in early Tamil literature. The *Varanaka-Samuchaya* of 1520 CE mentions many of today's Gujarati snacks, including deep-fried rotli flatbread, spiced paratha wheat flatbread and vegetable stuffed puffs called gujiyas. These snacks have stood the test of time.

Each city has some nibbles which are common to all of India and others which are special to the area. Mumbai is one city which has welcomed dreamers and strugglers from every state, so you find almost every regional food on its streets. Here we have showcased a sampling of the vegetarian offerings. Mind

you, while some of India's "street foods" are relatively simple, most are complex creations for which we have space for only a brief description [see sidebar].

Revisiting My Childhood Tastes

You can travel and sample the foods of the world, but you will still get the most delight from those of your childhood. For me, it's the spicy crunchy bhel mix I used to eat near Churchgate Station, on the streets of South Bombay, now known as Mumbai. The vendor had a makeshift stand and he would deftly add cubed potatoes, chopped onion and green chilies to the puffed rice and crunchy vermicelli pasta threads of chickpea or other gram flour, toss around mysterious sauces and powders and serve the concoction in a newspaper cone. The spicy treat had us in tears, as we munched with sniffing noses

On the streets: (left to right) Gopal roasts papad on a charcoal fire and smears them with butter, cheese or fruit mixed with spices; this cart in Zaveri Bazaar serves healthy fresh watermelon slices garnished with pineapple, lime and spices

and pleas of "Make it hotter!"

Those halcyon days of street food adventures came to mind, days when germs and Bombay belly were unknown to us and we would eat just about anything and survive. Now, decades later, I revisited the back-lanes of childhood, to taste and embrace the lost joys of street food. Although I have been living in the West, where we get sanitized and gentrified versions of these edibles created by trained chefs in hotels and restaurants, over a billion Indians can't be wrong. They still swear by the street eats which exist all over India—in villages, towns and cities—and the business of eating under the skies is alive and well.

In India you will find food vendors wherever there is a public area. Peanut, gram and coconut sellers ply the Queen's Necklace waterfront and the Gateway of India along with pappad-wallahs carrying their crispy wafers in a basket balanced on their heads. These hasty, tasty munchies are always light on the pocketbook (12 rupees for a samosa, up to 65 for biryani) and yet fill you up.

It is food you can carry with you as you run to catch a local train, bus or yellow taxi, or munch as you walk to where your feet can take you, on crowded road and overhead pedestrian bridges below which churns chaotic traffic.

Mumbai, without a doubt, is the epicenter of Maharastrian viands such as pav bhaji, vada pav, bhel puri, and ragda pattice. These are authentic Mumbai snacks and are found everywhere, in many of its 1500 restaurants but most deliciously in its roadside avatar as street foods, along with South Indian specials, Gujarati thali full meals and spicy chaats or snacks to wet the appetite.

While there are scores of vada pav wallas all over Mumbai, I went to a famous vendor who had started in the streets but became so popular with a mass following (and that before the days of social media) that he started his own shop where today long lines form to get a taste.

In Colaba, in Pasta Lane, you have Kailash Parbat, the old eatery which is now gentrified but which offers the spicy pani puris

What's on Your Plate?

bhel puri: puffed rice, potatoes & onions in a tangy tamarind sauce

chaat paapri: fried wheat crisps with chickpeas, potatoes, yogurt and tamarind

pistachio kulfi: traditional Indian ice cream flavored with pistachio nuts

jalebi: pretzel-like sweet of deep fried wheat flour soaked in orange sugar syrup

mithais: sweetened full cream milk reduced to a fudge-like consistency

paapri chaat: crispy chips of wheat flour topped with potatoes, chickpeas, yogurt and tangy chutneys.

pani puri: small crispy balls filled with vegetables and spiced water

pav bhaji: a thick vegetable curry served on a toasted bread roll

pista mithai: solidified condensed milk, sugar and ghee with ground pistachio nuts

ragda pattice: a white pea curry served over potato patties

vada pav: a deep fried spiced potato dumpling in a wheat flour bun



ALL PHOTOS HINDUISM TODAY



Sunset dishes: (left) roasted nuts, beans and fresh fruit are popular on Mumbai's beaches; (above) fresh potato vada in a bun; (below) bread and chutney pakodas and potato bhondas—both crispy fried fritters

and chaat papri which are the must-haves. It also offers mithais and specializes in Sindhi goodies. Around Holi, they bring out geyar, a flat, bigger version of the syrupy orange jalebis.

Mumbai is also famous for its Khau Gallis or "eating streets" where you can get a cornucopia of regional treats. Close to the Church-gate Railway Station is one such lane—a wondrous warren of small shacks which offer foods to the locals, working people and students. There is such a vast variety that you can be completely overwhelmed!

A bustling Khau Galli also exists in Zaveri Bazaar, a crowded jewelry district with countless gold wholesalers, ramshackle buildings and nonstop traffic. We tried a papad—the light deep-fried discs usually of gram flour—from Gopal, a young vendor who had quite a menu and kept producing different ingredients from his magic cart. Close by was a place where you could get spicy chole (chickpea curry) from huge vats and puris, fried ballooning breads.

Walking down the twisted lanes, I came across another vendor selling hot green chutney pakodas, a deep-fried treat I used to relish in my college days. This stall was disconcertingly right next to a stand selling footwear, and seemed to have a buzz of flies which are just about everywhere in the Mumbai heat. The pakoda salesman had an assistant who was splattering green chutney on the slices of bread and dipping these sandwiches in a besan or gram flour batter before deep frying in a vat of hot oil, right on the sidewalk. The result—crunchy, crispy golden chutney pakodas. Delicious!

Street-eaters can actually get quite healthy food, too. Other favorites watermelon chunks, as well as mixed bananas, guava, cucumbers and potatoes. These are all served fresh with

a generous squeeze of lemon juice and some spices which really wake up the taste buds.

Mumbai's beaches are not used for swimming or sunbathing as in other countries, but rather for family outings and strolls along the water's edge as the waves hit against the shore. The two best known are Chowpatty and Juhu; both are wonderlands of street food.

My childhood memories of Chowpatty are blurred, but I do have a faded black-



and-white photo which shows me as a five-year-old, sitting with my family on a bench, as they dig into plates of chaat. Chowpatty, with neon lights decorating the little seaside shacks, has still a fairyland look, and I am sure children today love the experience as I did. Be it vada pav, bhel, pista or pistachio kulfi—everything is available and for just a few rupees.

I also journeyed to Juhu Beach, and here the scenario had changed. While there were still cart vendors on the sands, they were a handful amongst the many strollers and frolicking families. Most vendors are now housed in a covered building on the beach. Here you have small stalls of every street food imaginable—sizzling tikkis (potato

turnovers), dosas, vadas and chaat of every variety. The bustling crowds love this modern setup, which is definitely an improvement for the vendors' lives and business.

As the golden sun was setting over the Arabian Sea, turning the sky a flaming orange, we left the expanse of the beach for the chaos of the crowded streets of Bandra. Arun, our photographer who is a Mumbai native, showed us where everyone goes to end a day of street food binging—a paan-wallah's stand.

Paan, a rolled-up betel leaf stuffed with condiments, is a mouth freshener and sweet ending to any feasting in India. Since Juhu Beach is in the suburb of Bandra, where many of the Bollywood stars live, some of these celebrities drive by in their limousines to pick up a fresh paan. The store is just a small hole in the wall, but noted celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan have stopped by for one of their famous juicy paans topped with inedible silver foil. That is the ultimate in street food, so I just had to have one! The young owner who was carrying on his father's legacy whipped up a special paan for me and shared some succulent Bollywood tales, too.

As I ended my street food journey, I realized that the past doesn't really vanish—it just realigns itself as memories and mixes in the present. I was happy to revisit my childhood haunts and see that the vibrancy of street food is still there, creating memories for a whole new generation.

You don't need a fortune to be happy here—a spicy plate of paapri chaat or a bhel puri will do the trick!

Lavina Melwani is a journalist who blogs at Lassi with Lavina (www.lassiwithlavina.com)

Hindu Heritage Endowment

Canada Law Dictates a Will for Those Who Did Not Leave One

Canadian residents, which now include over 400,000 Hindus, should know about the will their Province has written for them if they die "intestate"—that is, without a will. In these circumstances "the surviving married spouse is often surprised by the way the estate is divided," says Suzana Popovic-Montag, a partner at Hull and Hull LLP, a Toronto law firm specializing in estate, trust and capacity litigation.

Rather than a simple transfer of ownership to the bereaved spouse, Ontario law gives the survivor the first \$200,000 of the estate—the "preferential share." The remainder is then split fifty-fifty with a sole surviving child or one-third and two-thirds if there is more than one child. In British Columbia, the spouse's preferential share is \$65,000, with one-half of the remainder going to the spouse and one-half to the children. In Quebec, there is no preferential share; the estate is simply divided one-third to the surviving spouse and two thirds to the surviving children.



A written plan avoids such default formulas; but slightly less than half of Canadian adults have a will, much less a full estate plan, Suzana explained. "I find it difficult to understand why, after spending a lifetime amassing wealth, a person will not spend the relatively short time needed to plan for its distribution." One factor that makes planning urgent is "deemed disposition" taxes. In Canada, the death of an owner triggers a tax on capital gains on assets that are owed by a deceased. This tax can be a significant liability of the estate. Another estate planning mechanism is the attempt to limit or eliminate probate tax on death. Many use joint tenancy to avoid the tax, Suzana explained, but this may cede unwanted control to an heir during life or expose a parent's property to an adult child's creditors. "Joint tenancy can be a litigation nightmare in Canada," she cautioned.

We have seen situations where individuals use "elaborate tax planning to avoid probate tax. They will sometimes spend a highly disproportionate amount on legal fees to avoid what amounts to, at the end of the day, a nominal tax." However, procrastination, not probate tax, is the most common estate planning problem, according to Suzana. "I'm too busy to get to it." "I don't own enough to worry about." "If I write an estate plan, something is going to happen to me," are common excuses. Clients often need a triggering event—the birth of a child or a serious illness—to motivate them to get their documents in order.

Hindu Heritage Endowment encourages written estate plans, for the sake of supporters and their families, and because without a written bequest neither HHE nor any other good cause is likely to share in the estate. "Some children may make gifts to charities they know their parents cared for," Suzana notes. "Others show a strong sense of entitlement to the estate even before their parents' death." In Canada, a donor can pass bequests to qualified charities, like Hindu Heritage Endowment, with significant tax advantages to his or her estate.

More than a will is needed to complete an estate plan, she counsels. "Powers of attorney for property and personal care allow you to appoint someone to make vital decisions if you become incapable of making them yourself." Suzana encourages clients to prepare written estate plans to ensure that their wishes will be carried out efficiently and at the least cost. She points out that those who die without written plans generate controversy among heirs and unwanted legal fees. "Our firm does a lot of estate litigation that arises out of intestate situations."

For a list of Canadian attorneys and law firms specializing in estate planning, go to <http://www.canadianlawlist.com/>. For more information visit www.hheonline.org. For an estate planning toolkit write to hhe@hindu.org.



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Kizhake Ramachandran

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Rajendra Giri
Akshat Jaganmohan
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Total

Pazhassi Balamandira
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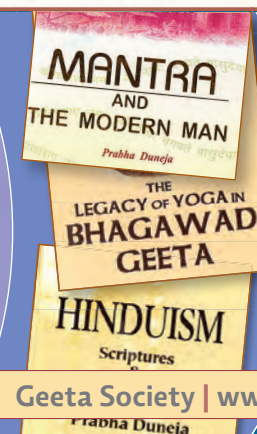


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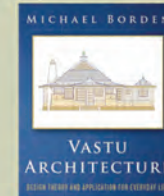
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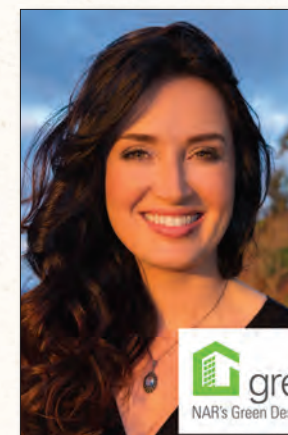
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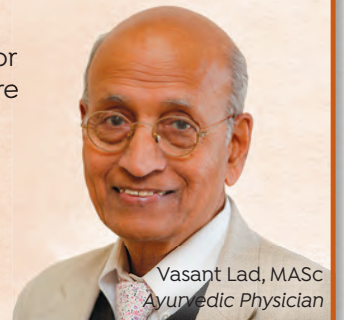
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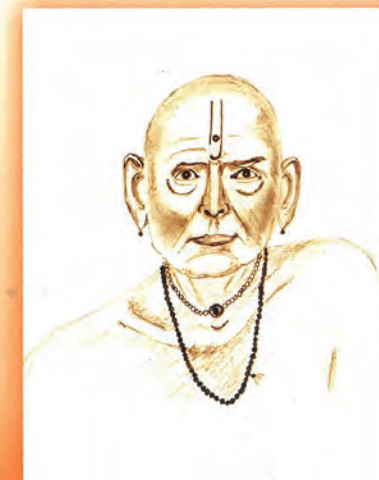
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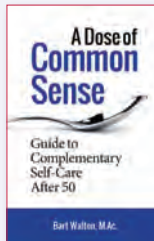
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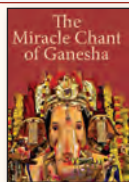
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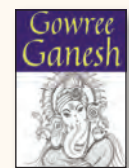
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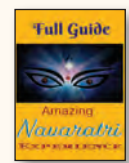
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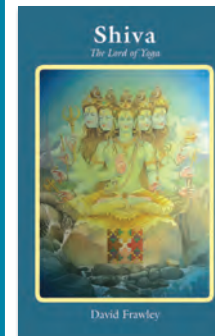
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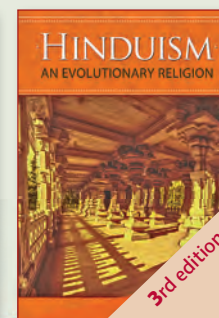
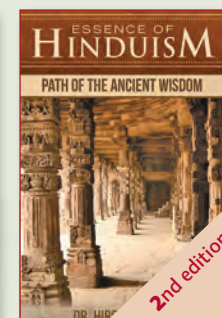
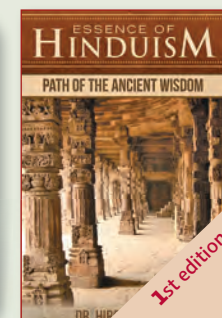
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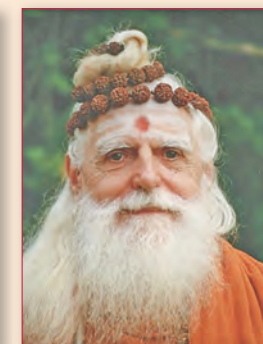
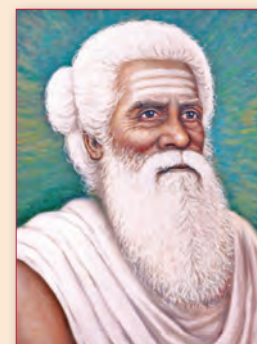
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But not my heart.
It beats,
It beats for Thee,
My Muruga.

The nights are long,
My eyes forlorn,
Waiting for Thee.

The future I see
In a vision:
My setting sun
On the horizon.

Meeting is no certainty
But, having met,
Parting is.

I fear not the door.

Like a river meandering
to meet the Ocean,
I shall reach Thee,
Thou, who art the balm
To my aching heart.

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