

HINDUISM

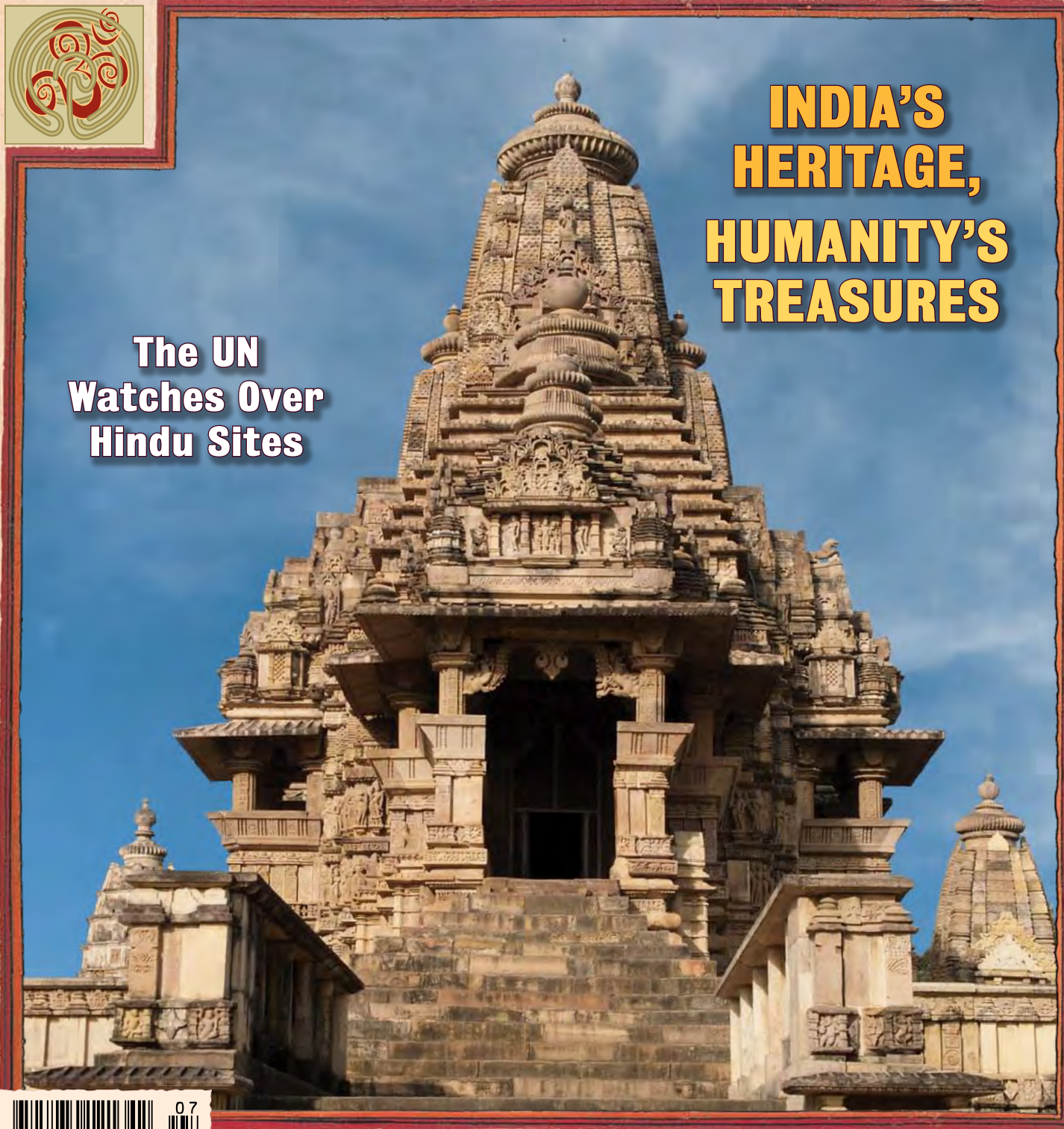
July/August/September, 2011 US\$7.95

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



INDIA'S HERITAGE, HUMANITY'S TREASURES

The UN
Watches Over
Hindu Sites



SHUTTERSTOCK



FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

COVER: Entrance to the Lakshmana temple, one of 17 in the Khajuraho complex in Madhya Pradesh, part of India's World Heritage Sites protected by UNESCO; two tiny palm-leaf manuscripts in the just-digitized collection of the French Institute of Pondicherry

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2011 • HINDU YEAR 5112
KHARA, THE YEAR OF HARDSHIP

Bodhinatha Veylanawami www.gurudeva.org

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ALL ABOUT UNESCO'S

Hindu World Heritage Sites of India

Thousands of guests visit Konark's Sun Temple in Orissa every year. The temple, a pride of India, is one of the many marvels that help us understand what life was like in ancient Bharat.

Lost empires, mighty civilizations, ancient ruins. Far from forgotten history, these are places where the India we know today was shaped. Explore the World Heritage Sites of the subcontinent . . . page 18

GLOBAL DHARMA

A USTRALIA

Shots Fired into Temple

VIOLENCE AT AUSTRALIA'S oldest temple, the Sri

Mandir Temple, in Auburn, Australia (near Sydney) was

raised to a shocking level when eight rounds were fired on the temple at night on March 19, 2011. The temple's CCTV cameras captured images of two men on foot in balaclavas firing the shots.

The temple's priest, Jatin-kumar Bhatt, who lives on the site, said he had been harassed

by youths in the past but he was scared by the shooting. "I have a family as well, three kids and my wife," he said. "Throwing eggs and bottles at the temple is an ongoing process but these bullets really put us in a panic."

The president of the Council of Indian Australians, Yadu Singh, said the shooting was a sign that attacks on the temple were becoming more serious. There were no worshippers in the building at the time of the shooting—unlike an incident last November when two windows were smashed by people armed with metal bars. "The bottom line is that something needs to be done, because it is not a one-off event," Singh said. "We have a right to exist. We have a right to practice our religion."

The temple was established in 1977. In 2001, a new building was erected with a contemporary design. The temple's main Deities are Radha Krishna. Other Deities include Ganesha, Lord Ram, Sita and Laxman, Hanumanji, Sri Nathji, Mahavir Swami, Shirdi Sai Baba, Jhulelal Bhagwan, Lord Shiva, Shankar/Paarvati Parivaar, Amba Mata and the Navagrahas. See www.srimandir.org



Bullet holes pepper the side of the temple, which was fortunately empty. Crime scene markers remain until the investigation is over. The escalation to a gun attack has Hindus in Australia deeply concerned.

INDIA / THE WORLD

Hot Trend: Past Life Regression

MODERN HYPNOTISM BEGAN in the early 1800s and drew in part on the Hindu teachings on breath control and concentration. Age regression is one of its forms, used in therapy to uncover and release early life experiences that may be the underlying cause of present day mental and even physical ills.

Hypnotic implant of suggestions is widely accepted, but age regression remains highly controversial. If the hypnotherapist takes you back to your birth and then asks, "Where were you before you were born?" are the

details revealed from an actual past life or a fantasy of the incredibly creative dream power of the human mind released from the fetters of distraction? Whatever you may believe, there is plenty of clinical evidence that it works. People are being healed. Past life regression has become a huge growth industry. With a Hindu majority population that believes in reincarnation, India now has over 150 practitioners.

Whether it's in the privacy of a conservative psychologist's office, on stage on Oprah or India's hot reality show "Secrets of Previous Lives" or at a Past Life Regression Party with your friends, there are hundreds of hypnotists ready to help you release the memories at

the root of your phobias. Debate over the practice is hot, which may be a good thing. Scientific auditing would root out fraud

but also verify the facts in many cases and push the truth of reincarnation even farther forward in global awareness.



Dr. Trupti Jayin hypnotizes a participant on India's popular reality TV show, Raaz-Pichhle Janam Ka ("Secrets of Previous Lives")

CAMBODIA

War Threatens Siva Temple

CAMBODIA'S FAMED PREAH Vihear Siva temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Sadly, one of its wings collapsed under Thai military bombardment in February. The temple lies right on the border between Thailand and Cambodia. A 1962 international court ruled that the temple belonged to Cambodia, based on early French

maps. But Thailand claims the area surrounding the temple. A Khmer Rouge refuge for three decades, the temple was opened after they surrendered, only to find itself at the center of another military skirmish early this year. Tensions still run high and the fighting continues, as everyone prays for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.



Military attachés of 12 countries visit the Cambodian Preah Vihear temple in March to survey damage by Thai mortar and artillery fire

TAMIL NADU

Stainless Steel Stitching Saves Temple

THE GOPURAM OF TAMIL Nadu's famed 1,250-year-old Siva temple, Kailasanathar, was on the verge of collapse. Rural Education and Conservation of Heritage (REACH Foundation) got involved. With three-foot wide cracks, replacement of stones would have been challenging and perhaps even dangerous.

REACH recruited Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M) a premier engineering institute, for advice. IIT's team analyzed the structure and deemed the cracks to be "non-progressive." Instead of manipulating the structure, the cracks were "stitched like cloth." Corrosion resistant high-chromium content stainless steel rods are placed at intervals spanning the cracks. They are anchored with epoxy, immobilizing both sides of the crack, which is then filled. Twenty locations were "sewn" together. See REACH's site:

conserveheritage.org

Kailasanathar was built by the Pallava king Dantivarman at the end of the 8th century CE. A unique feature of this Siva temple is the meditation chambers built into the outer periphery of the temple.



On Mahasivaratri in 2011, Dubai's Shiva/Krishna Mandir darshan queue grew to 125,000 and stretched for several kilometers

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Faith Runs Deep in Dubai

JUST THREE DAYS AWAY FROM India by ship, Dubai has a long history as a trading gateway between India and the Persian Gulf. Ships coming through the Strait of Hormuz find a calm, protected port at Dubai. As far back as the first millennium BCE,

Dubai's pearls were renowned all the way to China. Hindu gold and textile merchants thrived in ancient UAE. Since the discovery of oil, UAE has become one of West Asia's most developed nations. The 1963 population of 93,000 grew to 5.7 million

by 2009. Nearly two million are Indian nationals, including 33,000 millionaires and legions of workers, who collectively send 5 billion US dollars a year back to India.

A relatively liberal Muslim state, UAE is tolerant of other faiths. You may practice Hinduism freely at home. But there is only one Hindu temple in the whole country, Dubai's Shiva/

Krishna Mandir (built in 1958), to serve the Hindu population, estimated to be around 700,000. If your living space is a labor camp bunk, you won't have your own private shrine. To get blessings and a spiritual boost, you must stand in line for hours with ten thousand other faithful for a moment of darshan to make your weekly hook-up with the Divine.





TRANSITIONS

Beloved Artist Pai Passes On

WHEN ANANT PAI LAUNCHED the Amar Chitra Katha series in 1967, it was an instant hit. He was a visionary who helped millions of children delve into the fascinating treasure trove of Indian sacred stories, mythology, history and legends through comics. The shy but affectionate man became a legend in his own lifetime. He signed handwritten letters to his young fans as "Uncle Pai." He died on February 25, 2011, at the age of 81 after a massive heart attack.

The Amar Chitra Katha series left an indelible mark on Indian popular culture. Uncle Pai started the series after a stint with *The Times of India*. He was motivated by a TV quiz in which contestants rattled off answers related to Greek myths but

didn't know the name of Rama's mother. Most publishers were skeptical, but Pai persisted and the series finally began with the launch of the first title, "Krishna." He lent it the auspicious Indian touch by titling it number 11.

The early years were tough—there are anecdotes of Pai personally setting up display racks in restaurants. But today, Amar Chitra Katha sells about three million comic books a year in more than 20 languages, and has sold over 100 million copies since its inception. Pai is survived by his wife Lalitha. The couple did not have any children, though Pai was adored by millions of young readers. See:

www.amarchitrakatha.com

EXCERPTED FROM AN ARTICLE
IN THE TIMES OF INDIA



The Vidya Mandir campus has a Veda Patashala, a Namasankirtanam Patashala and an academic school with a total of 1,000 seats

EDUCATION

Shankara Math's New School

ONE OF FEW HINDU SCHOOLS of its kind, Kanchipuram's new Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Vidya Mandir at Rajakilpakkam, outside Chennai, offers

academic as well as religious studies. V. Shankar, a Mumbai-based businessman who initiated the project, explains, "Students will be taught *Vedas* and

Puranas every morning and evening, academic studies during the day and finish their school work before going to bed." Only Brahmin boys are accepted into the residential *patashala*, but girls may enroll for the academic studies program. Studies will be overseen by Kanchipuram's

Shankara Math in affiliation with the Central Board of Secondary Education. The Kanchi Shankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswati, inaugurated the new school on March 16, 2011. See:

www.srikanchimahaswamividyamandir.org

BRIEFLY...

INDIA'S TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE Library (TKDL) database will soon be online to pull the plug on brand and copyright claims of yoga teachers outside of India. Once the database is launched, patent offices across the world will have a reference point to check for asanas claimed by a yoga guru. Dr. V.P. Gupta, cre-

ator of TKDL, notes by way of example, "All the 26 Bikram's Hot Yoga sequences have been mentioned in Indian yoga books written thousands of years ago."

WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN claims that conversions have expanded the Christian population in Nepal to two million,

the number is likely closer to one million. But the concern is not all hype. There has been a proliferation of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which are now found in all 75 districts of the country. Researchers have identified 2,500 Christian places of worship in Nepal.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS IN MUMBAI are jumping with joy after the Bombay High Court ruled that Deities created for immersion

must be made of environment-friendly materials, such as soil, paper and natural colors. Plaster of Paris components and chemical colors, which are dangerous pollutants of wells, rivers and the sea, are not allowed.

TIRUPATI TEMPLE BANKED 2,590 pounds of gold in February, 2011 in exchange for government-issued, interest-bearing gold certificates. Last year it deposited 2,370 pounds of gold.



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

Protecting the Diaspora

The diaspora is our future, but it needs our help to overcome crises, trauma and alienation

BY DR. GREESH C. SHARMA

IHAVE BEEN TRAVELING THE world since 1970, and whether it was Fiji, Mauritius, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname or Bali, members of the Hindu diaspora treated me instantaneously like a long-lost cousin. I felt safe, "local" and immediately part of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "the worldwide family." My inspiration comes from many beautiful personal

encounters with Indians all over the world, from Haiti to Hindustan. There is no greater pilgrimage than visiting the countries where the Indian diaspora have settled.

Visiting 106 countries, I came to notice that underneath the smiles, hospitality, warmth and affinity, the Hindu diaspora suffers from poverty, alcoholism, domestic violence, depression-suicides, unemployment, alienation, isolation and a lot more. I have witnessed the threats of Christian missionaries proselytizing and splitting Hindu families, Islamic terrorism, racial discrimination and blackmail. In essence, the Indian diaspora in the majority of the countries in Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Pakistan and Bangladesh are living under the threat of racial-religious-political oppression. Their choices are nil to few and their desperation is beyond imagination.

With 27 million non-resident Indians living in 150 countries, clearly the Hindu diaspora needs to work as a gestalt to manage its inherent vulnerabilities regardless of national boundaries. The Hindu virtues of nonviolence, accommodating others regardless of their ulterior motives and downplaying their own faith, culture and tradition makes Hindus invisible and unmistakably soft targets. Yes, they are hardworking, law-abiding, family-oriented, entrepreneurial and loyal to the societies in which they have settled. But it would be an illusion to fantasize that they are prosperous, safe, empowered and able to live peacefully in the sanctuary of their homes and temples.

This was the understanding that led me to



establish Vanaprastha Corps in 1992. Since then mental health/medical/addiction treatment camps have been carried out in Fiji, Mauritius, Zambia, Cambodia, Nepal, Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. The mission is to empower the Hindu diaspora wherever there is crisis and trauma and to enlist rich, resourceful, retired professionals with necessary specialties to coordinate and provide

needed services.

Vanaprastha Corps has been reaching out to Hindu communities by offering counseling, guidance, referral resource identification, providing medicines, books and equipment, lectures, training and direct treatment. The process begins when a leader in a community, government, mental health department or NGO requests assistance. Then the exact needs for services and programs are identified, a service delivery program and timetable planned, interdisciplinary volunteers recruited, and finally the treatment camps are conducted.

All volunteers pay their own expenses. Programs usually take place in university premises, government buildings, community centers or mandirs, and include lectures and workshops to train local volunteers as well as give direct treatment and consultation for patients. Local professionals and community leaders are involved in every aspect in order to promote networking and follow-up services once our team leaves.

Apathy is an anathema for the Hindu diaspora. If we protect the Hindu diaspora, it will protect us and future generations. We are in it together no matter what country we find ourselves in. Let us begin the process of networking, identifying our needs and strengths and searching for solutions collectively.

GREESH C. SHARMA, PHD, is a psychologist and director of Lower Bucks Institute of Behavior Modification in Morrisville, Pennsylvania. E-mail: drgreesh@yahoo.com



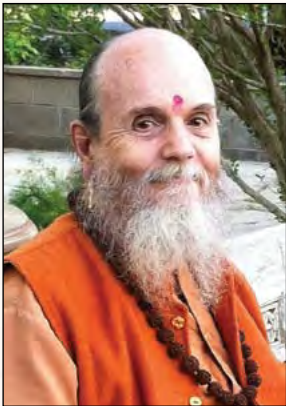
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Be a Spiritual Leader!

Uplift the spirit of everyone you meet by expressing kindness, gratitude, appreciation and encouragement

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

FROM AUGUST 28 THROUGH 31 OF THE YEAR 2000, two thousand of the world's preeminent religious and spiritual leaders representing the many faith traditions, gathered at the United Nations in New York City for a "Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders" to pledge themselves to work for peace. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, was among the Hindu delegates. Speaking at one gathering, he delivered the message: "For World Peace, Stop the War in the Home." The talk was also published as his Publisher's Desk column in the November/December 2000 issue:



"When asked by the United Nations leaders how humanity might better resolve the conflicts, hostilities and violent happenings that plague every nation, I answered that we must work at the source and cause, not with the symptoms. That is what we do in ayurvedic medicine, focus on the causes, on establishing the body's natural balance and health. That way, we are not always working with illness and disease, we are spending time and resources instead to establish a healthy system that itself fights off sickness. To stop the wars in the world, our best long-term solution is to stop the war in the home. It is here that hatred begins, that animosities with those who are different from us are nurtured, that battered children learn to solve their problems with violence."

The summit caused me to reflect on the difference between a religious leader and a spiritual leader. The conclusion I came to is that a religious leader is a leader of a recognized religion. A spiritual leader is someone who is expert in uplifting the spirit of others. Some religious leaders are also spiritual leaders, and some are not. Some spiritual leaders are also religious leaders, and some are not. My Gurudeva was definitely both. In fact, he was an expert in uplifting the spirit of others no matter what their religion or ethnicity. How did he accomplish this? By speaking encouraging words. You, too, can be a spiritual leader. Simply make it a point to say something encouraging, complimentary and high-minded to everyone you meet. Their day will be brighter because of it, and so will yours. Your words may be just what they needed to escape a moody morning and discover a new energy for the day. Isn't that what spiritual leaders do, change the energy, elevate the spirit so people connect with their intuition and open themselves to the highest course of action for the day?

When encountering people you know, you can ask about some aspects of their life, such as their children or recent travel, and show an interest in their well being. Gurudeva was skilled at this form of empathy. As a result, he was an important source of upliftment and encouragement for many people on Kauai from all walks of life. Meetings are excellent opportunities for encouraging others.

Listen attentively to each individual's ideas, and when they are good ideas be sure to compliment them. If someone is a bit shy in presenting an idea, make a few encouraging remarks to help him or her feel more confident. Control yourself by not dominating every meeting with your ideas and presence.

Another way to be a spiritual leader is to uplift others by expressing gratitude for their help, friendship and presence in your life. Those who are full of gratitude lack nothing. They are filled with divine energy, complete, with nothing to require for their further happiness, nothing to regret. Their

spirit is whole, their life is rich beyond measure. So, naturally, they are the spiritual leaders to others who feel less than perfect in their lives. Gratitude may seem an ordinary thing, but it is the touchstone of spiritual maturity.

Showering your gratitude on others teaches them of their own fullness. One of the first ways to do so is to greet everyone with a good morning, afternoon or evening, and a smile. Keeping your mood elevated lifts everyone around you. Being kindly reminds them to show others kindness. Be the opposite of a complainer.

Unfortunately, it is an all-too-common way of our times that when something is done that is good, helpful or loving, it is overlooked, treated as something expected. No acknowledgement is shown, no appreciation is expressed. But if a shortcoming is seen, everyone is swift to point it out, and often in an unkind manner!

Let's look at some common examples of not being grateful or expressing appreciation. 1) The mother of two teenage boys works hard every day to take care of her sons' needs at home and at school. They take her efforts totally for granted and never say, "Thanks, Mom." 2) A wife is faithfully attentive to her husband's needs and supportive of his career. The husband never bothers to acknowledge her constant care. 3) A husband works hard to financially support his family, even toiling weekends to earn extra income. The wife, thinking it his duty, never expresses any gratitude for his tireless efforts. 4) A supervisor takes extra time with his staff to help improve their skills and advance their position. But not one of them ever expresses thanks for his leadership.

Gurudeva developed two sadhanas in this area, one for gratitude and one for appreciation. He advised fulfilling the sadhana of gratitude first, then the sadhana of appreciation. The sadhana of gratitude is to take out paper and pen and list all the good that has come into your life during the past five years. As memory is stimulated, the list will grow. Gurudeva suggests that if you find yourself not able to even recall one good thing, write several times, "I am a spiri-



tual being of light maturing in the ocean of experience." This will stimulate a positive memory, which will soon be followed by more. Feelings of loving appreciation will begin to flow toward those who helped you in the good times. Feelings of acceptance and forgiveness will also well up for the bad times. This sadhana echoes the wisdom found in the *Turukural's* chapter on gratitude: "It is improper to ever forget a kindness, but good to forget at once an injury received."

Focusing on the good things in our life leads naturally to the sadhana of appreciation. This sadhana is to approach those to whom you are grateful and tell them, while looking deep into their eyes, how much you esteem and value them. Be specific. That is the key. Don't just say something general, like, "You are wonderful." Rather, point out specific qualities so that the person knows you really, deeply feel what you are saying, that it is not just a surface compliment. Convince him or her that you are sincere by your kind words and smiling face.

To prepare yourself for the appreciation sadhana, you can practice on yourself! Stand before a mirror, looking into your eyes, and say aloud, "I am grateful to you and appreciate your being in my life." You can then describe some of the many good actions you have done during the past five years. Once you feel comfortable appreciating yourself, you are ready to begin appreciating others. This exercise helps overcome any shyness you may feel.

Special events are great times to express appreciation. Birthdays are perfect opportunities, as are Mother's Day, Father's Day and Grandparent's Day. In many nations there is even a bosses day. A few years ago a number of our youth devotees in Malaysia held a surprise Mother's Day event. They wrote to me about it: "After the normal satsang events, bhajans and meditation, we announced our surprise, got each amma (mom) to come forward and stand in front, and each of her children put a huge garland on her and gave her a bookmark, a card, and a beautiful single rose package (all done by us),

Expressing appreciation: *Telling people how important they are in our lives can be done with a simple note and a gift, or, more effectively, in person as you look into their eyes and recount their positive qualities and contributions*

.....

and prostrated to each amma's feet, hugged her and wished her well on this day. By now, most ammas were already busy wiping away tears from their eyes!"

One of the obstacles to expressing appreciation is the fact that, unfortunately, no one else is doing it. Extra courage then is needed to be the first to do so. For men, the culture may say without saying that real men don't express appreciation. In that case, even more courage is required!

A less personal way to express appreciation is in a note accompanying a gift. A gift that you make yourself conveys care and heartfelt sincerity.

My guru encouraged us to express appreciation to family members and friends, spiritual mentors, business associates and community leaders as often as we can. Remember, when sharing your love with others, be specific, smile and realize you are helping change the world for the better. Those you uplift will learn from your example and later uplift others in their life.

He wrote: "We are essentially pure souls temporarily living in a physical body. We can and should use our God-given gift of free will encased in love to make a difference in the world today, even if it is in a small way. All of us making the same difference together do so in a big way. Shishyas should be grateful to their gurus, husbands to their wives, wives to their husbands, parents to their children, children to their parents, students to their teachers and teachers to their students. It's far more effective to praise others and appreciate what we have than to find fault and complain about what we don't have!"

Best Issue Ever

This issue of HINDUISM TODAY is the best, most inspiring issue ever! The cover story on Bharat Sevashram Sangha—completely ignored by Western media while they doted on Mother Teresa—is a great revelation, seeing all the *seva* they are doing from such pure beginnings. In the back of my mind had been the doubt, “If moksha and reaching God is the goal of all life, why are so few interested in it?” In this issue, here they are! They have always been here, but just didn’t get much press. The feature article on “Our Sacred Earth” will ignite Hindu spirits worldwide, as this makes the obvious-but-heretofore-unspoken connection between ancient dharma and current needs of the planet. I know from time to time I’ve written exulting “best issue ever,” that’s because you continue to outdo the past with each succeeding gem of a magazine.

EASAN KATIR
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I am very much impressed by the contents of HINDUISM TODAY, which are selected with a view to enlighten the people who have only a limited understanding of Hinduism. By publishing well-researched articles, you are rendering valuable service to the Hindu brethren. Keep it up.

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MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA
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Bharat Sevashram Sangha

We are extremely happy to receive the issue of HINDUISM TODAY featuring an article about us (“India: At Her Service,” Apr/May/ Jun 2011) on Shivaratri day when we were celebrating a three-day-long Hindu Dharma Sanskriti Sammelan, which saints and sevaks, educators and culturalists as well as 500 monks from around our organization attended. Each was given a copy of the magazine, and all praised the interest shown by you. We are very much obliged to the editors, who showed an extra interest in our activities.

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Thank you for your article on Bharat Sevashram Sangha with whom our family has been connected for generations. My maternal grandfather, the late Girindra Nath Roy Chowdhury, a well known lawyer-activist of Indian independence movement, was a neighbor of Swami Pranavananda Maharaj in their native Faridpur District, now Madaripur, and they knew each other. We have grown up seeing Bharat Sevashram reach-

ing door to door helping the destitute after floods, draughts, cyclones, tornados, in refugee camps, during riots and pogroms.

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Amma’s Golden Temple

Thank you for the front cover dedication to Amma’s Golden Temple (Jan/Feb/Mar 2011). I have been a devotee of Narayani Amma since 1999 and have witnessed first-hand the miracles which are occurring in South India under Amma’s blessing. Although your article initially focused on the Golden Temple, I was pleased to see your description of the humanitarian and service programs. With Amma’s blessing one of the most impoverished areas of southern India now has healthcare, food and education. The lives of thousands of people have been transformed. I have visited Sri Puram yearly since its consecration and I continue to marvel at the transformation of individuals as they walk the star path, listening to Vedic chants and reading messages of universal truth. I wish this experience for all human beings.

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Salvific Exclusivity

Regarding the letter by Dilip Amin in the Apr/May/ Jun 2011 issue, the writer is 100 percent wrong when he says that Judaism teaches that there is only one way to salvation. On the contrary, the *Talmud* states, “the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come.” Not only that, Judaism teaches that most all of us will get there.

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Religion, Laws and Sexuality

In the August 2010 ruling which overturned California’s Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage, a witness asserted, “Religion is the chief obstacle for gay and lesbian political progress.” Why does religion play such a central role in debates about homosexuality?

The first question that should be addressed is “What functions do sex and sexuality play in our lives?” For many people, these have central roles that influence nearly every other aspect of their lives. For many others, they are relatively minimal. The second question is the more problematic one, at least for religious minded people: “What determines if and when sex is a good or a bad activity?”

Within the Hindu tradition, two of the

key criteria for determining whether or not an activity is right or wrong are: 1) Does the activity cause anyone harm? and 2) Can the activity bring one closer to realization of the divine?

Add to this the belief that most Hindus hold the concept “live and let live.” The result is a general tolerance for a wide range of lifestyles and forms of loving and living. Of course, not all Hindus are unanimous on this point. Nevertheless, most Hindus understand that focusing on one’s own lifestyle and actions is far more important and necessary for spiritual growth than worrying about what others are doing. There are far more important issues and individuals with which religious minded people should be concerned, such as those who choose to hate and perpetuate violence.

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The Mauritian Spiritual Park

When I read the article “The Mauritian Miracle” (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) by Vel Mahalingum, I felt a sudden urge to revisit that beautiful island nation in the Indian Ocean I had been to 22 years ago. My wish was fulfilled when I was recently invited to participate with an 82-person contingent from Malaysia to promote social and cultural ties between our two countries. During our trip, I requested a newly made friend to take me to the Spiritual Park. After driving for an hour through sugarcane fields and hamlets, a large sign for the park suddenly emerged. Walking into the park, there He was, our famous Lord Ganesha gazing at us as if in anticipation of our visit. He was huge, His five faces gazing at all sides of his seven-acre domain. After washing our feet, we collected some flowers from the garden and placed them at His feet. I sat down at Lord Ganesha’s feet and began chanting mantras, then went silent in meditation for several minutes. The park itself was well-maintained, with lots of pine trees, coconut and lychee fruit trees. Clusters of bamboo and flower plants adorned the park. After spending about two hours there, my friends and I left the park with enlightened hearts, the spiritual vibrations so pleasing that I said to myself that I would one day come back to visit this enchanting place. Thank you, Gurudeva, for your great contribution to the people of Mauritius.

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USA, Barely a Christian Nation

An increasing number of Americans are identifying with Eastern spiritual religious

practices. Just consider the growing popularity of yoga, meditation, tai chi, qigong. According to a Pew Forum Research poll, a whopping 24 percent of American Christians believe in reincarnation, a foundational concept in Hinduism. Even more striking is this: the same Pew Forum poll discovered 65 percent of American Christians believe that “many religions can lead to eternal life.” Included in that group were 37 percent of evangelical Christians who, in the past, argued fervently that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. Again, the idea that there are many paths to God is a foundational Hindu principle as outlined in their scripture, the *Rig Veda*: “Truth is one, but sages speak of it by many names.”

It seems that though America is a Christian nation, it is only barely so. More and more evidence continues to present itself that Christianity is losing its grip on many Americans. Why is this? Why are traditional Christians in America embracing Eastern spiritual philosophies in ever growing numbers? The answer is not complex: they’re tired of rigid theologies which separate people and suspicious of doctrines which are an affront to reasonable thought.

They are drawn to Eastern thought because practices such as yoga and meditation can give them a spiritual life without the baggage of Christian theology and doctrine. In the East, the spiritual approach is to harmonize,

while in the West, Christianity has sought to categorize: the “saved” and the “unsaved.” In the East, they have spiritual teachers whose role is to expand consciousness. In the West, Christianity has theologians who define and therefore confine. Christianity places the focus on differences. Hindus are comfortable with multiple viewpoints of truth, all facets of the same Ultimate Reality. Christianity has a much lower tolerance for differing viewpoints, declaring that there is but one truth, the one preached by Christians.

Given the corner which Christianity has painted itself into, it is not surprising that the number of Americans who say they are “spiritual but not religious” (meaning they don’t attend Christian churches) continues to grow. A recent *Newsweek* poll (2009) revealed that 30 percent of Americans define themselves that way, up from 24 percent in 2005. As more Americans discover the openness of Eastern spiritual paths, it’s a number which will continue to grow.

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Are Paths Many?

I read with revulsion the letter to the editor “Are Paths Many?” (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) where a Christian attempted to berate Hindus and HINDUISM TODAY for daring to be both pluralist and proud of being Hindu. At

one point he stated that he doesn’t believe that “Truth is One, paths are many” and said that this does not make him intolerant. Actually, it does indeed. The concept of religious exclusivism is indeed the central point from which all religious intolerance emanates.

Belief in the validity of other religions as spiritual pathways does not mean that they are “identical,” as he put it. A phrase that I have come to use as a personal motto is “The only false religions are those that believe in the existence of false religions.” While not all Christians believe that their religion is the only “true” religion and all others are “false,” I cannot respect that kind of intolerance any more than I can respect racism.

The writer’s attempt to cleverly disguise his intolerance should not be overlooked or tolerated. He can claim he respects Hinduism and this magazine all he wants, but it is apparent that such is not the case.

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or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

A Steady Flow of Grace

Helping families and youth to reconnect

IT ALL BEGAN WHEN A MEMBER OF the Krishnans’ extended family discovered HINDUISM TODAY about 20 years ago. Very gradually, one by one, sisters, uncles, husbands, nephews, grandparents, nieces, sons and daughters also began reading and appreciating the magazine, a process still going on today. “It has reconnected us with our Hindu faith,” concludes Mrs. Sakuntalai Krishnan, a supervisor in Singapore’s police department. Mr. Krishnan is a retired executive for Shell Oil.

In 2001, ten members of the family pilgrimaged together to HINDUISM TODAY’s home in Hawaii, there to meet the founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

“Previously, our religious life consisted of periodic elation, following some talk or event, which would soon die down. Then we’d start all over again,” explained Mrs. Krishnan. “But HINDUISM TODAY comes to us on a regular basis, bringing new knowledge with each issue, gradually

making the big picture clearer. It is our constant flow of grace.”

“Because we all have the same inner understandings, our family finds it easier to be of one mind. Whenever something comes up, we don’t worry, knowing we’ll find a good solution soon enough. We feel fortunate and each time we meet someone who’s likely to appreciate the magazine, we give him or her a copy, or we’ll share a quote from it.”

The Krishnans have given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. “It is our thank-you. We want the magazine to help other families as it has helped ours. We are happy to see HINDUISM TODAY’s growing presence in digital media, which captivates youth. We saw this firsthand with our son Vasaant, who has taken a keen interest in the magazine publisher’s presentations on the web.”



The Krishnans: “We have seen in our family, and now in others as well, HINDUISM TODAY’s power to make people’s lives better”

If, like the Krishnans, you would like to contribute to the upliftment of families and youth, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund or including it in your estate plan. Read about the fund at www.hheonline.org/productionfund. Subscribe to the Production Fund e-newsletter at: www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Ask for our Planned Giving Toolkit by contacting one of our monastic staff at 1-808-634-5407 or hhe@hindu.org.

QUOTES & QUIPS

The great soul of India will topple our material world.

Romain Rolland (1866–1944), *French thinker and Nobel laureate*

He who is called Brahman by the jnanis is known as atman by the yogis and as Bhagavan by the bhaktas. But even That disappears when the aspirant reaches nirvikalpa samadhi. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

All other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

The human being is a marvelous thing. Imagine, a creature that can talk to God Himself! **Dada Vaswani**, *leader of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes which see reality. **Nikos Kazantzakis** (1883–1957), *Greek writer*

A quiet mind is all you need. All else will happen rightly, once your mind is quiet. As the Sun makes the world active with its rays, so does self-awareness change the mind. In its light, energies wake up and work miracles without effort on your part. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *Hindu sage*

All things are good when we learn to master them, but no thing is good when it masters us.

Reincarnation is an ancient, mainstream belief in Judaism. Even the great Torah scholar, commentator and kabbalist, Ramban, attributed Job's suffering to reincarnation. In the Jewish concept, the soul is placed in a body in order for a person to attain spiritual perfection. If one didn't take full advantage of the opportunity to perfect the soul, he may be reincarnated to complete the soul's perfection. **Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman**, *teacher at the Ohr Somayach scripture school in Jerusalem*

DID YOU KNOW?

Maybe We Are All From Jwalapuram, India

THE HUMAN BODIES THAT WE NOW INHABIT TO LIVE ON THIS planet were, most scientists agree, developed in Africa. Anatomically modern humans originated there about 200,000 years ago, after a long evolutionary process.

Intriguingly, analyses of human DNA have detected a population bottleneck sometime around 60,000 years ago, when only a minuscule number of humans, fewer than 10,000 individuals, survived an unknown event. All of us *Homo sapiens* are their descendants.

What could have caused such a dramatic decrease in human population? The leading theory is that a major volcanic eruption which happened at that time is the culprit. When the Toba supervolcano on the island of Sumatra exploded, it spewed a catastrophic amount of particles into the atmosphere. A blanket of ash covered several continents. Climate changed abruptly, poisonous gases tainted the Earth and few human settlements—or perhaps even just one—managed to survive.

Scientists are investigating where human populations were living at the time of that eruption. It was in India, not in Africa, that the most convincing evidence was found so far. Recent archeological discoveries show that a human population certainly survived in the Jwalapuram Valley, South India. Its remnants can be dated to both before and after the Toba Cataclysm.

Given the cohesive genetic identity of those who endured the population bottleneck, scientists believe that a few groups with individually homogenous populations

survived—or maybe one single, highly diverse community.

A possible, yet speculative, portrait that this evidence paints of the past is that the humankind we know began in South India, a tribe of heroic survivors, who were perhaps more ingenious and skilled than others who perished. From there, they spread all over the Earth, quickly developing technology and mutating into the different races we know today.



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO



4-28-11
Cyan Jenkins

For Earth, in a sense, it matters little if we extract energy from petroleum or from eating our vegetables: all of it comes from the planet. Now, a human being at rest runs on 90 watts; that's how much power you need just to lie down. And when you're physically active, you'll need about 250 watts. So how much energy does our Western lifestyle require? When you add up our food calories plus the energy needed to run the computer and the air-conditioner and more, you get over 11,000 watts. A single New Yorker needs more energy than a blue whale, the biggest animal

that has ever existed. That is why our lifestyle is unsustainable: Earth just can't do it. **Geoffrey West**, *British physicist*

An imperfect world goads us to improve. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Just sit quietly and you will hear swami speaking to you. All are swami. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami**, (1872–1964) *Sri Lankan mystic*

Who there be who, like our Lord, knows

the great and the small, the difficult and the facile? Only they who, like a tortoise, withdraw the five senses under their shell. They hear and see the here and the beyond, and have all impurities dispelled. **Tirumantiram**, *verse 133*

Hinduism is an orthodox religion, conservative in its ways and yet pliant and understanding. It is simultaneously the most demanding spiritual path and the most forgiving. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Sampradayas and Paramparas

THE VEDAS HAVE LONG DECREED, "TRUTH IS ONE, BUT SAGES call it by many names." The decentralized structure of Hinduism—the world's most tolerant and comprehensive religion—is an affirmation of this creed.

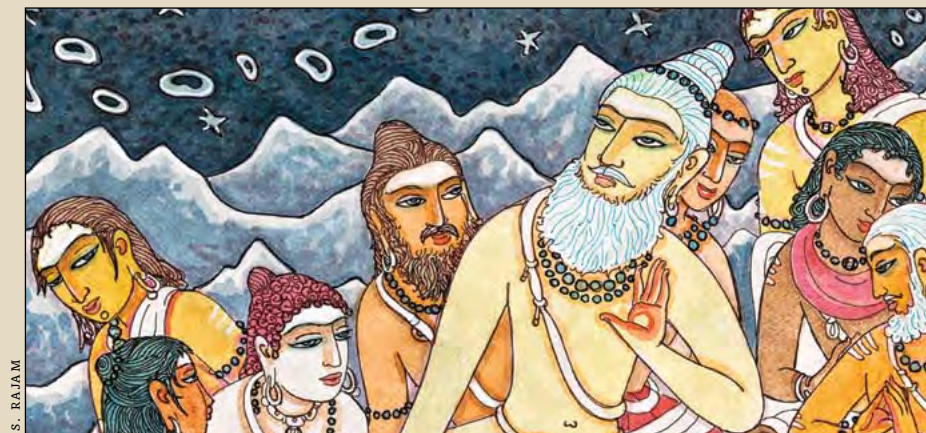
Having no single religious authority does not mean Hinduism lacks order. Tradition is the basis for its system, giving credence to spiritual preceptors of recognized groups. Wisdom, along with the belief that advanced souls are continuously being born to teach, adds flexibility when there is no precedent.

A *sampradaya* is a theological and philosophical school with specific practices, views and attitudes transmitted by each successive generation of followers. A *sampradaya* assures continuity with the past. Each one may hold several distinct lineages of gurus that teach its main tenets; such lineages are called *paramparas*.

A *parampara*, meaning "uninterrupted series," is a line of spiritual gurus. In a *parampara*, a chain of mystical power and

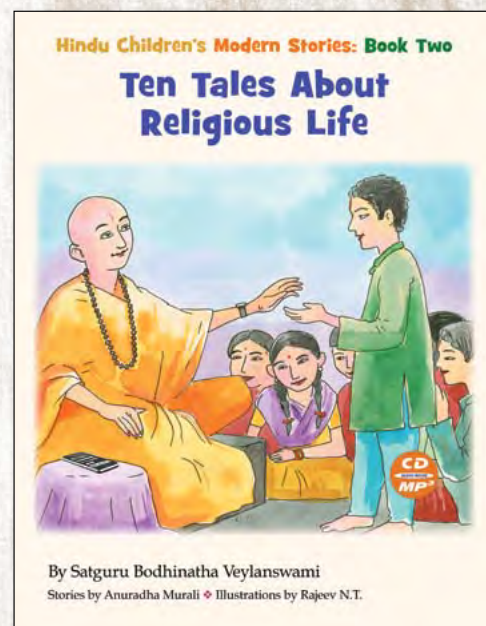
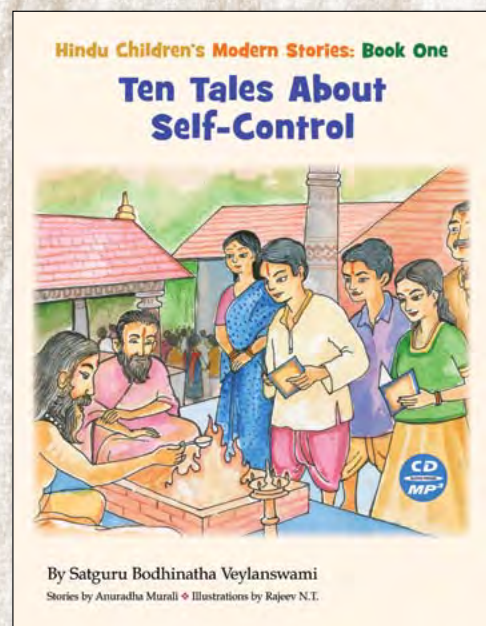
continuity of authority is passed from guru to guru, each teaching within the philosophical realms of his or her *sampradaya*.

A good example lies in Hinduism's Vaishnava denomination, which has four major *sampradayas*: Sri (espoused by Ramanuja), Brahma (Madhvacharya and Chaitanya), Rudra (Vishnuswami and Vallabhacharya) and Kumara (Nimbarka). Within the Kumara *sampradaya* of Sri Nimbarkacharya, a major *parampara* is headed today by Swami Sri Gopal Sharan Devacharya and his guru, Swami Sri Lalita Sharan Devacharya.



S. RAJAM

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FROM THE AGAMAS

Urban Planning According to Agamas

Exploring one of the earthy sections of the *Kamika Agama*: town design

The following text is from the *Kriya Pada* of *Kamika Agama*, chapter 30, entitled "Directions for ascertaining appropriate locations for those who live in the villages and other settlements." It is part of a long section on architecture which discusses with the construction of temples, Deities and types of buildings.

NOW I WILL EXPLICITLY TELL YOU THE APPROPRIATE DWELLING place for those who maintain their livelihood in the major divisions and the minor divisions of villages and such other settlements. The knowers of the divine forms (*daivajna*), astrologers, physicians hailing from the medical tradition, traditional barbers, dispensers of medicines, poison-removers, blacksmiths and other metal workers, soothsayers well versed in astrology—these are the eight kinds of people eligible to occupy the major divisions of the village. Oil merchants, potters, barbers, flower merchants, musical instrument dealers, those who keep the cows and beasts of burden, those who live by carts, wheels and such other tools, traditional traders, weavers, laborers, washermen, those who belong to the lowest *jati* (a community following a hereditary occupation)—these are the twelve kinds of people who are entitled to live in the minor divisions of the villages and other settlements.

Oil merchants are to be in the west, or alternatively in the east. Potters are to be in the northeast, north or east; barbers to the south-east or the east. It is recommended flower sellers be in the northeast. Those dealing in musical instruments and their accessories should be in the north. For those who live by making use of animals and other beings, the location should be either in the west, northwest or southwest. Those who maintain their life by making use of carts, wheels and such tools, should be in the south and north. It is declared in the *Sivagama* that the location for the traders by *jati* is to be in the northwest. The location in the south is fit for the weavers.

The exact location is to be determined by reasoning, according to the situation and according to the superiority of *jati* denominations. The location for the superior classes should be near the central region of the town, and the location for the inferior classes should be at a considerable distance from the central region. For the artisans and the washermen, the exact location is to be in the southeast or in the northeast, at a distance of at least 100 poles (1,100 feet) outside the boundary. The location for the lowest *jati* is to be allocated in the east or in the four corners of the village. The huts for the lowest *jati* are to be built at a distance of one *krosa* (2.1 miles).

If there is a river either in the northeast or in the northwest, or in the east or north of the village, then the cremation ground should be formed near the river bank.

The authorities concerned should construct tanks and wells either in the east, west, northwest, northeast or north side of the village. They should avoid other directions.

The cow shed is to be in the southern area, and the flower garden should be in the north. Alternately, the ponds, wells and tanks may be constructed in all the directions around the village.

An alternative dwelling place for the trading community may be in all directions around the village. That for the shudra (agricultural) community is to be in the southwest. The dwelling place for the



Each a place: In an Agamic village, each occupation is assigned a certain location, and the temple receives special consideration

people of lowest *jati*, *chandalas*, and for hired laborers is to be in the north side of the cremation ground.

There are some specific activities to nullify the defects that may have occurred in the process of allocation and to expedite the growth in the major parts of the village. Similarly there are some specific activities to be performed for the perfection of the roads which lead to the shrines of the Gods and the houses of the people.

In order to maintain the purity of those roads and paths which seem to have defects and impurity, the concerned authorities should plant the recommended trees in the empty spaces available around the village. *Sleshamataka* (large sebesten), *vata* (banyan), *kataka* (soap nut), *udumbara* (cluster fig), *aragvata* (konrai), *asvattha* (peepal), *nimba* (neem), *plaksha* (wavy-leaved fig)—all these eight trees are to be planted in the eight directions, starting from the northeast and moving in a clockwise direction. All these trees are to be outside the boundary line of the village, and each should be provided with a raised platform at the bottom. Specifically, it is declared in the scriptures that such recommended trees are capable of nullifying the defects of the village and other settlements.

A village [normally 10,000-12,000 residents] in which more than 1,000 brahmins live does not get affected by defects or irregularities, because of the vitalizing spiritual power of the brahmins.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, 67, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Kamika Agama*.

Standing firm against the unrelenting tides of time, the Siva Virupaksha temple was built by the Vijayanagara Empire more than 1,000 years ago. Serene surroundings and rock outcroppings conceal the vigorous past of this area as the capital of a puissant empire.

ADARSH PADEGAL

UNESCO'S INDIA

World Heritage Sites

SPECIAL FEATURE

A treasure of humankind, India's history frozen in stone

SOME THINGS BUILT BY MAN ARE SUCH A triumphant achievement of genius and effort that it would be a loss for all humanity if they were to disappear. Concerned with magnificent sites all over the world that were falling into disrepair, the United Nation's body for education, science and culture (UNESCO)

created a program to identify and help protect them. Twenty-eight have been recognized in India so far, nine of them relevant to Hinduism. We explore each of these jewels, in a journey through time that goes beyond the ruins and transports you to the splendor of ancient empires, kingdoms that shaped the India we know today.

Vijayanagara Hampi village, Karnataka (14th to 16th centuries)

THE QUIET AREA AROUND THE LITTLE village of Hampi, in Karnataka, was once occupied by Vijayanagara City, the capital of the prosperous and far-flung Vijayanagara Empire. The ruins of the great city still attest to its former glory.

The empire was created during the 14th century, a time when northern kingdoms were falling to Muslim armies one after another. Inspired by the rousing discourses of saint Madhavacharya, local Hindu kings realized their common identity and united for mutual protection. The empire soon merged with the neighboring Hoysala kingdom, creating a vast sovereign state that stood strong and defended itself for centuries. Transcending regionalism by promoting Hinduism as a unifying factor, the empire harbored a golden age for Hindu art, religion and culture. Its architecture, reflecting the empire itself, merged various South Indian traditions. This same dynamic inspired talented craftsmen and catalyzed innovation, producing masterpieces unmatched before or since. The empire's patronage enabled fine arts and literature to reach new heights in Karnataka, Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrit languages; it was also during this period that Carnatic music evolved into its current form. Artistry in Hindu sculpture reached its zenith in the 15th century, a few decades before the apex of the Italian Renaissance, a time when the world basked in magnificent art.



The finest craftsmanship: (Clockwise from top) Vittala temple, famous for its stone chariot and extraordinary musical pillars that make music out of stone; an exquisitely carved Lord Vishnu; massive stables for the king's war elephants

Efficient administration and vigorous overseas trade brought new technologies, such as complex irrigation systems. The capital had water supply systems constructed to channel and store water, ensuring a consistent supply throughout the year. Huge reservoirs were built by thousands of laborers. The royal palaces had a system with sophisticated channels using gravity and siphons to transport water through pipelines, an innovation in its day.

Vijayanagara excelled in military strength. King Krishnadevaraya, who reigned from 1509 to 1529 CE, had a personal army of 100,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalrymen and over 900 war elephants. The nation's army and navy comprised between one and two

million soldiers at all times. The army, recruited from all classes of society, also consisted of archers, musketeers and a class of soldiers carrying the largest shields ever taken to the battlefield. The empire was the first in India to use long-range artillery. This was commonly manned by foreign gunners; mercenaries were hired from as far as the borders of the Caspian Sea. Horses and elephants were fully armored, and the elephants had knives fastened to their tusks to inflict maximum damage. With such a massive military operation, sometimes with the help of the Portuguese from Goa who were their trade partners, the empire successfully held control of South India for centuries, essentially keeping Hinduism from being diminished by Muslim invaders.

But even as religious wars raged, Vijayanagara kings were tolerant of all religions and sects, a fact that surprised foreign visitors. Staunchly Hindu, the kings were addressed by titles such as "protector of cows" and Hinduraya-Suratana, "upholder of the

Hindu faith." At the same time, tolerance earned one ruler the honorary title "sultan among Hindu kings." The Empire's founders, Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, were devout Saivites, but made grants to the Vaishnava order of Sringeri and took Madhavacharya as their patron saint.

The empire's legacy includes many monuments spread over South India, but the best known are those at Hampi. The final capital of the last great kingdoms of South India, this city, enriched by cotton and spice trade with Europe, was one of the most beautiful of the medieval world. Its palaces and Dravidian temples were much admired by travelers, be they Arab (Abdul Razaak), Portuguese (Domingo Paes) or Italian (Nicolò dei Conti)—see sidebar, below.

Vijayanagara reached its apogee under King Krishnadevaraya, whose name evokes awe in India to this day. The king was reputed to be cheerful and courteous, but ruthless in maintaining the law. Ever a general, he kept fit through strenuous daily exercise. Travelogues depict him as an able administrator and excellent warlord, leading from the front in battle and tending to the wounded. In 1524, he began transitioning power to his son, Tirumala Raya; but the crown prince was fatally poisoned, allegedly by the king's trusted commander and advisor, Timmarusu, who was blinded as a punishment. Heartbroken, the king fell ill and never recovered.

The empire would not last much longer. Vijayanagara city was ruthlessly defeated by the Deccan Muslim confederacy at the battle of Talikota in 1565, plundered over a period of six months and then abandoned. With it, also fell the empire.



Historical Accounts

Travelers from Europe, struck with awe, wrote back to their kings describing the imposing Vijayanagara Empire

THE SIZE OF THIS CITY I DO NOT WRITE here, because it cannot all be seen from any one spot, but I climbed a hill whence I could see a great part of it. What I saw seemed to me as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight; there are many groves of trees within it, in the gardens of the houses, and many conduits of water which flow into the midst of it, and in places there are lakes. The king's palace has chambers made of ivory, with roses and lotuses carved at the top, so rich and beautiful that you would hardly find anywhere another such.

This is the best provided city in the world, and everything abounds. It is stocked with provisions such as rice, wheat, grains, Indian-corn, barley and beans, mung, pulses, horsegram, and other seeds, and there is a large

store of these and very cheap; but wheat is not so common as the other grains, since no one eats it except the Moors.

Domingo Paes, Portuguese explorer, 1522

THE KING HERE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN all the other kings of India. He takes to himself 12,000 wives, who follow him wherever he may go, a third on foot, another third on horseback and the remainder carried by men in litters.

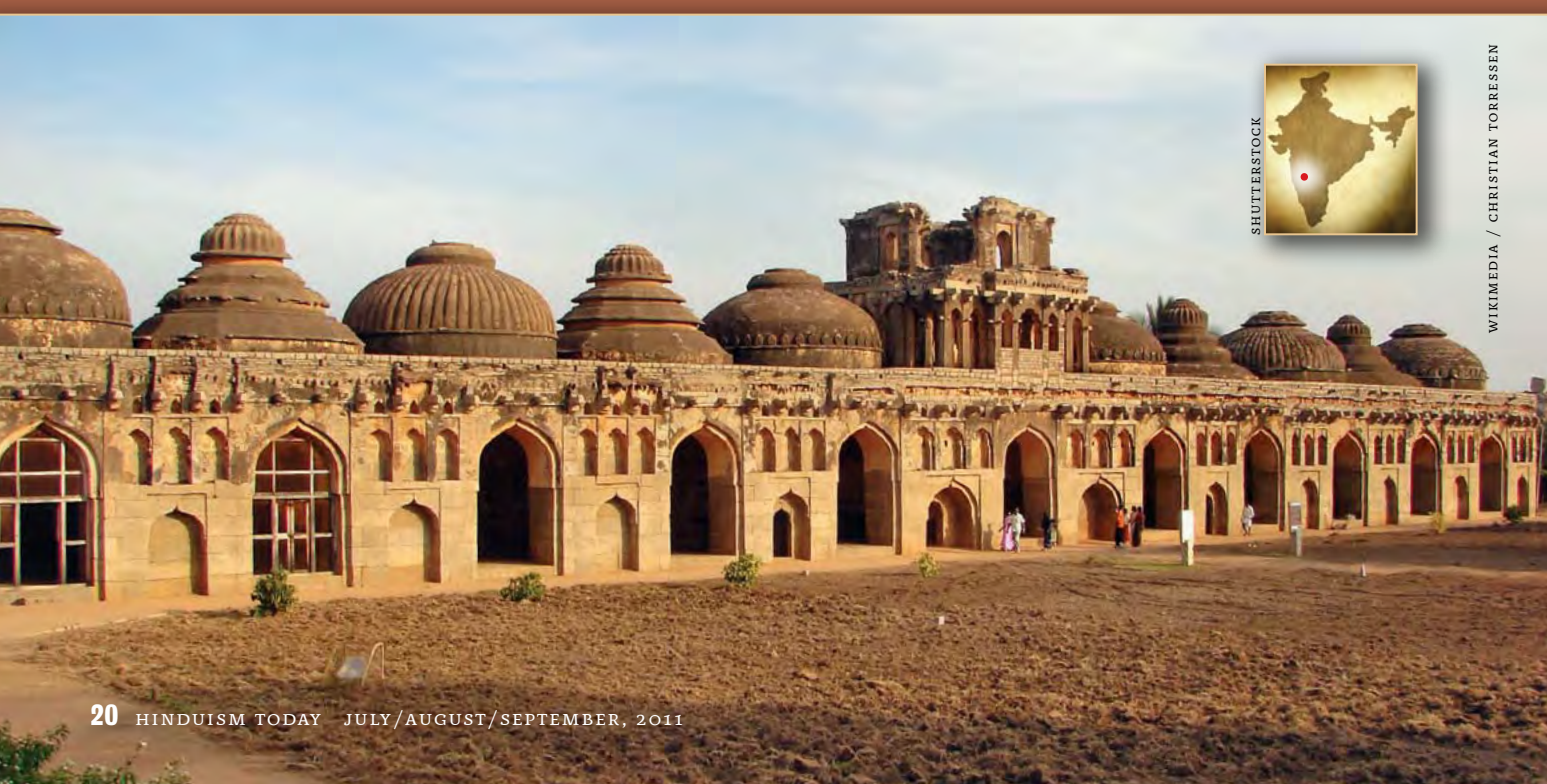
At a certain time of the year their idol is carried through the city, placed between two chariots, in which are young women richly adorned, who sing hymns to the God, and accompanied by a great concourse of people. Some, making an incision in their side, and inserting a rope thus through their body, hang themselves to the chariot. This kind of sacrifice they consider the best and most acceptable of all.

They keep festivals of especial solemnity. On one of these occasions the males and females of all ages, having bathed in the rivers

or the sea, clothe themselves in new garments, and spend three entire days in singing, dancing, and feasting [New Year]. On another of these festivals they fix up on the outside on the temple roofs an innumerable number of lamps of oil of sesame, which are kept burning day and night [Dipavali]. On the third, which lasts nine days, they set up in all the highways large beams, like the masts of small ships, to the upper part of which are attached pieces of very beautiful cloth of various kinds, interwoven with gold. On the summit of each of these beams is each day placed a man of pious aspect, dedicated to religion, capable of enduring all things with equanimity, who is to pray for the favour of God [Navaratri].

There is also another festival during which they sprinkle all passers-by, even the king and queen themselves, with saffron colored water, placed for that purpose by the wayside: [Holi]. This is received by all with much laughter."

Nicolò da Conti, Italian explorer, 1421





Pattadakal Karnataka (6th to 12th centuries)

ON THE BANKS OF THE MALAPRABHA RIVER lies Pattadakal, the capital of the Chalukya dynasty, which reigned in South India from the 6th to the 12th century. The rule of the Chalukyas marks a golden age in the history of Karnataka and an important milestone in India, the shift from smaller kingdoms to large empires. For the first time, a South Indian kingdom took control and consolidated the entire region between the Kaveri and the Narmada rivers. The rise of this dynasty saw the birth of efficient administration, overseas trade and commerce and the development of a new style of architecture.

The kings claimed to be descended from Divinity and nursed by the Sapta Matrikas (seven mothers). A court poet from Kalyani thus sung, "Once Brahma was engaged in the performance of the twilight rituals. Indra approached and beseeched him to create a hero who could vanquish the rising evil on Earth. Brahma looked steadily into the oblation water on his palm and out sprang a great warrior, the progenitor of the Chalukyas." The Chalukyas worshiped many Gods, foremost

among them Siva, but also Vishnu, Chamundi, Surya, Kubera, Parvati, Vinayaka and Karttikeya.

Even though Pattadakal is now abandoned, it has so many temples that some consider it still holy. It represents the high point of an eclectic art which blends architectural forms from North and South India. (The style, known as Badami Chalukya, takes its name from a nearby town.) The carvings are so harmoniously integrated that they seem to flow from stone to stone. There are nine impressive Hindu temples here, as well as a Jain sanctuary, but one masterpiece stands out: the Virupaksha Temple, a Saiva sanctuary built in 740 by Queen Lokamahadevi. It served as inspiration for Hindu temples at Ellora, which

in turn were used as models for later Buddhist constructions.

The fortunes of the Chalukyas waned in the 11th century. Danarnava, the king, was killed in battle in 973 by King Bhima of the Telugu Chodas, who then imposed his rule over the region for 27 years. During this time, King Danarnava's two sons took refuge in the rival Chola kingdom. In the year 1000, Saktivarman I, the elder of the two sons, returned to Pattadakal as the ruler, though under the protection of king Rajaraja Chola, who was a suzerain to the Telugu Chodas. Eventually, the Chalukyas were peacefully absorbed into the Chola Empire. Many centuries later, their serene art style reappeared in the pillared architecture of Vijayanagar.



(above) Pattadakal's Siva Virupaksha temple honors the same Deity as the larger eponymic temple built later in Vijayanagara; (right) a weathered Nandi's keeps his centuries-long watch near the Kashivishwanatha temple

SHUTTERSTOCK

Mahabalipuram Tamil Nadu (6th to 9th centuries)

ON INDIA'S EAST COAST, 37 MILES SOUTH of populous Chennai, lies Mahabalipuram, a 7th-century port city built by the Pallava dynasty, which ruled northern Tamil Nadu and southern Andhra Pradesh from the 6th to the early 9th century. The city's original name, Mamallapuram, (city of Mamalla) is believed to refer to the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, who took on the epithet *mahamalla* (great wrestler) after his favorite sport.

The Pallavas were staunch Hindus known for their tolerance of other faiths. Chinese monk Xuanzang, who visited Kanchipuram during the reign of Narasimhavarman I, reporting that there were 100 Buddhist monasteries and 80 temples in the Pallava capital.

Music, painting and literature thrived under the patronage of this dynasty, with some of the most illustrious Sanskrit poets, like Bharavi and Dandin, belonged to this era. But the greatest surviving monuments are architectural.

The site today is known for its chariot-like temples, cave sanctuaries, and giant open-air reliefs. The carved-stone structures are so



numerous that visitors wonder if they are in a city made of rock. Mahabalipuram absorbed, refined and disseminated myriad stone-building influences. It was here, it is believed, that Hindu temple architecture evolved from the ancient pattern of carving and refining a natural cave, and adopted new techniques of quarrying and moving stones and creating pillars, so that temples could be built far from the native rock.

These craftwork shown here, on the cutting edge 13 centuries ago, is still impressive today. The sculptural style, characterized by softness and supple mass, established the foundations of medieval South Indian architecture and spread widely to civilizations

that traded with the Pallavas: Kambuja (Cambodia), Shrivijaya (Malaysia, Sumatra, Java) and the empire of Champa (Annam).

Some believe that this area served as a place for masters of different schools to demonstrate their work to the king. The site feels like an artist's studio immortalized in stone, with sketches more than a thousand years old. The sculptures, some half finished, showcase several distinct styles of architecture. This can be seen in the *pancha rathas*, five large, ornate chariot shrines carved wholly from a monolithic outcrop-

ping of pink granite honoring the Pandavas of the *Mahabharata* epic. While the Yudhishthira, Arjuna and Draupadi *rathas* are square, the Bhima and Nakula *rathas* are rectangular, and the Sahadeva *ratha* is semi-circle. A completely different style is exemplified by the Shore Temple, which was constructed from granite blocks. Now eroded by seawater and wind, the temple is still a breathtaking sight against the deep blue waters of the ocean. Visitors can only imagine its original glory.

(clockwise from top) The five chariot-shrines, each honoring a hero of the Mahabharata epic, built from monolithic stones; the "Descent of the Ganges" relief; the Shore Temple's ornate towers



ALL PHOTOS ON THIS PAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Chola Temples

Tamil Nadu (10th to 13th centuries)

CIVILIZATION IN SOUTH INDIA HAS flourished in unbroken continuity for many thousands of years. Mighty empires and powerful kings have ruled millions of people from their capitals. But where are their opulent palaces?

In India's architectural tradition, as in her culture and religion, God is first and foremost. Great rulers made their mark on history not by building extravagant abodes for themselves but rather by creating magnificent temples, where the Divine ruler dwelled. Case in point: the awe-inspiring temples created by the Chola empire. UNESCO calls them the "Great Living Chola Temples," for unlike most World Heritage monuments, they are as functional today as they were a thousand years ago. Built in the 11th and 12th centuries, these are Brihadisvara Temple at Thanjavur, the Temple at Gangaikondacholisvaram (also called Brihadisvara Temple) and Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram.

The most important of the three is the Thanjavur Temple, built during the reign of the great king Rajaraja I (985-1014), the true founder of the Chola Empire. At its greatest expanse, his realm stretched over all of South India and the neighboring islands (see map). Historians owe much to him, as he was the first king of South India to record each event of his rule in detail. Without those records,

much of the history would be unknown.

Rajaraja Chola is revered as one of the most competent rulers of all time, militarily and administratively. He fought many battles with the Chalukyas in the North and the Pandyas in the South, each victory strengthening the foundations for a Chola dynasty. His son and successor, Rajendra Chola I, would extend the empire even further.

Rajaraja streamlined administration by dividing the country into districts and standardizing revenue collection through systematic land surveys. His massive infrastructural projects, including Thanjavur's temple, effectively circulated the money back out amongst his subjects.

The Chola system encouraged the building of countless small temples and shrines, one for each village. Temples were the heart and center of the community, a place of gathering, a hub for culture and worship and a source of identity for those living in the area.

In the Chola kingdom, every citizen felt connected to a temple and considered it his own.

Even financially, temples were the center of the empire: rather than perpetually accumulating wealth, they served as a channel for money to reach the commu-

nity or return to the central government. They acted as banks, lending money or buying products, creating incentives for farmers and merchants. Soldiers borrowed from the temple and paid interest in cash. Each temple sponsored specific troop regiments, including elephant troops, cavalry and foot soldiers, all manned and funded by the community of that temple.

In 993 CE, Rajaraja Chola invaded Sri Lanka. A copper-plate inscription describes his powerful army crossing the ocean by ships to defeat Mahinda V, the king of Sinhalas. Anuradhapura, the 1400-year-old capital of Sinhala, was totally destroyed and abandoned. It is believed that after thus consolidating his power, while he was still in Sri Lanka, Rajaraja conceived the wish to build a mammoth temple. The Brihadisvara Temple of Thanjavur was erected in only seven years, and completed in 1010.

Sometimes called Rajarajesvaram, the sprawling edifice was richly endowed by the sovereign. There, major royal ceremonies were performed, such as anointing the emperor and linking him with God Siva. Inscriptions and chronicles indicate the temple had a permanent staff of several hundred priests, 400 *devadasis* (sacred dancers) and over 50 musicians, as well as record-keepers, scholars and craftsmen.

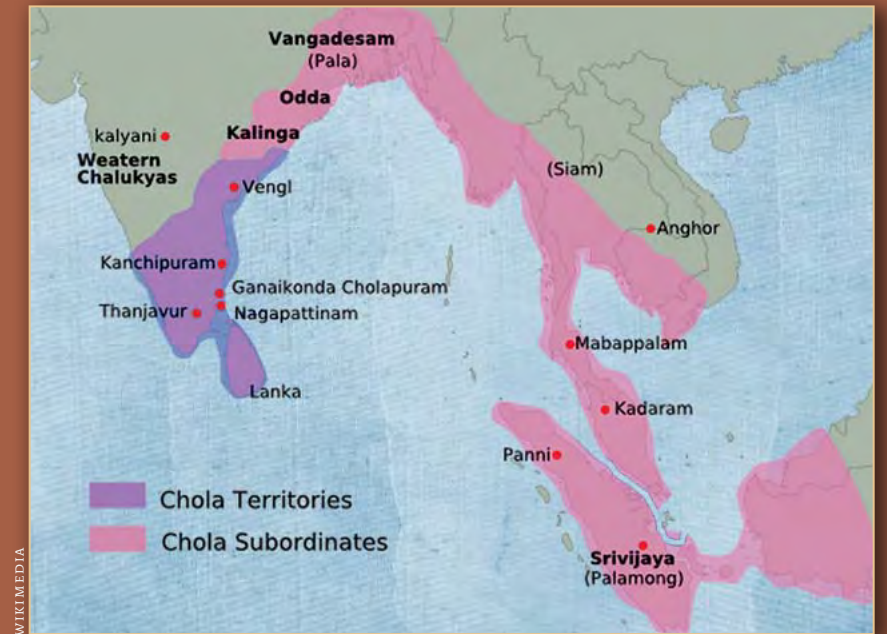
Its income in gold, silver and precious stones was legendary, but efficiently managed, providing not only for the upkeep and improvement of the buildings but also for real investments. The outer walls, for example, which befit the massive temple, are thought to have been built later, in the 16th century, using the temple's own funds. The temple lent money to shipowners, village assemblies and craft guilds. It was a business

hub for thousands of suppliers, who brought countless flowers, brass items and barrels of ghee and sesame oil. The temple also served as a center for cultural events, such as worshipful dance. The outer walls are covered with intricately carved portrayals of Lord Siva as Nataraja, in the 108 poses of His cosmic dance.

At the center of a large courtyard stands a pavilion housing a colossal statue of Nandi, the vahana bull of Siva. From there, a succession of halls and vestibules (*mukta mandapam*, *maha mandapam*, *ardha mandapam*) leads to the sanctum sanctorum which enshrines a giant Sivalingam, a stone pillar 12 feet tall, the largest in any temple worldwide, representing Siva as Absolute Reality, beyond time, form and space.

Rising high over the sanctum is the 206-foot-tall pyramidal temple tower (*vimanam*) crowned by a monolithic capstone weighing 70 tons—one of the architectural masterpieces of India. The feat of lifting and placing this massive stone so high up in the air still baffles modern engineers. With no mechanized cranes, the ancient builders had to rely on ingenuity and brute strength. How did they do it? Miles away from the temple are the remnants of a ramp incline that some believe (with satellite images to back their claim) was used to move and raise the stone, using elephants, ropes, levers and rollers.

Rajaraja Chola dedicated Brihadisvara Temple strictly to God Siva, though temples and shrines for other Deities were added in later centuries. These include a Devi temple, built in the 13th century by Pandyan king Konerinmaikondan, and a Subrahmanya temple, built in the 17th century by a Nayak king of Madurai and a Ganesha temple around erected also the 17th century.



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(left) Architects, historians and a stellar team of experts restored the Thanjavur temple in the late 20th century, including a tricky re-balancing of its massive capstone. In 2010, the temple celebrated its 1,000th anniversary on a grand scale. (opposite page, clockwise) A map shows the extension of Chola influence, rivalling the largest empires; bronze casting was at its peak during the Cholas; Rararaja I stands humbly behind his guru in a painting.



UNKNOWN



PHOTO AND INSET: SHUTTERSTOCK

The Sun Temple

Konark (13th to 16th centuries)

SURYA, THE SUN GOD, IS EXTOLLED IN the *Vedas*; in fact, the *Chandogya Upanishad* focuses solely on Surya worship. Though temples for this Deity are rare—there are only seven in existence—the complex of Konark, Odisha, where the Sun has been worshiped continuously since ancient times, shines bright amid the constellation of renowned temples of India.

Located on the shoreline, now about two miles from the sea, the Sun Temple was designed and built to represent Surya's chariot, ever moving, navigating unfailingly through the skies, with twelve pairs of exquisitely decorated wheels at its base and drawn by seven spirited horses, each over 15 feet tall. The entire complex is decorated with intricate carvings depicting the gamut of all that the Sun's rays touch.

The Konark temple is testimony to the religious fervor of 13th-century Odisha. Built during the reign of King Narasingha Deva (1238–64) of the Eastern Ganga dynasty, it was probably erected to celebrate a victory over Muslim forces. The location was once the busy port of Kalinga, a bustling and wealthy capital, which had maritime trade relations with Southeast Asian countries. Solar symbols on ancient punch-marked coins prove Sun worship's antiquity.

The temple is oriented so that the first rays of the Sun strike its principal entry. The portal is guarded by two giant lions, each

pouncing on and subduing a war elephant, which in turn stands on a human. Beyond is the main structure that remains standing, the audience hall (*jahamogana*), where a pyramidal roof soars over 128 feet high. The *vimana* (principal sanctuary) that enshrined the presiding Deity, a curvilinear tower mounted by cupolas which stood 229 feet tall, collapsed in the 19th century. Now only its elaborate external projections remain. Also surviving the vagaries of time are the banquet hall (*bhoga mandapam*) and a few portions of the long dancing hall (*natya mandir*), where temple dancers danced in homage to the Sun God.

On the north and south sides, completing the depiction of temple as chariot, are 24 wheels, each 10 feet in diameter and lavishly sculptured with symbolic motifs representing the cycle of the seasons and the months. Between the wheels, the plinth of the temple is entirely decorated. The carvings are prolific and exquisite. Thousands of images include Deities, celestial and human musicians, dancers, lovers, and myriad scenes of courtly life, from hunts and military battles to the pleasures of courtly relaxation and intimate relations. These are interspersed with birds, animals (close to two thousand charming and lively elephants march around the base of the main temple alone), mythological creatures, and a wealth of intricate botanical and geometrical decorative designs.

The Konark complex was constructed from oxidized, weathered-looking ferruginous sandstone. Records describe a lodestone atop the vimana so massive that its magnetism attracted vessels navigating the nearby sea, con-

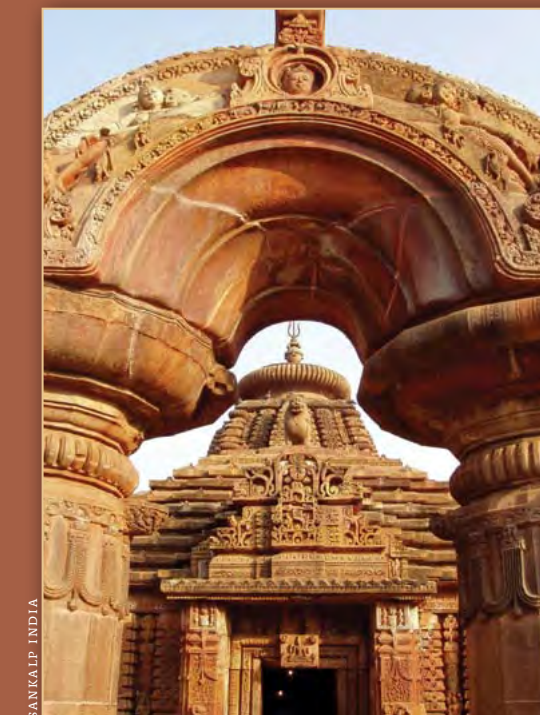
founding compasses and causing shipwrecks. To save their ships, the Portuguese voyagers are said to have taken away the lodestone, which was key in holding together all the stone walls of the main sanctum and the iron columns. Without it, the walls lost their integrity and eventually fell down. Folklore describes wide use of magnetism in the original temple, with a complex system that could make the Deity statue, because of its high iron content, float in mid air. The Siva Lingam of Somnath Temple, on India's west coast, was similar held in mid air by carefully placed magnetic stones.

The Sun Temple retains its original magnificent for only three centuries. Odisha fell to Muslim control in 1568, whence began constant attempts to destroy the Hindu temples. The *pandas* (priests) of Konark removed the presiding Sun God *murti* for safekeeping, allegedly burying it deep in the sand. According to one story, the murti was later taken to Puri and kept in the temple of Indra; others believe it still lies in Konark, undiscovered. In either case, Sun worship in the temple ended upon the removal of the Deity.

Gradually, many impressive items of the temple were moved to the Jagannath temple in Puri, including a few *murtis* of God Surya. In 1779, a sadhu took the Arun Pillar from Konark and put it in front of the Lion's Gate at Puri. By the end of 18th century, Konark had lost most of its glories and became overgrown with dense forest, resurfacing slowly as Indians became aware and proud of this jewel of their heritage.

What remains, however, nonetheless testifies to the glory of India and the human genius behind the complex. Poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote of Konark: "Here the language of stone surpasses the language of man."

(clockwise from top right) The main sanctum's ruins, with the audience hall behind; a giant wheel on the side on this chariot temple; a portico; one of the remaining horses, five meters tall; the audience hall is popular at night for gatherings





Ajanta Maharashtra (200 bce to 650 ce)

IT WAS 1819. ABOUT 60 MILES FROM AURANGABAD, an expedition of British adventurers, flamboyant in their bravado, with native servants carrying their heavy gear, trudged through the hot jungle in search of a tiger to kill. To their astonishment, they stumbled on a warren of hidden caves, known only to locals, that bore witness to a great and ancient civilization, a kingdom that had mastered painting and stone-carving in the days when England, not yet conquered by the Roman Empire, was still a land of warring tribes, agricultural but possibly preliterate.

Cut into the volcanic lava of the Deccan among the sylvan Sahyadri Hills, the 29 caves of Ajanta were excavated beginning around 200 BCE, then finally abandoned in 650 CE. Five of the caves were

temples; the remaining 24 were monasteries, thought to have been occupied by some 200 monks and artisans.

Massive pillars support the caves' ceilings. On the walls are masterful paintings, their style fluid and sensitive. The refined lightness of the decoration, the balance of the compositions and the grace of feminine figures place the paintings of Ajanta among the major achievements of universal pictorial art. When most of the world's art was still flat and

bi-dimensional, the Ajanta artists used light and shadow to give depth to their paintings. The Ajanta style has exerted considerable influence in India and elsewhere, particularly in Java and Sri Lanka.

The complex was home to both Buddhists and Hindus, a reflection of the Gupta Empire (4th to 7th century), in which the two religions coexisted. This was a golden period for Indian civilization, with scholars such as Varahamihira, Aryabhata, Vatsyayana and Kalidasa.



(top) The entrances to several of the caves have been carved to look like temples, where unsuspected marvels await. (right) Weathered by time and vandalism, the paintings at Ajanta still give testimony to artistic skill and sensibility. Well-proportioned, harmonious and life-affirming, they stand in stark contrast to European art of the same period (above).

Ellora Maharashtra (5th to 10th centuries)

ELLORA, ABOUT 20 MILES FROM AURANGABAD in Maharashtra, was built by the Rashtrakuta rulers between the 5th and 10th centuries CE. The 34 man-made caves, representing the epitome of Indian rock-cut architecture, were excavated out of the tall Charanandri hills, continuing and improving the same style as Ajanta. They harbored monasteries and places of worship for Hindus (17 caves), Buddhists (12 caves) and Jains (5 caves), illustrating the spirit of tolerance characteristic of India, with three religions establishing sanctuaries in a single place.

Southernmost along the cliff are the Buddhist group of caves, which appear to be the oldest (c. 600 and 800); the Hindu group (c. 600 to 900) occupy the middle section; and northernmost are the Jain caves, created by Digambara monks towards 800-1000.

The most widely known of the Ellora caves are the Hindu group, which are mostly Saivite. Particularly famous is the Kailash Temple, an enormous complex probably undertaken during the reign of Krishna I (757-783) of the Rashtrakuta. Also called Kailasanatha, this king among rock-cut temples is the unrivalled centerpiece of Ellora. Sprawling over an area twice the size of Athens' Parthenon, this massive, multistory complex showcases elaborate workmanship, landmark architecture and monk-like attention to detail. Though the architects cut away

all the rock around the perimeter so that it appears to be a free-standing structure, it was actually carved out the solid rock of the cliff. Designed to evoke Mount Kailash, Lord Siva's abode, the temple was originally covered in white plaster to represent that snow-covered peak.

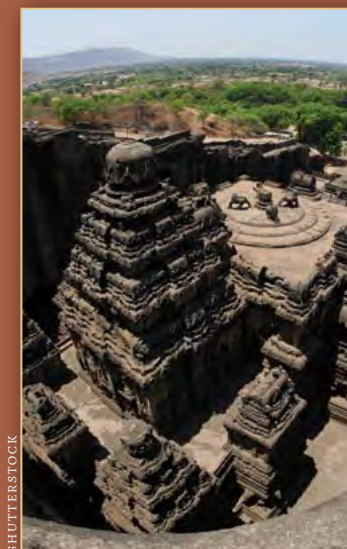
The temple spans several stories, once connected by stairways and bridges that have now fallen. At the entrance, a towering gateway opens to reveal a courtyard edged by columned galleries three stories high. The galleries are punctuated by huge sculpted panels and alcoves from which sculptures of many Deities watch and bless the devotees. Originally, flying bridges of stone connected the galleries to the central temple structures.

Within the courtyard, in front of the central Siva temple, stands the giant Nandi Mandapam, carved 95 feet tall with 16 pillars. Life-size elephants carved into the base hold the structure aloft. A rock bridge connects the Nandi Mandapam to the Siva temple beyond, a tall pyramidal structure reminiscent of a South Indian temple. The shrine, complete with pillars, windows, inner and outer rooms and gathering halls, has an enormous Sivalingam at its heart.

The construction of this cave was a feat of human genius—and patience. The largest monolithic structure in the world, it entailed removal of 200,000 tons of rock and took more than a century to complete.



(clockwise from top) A Buddhist stupa is one of the many marvels of the caves; the Kailash temple, carved out of the mountain for more than a hundred years; a rear view of the temple



Khajuraho

Madhya Pradesh (950 to 1400 ce)

By ANEESHA MYLES SHEWANI

EVERYTHING ABOUT KHAJURAHO IS magical, even the legend of its origins: Hemavati, the attractive daughter of a brahmin priest, was seduced one evening by the Moon God, Chandra, when she was bathing in the Rati river. A son was born from this union between a woman and a deva outside the bonds of matrimony. Be-leaguered by society, Hemavati sought refuge in the dense forest with her young son, Chandravarman. The boy grew up under his mother's tutelage and, empowered by his divine heritage, founded the great Chandela dynasty. He was blessed by his father with a philosopher's mind, political skills and unsurpassed bravery. When he became a ruler, he dreamt that his mother wanted him to build temples that would reveal human passions and the emptiness of human desire.

The name Khajuraho is derived from "kharjuravahaka," an amalgamation of the Sanskrit words *kharjura*, date palm, and *vahaka*, "one who carries." The city was the original capital of the Chandela Rajputs, a Hindu dynasty that ruled Central India from the 10th to the 12th centuries. The Khajuraho temples were built over a span of a hundred years, from 950 to 1050. Of the original 80 Hindu temples, only 22 now stand over an area of about eight square miles, maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. The largest and grandest temple of Khajuraho is

the Kandariya Mahadeva temple, attributed to King Ganda (1017–29).

The seventeen main temples were built mostly for Siva (6) and Vishnu (6), but also for Surya, Brahma and the *apsaras*. Three temples are Jain; and one Vishnu temple has been converted into a Parvati shrine, the Devi Jaadambi. Folklore has it that most of the massive temples were originally surrounded by lakes.

The temples are made of sandstone. No mortar was used; the stones were put together with mortise and tenon joints and held in place by gravity. This form of construction requires very precise joints. The columns and beams were built with stones that weigh up to 20 tons. Each temple has an elevated substructure over which rises the body of the richly decorated building, the *jangha*, covered with several sculpted panels and from which side galleries are accessed. The structure is crowned by a series of bundled towers with curvilinear contours, the *sikharas*, characteristic of the temples in the Nagera style. Each tower symbolizes the "cosmic mountain," Mount Kailash.

Khajuraho is often misinterpreted by tourists as the "kamasutra temples." Beautifully carved erotic sculptures and sexual postures are among the carvings on the external walls of the temples. Travel writer McConnachie describes Khajuraho sculpture thus: "Twisting, high breasted-nymphs display their generously contoured and bejewelled bodies on exquisitely worked exterior wall panels. These fleshy *apsaras* run riot across the surface of the stone, putting on make-up, wash-

ing their hair, playing games, dancing, and endlessly knotting and unknotting their girdles... Beside the heavenly nymphs are serried ranks of griffins, guardian Deities and, most notoriously, extravagantly interlocked lovemaking couples."

However, the suggestive carvings are actually a minor part of the art. A greater emphasis is put on the depiction of womanhood: here one woman is depicted writing a letter, applying makeup to her eyes, combing her tresses, dancing, picking a thorn from her foot, or playing with her child. All carvings are intricately detailed, sharply etched and sculpted with consummate skill. There are scenes from daily life, of warfare, of musicians and potters, and various forms and facets of a kingdom's routine. Khajuraho is not a temple that celebrates sex: it celebrates life itself.

Nonetheless, the morality of the first Western visitors was struck and challenged by what they saw on the walls, launching the temple onto a well-deserved fame—but for misplaced reasons. Barely emerging from the grasp of 19th-century Victorianism, the first British to see the temple focused only on the sexual carvings. Most people even make the mistake of assuming that, since these are temples, the carvings must depict sex between Deities, but they do not.

There are many explanations about why such suggestive sculptures are carved on the walls of a holy place. According to one theory, the Chandela kings were followers of the tantric cult. Another school of thought believes the sculptures portray that before paying respect to the Gods, we have to leave our worldly desires outside the temple walls. Other hypotheses hold

that the sculptures were designed to prepare students—who traditionally observed brahmacharya (celibacy)—for married life, or that they simply depict what the army did to relax between battles, since the carvings are often intermixed with sculptures of warfare and victory.

Anyone who focuses solely on the sensual side of Khajuraho loses the opportunity to enjoy one of the most beautiful temple complexes ever built by man. Hindus know that *kama* (pleasure) is only one of the four *purusharthas* (goals of life), along with *artha* (wealth), *dharma* (duty) and eventually *moksha* (liberation). It should be natural and joyful, but restrained and in the right measure; and so it is in the temple, where it amounts to about one-tenth of the total sculptures.

The fate of the Khajuraho complex is rare in that it survived the Muslim conquerors relatively unscathed. In 1202, the Chandela fort of Kalinjar, celebrated as an unassailable war stronghold, was finally taken. With it fell the Chandela dynasty. Most of the kingdom's temples were converted into mosques, and fifty thousand men were carried off as slaves. Khajuraho, however, was largely ignored by the new rulers; according to Ibn-Batuta, it continued to function until at least 1335.

However, it was finally abandoned; and the lush jungle overpowered the tall *sikharas* of the temples until a British officer spread word of its marvels in the 19th century.

It is possible that the Muslim vandals never had the heart to destroy these masterpieces—or perhaps devas and *apsaras* themselves intervened, unseen, from the inner planes. You may well believe that, if you witness the mystery, the mysticism and the magnitude of Khajuraho.

(left) The style of Khajuraho temples provided ample area for a veritable army of sculptors to show their skills; refinement was the order of the day



(clockwise from top) The meticulous details of the sculptures make visitors gasp in awe; this carving of a king and his consort exemplifies the graceful movements and the celebratory mood that permeates the temples; the minor carvings portray thousands of people in different activities



ALL PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK





Elephanta Maharashtra (unknown date)

THE ISLAND OF ELEPHANTA IN THE SEA of Oman, 10km offshore from Mumbai, seems unimposing at first sight. Its treasures lie underground. Here, in seven caves, Indian art has found one of its most perfect expressions, particularly in the huge high reliefs in the main chamber. Originally named Gharapuri, the "city of caves," the complex owes its modern name to the enormous stone elephant found there by Portuguese navigators, which today guards the Victoria Gardens Zoo in Mumbai.

The main cave is famous for its carvings of Siva. At the entrance, to the north of an esplanade reached by a steep flight of steps, the visitor to this high place of Saivism is greeted by two large carved panels depicting, on the left, Siva Yogishvara (master of yoga) and, on the right, Siva Nataraja (the Cosmic Dancer), both carved in a monumental style.

In a sanctum to the right stands a Sivalingam. This sanctum has four doors, each flanked by colossal figures of *dvarapala*, mediator guardians whose task was to admit the faithful and keep out ill-intentioned visitors.

On each wall of the *mandapa*, enormous high-reliefs (nearly 20 feet tall) portray still more images of Siva. Opposite the entrance, on the south wall, is the iconic three-headed bust of the Mahadeva, whose three faces are Aghora, the dissolver, to the east; Vamadeva, the preserver, to the west; and Sadyojata, the creator, facing north. To the left of the Mahadeva is a relief depicting Siva Ardhanarisvara; on the right, a relief of Siva Gangadhara.

The caves are hewn from solid basalt rock. All the caves were originally painted, but only traces remain now. The rock-cut architecture here dates between the 5th and 8th centuries, but the identity of the builders remains a subject of debate. Some historians attribute the caves to the Konkan Mauryas, dating them to the mid 6th century. Others refute this, claiming theirs was a relatively small kingdom which could not undertake "the almost superhuman excavation effort" needed to carve the temples from solid rock; nor did they have the skilled labor to produce such masterful sculpture.

When the Portuguese arrived in

the 1600s, people on the island still used the main cave temple for Siva worship. Disrupted by the foreigners, the population stopped regular worship. Today only a celebration for Mahasivaratri is still performed, unflinching, every year. Portuguese soldiers used the reliefs of Siva in the main cave for target practice, sparing only the Trimurti Mahadeva sculpture. They also removed an inscription related to the creation of the caves, a missing link that could clarify the mysterious past of one of humankind's most impressive heritage sites.



(top) The caves are so spacious and wide that the British flaunted their dominance over India by further desecrating the site, using it as a banquet hall. Notice the giant three-headed Mahadeva in the drawing, also pictured here to the right. (top, inset) The entrance to the caves is unassuming.

What Are World Heritage Sites?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of those cultural and natural heritage sites around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972. The following summary is excerpted from the treaty:

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Paris from 17 October to 21 November 1972, at its seventeenth session:

❖ NOTING that the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions;

❖ CONSIDERING that deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world;

❖ CONSIDERING that protection of this heritage at the national level often remains incomplete because of the scale of the resources which it requires and of the insufficient economic, scientific, and technological resources of the country where the property to be protected is situated;

❖ CONSIDERING that parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole;

❖ CONSIDERING that it is essential for this purpose to adopt new provisions in the form of a convention establishing an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, organized on a perma-

nent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods;

❖ HAVING decided, at its sixteenth session, that this question should be made the subject of an international convention;

❖ ADOPTS on this sixteenth day of November 1972 a Convention to appoint and protect humanity's World Heritage Sites.



Jewels of India

Find the nine Hindu World Heritage Sites of India on the subcontinent's map. More sites may be recognized in the future.

1. Vijayanagara, KARNATAKA
2. Pattadakal, KARNATAKA
3. Mahabalipuram, TAMIL NADU
4. Chola Temples, TAMIL NADU
5. Sun Temple, ODISHA
6. Ajanta, MAHARASHTRA
7. Ellora, MAHARASHTRA
8. Khajuraho, MADHYA PRADESH
9. Elephanta, MAHARASHTRA



The Legacy of Professor Uberoi

Aerospace engineer leaves fortune to establish foundation to support academic study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism

BY KATHARINE NANDA

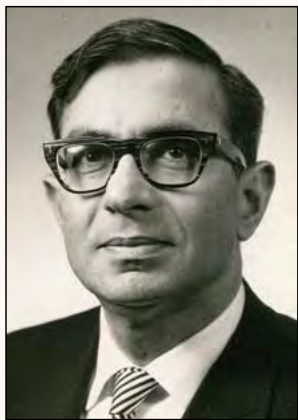
PROFESSOR MAHINDER SINGH UBEROI (1924–2006) was an aerospace engineer at the University of Colorado at Boulder and an intellectual whose vision of the religions of mankind paralleled his expansive view of the heavens. In his house on the hill in Boulder, Dr. Uberoi had a clerestory of colorful windows bearing the character names for God in a number of different symbolic languages—Chinese, Arabic, Sanskrit and others. He once said the name of God was the most common word between all the languages of the world.

Thus, while Dr. Uberoi was an intensely private man in his later years and did not generally discuss religion with friends or colleagues, it was not altogether surprising that after his death in 2006, at age 82, a handwritten will dated 1986 was discovered amid the old piles of his papers, in which he left his entire estate to a foundation to be used for the “scholarly study of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and other related religions....” On the other hand, because he had remained single and had chosen to live his life without pretense or ostentation, many who knew him may have been startled to learn that the estate amounted to nearly eight million dollars—developed from a good academic salary combined with a family inheritance, austere living and astute investments.

The trustees he designated were his three Delhi-based nieces, Anu, Jyothi and Sneha, whose own father had died when they were children. Their mother, understanding the difficulties facing fatherless young women in India, had sent them to the best possible schools and instilled in them a love for learning. But they were caught unawares upon hearing of this plan crafted by an uncle they scarcely knew. Now grown and with their own families, they were about to embark on an unanticipated adventure that would truly change their lives.

Through friends and relations in Delhi, the sisters discovered a law professor in Denver who, it turned out, had met Mahinder Uberoi many years earlier. This was my husband, Professor Ved Nanda. Unlike Dr. Uberoi, Ved has always been actively involved in Hindu community activities in Colorado, the US and India. He was soon named chair of the Foundation. Anu’s brother-in-law, Mr. Parveen Setia of Orlando, Florida, joined in the effort as vice-chair. Jim Polsfut of Denver was recruited to be our Executive Director, and I was named Secretary.

Dr. Uberoi’s will made it clear that his intent was not to proselytize. “Scholars need not have any particular faith or beliefs,” he wrote. To carry out his mission, he intentionally left much to the judgment of



the men and women who would be named as trustees of the foundation. Nevertheless, by way of example, he wrote, “Obvious candidates for support are persons who are regularly engaged in scholarly work, such as universities, institutes and religious centers.”

Coincidentally—or maybe providentially—the Uberoi Foundation (uberoreligiousstudies.org) was created to promote the scholarly study of the religions founded in India at roughly the time the famous California textbook litigation was coming to a close. In the California case, the plaintiffs, parents of middle-school children, challenged the State Board of Education for using teaching materials that gave a distorted—sometimes grossly misleading—view of Hinduism. In fact, the case was simply symptomatic of the larger issue of education in the Eastern religions in America as a whole. For generations,

American school children have been taught that Hindus worship monkeys and elephants, have long hair and beards and live in caves; Sikhs are warlike; and Buddhists have big bellies and meditate all day. Jains barely find mention at all.

Even in some of the best universities in the country, teachers of Eastern religions are frequently not practitioners of those faiths. Destructive distortions result, even though they may be unintended and the teachers well-meaning. Such ignorance has resulted in the dissemination of seriously misleading information. There is a real need to establish institutions of dharmic study that operate from an authentic point of view.

The new Uberoi Foundation thus charged itself to raise awareness of the four major religions named by Dr. Uberoi—Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism—in an ef-

fort to promote understanding, communication, tolerance and peace among the diverse peoples of the world. These four may be called the “dharmic traditions,” as a similar concept of dharma is central to each. The Foundation seeks to encourage an honest portrayal of the dharmic traditions in academia through fair inquiry.

It is remarkable that, while most Western or Abrahamic religious traditions are taught in the US by adherents, this is not generally the case with the South Asian religions, which attract scholars who may not even be sympathetic toward them. This makes a fully sensitive and properly profound understanding difficult to achieve. Also, these South Asian traditions often involve foreign or remote concepts that do not translate easily into Western religious prototypes. The Foundation aims to make the dharmic traditions more accessible to the American audience while retaining their integrity.

Especially in the current geopolitical climate, where interest in the dharmic traditions is eclipsed by a preoccupation with Islam,

and often motivated by fear of differences, it is important to counter media preconceptions and misunderstandings that have been fostered by inadequate instruction and materials, particularly in the disciplines of world history and world religions.

The popular perception of India’s religions is largely framed by Christian terminology and ideas, based on the work of colonial scholars who sought to explain the beliefs of the Indian subcontinent—with a strong subtext of domination involved. Far from having disappeared, today this subtext has evolved in two primary forms: systematic hostility shown by parts of the academic community, and are ongoing efforts to fracture dharmic societies through conversion.

While so many forces are arrayed against an honest understanding of the dharmic religions in the globalized setting, it is significant that today we see a prevailing longing for the knowledge of universal truths to which they hold the key. Today the West is particularly receptive to grasp the dharmic traditions’ contributions to the 21st century world.

Considering the dharmic traditions on a mutual footing brings a useful synergy. At their best, these traditions have a resonance with each other that is lacking when they are compared and contrasted within customary Western paradigms of thought. Consideration through one another’s lens and from their shared basis enriches both the separate and the mutual inquiries: far from consensus, their individual independence and honesty resound in this process. Considered together, their common resistance to being assessed within the Abrahamic framework of Western thought yields to a flowering of subtlety and power in their discourse. The Uberoi Foundation strives toward these goals through a program of grants and of periodic “Experts’ Meetings” on specific topics, engaging religious studies scholars with those of other academic fields who are also lifelong students and activists in the dharmic traditions. The first Experts’ Meeting was held in 2009 to consider the topics of “The Absolute Reality” and “Karma,” with papers given by Dr. Shiva Bajpai, Dr. Arvind-Pal Mandair and Dr. Bal Ram Singh. The 2010 Experts’ Meeting was held in Denver and hosted by Dr. David Trickett, a Friend of the Uberoi Foundation and President of the Iliff School of Theology, which adjoins the University of Denver campus. This meeting was on “Decolonizing Indic Studies,” with Dr. Arvind Sharma as the convenor. The meeting grappled with the impact of 19th century colonial thinking and missionary intent that remains in Indic studies. In 2011, the Uberoi Foundation Annual Experts’ Meeting will be held in Los Angeles to consider “The Teaching and Transmission of Dharma Traditions.”

That eight-million-dollar estate left by Dr. Uberoi hit a rough patch in September 2008, less than one year following our 501(c)(3) approval, when the stockmarket lost nearly half its value in a few days. We were not alone in suffering a nearly 25 percent loss in value. Fortunately, we had removed the funds from a large brokerage house and put them into the care of a private bank and trust company in Denver, whose risk management practices brought the Uberoi account steadily back to health. Now, in only about 2-1/2 years, we have recovered nearly all that was lost. At this point, we have not sought donations from our friends or the public and do not anticipate doing so in the future, although Dr. Manohar Shinde has made some significant gifts.

The Foundation grant-making process is by invitation of the board of directors; unsolicited applications are not accepted. In the first three years of grants, the amounts ranged from \$10,000 to

\$100,000. An important project, begun in 2010 which will continue through 2011, is a teacher training program hosted by the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth. Led by Mr. Rajiv Malhotra and Dr. Bal Ram Singh, this program instructs middle and high school teachers in the basics of the dharmic traditions and their cultures, making the teachers more sensitive and aware of how they teach



Experts gather in Denver 2010: The theme of Decolonization of Indic Studies brought a number of insightful papers and lively discussion among the elite group (author Katharine Nanda is in yellow, front row with husband Ved to her left)

and more discerning about the materials they use. The instructional materials for this project are prepared by a number of scholars in the traditions and may be used by the teacher-participants in formulating their own curricula in the future.

Other grants for 2011 funded the start-up of a dharmic traditions think tank and database, a program on Eastern and indigenous traditional perspectives in conflict management, support of research in communication studies and dharmic traditions, a dharmic traditions teaching project, work on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World’s Religions, and a workshop on Sikhism and public life. Earlier, the Foundation also supported the publication of a book on tantra.

In the near future, the Foundation anticipates publishing materials from the Experts’ Meetings and other projects. We hope also to promote establishment of academic chairs and programs in major academic institutions.

On a personal note, I must mention the serendipity that has brought us together in Denver with such highly esteemed religious scholars and practitioners from around the US and overseas. We feel tremendously blessed to be part of this organization that almost literally landed in my husband’s lap, and grateful for the opportunity it created for us to know and to learn from such wonderful, intelligent and wise persons. No less an adventure has been becoming part of the Uberoi family with the Delhi nieces and Mr. Setia of Orlando, who also could never have anticipated how their lives would change as they have become involved in this lofty dialogue and the fascinating world of religious discourse. We thank them for their confidence and friendship and the joy they share with us.

KATHARINE NANDA, now semi-retired, has practiced law for many years and is involved with several community organizations, including being a founding member of the Hindu Temple & Cultural Center of the Rockies.

Hindu Children's MODERN STORIES

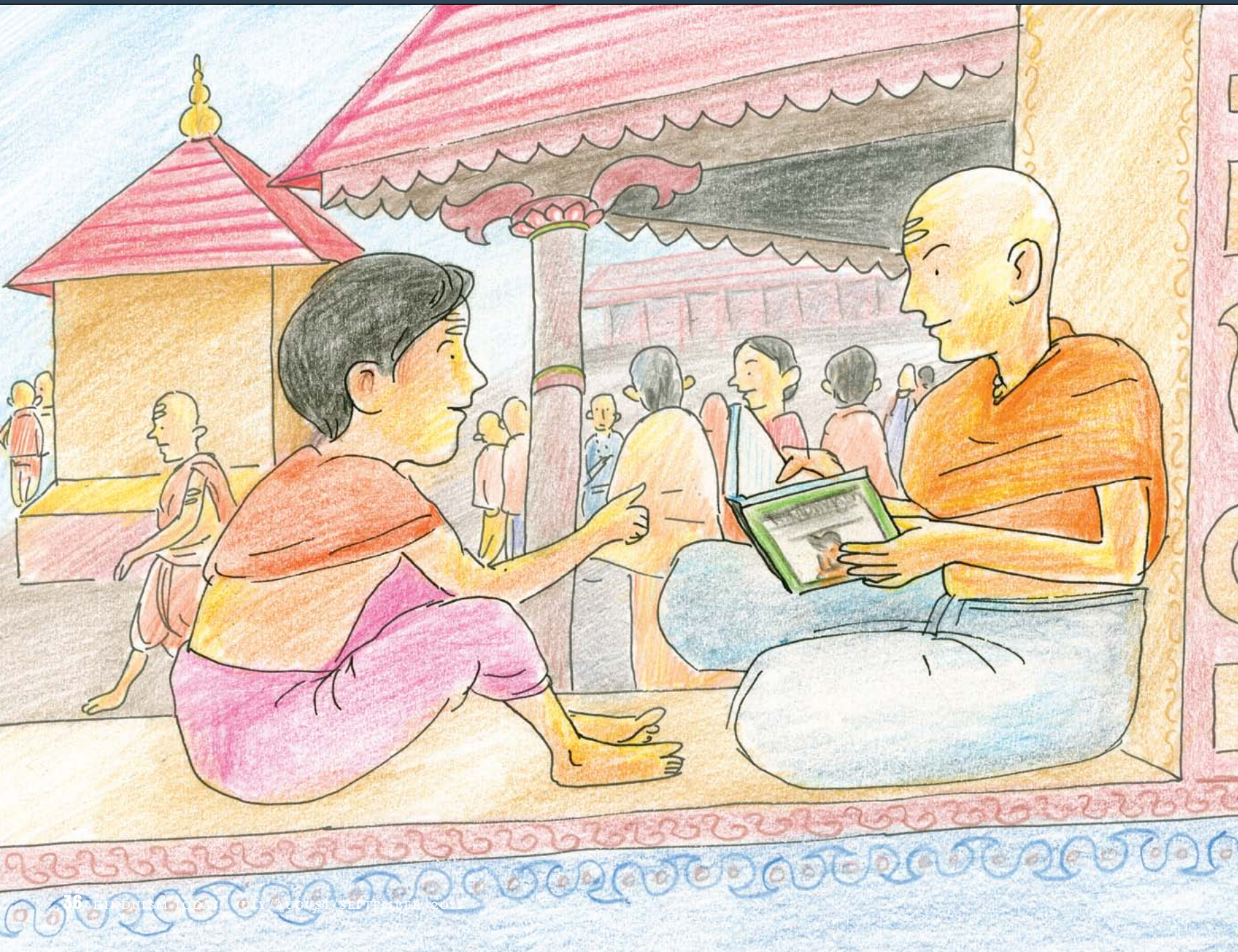
Excerpts from newly published short stories that teach moral values based on the yamas & niyamas, Hinduism's twenty cardinal virtues

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

THE COLLECTION OF STORIES IN books one and two of *Hindu Children's Modern Stories* was written and illustrated at my request to convey Hinduism's ethical and moral values and basic religious observances, the traditional *yamas* and *niyamas*, to a new generation. The stories, set in India and America, are intended for children ages ten to twelve, when it is natural to learn about being good. Each story speaks to a single value, for example, nonviolence, honesty, purity or giving. Some stories illustrate the choices a child may face in his or her life, such as lying to cover a mistake, and the pleasant or unpleasant consequences that may result from those choices. They show how the negative consequences may be softened by confession, apology and penance. In other stories the characters model positive, noble behavior, helping others and applying religious principles in real-life situations. In "One Tired Student," children who make fun of a boy who constantly falls asleep in class discover compassion when they learn that he is tired because he stays up most of the

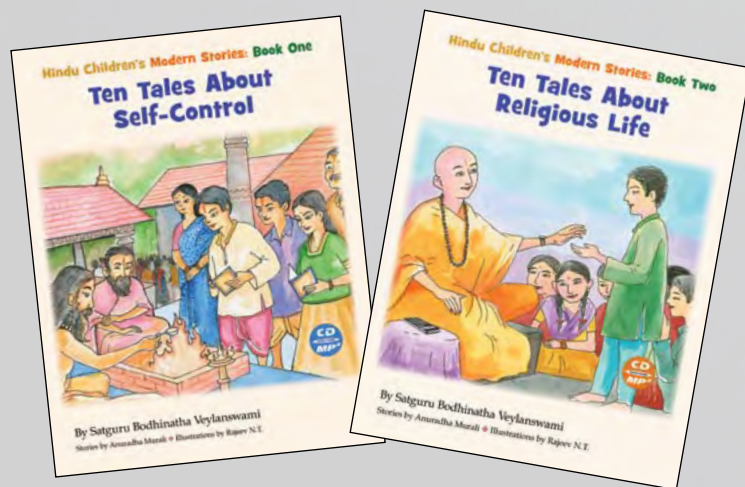
night helping his great grandfather get through a severe illness. Several stories focus on the consequences of making the wrong kind of friends. The stories show how a child must think about the friends he or she makes, and choose those with similar, positive values. The stories follow the nonviolent child-raising principles of Positive Discipline: avoidance of corporal punishment, seeing mistakes as opportunities for teaching and letting children learn by fully facing the consequences of their own actions. In "Caught in a Friend's Lie," a boy who has been deceitful at school does not face an angry, critical, judgmental parent upon returning home. Rather, his father reacts in a kindly, loving, thoughtful manner, speaking calmly to help his son understand his error, how to make amends and how not to repeat the mistake in the future. Unfortunately, ethics and morals are ignored subjects in most of the world's schools today. I hope that this small set of stories will provide Hindu and non-Hindu parents alike one means to convey these all-important character-building values to their children.

STORIES BY ANURADHA MURALI ♦ ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAJEEV N.T.



Be Satisfied With What You Have

This story illustrates the virtue of contentment, or santosha, the second of the ethical observances known as niyamas.



Each book includes a CD on which voice actress Jennifer Vaughn reads the stories in dramatic fashion, making them accessible for even young children.

Yogesh's parents seemed to have no time for him ever since they arrived in Chennai two days ago. His mother jabbered endlessly with relatives, and his father seemed mostly interested in sitting down for meal after home-cooked meal. His grandpa and grandma made a fuss over him; but even though they spoke English, they could not understand his American accent. He knew enough Tamil to communicate. His mother had insisted he learn, but he had never been comfortable with it.

He was not interested in being taken to the beach, nor for ice cream. He wanted to play on a computer, but this house did not have one. He asked his mother to buy one, but Grandpa laughed at the idea and said, "After you go back to the US, what will I do with a computer? This old man doesn't even know how to operate a TV remote!"

Yogesh wished he found it as funny as his grandpa did. Somehow he couldn't help feeling irritated with his relatives. So what if they were in India? Couldn't they be more modern? He could not imagine anyone in the US



living without a computer.

One day as they sat together, Grandpa asked Yogesh, "What do you play back home?"

"I play on my Xbox and Nintendo."

"Are they your friends?"

Yogesh groaned, "Grandpa, they are game consoles that you connect to your television and play."

"Oh! Then what about friends?"

"Friends? I have more than 200!"

"200? That's a lot for a young boy!" said Grandpa. "Where did you meet them?"

"On Facebook."

"Where is Facebook? Is that a park?" asked Grandpa innocently.

"Grandpa," exclaimed Yogesh with growing frustration, "Facebook is an Internet social networking site where people meet and interact."

"Without seeing each other?" Grandpa was amazed.

Yogesh offered eagerly, "Yes. You should get yourself a computer too, and make some good friends. There are lots of interesting people out there."

Grandpa grew silent for a few minutes, deep in thought. Then he asked, "Do you like India?"

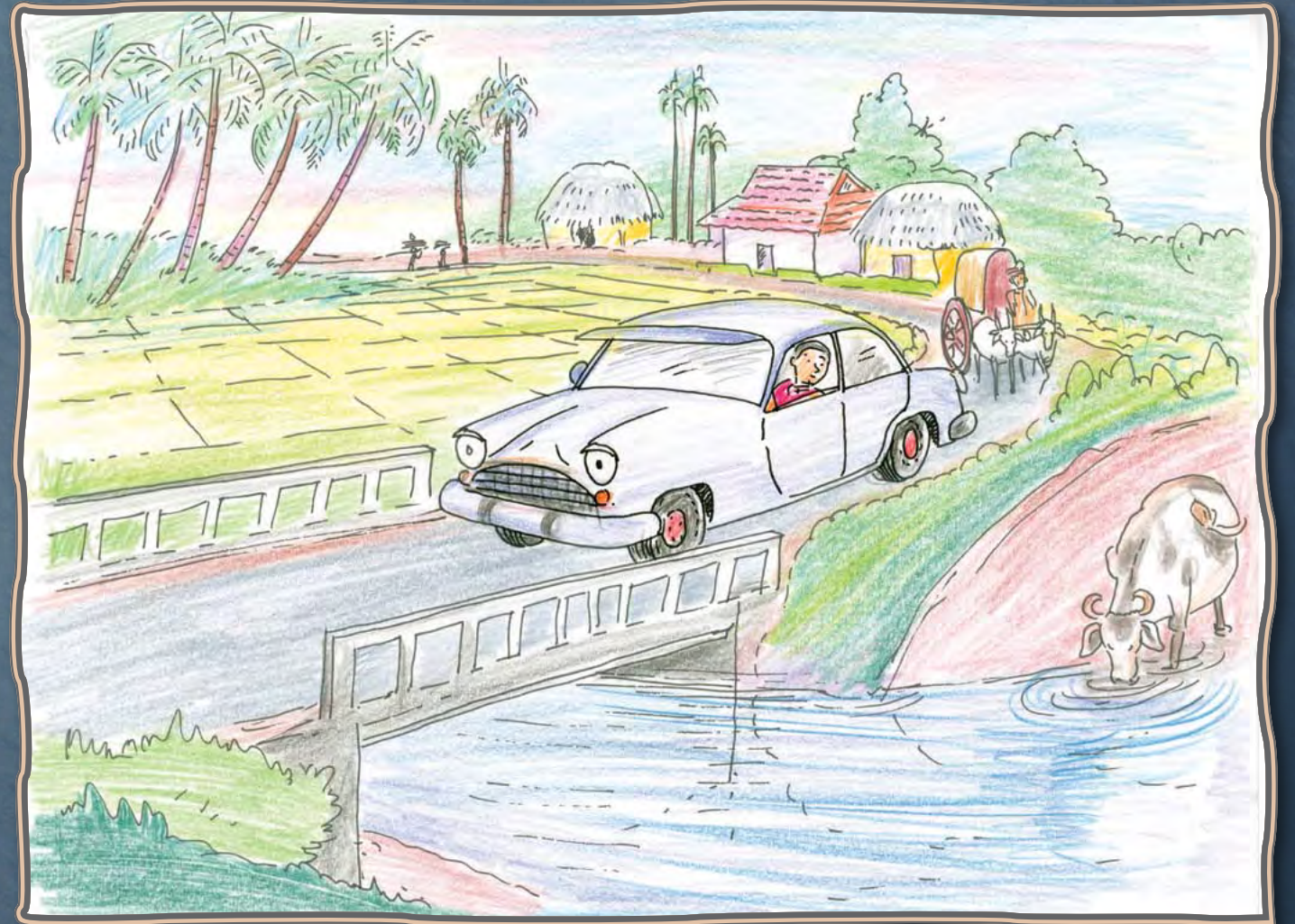
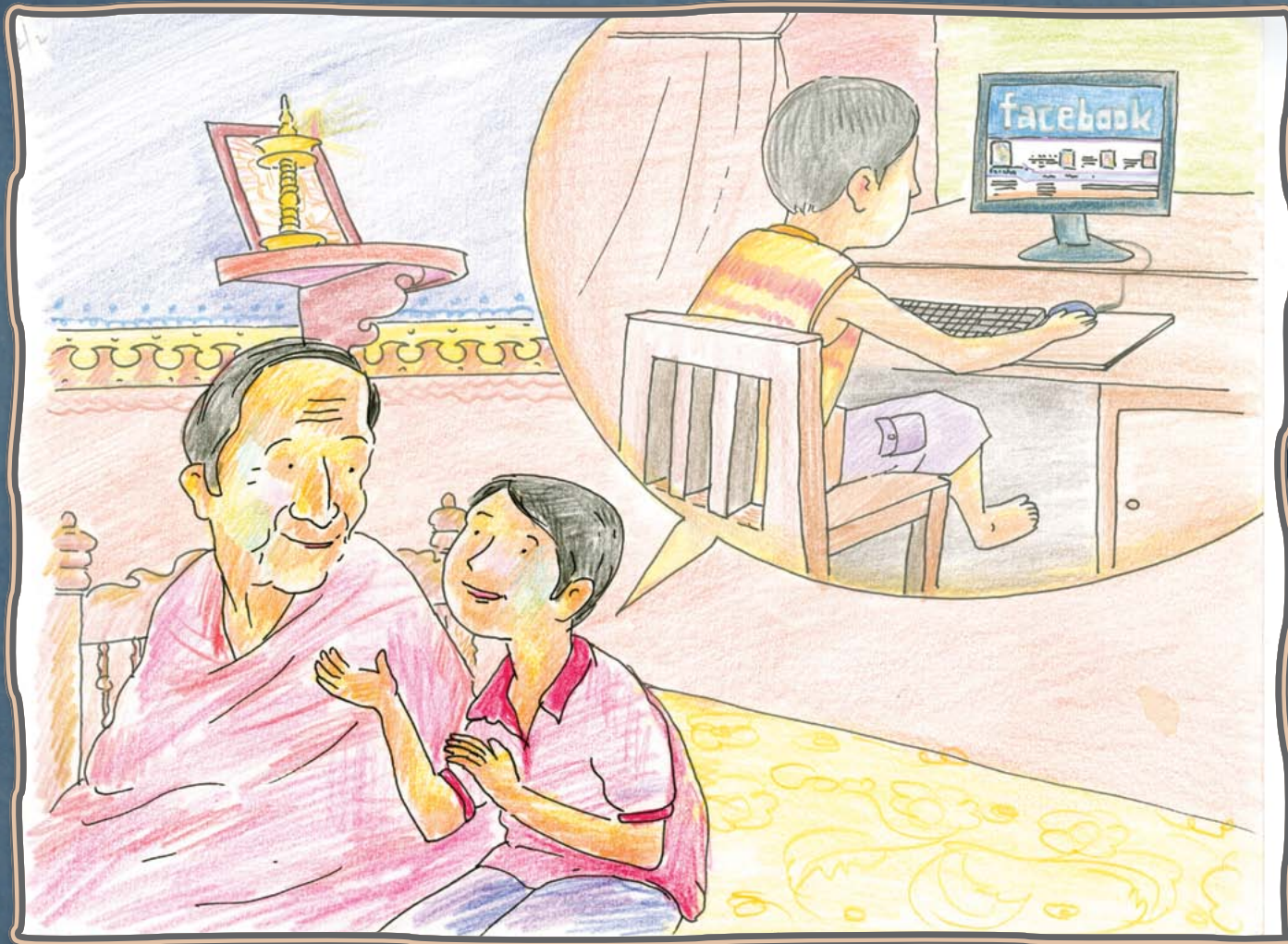
"Frankly, no! There's nothing to do here. The boys are playing cricket all the time. When I try to teach them baseball, they laugh at me. I miss my games and my computer."

Grandpa suggested, "In that case, instead

of being stuck here, I think you should go and see our family's native village. You can stay with your great uncle, my brother. It's a few hours' drive from here."

Figuring that it couldn't be worse than being here, Yogesh agreed. The next day, he got into a hired car and left for the village.

He rolled down the windows, and a warm breeze blew into the car. He watched the passing scenery. Soon the city was far behind them. Green rice fields lined each side of the road their car shared with bullock carts, huge buses and trucks. The



green complemented the blue of the sky, and the scene was pretty.

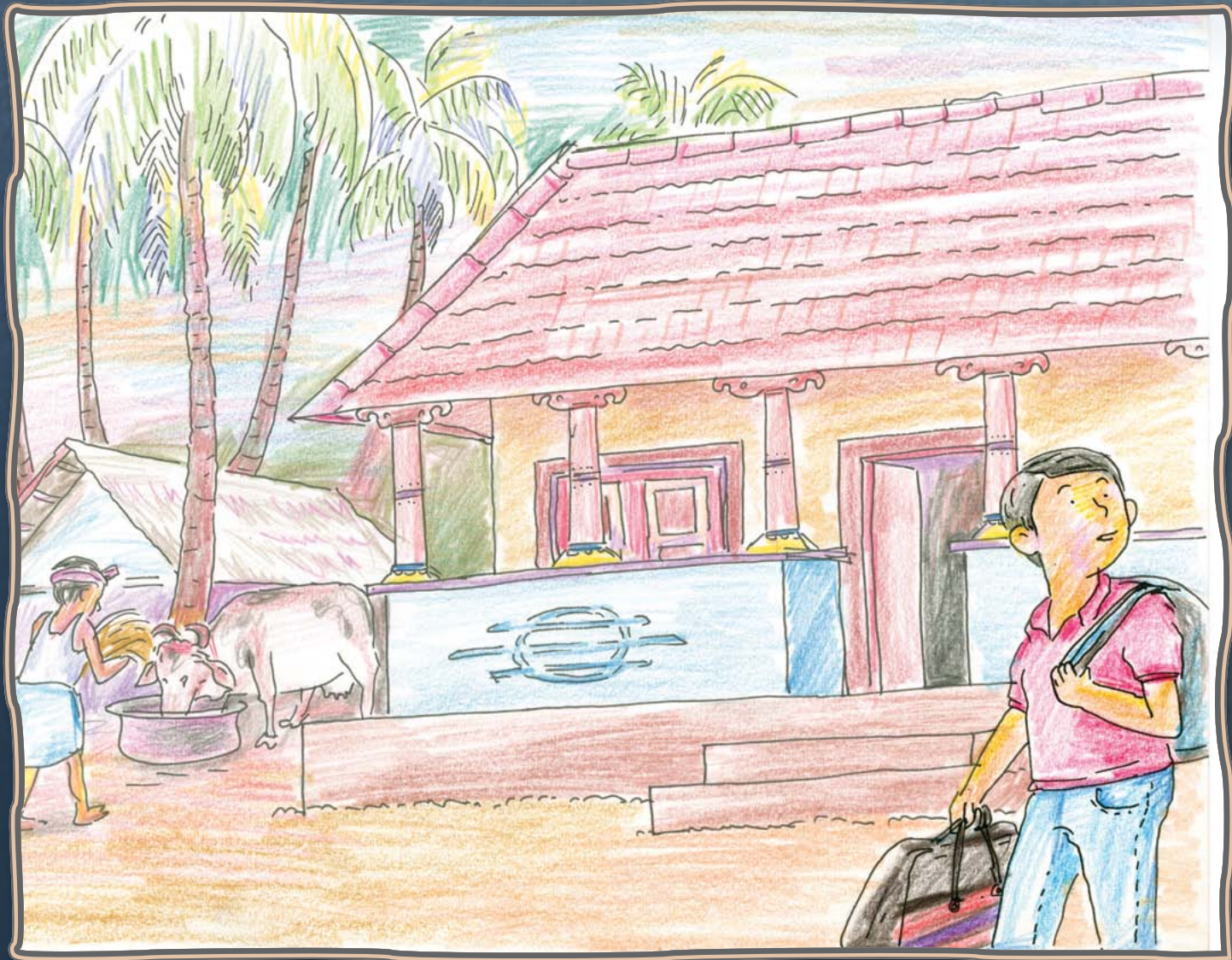
It was evening when they reached Nattrampalli, a little village outside Vellore. The car bumped down a narrow side road for at least a kilometer, then stopped. They got out near a cow shelter. Outside the barn, a white cow mooed at them loudly. Yogesh peeped around the side and saw a small calf grazing on tender grass.

A short distance away, he saw a whitewashed house with a little

lamp hanging outside. His great uncle, Abhiraman, came out and paid the driver.

"Son, welcome home," he said with a toothless smile.

Yogesh walked into the house. His grandpa's home in Chennai was spartan, but it was a palace compared to this place. There was absolutely nothing here. No sofa, no dining table—no furniture whatsoever, except for a cane bed, a few mats and some large gunny bags filled to bursting with grains.



He ran out to get back in the car, but to his dismay, it was disappearing into the distance. A tear rolled down his cheek. How he hated this! Why had he agreed to come? Why had Mom let him go, knowing what it would be like?

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked Uncle.

"Bathroom? Come with me," replied Abhiraman, and took him to a roofless room through which the moon shone

down.

He didn't remember the rest of the evening. He had fallen asleep, sad and upset, on the simple cane bed.

In the morning, a tender breeze blew in and woke him up.

"Uncle, where's the shower?" Abhiraman led him to the well and showed him how to bring up buckets of water to pour over his body.

Yogesh found that he was not as upset as he had been yesterday. "Well, this is a different way to bathe," he thought, "but it works."

He returned to the cottage, where his uncle was holding a glass of frothy milk for him.

"Where do you buy milk, Uncle? Is there a supermarket nearby?" asked Yogesh hopefully.

"There are no shops here. We produce our own food. The milk is fresh from our cows. Do you know how to milk a cow?"

"No..." replied Yogesh.

"Well, then, it's time to learn." Yogesh soon found himself sitting on a short stool next to an 800-pound cow.

Milking the cow was not easy but, Yogesh had to admit, it was fun. He was actually starting to enjoy himself!

In the distance, he saw a boy around his own age who was leading a small herd of goats. Shyly he walked up and introduced himself, using the best Tamil he could muster. The boy, Mani, had dark skin, a mop of curly hair and shining white teeth.

Within a few minutes the two felt like old friends. Mani asked, "Do you want to see some of the things we do here in the village?"

Yogesh felt a surge of excitement. "Sure! I'd like that," he said, thinking of the stories he will have to tell his friends back in the US.

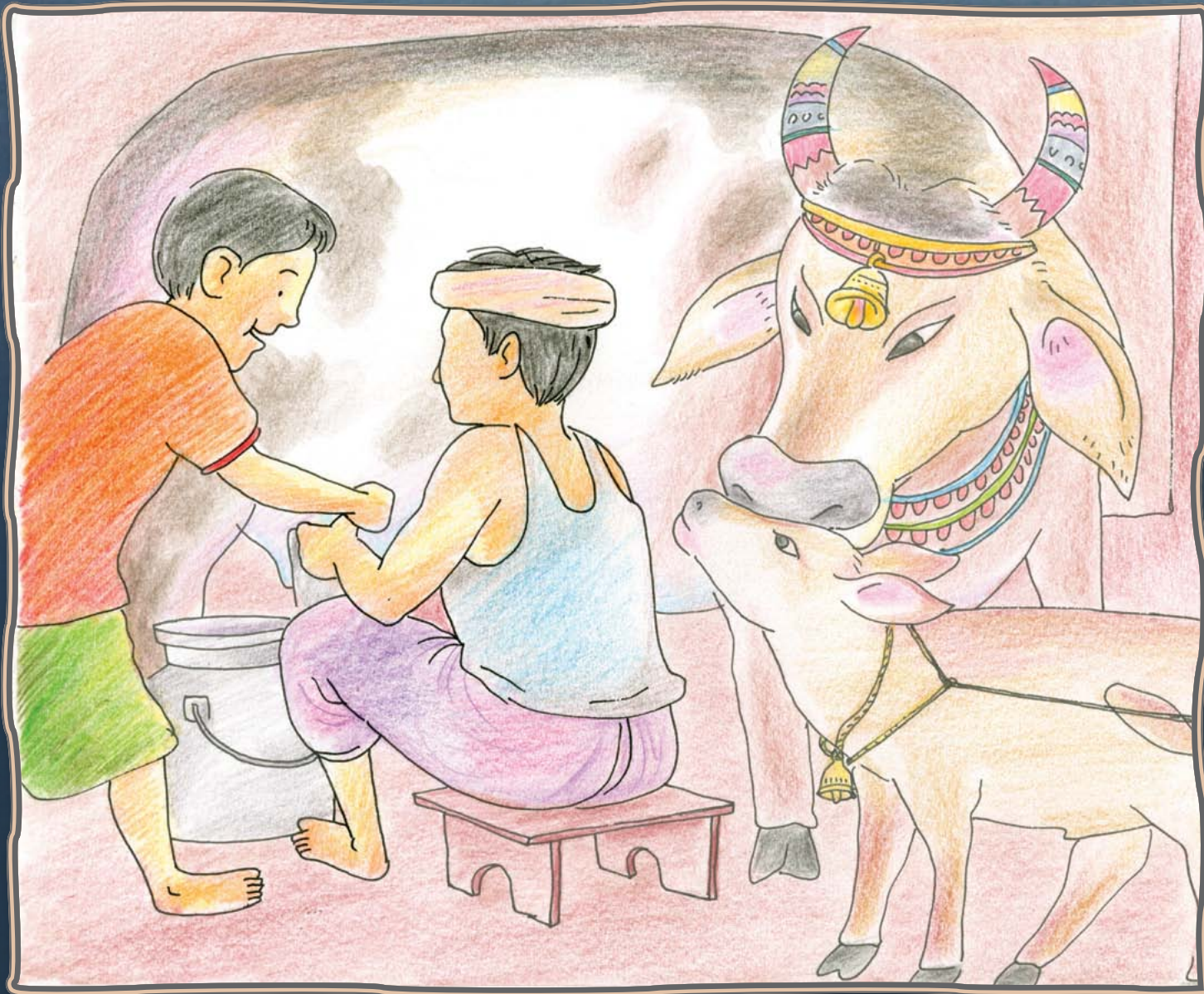
As Mani herded the goats forward

Contentment: A Real Treasure

FROM THE TEACHINGS
OF SATGURU SIVAYA
SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI

Contentment, *santosha*, is the second *niyama*. How do we practice contentment? Simply do not harm others by thought, word or deed. As a practitioner of ahimsa, noninjury, you can sleep contentedly at night and experience *santosha* then and through the day. Contentment is a quality that everyone wants, and buys things to obtain—"Oh, if I only had my house redecorated, I would be content." "A new wardrobe would content me, give me joy and serenity." "To be content, I must have a vacation and get away from it all. There I can live the serene life and have joyous experiences."

The dharmic way is to look within and bring out the latent contentment that is already there by doing nothing to inhibit its natural expression, as *santosha*, the mood of the soul, permeates out through every cell of the physical body. Contentment is one of the most difficult qualities to obtain, and is well summed up within our food blessing mantra, from the *Shukla Yajur Veda*, *Isa Upanishad* invocation, "That is fullness. Creation is fullness. From that fullness flows this world's fullness. This fullness issues from that fullness, yet that



with a sturdy stick, they set off on a path between green paddy fields. Soon they came upon a coconut grove. Mani climbed up a tree and threw down a tender coconut. Slipping back down, he chopped an opening in the coconut and gave it to Yogesh. "Drink this!"

Yogesh drank it eagerly. "This is the sweetest tasting water on earth! Wow!"

Next Mani guided them to a hill where a group of boys were playing. Mani called out to them, "Come and meet Yogesh; he is from Bombay!"

Yogesh shot back, "Not Bombay! USA!" "It doesn't matter. For us, both are the same!"

Yogesh laughed at the statement and suddenly felt lighthearted. These boys had

a simple and easy view of life. In their company, he began to relax.

They climbed the hillock and ate wild berries. They swam in the lake on the other side, and Mani dug up some kind of root vegetable and roasted it on an open fire. When the sun started nearing the horizon, they headed back home.

When they reached the house, Uncle Abhiraman was standing outside with a worried look on his face. But when he saw Yogesh's excitement, he smiled and called him in for supper—freshly cooked rice with sambar and fried potatoes. Mani said goodbye and herded the goats to his family's home. Hungry and tired, Yogesh ate heartily.

That night, as he lay in the cane bed, he watched the stars outside twinkling merrily, and he saw a few fireflies behaving like stars on Earth.

The next morning, after bathing at the well, he milked the cow—with more than a little help from Uncle—and collected some vegetables from the garden.

Soon Mani came for him. Today Yogesh asked permission, "Uncle, may I go out with Mani this morning?"

"Certainly! Have a good time together."

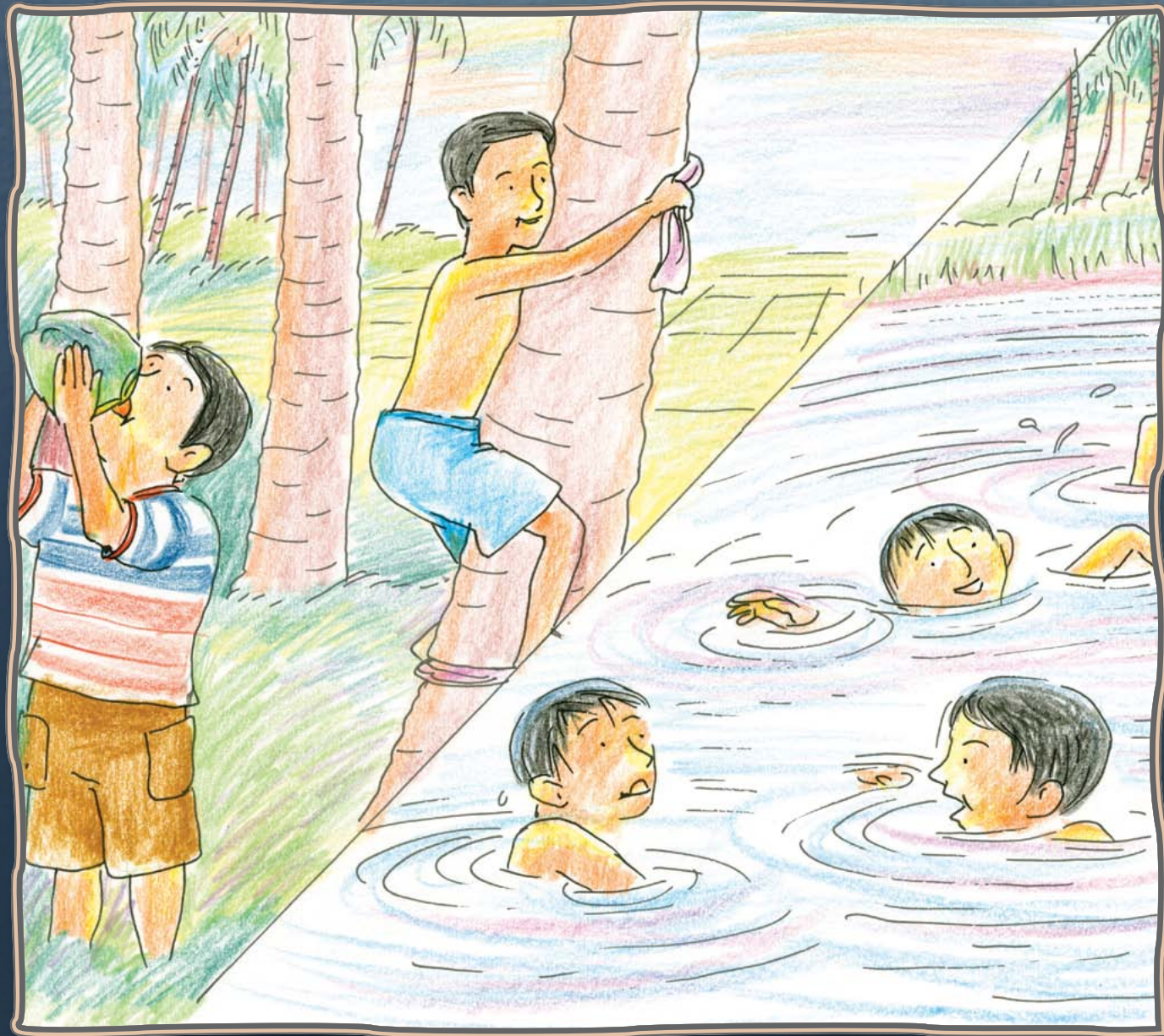
With a big "Thank you!" the two set off to the hillock. This time, the boys wanted to play some games. They taught him marbles and kabaddi. He found that playing marbles was difficult, but kabaddi was easy for him. He enjoyed scuffling around on the ground, pushing,

SANTOSHA

fullness remains full." This joy we seek is the joy of fullness, lacking nothing.

Life is meant to be lived joyously. There is in much of the world the belief that life is a burden, a feeling of penitence, that it is good to suffer, good for the soul. In fact, spiritual life is not that way at all. The existentialist would have you believe that depression, rage, fear and anguish are the foremost qualities of the human temper and expression. The communists used to have us believe that joy and serenity as the outgrowth of religion are just an opiate of the people, a narcotic of unreality. The Semitic religions of the Near East would have us believe that suffering is good for the soul, and there is not much you can do about it. The Saivite Hindu perspective is that contentment is a reflection of centeredness, and discontentment is a reflection of externalized consciousness and ramified desire.

Maintaining joy and serenity in life means being content with your surroundings, be they meager or lavish. Be content with your money, be it a small amount or a large amount. Be content with your health. Bear up under ailments and be thankful that they are not worse than they are. Protect your health if it is good. It is a valuable treasure. Be content with your friends. Be loyal to those who are your long-time, trusted companions. Basically, contentment, *santosha*, is freedom from desire gained by redirecting the forces of desire and making a beautiful life within what one already has in life.



pulling and tugging. It was a bit like tag, but with a lot more running, plus you have to hold your breath for part of it.

Although he washed his clothes at the well every day, his new jeans were soon a dirty brown color. His t-shirt, too, looked like it had seen better days. But Yogesh couldn't care less.

What amazed him the most was that everyone in the village was happy. When he arrived, he had thought, "This is a such a poor village." But after a few days, he couldn't figure out what they were missing. They had good, fresh food, they had comfortable houses, they had the beauty of nature, and they had each other. Nobody

felt they needed computers, TV, Internet, or even iPhones. They were totally content.

The next few days passed quickly in a similar fashion. Soon it was time to head back to Chennai. Yogesh decided to give a gift to each of the boys. They flocked around him as he dug into his bag for things to give away. He gave his watch to Mani. "My goodness!" Mani shouted, "This is beautiful. Thank you. I don't really need it, since I can tell the time by the sun. But it looks good, and it makes me feel like a man."

To Sagar, one of the kabbadi players, he gave his best pair of sneakers. To little Varendra he presented his hand video game. The boy tried to put it in his shorts pocket, which was torn, and the console kept falling out. Yogesh wasn't really sure what Varendra would do with it, but at least it would be a souvenir of his visit.

As Yogesh watched the car approach, his uncle and a few villagers came and stood by him. Yogesh turned to Abhiraman, "Uncle, thank you for everything. Thank you for teaching me how to milk the cow and thank you for teaching me that I don't need expensive gadgets to be content. These have been the happiest few days of my life."

Varendra was beginning to cry, and Mani looked like he too might shed

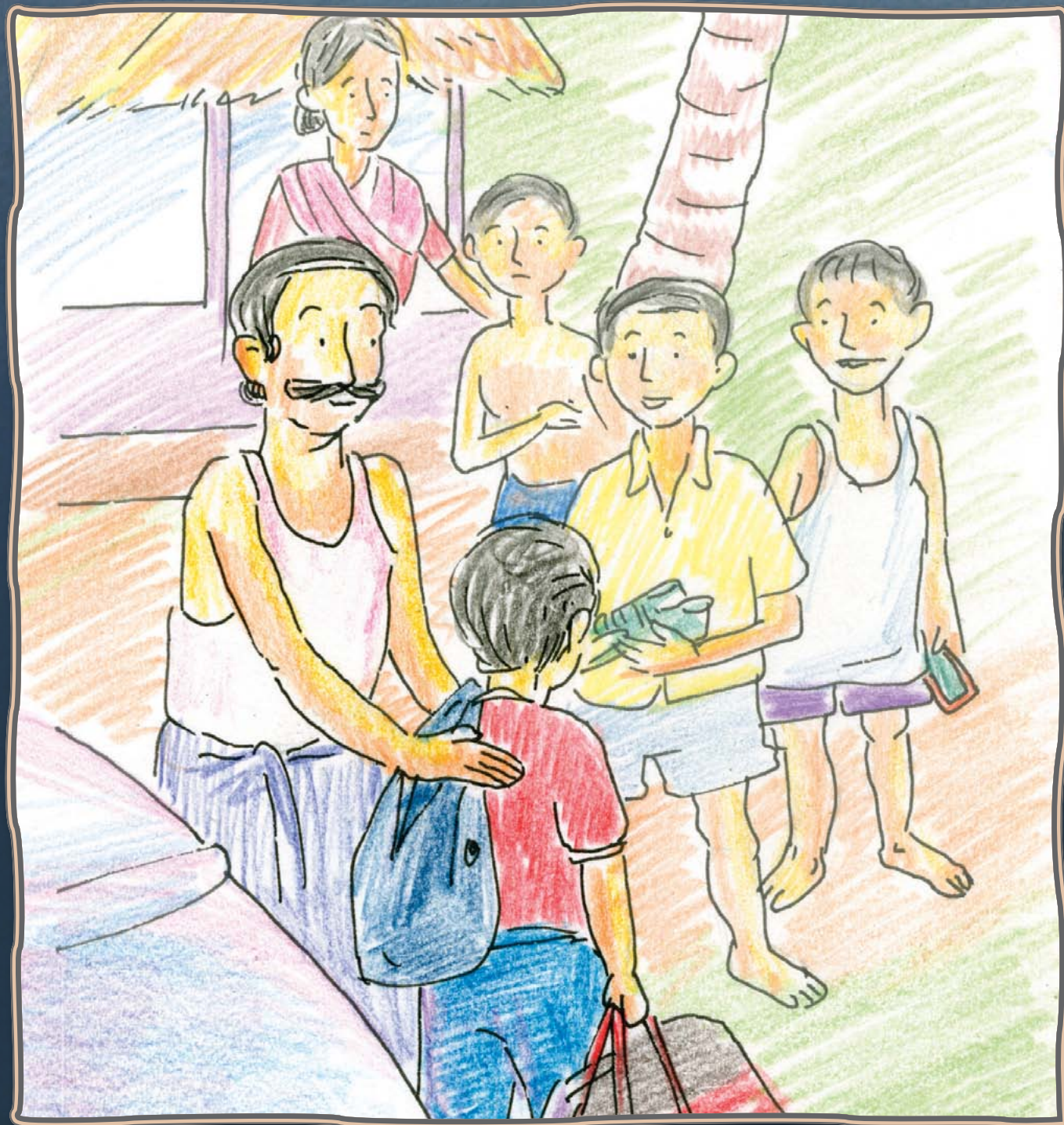
SANTOSHA

The rich seeking more riches are not content. The famous seeking more fame are not content. The learned seeking more knowledge are not content. Being content with what you have does not mean you cannot discriminate and seek to progress in life. It doesn't mean you should not use your willpower and fulfill your plans.

It does mean you should not become upset while you are striving toward your goals, frustrated or unhappy if you do not get what you want. The best striving is to keep pushing along the natural unfoldment of positive trends and events in your life, your family life and your business. Contentment is working within your means with what is available to you, living within your income, being grateful for what you have, and not unhappy over what you lack.

There are many frustrated souls on the path who torment themselves no end and walk around with long faces because they estimate they are not unfolding spiritually fast enough. They have set goals of Self Realization for themselves far beyond their abilities to immediately obtain. If people say, "I am not going to do anything that will not make me peaceful or that will threaten my peace of mind," how will they get anywhere? That is not the idea of *santosha*.

True *santosha* is seeing all-pervasiveness of the one divine power everywhere. The light within the eyes of each person is that divine power. With this in mind, you can go any-



a tear. Yogesh hugged Mani, "I will come back next year to see you. I promise! I will write letters from America, too."

As the car neared Chennai, Yogesh

realized that he had not even thought of his computer for a week. He didn't miss his games, and he felt no need to check up on his 200 Facebook friends.



All the relatives were waiting to greet him as the car pulled into the driveway. Yogesh jumped out and hugged his grandpa. "Thank you for sending me to our native village. It was the greatest experience of my life. I was so happy there, and now I know I can be happy anywhere!"



SANTOSHA

where and do anything. Contentment is there, inside you, and needs to be brought out. It is a spiritual power. So, yes, do what makes you content. But know that contentment really transcends worrying about the challenges that face you. *Santosha* is being peaceful in any situation. The stronger you are in *santosha*, the greater the challenges you can face and still remain quiet on the inside, peaceful and content, poised like a hummingbird hovering over a flower.

Santosha is the goal; dharma, good conduct, remains the director of how you should act and respond to fulfill your karma. This goal is attainable by following the ten Vedic restraints: not harming others by thought, word or deed, refraining from lying, not entering into debt, being tolerant with people and circumstance, overcoming changeableness and indecision, not being callous, cruel or insensitive to other people's feelings. Above all, never practice deception.

Don't eat too much. Maintain a vegetarian diet for purity and clarity of mind. Watch carefully what you think and how you express it through words. All of these restraints must be captured and practiced within the lifestyle before the natural contentment, the *santosha*, the pure, serene nature, of the soul can shine forth. Therefore, the practice to attain *santosha* is to fulfill the yamas. Proceed with confidence; failure is an impossibility.

Other Fun Stories in the Series

At right are previews of six more of the books' twenty stories in which children will encounter challenging situations that are familiar to them, tales of stealing, lying, injuring others and more. The stories illustrate the power of worship, chanting, penance, taking of vows and other religious practices, while highlighting the meaning, purpose and value of applying self control and religious principles in daily life.

Where to Get the Books

Book One, *Ten Tales About Self-Control* and Book Two, *Ten Tales About Religious Life* are each 84 pages long and profusely illustrated with pastel pencil art by Rajeev N.T. of Kerala. The books are available as hardcover (ISBN 978-1-934145-08-1 and 978-1-934145-09-8, \$29.95 each) and as e-books through Amazon.com and Apple's iBookstore. All versions include the audio. Order at minimela.com or through Amazon.com.



How Our Family Became Vegetarians

One day at the dinner table, while enjoying chicken sambal, Janaki, age eight, starts asking difficult questions about why Auntie is a vegetarian and their family is not. Through the course of the story, she realizes that it is wrong to eat animals, decides to quit, and the family joins her in the decision.



Praying for Ganesha's Help

Vasuki, whose father has lost his job, promises to worship Lord Ganesha daily in their shrine to help him find employment. Inspired by his daughter's devotion, Dad searches even harder, and after weeks of interviews finds a new job to support his family, better even than the one he lost.



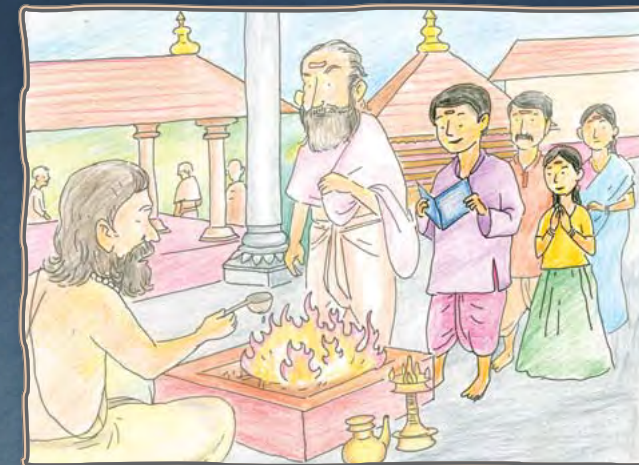
Ananya and the Teacher's Purse

Normally a good girl, Ananya steals \$100 from a teacher's purse and is caught. She must then confess to her parents and deal with the regret, remorse and the shame. She does heartfelt penance, cleaning at the temple, to make up for her mistake and regain the respect of the community.



Treating Guests as God

Valli and Seyon respond selfishly to the unexpected arrival of Aunt Hema and her family. After reflecting on the wisdom of the scripture they have been studying, they open their hearts, treat their guests as God and discover the joy that comes from making others happy.



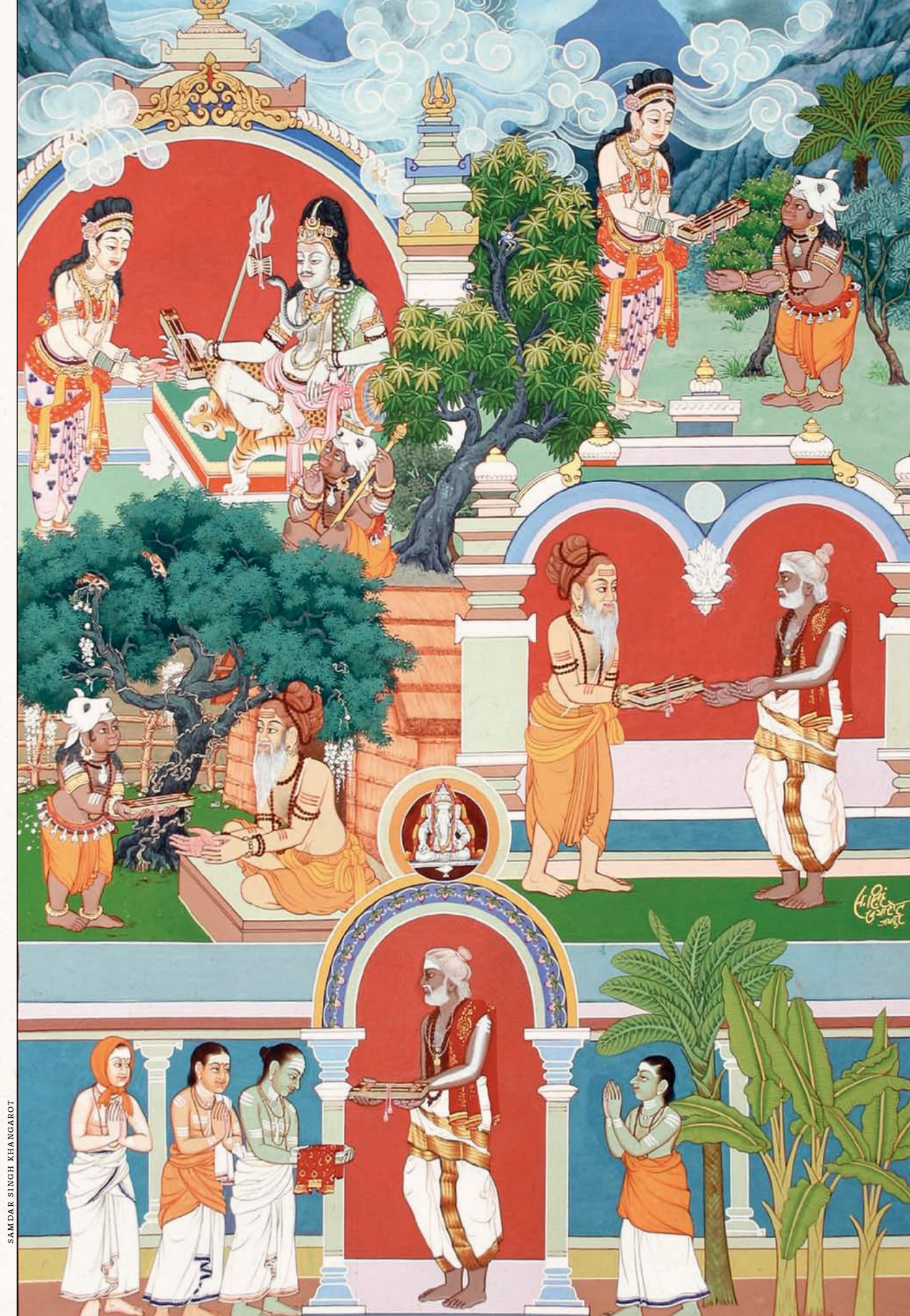
Vadivel's Special Vow

At 12, Vadivel took a vow to remain celibate until marriage. Reaching age 15, he becomes obsessed with Amelia. His sister reminds him of the vow, seeing that Amelia is interested in more than just holding hands. Vadivel struggles with his instincts and finally reaffirms his commitment.



Penance at a Cave in Malaysia

Young Raj prepares himself a month in advance for Tai Pusam, eating just one meal a day and sleeping on the floor. One the day of the festival, he carries kavadi at Batu Caves and has his skin pierced with small spears as a penance. His friend Arvind, afraid at first, learns lessons of devotion and purity.



SAMDAR SINGH KHANGAROT

SCRIPTURE

Digitization Project Saves Saiva Agamas

Kauai's Hindu Monastery completes two-year project to photograph and preserve French Institute's world-renowned palm-leaf scripture collection

SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI had a persistent interest in the *Saiva Agamas*. The founder of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, home of HINDUISM TODAY, knew these ancient texts to be the key scriptures defining the Saiva denomination of Hinduism. They are best known today as the source texts for temple construction and worship. But they contain much more, from cosmology and the intricacies of the guru-disciple relationship, to initiations and instructions for meditations on the nature of Lord Siva.

During his lifetime, Gurudeva, as Subramuniyaswami was known, was dismayed that these spiritual texts were virtually unavailable. So, he sent a team of monks on mission in India in the 1980s to discover where these texts could be found in their original palm-leaf manuscript form. Only a few had been put into print. None had been translated into English, or even into Tamil or other Indian languages.

The largest collection of *Agamas* was encountered at the French Institute of Pondicherry, a hundred miles south of Chennai. This institute was founded and directed by the late Dr. Jean Filliozat, who also directed the nearby French School of the Far East. Dr. Filliozat, wishing to explain the Hindu temple, started the manuscript library soon after opening the institute. During the late 50s and throughout the 60s, the late Pandit N. R. Bhatt spearheaded the collection effort. Bhatt, a scholar of the French School and former head of Indology at the Institute, gathered manuscripts from temples, priests and monasteries across South India.

The Institute now has about 8,600 manuscripts, some as old as three centuries, con-

taining approximately 60,000 texts. Jointly with the French School of the Far East, the total of over 11,000 manuscripts includes the world's largest assemblage of texts on Hinduism's Saiva Siddhanta tradition. It has been deemed a UNESCO "Memory of the World" collection. Besides the Saiva scriptures, there are significant numbers of devotional hymns and legends about holy places, Vedic astrology texts, epics, myths and legends, traditional medical texts, *Vedas* and other literary works. Among the manuscripts, 6,850 are written in Sanskrit in the Grantha script and 1,200 in Tamil.

The palm leaves come in a range of sizes, from the *Ramayana Aarudam* at just a few inches across to one of the *Saiva Agamas* at 45 inches long. These leaves, onto which letters are incised with a stylus, can deteriorate quickly in South India's climate. Many

Setting up the process: Acharya Arumuganatha-swami (left), managing editor of *Hinduism Today*, with Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam and the photography team in 2008



MARKLEY BOYER

are perforated with holes left by insect larvae. They are so fragile that each handling causes damage; pieces break off, sometimes carrying fragments of writing.

Digitizing the Collection

Gurudeva's successor, Bodhinatha Veylanswami, visited the Institute in 2005 after learning of the perilous condition of the manuscripts. He intended to protect the Saiva-related material—about half the collection—from further deterioration by having them digitized. But once he understood the significance of the entire collection, which could easily have been ruined by fire, tsunami or other disasters, he offered to digitize everything.

In their day, palm-leaf manuscripts were state-of-the-art technology. Well cared for, they can last for hundreds of years; but if neglected, they can be quickly destroyed by nature. Traditionally, such manuscripts were painstakingly recopied every hundred years or so to preserve them; but that effort stopped in the 19th century. Early efforts to copy the manuscripts using microfilm technology were thwarted by the cost and complexity. Only recently, with the advent of high resolution digital cameras, did an efficient, economical method become available.

The Institute is owned by the French Min-

Transmission of scripture: (left) This painting was created to honor Dr. K. Pitchai Sivachariyar as Hindu of the Year for 2004 and shows the transmission of the Agamas from Siva to Parvati (upper left), Parvati to Nandi, Nandi to the sages, the sages to Sivachariyar and Sivachariyar to humanity; (right) the wide variety of manuscripts in the Institute's collection



FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

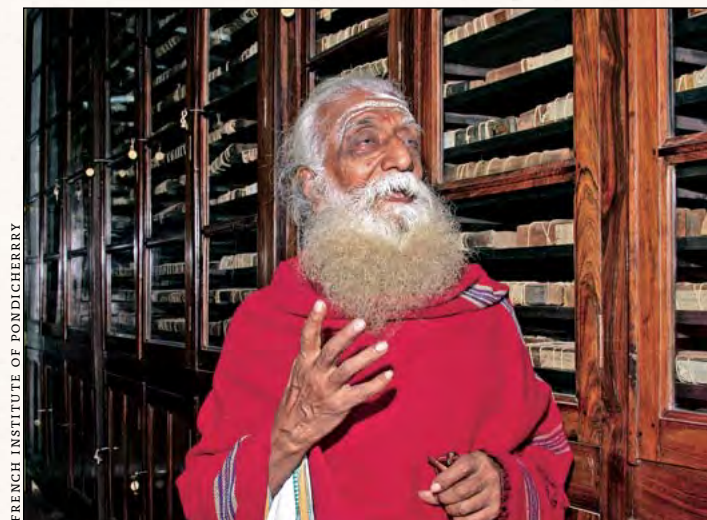
istry of Foreign Affairs. Even though the Institute itself had always intended to digitize the collection, getting permission from the French Government to accept Bodhinatha Veylanswami's offer was a tedious process. Finally, in 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Institute and the monastery's Indian counterpart, the San Marga Trust. The Institute's new director, Dr. Velayoudom Marimoutou, told us it is quite unusual for the French government to enter into such an agreement with a religious organization.

The entire plan could easily have fallen afoul of the French policy of *laïcité*, their strict version of secularism, or separation of church and state. However, the Institute staff concluded the agreement would not violate the spirit of the policy, since the monastery was covering all expenses, no money was being exchanged and the Institute would own the copyright of all photos taken. Another critical factor was the Institute's tradition of openness with the collection. It had always allowed any scholar to easily access the manuscripts, unlike many libraries in India which restrict access. Limited access to rare manuscripts is a major obstacle for Sanskrit scholars. The publication of the Institute's entire collection on-line promises to revolutionize study of these texts by making them available instantly anywhere in the world. Already Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam of Chennai is utilizing the digitized bundles to translate key *Agamas* into English.

Photographers contacted about the job in the Pondicherry area replied that it would be difficult and technical, requiring years of work and untold American dollars. Unfazed, the monastery sought out institutions with experience in digitization. They soon found the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at St. John's University, a Catholic school in central Minnesota. Wayne Torborg, their Director of Digital Collections and Imaging, proved immensely helpful and encouraging. He explained that with mid-price digital cameras and a few meticulous, industrious individuals, the collection could be photographed with top-notch results. He was confident because he was running more than a dozen projects worldwide just like it.

Let the Work Begin

With the MOU secured, plans proceeded in earnest. Experts in ancient manuscripts and photography were consulted, and a simple system using Nikon cameras tethered to



FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

Scriptural guardian:
(left) Sri Sambandan Sivachariyar, now 84, has spent his entire life collecting and researching the collection

than most people would shoot in years. One of the project's D80s took 191,695 photos before acting up! In all, the project went through 12 cameras and eight lenses.

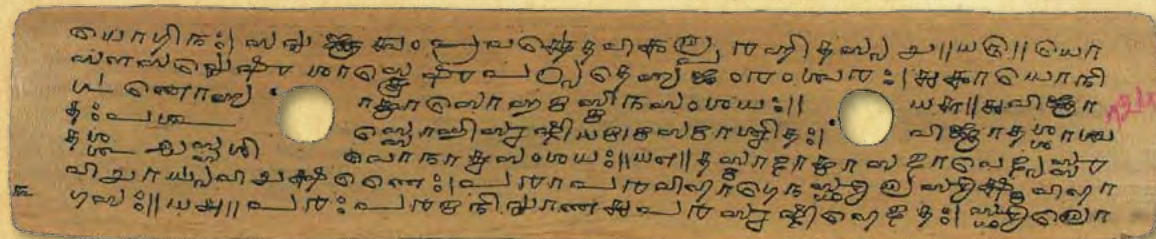
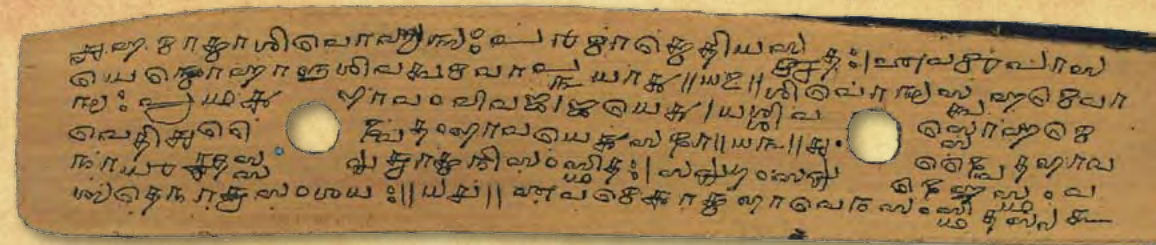
In retrospect, the monastery's project may appear to have been audacious. With no experience in manuscriptology, and only slightly more in photography, they set out to digitize the premier source of

ancient Saivite manuscripts. The condition of the manuscripts ranged from excellent to disintegrating. Some would fall apart at the slightest touch; in others, the leaves had become stuck together to form a solid block. A few bundles were found with live worms in them—and this in one of the best-cared-for collections in India. But the final results were excellent, with sharp image clarity.

The importance of these scriptures cannot be overstated. Consider the excerpt at right from *Sarvajnanottara Agama*, translated by Dr. Sabharathnam. Such profound thought is usually associated only with the *Upanishads* and *Vedanta*, the philosophy most well-known in Indian society. *Vedanta* is even more prominent outside of India, where it is often regarded as the sole expression of Hindu metaphysics. Here, in the *Agamas*, we find not only such profound expression of Advaitic oneness with God, but an expression melded with the metaphysics of temple worship.

The common Vedantic view regards temple worship as a beginner's practice, and provides it little philosophic support. Hence, temple worship is left adrift philosophically, especially in the countries of the diaspora, even though temples are the most conspicuous manifestation of Hinduism.

The Adisaivas, Tamil Nadu's hereditary clan of Sivachariyar temple priests, are the traditional guardians of the *Saiva Agamas*. It is they who entrusted their precious manuscripts to the Institute. Today, leading Sivachariyar priests—such as Dr. Sabharathnam, Dr. Abhiramasundaram, Dr. K. Pitchai and A.S. Sundaramurthy Sivam—have expressed strong interest in utilizing the priest training schools to produce modern Sanskrit, Tamil and English editions of the *Agamas*. A meeting is scheduled for July 2011 in Chennai to discuss how to approach this massive endeavor.



The Leaves' Hidden Treasures

Photo 125 of the Institute's 276-leaf, 8-inch wide bundle cataloged as RE10831 and deceptively labeled "1008 Names of Siva, etc." The bundle contains, among 20 other scriptures, the profoundly mystical *Sarvajnanottara Agama*. The text is Sanskrit written in the Grantha script. Below in Devanagari script and English translation are verses 12 to 16 of chapter 2, "The Direct Blissful Experience of Absolute Oneness with Siva." Verse 12 begins in Grantha on the first line of the top leaf. Translation by Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam of Chennai.

अहमात्मा शिवोह्यन्यः परमात्मेति यः स्मृतः ।
एवं योपासयेन्मोहान् न शिवत्वं अवाप्नुयात् ॥ १२
शिवोऽन्यस्त्वहमेवान्यः पृथग्भावं विवर्जयेत् ।
यश्चिदस्सोऽहमेवेति ह्यद्वयं भावयेत्सदा ॥ १३
अद्वैतभावनायुक्तस्सर्वत्रात्मनि संस्थितः ।

सर्वगं सर्वदेहस्थं पश्यते नाऽत्र संशयः ॥ १४
एवमेकात्मभावेन संस्थितस्य तु योगिनः ।
सर्वज्ञत्वं प्रवर्तेत विकल्प रहितस्य तु ॥ १५
योऽसौ सर्वेषु शास्त्रेषु पठ्यते ह्यज्ञ ईशरः ।
अकायो निर्गुणो ह्यात्मा सोहमस्मि न संशयः ॥ १६

"I am the individual self. Siva who is considered to be the Supreme Self is different from me." He who contemplates in this way being under the spell of ignorance and infatuation will never attain the exalted qualities of Lord Siva characterized by the power of all knowing and that of all doing. (12)

"Siva is different from me. Actually, I am different from Siva." The highly refined seeker should avoid such vicious notions of difference. "He who is Siva is indeed Myself." Let him always contemplate this non-dual union between Siva and himself. (13)

With one-pointed meditation of such non-dual unity one gets himself established within his own Self, always and everywhere. Being established within himself, he directly sees

the Lord, who is within every soul and within every object and who presents Himself in all the manifested bodies. There is no doubt about the occurrence of such experience. (14)

Within such a yogi who establishes himself in absolute non-dual union with Lord Siva and who keeps himself free from all sorts of differentiating notions, the exalted power of all-knowing gets unfolded in all its fullness. (15)

He who is declared in all the authentic scriptures as unborn, the creator and controller of the universe, the One who is not associated with a body evolved from maya, the One who is free from the qualities evolved from maya and who is the Self of all, is indeed Myself. There is no doubt about this non-dual union. (16)

Challenging Materialism

We cling to a matter-based worldview, but physics, brain science and the definition of life itself all point to a non-material reality

BY JAY LAKHANI

ALL PARADIGMS HAVE A HABIT OF CRACKING up. This is not a bad thing at all. Evolution in the world of ideas is as crucial as evolution in the biological realm. Both have to adapt themselves to changing circumstances else they stagnate or perish. Living organisms evolve, reflecting the changing environment; scientific theories evolve through newer discoveries that allow us a more economic and elegant grasp of reality.

Materialism originates in our earliest attempts to define reality using the norm of substances and their attributes. Explaining the universe in terms of sticks and stones or smaller versions of sticks and stones (elementary particles with mass, charge and spin, etc.) is a tried and tested paradigm that has produced durable results for over 2,000 years. The paradigm of materialism is enshrined at the heart of physical sciences and influences all branches of scientific thinking. The 1929 proclamation of the Vienna Circle that "only those statements that can be supported by empirical evidence are meaningful" reflects this strict materialism.

One of the endearing aspects of science is its theoretical preparedness to test all its hypotheses to destruction. But this is not so easy to put into practice. Scientists are human and prone to becoming emotionally attached to their pet paradigms. Let us explore and challenge science's pet paradigm of materialism with challenges from discoveries at the cutting edge of science itself.

The Quantum: Since the 1920s the dramatic discovery of the quantum phenomenon has been stupendously successful in explaining the workings of almost everything from a computer chip to DNA. Though the mathematical formalism is extremely successful, there is complete lack of conceptual grasp of the phenomenon, because the quantum that underpins matter is essentially non-material. Einstein desperately tried to capture the quantum in a materialistic framework, but failed every time. Consider these three intriguing features:

1) Quanta do not behave like matter. If we were to smash two bricks together we still get two bricks—part as rubble and part as energy. But if we smash two quanta together, we can get anything from two quanta to no quanta as a result, without the slightest trace of them or even a ripple of energy.

2) Observer problem: Science finds that reality is not material. This is non-negotiable. So what is reality? The best science can do is to say that it is mathematical (or metaphysical in contrast to material). But a problem still arises: who or what is able to turn a non-material reality into the material reality we call the objective world? In Quantum Mechanics this very serious issue is labelled "wave



HINDUISM TODAY

collapse" or "the observer problem."

3) Non-locality: If two elementary entities (like photons) that were once "entangled" get separated by billions of light years; when we squeeze one, the other knows it instantly! How does it know? There is clearly a non-local or a non-material linkage.

The reason such conceptual anomalies will not go away is that we continue to dignify matter as primary and demote the quantum discovery to a mere mathematical ploy invoked to handle the unexpected shenanigans of matter. This is not only like putting the cart before the horse but attempting to show how the cart is pulling the horse! Most physicists are so fixated on matter that it is almost impossible for them to think outside a materialistic box.

But quanta obviously point to a non-material phenomenon that is primary. Matter has to be demoted to a secondary feature, as Schrodinger had suggested: Particles are just *schaumkommen* (appearances). The empirical world of matter that we are so sure about is just one aspect of appearance rigorously validating another aspect of appearance. When we rub two pebbles together and hear the satisfying empirical click, all we have done is given credence to one aspect of the appearance (pebble) using another aspect (pebble) of appearance. We define this process as crisp empirical science. The reason material reality appears so solid and objective is that not only is the world of appearance incredibly self-consistent, it is shared universally by all observers.

Neuroscience: At the heart of neuroscience sits consciousness, another intriguing phenomenon. We can be forgiven for thinking that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of brain activity. However, investigations attempting to find the seat of consciousness in the brain reveal a highly versatile phenomenon that defies a simplistic reductionist approach. This is referred to as the hard problem in neuroscience. Can we find a slice of the brain (or a region in the brain) that produces consciousness? How are we going to verify that experimentally? Consciousness is a subjective phenomenon and every tool we come up with is bound to be an object. So how can we possibly carry out an experiment to find the seat of consciousness using material tools?

Let us do a thought experiment: Imagine that we have a highly sensitive probe which we can use to prod any part of the brain. Exactly how are we expecting the probe to detect consciousness? Remember, we are not exploring matter or motion or even a complex process associated with a living cell. We are in search of consciousness. How do we do that? This is the problem. Only consciousness

can validate consciousness and neither are objective by definition.

A host of thinkers keep churning up volumes of literature to explain consciousness away in material or social or psychological or computational terms. This is how one brain scientist explains consciousness: "Consciousness is short-term memory combined with awareness." All he has done is to replace one unknown (consciousness) with another unknown (awareness). This is perhaps forgivable, but what is unforgivable is when some authors generate a jungle of jargon to circumvent their confusion. Employing a string of clever words does not necessarily mean that we have grasped what we are talking about. Let us look at a classic example from Dennett who comments, "Conscious human minds are more-or-less serial virtual machines implemented inefficiently on the parallel hardware that evolution has provided for us." This is supposed to lull us into thinking that he has explained consciousness away! Why are so many intelligent thinkers keen to explain consciousness away as a secondary feature of matter rather than acknowledge and dignify it as a primary phenomenon? The answer comes from John Searle who says, "If one had to describe the deepest motivation for materialism, one might say that it is simply a terror of consciousness. It challenges science's pet paradigm of materialism."

Biology: In life sciences, the definition of life itself poses a similar problem. A live entity is defined as a complex string of molecules undergoing complex processes like homeostasis, metabolism, growth, adaptation, response to stimulus, reproduction, etc.

Life makes its appearance when an entity throws up a membrane to separate itself from the rest of the environment. This separation offers it a chance to build a kind of individuality for itself. After separation, it exhibits its uniqueness by interacting with its environment in a selective manner! The word "selective" is the crucial term that hides the non-material underpinning to life. The best definition of life I have come across is: Life is that which is not in conformity with its environment but in defiance of it! Even the simplest form of life does not roll over and play dead when nature prods it. It does not like being dictated by nature. When we see a bacteria buzzing, it is fighting against natural forces. When it stops its fight, external forces will tear it apart. A biologist offered this tongue-in-cheek example of how to distinguish between living and non-living things. If you kick a piece of rock you can work out its trajectory to the nearest millimeter. But if you kick a dog, its trajectory is the last thing you can work out—though it is quite likely that it will go for your leg!

So when we hear the idyllic saying, "Let us go back to nature," don't listen. They are asking us to die! Everything humanity stands for has been achieved by standing up against nature and its forces, and not by playing ball with it. An evolutionary biologist may object to this explanation and suggest that life is just complexified nature (the apex being mankind) that is standing up to less complex nature! But then they have slipped in a meta-term, "complex," that hides the non-material aspect of what life is all about. The study of life belongs to a new field of science: "complexification" which does not use a reductionist materialistic approach.

To suggest that life is an epiphenomenon of matter and its attributes is an oversimplification. It is fine to suggest that human beings are a continuation of the animal kingdom but this is not necessarily the same as suggesting that life is a continuation of the material kingdom. The signature of life is that it does not like being buffeted by material forces; it stands up to them and attempts to harness

them. Modern humanity reflects the culmination of this process.

Leap Beyond Matter: Quanta, consciousness, or the definition of life itself: none of them sit well within the paradigm of materialism. This does not mean that we have to throw this paradigm out the window. Even though we know that Newton's theory of gravitation is just an approximation of Einstein's more elegant theory, we



More than neurons: "Investigations attempting to find the seat of consciousness in the brain reveal a highly versatile phenomenon that defies a simplistic reductionism."

still use Newton's theory to do our day-to-day calculations. In the same way, a materialistic paradigm should be accommodated as a ploy that gives us a handle to relate to the world around us. However, this should not stop us from taking a conceptual leap beyond matter. Schrodinger was aware that the quantum phenomenon resonates well with the insights of Eastern metaphysics. Let us explore that avenue.

Esoteric, non-theistic Hinduism offers an interesting insight into the nature of reality. It claims that the underpinning to everything including ourselves is Brahman. The best linguistic expression for Brahman is captured through the words: Existence (Asti) and Consciousness (Bhati).

When Brahman shudders, the world of appearance comes into being. The subject/object divide, too, is part of this appearance. Such stuff could be written off as poetry if it were not so incredibly close to what quantum and consciousness are pointing at. If we were to ask a physicist to give a physical interpretation to the quantum function, he will immediately say it is the probability of existence!

Trying to explain the quantum in terms of matter fails because it is trying to capture reality through its appearance. The reason why neuroscience struggles to capture the essence of consciousness is that it ends up focusing on what we are conscious about, rather than on what consciousness actually is. This again is an attempt to capture reality through the world of appearance. What life reflects is the struggle of consciousness to find greater and better expression in the material world. This is why we have evolved from a single cell organism to this complex being and this is why we are so keen to make sense of the world around us. The question still remains why all this; why this subject/object divide? Shelly provides an eloquent answer in Song of Apollo: "I am the eye with which the universe beholds itself and knows itself as divine."

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LIFESTYLE

How We Spiritualized Our Business

A successful couple bring the *Bhagavad Gita's* teachings to Silicon Valley

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

IN 1981, SATYA AND KRISHAN KALRA CO-founded BioGenex, now a multimillion-dollar biotech firm producing the latest in cellular and diagnostic testing. Krishan is CEO and head of research and development at BioGenex Laboratories while Satya now increasingly devotes time to spiritual teaching. She has several inspirational books to her credit. Together, Satya and Krishan have discovered that there is no conflict between material and spiritual wealth; each can enhance the other.

At one point, however, there was a real tension between spirituality and materialism in their lives. During the early years, striving to build BioGenex from the ground up, Krishan and Satya became preoccupied with business matters to the exclusion of all else.

Both were born in the small town of Lucky in Bano in the Northwestern part of undivided India. In the Partition of 1947, this area became part of Islamic Pakistan, and both families were compelled to leave for India.

Satya's middle-class family, involved in the shoe trade, eventually settled in Gwalior. "My father had little education, but he was a saintly practitioner of the *Gita*," she recalls. "My mother was an intelligent housewife who used to counsel the community on family issues. They were both very giving people. Everything was first for others, then for us."

Krishan grew up in a much more affluent family of landowners, but that made it doubly hard to adjust to the hardships meted out by Partition. "My father was not educated beyond the ability to read, write and count. Our life in India after Partition was very difficult—there were many times we wouldn't even get three meals in a day," he says. He recalls being handed the *Bhagavad Gita* by his father when he was just six years old. He used to recite from it every day, until he left home for the larger world.

Education was a hard-won prize, as the family did not have money to send him further than middle school. He was about to join an uncle in a clerical job in the railways when

compensation money for their lost property in Pakistan came in and the family insisted he go in for higher education. Krishan went on to college in Mumbai and got a teaching job at the Bhabha Institute. But he was still leading a hand-to-mouth existence, so he went on a teaching scholarship to Chicago to find a way out of poverty for the family.

Meanwhile, Satya completed her B.Sc. and went on for M.Sc. In her family, she says, education was not for securing a job, but rather a good husband. She soon found herself married to Krishan and following him on the journey to America.

In the hard times that followed, Krishan somehow lost the faith he had as a child. "My father was above religion, but he believed in God, and he had those principles which guided him very strongly in life," he says. "I was very spiritual till I left home. Then I became a scientist and I got it into my head that there is no God and everything is left brain."

Satya, too, found it hard to keep her faith intact in her new country. This was some



forty years ago, and there were no Hindu temples in the area. Even so, she was unable to forget her upbringing. "My father was a businessman, but he was very spiritual, and he would conduct havans. Whenever there was a need in the temple, they would ask him to help. Our family wasn't much into rituals, but I learned from observing my father and his attitude. He was very open-minded, taking us to Hindu temples, Muslim *dargas* and Sikh *gurdwaras*."

The young couple settled in Chicago, and life was hard while Krishan worked towards his Ph.D. Satya finished her M.Sc., then worked to support the couple. Later, they were both working and also started a family. After several years, they moved to California and founded their own company. "We tried to bootstrap our business," says Krishan. "And that meant struggle and hard work."

In their passion to make it big, faith took a back seat. "I was more of a ritual person, not a spiritual person," Satya confesses. "The only thing I knew was you pray to God when you have difficulties and don't like your life."

The work became so important that the needs of the family were sometimes forgotten, such as attendance at a child's baseball game or Brownie meeting. He recalls the day when he never turned up at his ten-year-old son Amit's all-important game: "I believe it was a game he really wanted me to be there for because he was expecting to do well in it," he says with regret. "I got busy in my work and totally forgot about it. When I remembered, it was too late."

Krishan was a driven, workaholic boss. "If I was working six days, I'd expect them to work six days; and if I was working seven days, I'd expect them to work seven days. I gave no consideration for family time." He related to others reactively, getting angry when they got angry, arguing when they argued.

This was the pattern at home as well. "I felt my life was falling apart," Satya recalls, "I felt totally lost, depressed and confused." But

remembering the faith of her childhood, she sought out the saints and invited them home. She met Swami Hariharji Maharaj, founder of International Gita Ashram, who told her to read the *Bhagavad Gita*. She had tried often, but had given up because it seemed too complex. The swami advised her to read just three verses per day—and that changed her life. To better understand the text, she



learned Sanskrit and read several commentaries. Gradually, the *Gita* became the anchor of her life.

Krishan had become a hard-boiled businessman. "Satya pushed me back into spirituality. She had to really work hard, because I was stubborn. She would bring priests home, beg me, persuade me, and eventually she succeeded. One of the saints who came over was Hariharji Maharaj. He had some power, and he changed my mind. Looking directly at me, he asked me to organize a *Gita* conference." That conference, "Reconnecting Spirituality and Technology," was held at Stanford University, with erudite scholars such as Dr. Karan Singh and iconic business leaders including Desh Deshpande discussing the *Gita*.

Spiritualizing life: (opposite) Satya doing Ganga arati at Parmath Niketan, Rishikesh; Krishan (center, blue-striped shirt) with his employees at BioGenex headquarters in San Ramon, California; (below) Satya at a yoga retreat, Rishikesh

For Krishan, that was a turning point. He gave up his materialistic mindset and embraced the Vedanta way—looking on himself as the trustee of his corporation and at vendors and customers as stakeholders. "Everything should be for the welfare of the stakeholders. To be a trustee is a privilege, not a right," he says. Before, workers had been merely cogs in the wheel; now, their welfare was of prime concern.

Krishan also started looking at the larger picture. He became involved with TIE, a non-profit business organization for emerging entrepreneurs. As its globalization chairperson, he opened 20 chapters and mentored young entrepreneurs. Having gone through so many struggles, he now focused on recognizing the larger family, and giving back.

For the Kalras, spirituality came into their home along with the saints. Since many of the saints who spoke at the conference were staying with them, Krishan was able to interact with them. There was Gita Pravachan every day and *bhajans* in the evening. He says, "It had a profound effect on us all. The credit goes to Satya that this *gyan-ganga*, ocean of knowledge, had come to our house. We didn't have to go to Haridwar or Rishikesh—the saints had come to us. We were so lucky, so fortunate."

For Satya, too, the encounter with the saints was transforming. "To me, worldly gain had been the most important thing—going to a higher and higher rank in the corporate world, sending my children to the best private schools, having a bigger house, a bigger car. To me all those things were signs of a successful life," she admits.

Then she had a major problem with her back, and she was bedridden for months. During that time, she did some serious rethinking. Surrounded by the four walls of her luxurious 10,000-square-foot home, she realized that fine homes, a fine lifestyle, and positions of power had little value if you were not happy. She recalls, "I would lie down and contemplate and go deeper and deeper into connecting with my inner self."

One day she felt a light radiate over her and an Om flying over her body. "I had no idea what it was, but I enjoyed that light so much. After that, it became like my blanket. Instead of going into my blanket, I would go into that light and feel connected."

"I followed a very disciplined life, as Lord Krishna recommended in *Gita*—eating satvic food (light and fresh vegetarian), doing a



lot of yoga asana, pranayama and meditating, walking in the lap of nature, practicing silence, staying in the company of like-minded people and staying fully focused on the project."

"My big thing was to get the children acquainted with the saints," she recalls. Often the saints came to stay for a month. She would be working at the corporation, doing the groceries, cooking and then hosting the saints and followers. The lectures would be followed by dinner, and the evening often lasted until midnight. Her young son Amit would be doing homework, yet also recording and video taping the event—and sometimes falling asleep in the process. He was a child, but he absorbed a lot, Satya relates. If sometimes she did something which he felt was not right, he would pipe up, "Mom, this is not what your *Gita* teaches!"

Satya has deep devotion to all the saints, but Sai Baba is her guru. Her husband and children, on the other hand, particularly took to Muniji of Parmath Niketan, Rishikesh. Her daughter, a lawyer, adopted him as her guru. When it came time to marry, she married the person Muniji recommended.

Having discovered her own path to blissful living, Satya has founded "Path to Anandam" (www.pathtoanandam.org), to help others find their way through this material world. She visits schools, hospitals and temples, speaking about simple techniques for enhancing life. In her efforts to increase awareness of an ancient religion, she uses modern methods—PowerPoint presentations and all her marketing skills, scientific language and corporate know-how.

Satya strives to communicate the essence of *Bhagavad Gita*, drawing on its spiritual, humanistic and practical aspect rather than the philosophy. Her approach has been attractive to many. She has been invited to Germany to speak about the *Gita*, and one of her books is being translated into German. Her book, *My Questions, God's Answers*, will be used for a course on ethics at UC Berkeley; and she will be giving *Gita* lessons to the college and a hospital in Coimbatore.

Being human, Satya still has her bad days; but now she takes them with equanimity. "Even if someone gets mad at me, I think God is giving me some message behind this—helping me to increase my tolerance, taking away some bad karma." Seeing her always smiling, friends fondly call her "Anandamayi," "blissful mother"—and often say, "Let's ask Satya how she lives in *anandam*." She cheerfully advises them when they have an issue. "The issue is a small thing—but you are bigger than the issue."

When she herself has tough times, she confides, "I go into my home shrine and pray. I'll cry if I have to—it's just my place, it's between me and my God. I am totally fearless about what will happen tomorrow or what will happen in the future. Every problem is one less debt in my life."

The power of the Hindu faith and the gurus in their life is invaluable to the Kalras. At home and in the corporate world, the Kalras have taken measures to improve their environment. Krishan points out that spirituality has helped to ground him so he plans better and doesn't forget commitments to his family and staff. He realizes his workers need time to meet their family commitments, to see to children and cook for family. He says, "I tell them, 'Hey, go home—it's time to go home. You have other responsibilities—come back tomorrow when you're fully rested.'"

Krishan has introduced the American-style five-day work week in BioGenex's Indian office, even though most businesses over there work six days. His employees now have enough time to attend to their other responsibilities. In addition, each member of the staff gets health coverage. Krishan has also started internship programs, enabling younger people to learn on the job with an experienced mentor.

Most of all, his attitude has changed the way he views people. When he started the India office, he instructed the staff not to call him Dr. Kalra or Sir—just by his first name, which is rarely done in India. As he points out, in India the CEO is regarded almost as a

India connection: *Satya and Krishan with Muniji of Parmath Niketan, India; Satya applies tilak to a young girl at Hyderabad school for Durga Puja*

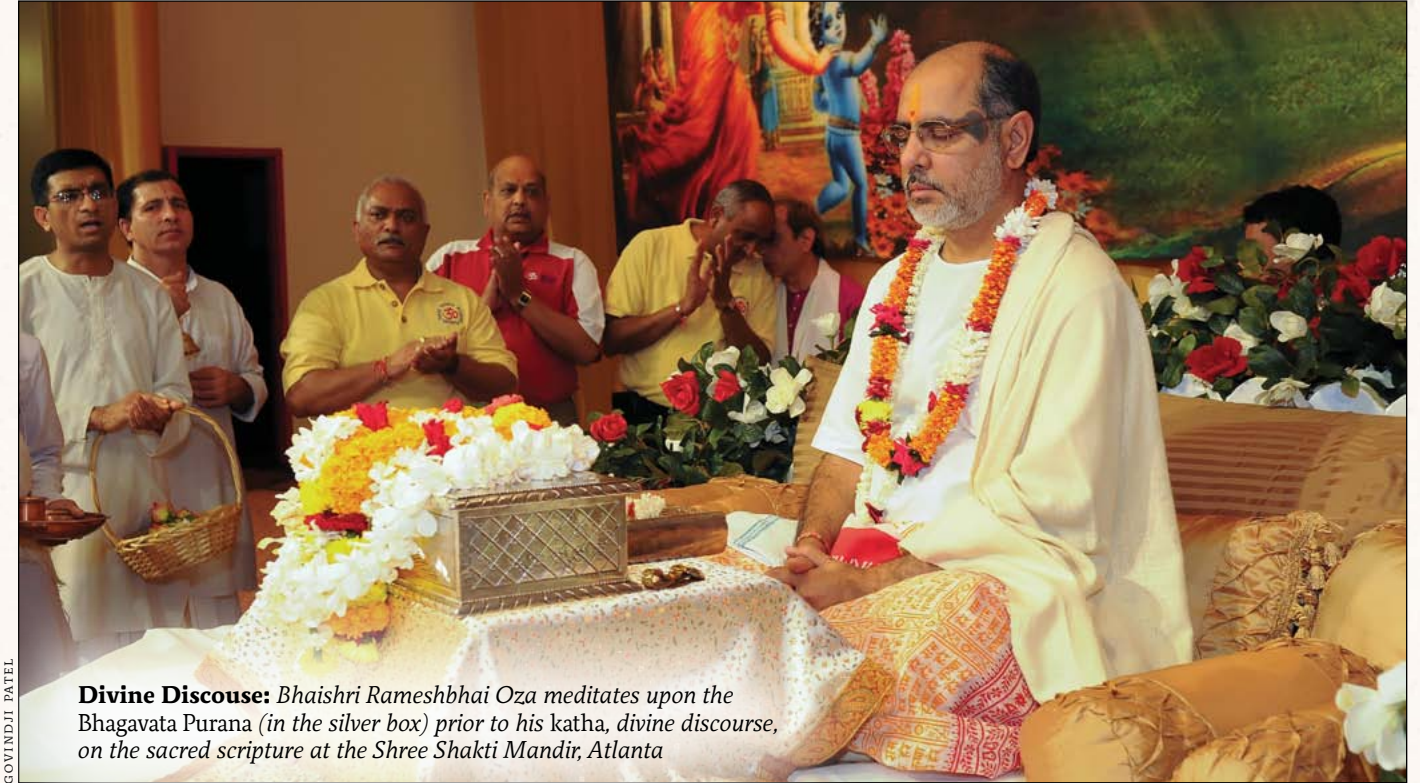
god. Jaws dropped when, instead of having a special office, he sat in an open cubicle with the rest of the staff.

Then he surprised them further by asking managers to select their own colors and tiles. He says with a wry smile, "In the old days, I would have made all the decisions! Now it's about giving everyone a chance to contribute, giving everyone the respect they deserve." And in place of his old reactive response pattern, he now listens. If someone is angry, he no longer responds in kind, but instead suggests reconnecting when things are calmer.

The Kalras' company designs, develops and markets cancer diagnosis and prognosis products. Krishan remarks they've gone the extra mile to ensure these meet the highest standards. Most products are supposed to be guaranteed for 60 or 90 days. BioGenex, however, supports the product's performance for its entire two-year shelf life—offering free replacement. Products are also given free to several hospitals in India.

"It's about fairness," says Krishan. "Not taking advantage of those who are in a weaker position, and focusing on long-term relationships rather than quick gain. If you take advantage of other people—suppliers or customers or potential or past employees—you have to pay for it in your next life. That understanding helps one to become more sensitive and fair to the needs of others. It is practice rather than policy. I try to set an example by how I treat other people."

The strong element of spirituality the Kalras have introduced into their business and their personal lives is having pleasant repercussions on the lives of those who come into their path. Satya reflects, "Ultimately, everything we do in our lives is to be happy. People have to realize that the basic foundation of their *anandam* is themselves."



Divine Discourse: Bhaishri Rameshbhai Oza meditates upon the Bhagavata Purana (in the silver box) prior to his katha, divine discourse, on the sacred scripture at the Shree Shakti Mandir, Atlanta

INTERVIEW

Tapping the Power of *Bhagavat Purana*

BY PUNIT PATEL, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

This interview was conducted in July of 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia, during Bhaishri Rameshbhai Oza's presentation (katha) of Bhagavat Purana, the ancient text recounting the life of Lord Krishna.

Punit Patel: *Is it a limitation that Bhagavat is in Sanskrit, as we are then dependent upon a learned preacher to understand it?*

Bhaishri: Sanskrit is the language of the Gods. It is not a dead language but the divine language of the cultured. We must first understand this. Whenever any text is translated, a portion of the original essence is lost. *Bhagavat* has been called the physical form of Lord Krishna. Therefore, as with all forms of Krishna, every piece must remain in its correct place. Yes, the fact that a preacher is needed to explain the Sanskrit verses is a limitation; but that becomes a strength as well, because it forces people to go deeper into the text to understand the hidden essence. It is a blessing in disguise, which brings you into the company of saints.

Punit: *I have heard the Bhagavat at least 17*

times in the last year, but I still feel I must hear more. How to explain this addiction?

Bhaishri: Every time one hears the *Bhagavat*, a new meaning can be found in every verse or episode. It is never out of date. Fasting, penance and *katha* are all done in an effort to develop love for God, the main aim of the human body. For example, a man is sent from India to the United States for a business trip. Now, if that man never really attends the necessary meetings and just tours the nation, then his boss will get upset when he returns to India. The man lacked love for the goal, which was progress of the company, just like many people forget their goal of realizing God. Lacking love for this goal, they get caught up in worldly matters and are unable to achieve it.

Punit: *Ahalya, Sita, Draupadi, Mandodari and Tara are considered the five satis, all of whom had to deal with grave sorrows in life. Are the ideal Hindu women always the ones who take on sorrow?*

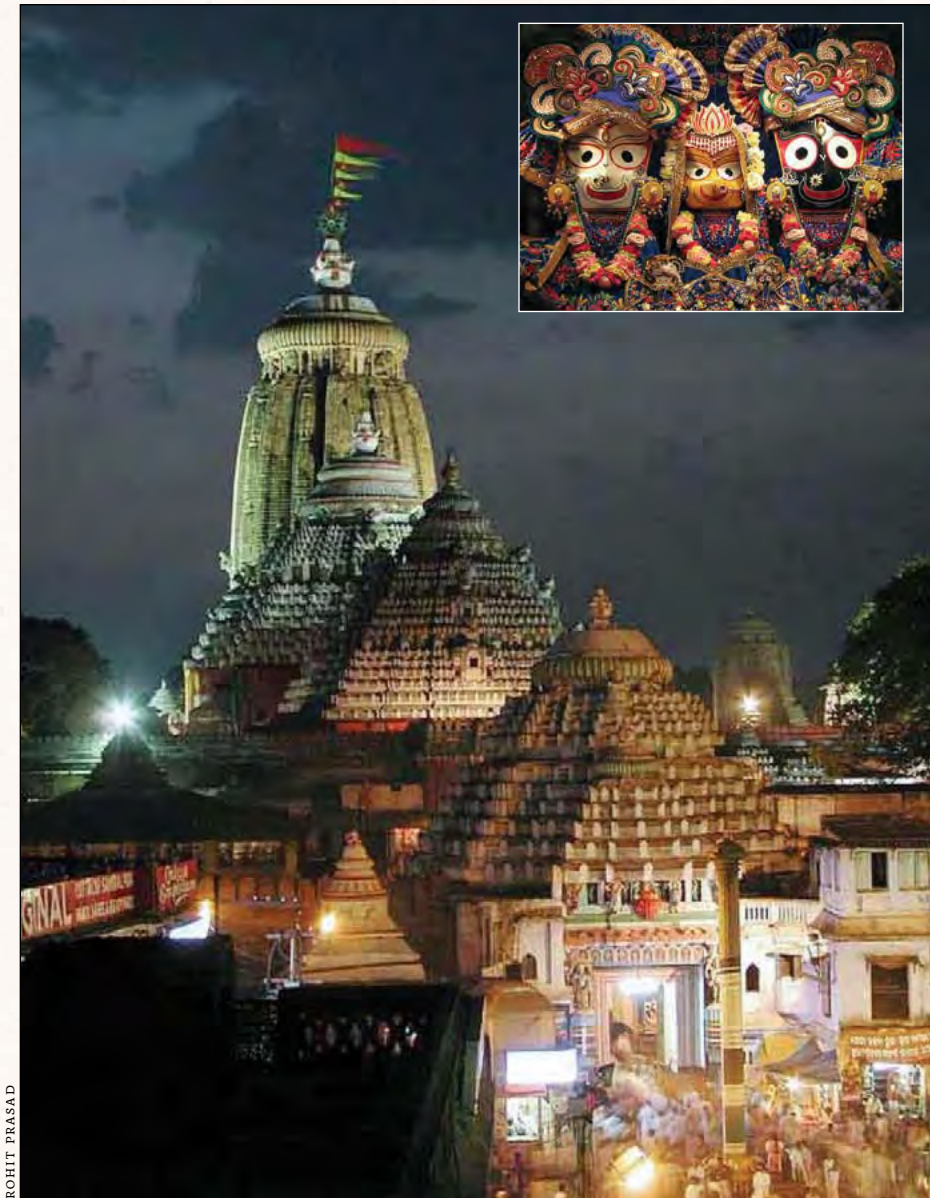
Bhaishri: Yes, *sati* is the ideal woman in Hinduism. But a woman is called a *sati* not because of the amount of sorrow she undergoes—rather, how she handles her life when such sorrow occurs. There are sorrows

in everyone's life. The key is how you react during those times. It should be with peace, patience and siding with truth. Thus, sorrows are not a requirement, but how we live in sorrow is the message.

Punit: *Some Hindus say that abortion is a result of the fetus' karma and fate. Others say that the act is a definite sin and bad karma for the parents.*

Bhaishri: It is the Hindu belief that from the moment of conception, a life has made its home in the mother's womb, and an abortion is disturbing this natural process. Hinduism is not a rigid religion. It is very flexible and moves according to the principle of truth. Abortion treats life like a commodity. The life is not seen as valuable entity in itself, but a possession whose fate is in the owner's hands. In India, desire for a son has led to an increase in abortions of female fetuses. Abortion, when driven by selfish reasons, is nothing more than viewing life as a commodity.

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Punit Patel (punitanilpatel@yahoo.com), 25, is pursuing a PhD in Healthcare Ethics at Saint Louis University.



PILGRIMAGE

Visiting Lord Jagannath

Join our family's devotional trek to the sacred town of Puri in Odisha and its famous Vaishnava temple

By DEEPTI R. PAIKRAY, NEW JERSEY

OUR ANNUAL TRIPS TO INDIA ARE INcomplete without worshipping our beloved family Deity—Lord Jagannath, Ruler of the Universe. In March, 2010, we headed for Bhubaneswar, Odisha's capital city. Home to almost 600 temples, Bhubaneswar is the jumping-off place for pilgrims to Puri, sixty kilometers to the north. Buses and taxis regularly ply between the two cities, especially during the months from August to February, when the weather is the most pleasant. Eminent artists and writers have brought glory to their

home state of Odisha, and everyday life here is a natural affirmation of its rich cultural tapestry. Although Odia is the spoken language, many people here can also converse in English and Hindi.

The road to Puri is fringed with graceful coconut and other palm trees. A low sun in the sky rides alongside our car over unremitting patches of lush paddy fields. We pass Pipli Village, famous for its prismatic appliqué work, wishing we had enough time for a side trip to Konark, the famed Sun Temple. Halfway to Puri, we do stop at Dakshineswar Kali, a powerful temple to the Goddess; and

Jagannath temple: Devotees enter the huge temple passing the Garuda Pillar at bottom right; (inset) tribal forms of the Deities: (right to left) Jagannath (Lord Krishna), His sister, Goddess Subhadra, and His elder brother, Balabhadra (Balarama)

later at Sakhi Gopal, a revered Krishna temple. On the outskirts of Puri, we offer the prayers at Batamangala Temple, where all devotees offer prayers before and after worshipping Lord Jagannath.

The Jagannath temple is now easily visible, towering above the ancient city of Puri sprawling at its feet. The main road to the temple is a scene of happy chaos. Cyclists, rickshaws and minibuses spouting black smoke dodge the omnipresent pedestrians, while vendors pursue harried tourists.

The temple, fortified by two walls built in the fifteenth century, has four entry gates: Simhadwara, Lion Gate; Ashwadwara, Horse Gate; Vyaghradwara, Tiger Gate; and Hastidwara, Elephant Gate. The gates denote dharma, *artha*, *kama* and moksha, the four goals of human life. The animals signify the four emotions of lust, love, attachment and jealousy, which are to be conquered for reaching the divine. Kings enter through the Lion Gate and saints through the Horse Gate. We enter through the Lion gate and climb the 22 steps to the temple's inner compound, carefully skirting an iron tile—a harbinger of misfortune if stepped upon.

The morning activity fills the temple. Families surround chanting brahmins, priests in cotton dhotis scuttle around, hawkers sell garlands of marigold and basil. All the while, fearless monkeys scamper wherever they please. Roars of adoration from a sea of devotees emanate intermittently from the temple's innermost shrine.

A sense of awe and happiness descends upon us as we breathe in the fragrance of camphor and ghee lamps. These are hallowed grounds earlier traversed by Lord's illustrious devotees from diverse religious faiths and stratas of society—Guru Nanak, Salabega, Kabir, Tulsidas, Chaitanya.

We soon emerge into the cobbled temple compound, sprawling 400,000 square feet, that in days of yore provided shelter to civilians during Muslim invasions. The main structure housing the Deities, completed in the 12th century, looms 214 feet above us. The interior walls of this great compound are covered with *pattachitra* paintings, the folk art of Odisha, displaying images from epics, fables, myths, royal processions, court ladies, animals and birds. Most of the rest of the temple, however, has been covered in a thick coat of plaster to protect the structure from the ravages of sea air. Restoration efforts removing this plaster have revealed detailed carvings of remarkable beauty.

We offer ghee lamps to the Deities of each of the 43 shrines encircling the main temple, including the major shrines of Ganesha, Ananta Vasudev, Vimala, Shakti, Sri Rama and the Navagraha. We ladies are most charmed when offered red bangles and kumkum by the priest at the Goddess Lakshmi temple. Just before leaving this outer area, we worship at the sacred banyan tree, making a wish while tying a stone to a branch.

We purchase our sacred offering at the government stand and, accompanied by a priest, enter the temple itself. As we stand behind the famed Garuda pillar, we catch our first glimpse of our Lord. We embrace the Garuda pillar, as doing so heals one of all ailments and sins. The crowds are overcome with devotion, and cries of "Jai Jagannatha" rend the air.

We inch closer to the Deities until parallel with the guardrail, beyond which only priests are allowed. The massive Deities are in their tribal forms, with huge eyes, attired in gold and decorated with jewels and flowers. Some say the triad of Deities represents the synthesis of major cults of Hinduism: Siva, Shakti and Vishnu; thus Lord Jagannath is the amalgamation of all Gods.

His gigantic eyes pierced my innermost subtle thoughts. As a scholar aptly said, "The sacred does not simply present itself to our gaze: it reaches out to seize us in its searing grasp." Abruptly, I am bought back to ordinary consciousness by the sound of clashing cymbals, announcing the offerings of cakes made from rice and bananas.

Our worship complete, the volunteers urge us back into the courtyard. The divine spell breaks as we emerge into the bright sunlight. We sit down to savor the *prasadam* while the priest summarizes the temple's routine. The day begins, he explains, by offering lamps to the Deities, followed by bathing and dressing. The daily bathing is done symbolically, in front of three mirrors reflecting the Deities' images—their wooden forms are not suitable for frequent immersion. Actual bathing is just once a year, on the full moon of Jyeshtha, May/June.

The daily worship, in which the Deity is treated in a very human way, combines the divine adventures of Krishna's boyhood home of Vrindavan and his adult reign as king in Dwarka. There are 36 ceremonial attires for the Deities, ranging from those ap-

propriate for a child, the *madhurya lila*, to those for a king, *aishwarya lila*. A popular one is *suna vesa* when the Gods are adorned in gold upon their return from the annual car festival. The Deities are offered food six times a day, and at night they are lulled to sleep through renderings of *Gita Govinda*, songs of the 11th-century poet Jayadeva, along with offerings of coconut and betel. During the scalding summer months, the Deities are covered in cool sandalwood and symbolically taken for boating excursions. During Kartika months (October/November), they enjoy afternoon siesta to compensate for rising earlier in the morning.



Temple-goers: Food offerings blessed by the Deity; Deepti with her husband, son and mother-in-law

We make our final salutations to the Nilachakra, Lord Vishnu's discus, made of eight metals. The twelve-foot diameter disk, mounted on top of the temple, was repaired last year by the Archeological Department of India. Our last stop before leaving the temple grounds is Koili Baikuntha, the "burial ground." Every 12 or 19 years when the Deities are replaced, the old ones are ceremoniously buried here. The new Deities are prepared at this same site from auspicious neem logs found after an elaborate search in the distant forests. These logs are carried to the temple in carts pulled by devotees. As the

Deities are installed, the Brahma Padartha must be transferred from the old ones to the new ones. This mysterious object, said to be a sacred Saligrama stone, is moved at midnight by the senior priest. He is blindfolded and his hands padded, so that even he does not see or touch the powerful Brahma Padartha.

We are off to Anand Bazaar, said to be the world's largest feeding area, whose kitchen serves at least 10,000 devotees a day with mounds of pearly rice, sunny lentils, piquant curries and robust sauces ladled onto banana leaves. Fifty-six types of food offerings (*bhoga*) are prepared here daily and offered to the Lord. There are some 750 wood stoves in the kitchen, operated by 500 cooks with 1,500 helpers. Every day, 7200 kilos of rice and a proportionate quantity of pulses and vegetables are cooked in earthen pots, nine per stove.

After our meal and a brief rest, we set out to shop for souvenirs in the vast marketplace adjacent to the temple. We complete our visit with a brisk walk along Puri's famous beach.

Perhaps next time we will come for the most famous event of all, the great chariot festival held in June/July, when the actual Deities are taken in procession to Gundica Temple, three kilometers away. These are not the "parade Deities" used in all other temples, but the actual Deities—a practice unique to this temple in all of India.

These massive chariots—the source of our English word *juggernaut*, meaning a huge and overwhelming force—are built anew each year. They are made from 1,072 logs by 125 carpenters. The largest, that of Jagannath, stands 70 feet tall and rolls on 18 huge wooden wheels. The chariots are pulled by devotees, using thick ropes each more than a hundred feet long. Thousands vie for a chance to help pull these chariots—all under the watchful eye of the security forces (see a video at <http://bit.ly/rath-yatra>). After nine days, the Deities return to the main temple. This Rath Yatra festival is duplicated at temples across India and around the world.

Tired but gratified, we return to our car for the journey back to Bhubaneswar. I cast one last look at the proud Nilachakra crowning the temple with its fluttering flags. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* songs resonate from the walkway shops, beseeching the Lord not for fame or material gains, but only for His love and grace.

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PHOTOS: SOORAJ NARAYAN

PRIESTHOOD

Meet Kerala's 13-Year-Old Priestess

Daughter installs temple Deity under tutelage of her father and grandfather

By G.K. NAIR, KERALA, INDIA

EVER SINCE JYOTHSNA CAN REMEMBER, she's been hearing verses from the *Thantra* scriptures of Kerala. This divine opportunity has come to her because she was born into an old and traditional Thantri family. For generations, its members have provided priests to a number of major and minor temples in the state, including the famous Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple of Thiruvananthapuram, which is still controlled by the erstwhile royal family of Travancore.

Thus, she grew up in a religious and spiritual ambiance, daily listening to the Vedic and Thantric mantras. But, unlike other children, this little girl paid close attention, and by a young age was reciting some by heart. Her grandfather, Thantri Padmanabhan Namboothiripad, recognized her unusual talents and set out a course of training for her. In the early hours of each day, before school, she studied mantras, rites and rituals. She was

initiated to Thantra in 2008, at the age of ten.

With her grandfather's blessings, she installed and consecrated the murti of Devi Bhadrakali on May 23, 2010, in the sanctum

sanctorum in the Painkunnikavu Temple in Irinjalakuda in Kerala's Thrissur district. There are a few other Thantri priestess in Kerala, but this was the first time in known history that a consecration had been performed by one so young.

Jyothsna's mother, Archana Antharjanam, told HINDUISM TODAY, "We don't want it to be construed as part of any women's liberation movement or any such agenda. It is not a revolutionary act. We Brahmin women have always performed pujas in our own homes."

Jyothsna's parents, grandparents and all her classmates were among the large number of devotees attend-

Installing the Goddess: *Jyothsna assisted by other priests places the Bhadrakali Deity, a form popular in Kerala in which the Goddess is represented by a stone mirror*



ing the installation. Devotees received the blessed *prasadam*, food offering made to the Deity, from Jyothsna and offered her *dakshina*, a monetary gift, in return. Her 7th grade teacher said she was proud to have a "young girl Thantri" in her class and the school.

Jyothsna explained to HINDUISM TODAY, "I developed a liking for doing puja and reciting the Sanskrit mantras from watching my father and grandfather. I don't know why, but I love worshiping Devi Bhadrakali." She said she would pursue further study, but could not say if she would take it up as a profession. "I have not learned it with that end in mind."

There has been little criticism of her initiation and performance of the installation from the Thantri community, especially as her grandfather is one of Kerala's most revered Thantri priests. He defends the initiation, saying, "The womanhood of God and the glorification of women is the core of Thantra," and in accordance with the scriptures of Kashmir Saivism followed here. According to the tradition, he explained, ten human births are believed to be needed for one to become a Thantri, and the girl must have done something great in her previous life.

A young priestess: (opposite page) Jyothsna practices mudras with her father, Shri Tharananelloor Padmanabhan Namboothiripad (junior); (above) with her father, mother and brother; (inset) her grandfather and guru, Brahmarshree Tharananelloor Padmanabhan Namboothiripad (senior) who has guided her training and approved her work as a priestess

As to qualifications, he said, "Anybody who is inclined from birth can study with devotion and become a Thantri, irrespective of caste or gender. Women often have more commitment to the required sadhanas, and understand that Thantra is not only for doing puja, but for obtaining Self Realization." He pointed out that there were women priests in ancient India and that today the Kerala woman saint, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, has installed Deities in many temples of her ashrams. "There are no hard and fast rules on this subject," he concluded.

Some of the devotees and officials from the Travancore Devaswom Board, which administers some 1,200 temples in the area, were not very happy with women becoming Thantris. According to Mr. Jagan Mohan Das a former Devaswom Board Commissioner, there is a general perception in the minds of the devotees that a Thantri should be a mature male capable both in spiritualism and in

thantra. "Therefore, we cannot think of having a young boy or girl performing the role of a Thantri in a temple," he said.

Brahmasri Kandaraj Rajivuru, Thantri of the famous Sabarimala Temple, countered that women can also perform the Thantric rituals as it is not forbidden for them in any of the scriptures. Jyothsna's initiation does not represent a social reform. But, he said, it would be up to her to decide whether to take it on as a vocation, and also depend on her responsibilities after marriage. He pointed out, "It is no longer a profession which can sustain a family. In 95% of cases, priests are low paid, the same as any of the temple hired help. In other religions, priests enjoy a respectable position. The result is that the present generation does not want to take up this traditional profession. Even though my children are learning it, their interest is in lucrative professional jobs outside this sphere. You cannot blame them."



SHUTTERSTOCK

What to Do about Childhood Obesity?

Changes in patterns of eating and playing are shaping today's youth in unhealthy ways, but reversing the process is simple and achievable

BY DR. MRUNAL PATEL

OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES, CHILDHOOD OBESITY RATES in America have tripled, and today nearly one in three children in America is overweight or obese. In Europe, around one in five children is overweight, and one-third of those are obese. How did we get here?

I remember growing up in India: we walked or biked to school; we had three recesses a day, a lunch break when we all ate from our lunch boxes and two small breaks to just get out on the grounds and play. After arriving home, eating a warm snack prepared by our mothers and finishing homework, everyone was out of the house to play with friends until being called back for supper. It's certainly not the same for children growing up in the USA.

A less active childhood is one of the most important factors contributing to childhood obesity. I found a lot of great information on the web about this growing epidemic, mostly from First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign (www.letsmove.gov) and the US Department of Health and Human Services, which I freely draw from, often verbatim, in this article.

Kids today lead a different kind of life: walks to and from school have been replaced by car and bus rides, while gym class and school

sports have been cut and are often replaced with afternoons of TV, video games and the Internet. Nutrition and Eating Habits Convenience has become the main criteria for America's food choices today. Parents are busier than ever, leading families to eat fewer home-cooked meals. Children are getting most of their food away from home. Energy intake from food sources has increased from 20 to 32 percent between 1977 and 1994. Snacking between meals is the norm, not the exception. While kids thirty years ago ate just one snack a day, they are now trending toward three—so they're taking in an additional 200 calories a day just from snacks. I have noticed that Indian-American communities are following in these footsteps, eating more fast foods and serving easy-to-fix meals to children instead of traditional Indian meals at home. Even during gatherings and parties, kids are served cheese pizzas

while the adults enjoy delicious, nutritious, traditional Indian food.

Portion sizes have also exploded. Food and beverage portions are two to five times bigger than they used to be. At a meeting of the Grocery Manufacturers Association in March 2010, Michelle Obama offered, "In the mid-1970s, the average sweetened drink portion was 13.6 ounces. Today, kids think nothing of drinking 20

"The physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake."

—MICHELLE OBAMA

LET'S MOVE! LAUNCH, FEBRUARY 9, 2010

Snacks & Meals: Kids' Choices Shape their Bodies



SHUTTERSTOCK

ounces of soda at a time." Sugared beverages now represent up to 10 percent of the average child's and teenager's caloric intake, as milk consumption has declined over the last few decades.

We are now eating 31 percent more calories than we were forty years ago—including 56 percent more fats and oils and 14 percent more sugars and sweeteners. The average American now eats fifteen pounds more sugar a year than in 1970.

That's the bad news. The good news is by making a few simple changes, we can help our kids lead healthier, longer lives—and we already have all of the tools we need to do it. We just need the will.

Physical Inactivity and Sedentary Behavior

Watching television, using the computer and playing video games occupy a large percent of children's leisure time, influencing their physical activity levels. It is estimated that children in the US are spending 25 percent of their waking hours watching television. Statistically, those who watch the most hours of television have the highest incidence of obesity. This is not only because little energy is expended while viewing television, but also because of the concurrent consumption of high-calorie snacks.

Child Obesity and the Built Environment

In my own experience, we have not allowed our daughter to walk to the tennis court or run through the neighborhood for the unjustified fear of something happening to her. The fear of kidnappings or attacks is so strong among parents that it prevails even when statistics in the neighborhood would show that we need not be so fearful. American culture has been described as having a pervasive "culture of fear" in which we are more obsessed with highly publicized events statistically unlikely to happen to us (such as kidnapping) than we are with far more common risks, such as obesity or heart disease.

As reported in an article by Nooshin Razani in the March 2010 issue of *Pediatric Annals*, the "suburbanization" of residential

Tips for Parents & Caregivers to Help Establish Healthy Eating Patterns in Children

1. Be active as a family: Go on a walk, bike ride, swim or hike together. Limit TV time.
2. Consider snacking on fruits, nuts and vegetables instead of high-calorie snack foods (often high in fat and sugar) and have these readily available in the home.
3. Limit use of high calorie, high fat and high sugar sauces and spreads. Replace high sugared drinks, especially sodas, with water and/or low fat milk.
4. Support participation in sports and other physical activities at school or through community leagues.
5. Avoid eating while watching TV. TV viewers may eat too much, too fast, and are influenced by the foods and drinks that are advertised.
6. Limit fruit juice intake to two servings or less per day.
7. Encourage free play in young children and provide environments that allow children to play indoors and outdoors.
8. Be a role model through your own healthy dietary practices, nutritional snacks and lifestyle activities.

THE OBESITY SOCIETY

America has created sprawled-out communities, resulting in longer distances between destinations. In 1969, about half of all American children walked to school; today, only about 15-17 percent of school-going kids walk. As one teenager explained: "If students do any sort of after-school activity, they must drive themselves home, bum rides or wait to be picked up... My parents are sick of chauffeuring me, and I am sick of begging rides to go anywhere."



Parental Influences vs. Genetics

Despite the strong influence that genetics has on obesity, the increases in the incidence and prevalence rates of obesity in the US are likely due to behavioral or environmental factors, which have interacted with genes, and not the effects of genetics alone. Constraints on parents' time can potentially contribute to children's weight problems, as working parents rely more heavily than non-working parents on prepared, processed and fast foods, which are generally high in calorie and fat and low in nutrition. We now know that parental food preferences directly influence and shape children's eating habits. Breast-feeding for six months has been shown to offer a consistent protective effect against obesity in children. In addition, unsupervised children may spend a great deal of time indoors, perhaps due to safety concerns, watching TV or playing video games rather than engaging in more active outdoor pursuits.

Consequences of Childhood Overweight

Childhood obesity is a personal tragedy for the individual, a financial burden for the future of this country and a manifestation of our failure to instill healthy habits in our children. Research has shown that as weight increases to reach the levels referred to as "overweight" and "obese," there is increased risk of psychological conditions such as depressive symptoms, poor body image, low self-concept and risk for eating disorders, as well as physical health consequences such as insulin resistance, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, sleep apnea, early puberty, fatty liver and orthopedic problems.

Childhood Obesity in Asian Indians

As reported by Swati Bhardwaj in her review article in *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in 2008, recent trends in the Indian

Play the old way: *Sitting in front of the TV, playing video games and surfing the Internet should be limited for children. Encourage them instead to spend time outdoors enjoying sports and other physical activities such as bicycling, swimming, walking and team games.*

population indicate a rise in obesity in children as well as adults. The overall prevalence of overweight/obesity in urban children in New Delhi has shown an increase from 16% in 2002 to about 24% in 2006-2007. Asian Indians have higher body fat and abdominal obesity and lower muscle mass than white Caucasians. Due to these body composition attributes, Asian Indians develop insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome and diabetes even with a body mass index currently defined within normal limits.

There is a general misconception among parents in India and other developing countries that an obese child is a healthy child, so in an effort to keep a child "healthy," he or she is fed in excess. Many such children remain obese for life. The high burden of schoolwork and academic competitiveness has led to decreased participation in sports and any other form of physical activity.

Childhood obesity is clearly an epidemic. Efforts to prevent it should not be made in isolation. They should be part of a whole gamut of actions to promote healthier, more sustainable lifestyles. In the process, we will also reduce other chronic diseases, create more productive citizens and foster goals that are in harmony with the great philosophies of Sanatana Dharma.

Mrunal Patel, MD, is a practicing gastroenterologist and former board member of the Hindu Association of West Texas in Midland. E-mail: mrunalpadi@gmail.com.

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Hindu Heritage Endowment

BEYOND 2012: GURUDEVA’S CALENDAR ENDOWED FOR THE FUTURE

The calendar used by the monks at Kauai’s Hindu Monastery blossomed from humble beginnings in the early 1970s when it was known as the “balanced life calendar.” It provided the monks and families a way to plan their daily routine of work and sadhana.

In 1984 Gurudeva asked Shanmuganathaswami to make a new calendar for the coming year. Typing it manually into a VisiCalc spreadsheet was tedious, so he began coding a Hawaii-time-zone-based calendar from scratch using Apple Basic. “It would take all night to compute one year’s calendar with an Apple II computer,” Shanmuganathaswami quips, “Now, with a Mac-Book Pro, it takes eight seconds.”

Two years later, Gurudeva asked Swami and Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami to add the elements of the traditional Hindu panchangams used throughout South India. “Pancha” means five, and “anga” means limb, referring to the calendar’s five basic building blocks: nakshatra, vara, tithi, yoga and karana. Then, in order to make it a full Hindu almanac, Gurudeva added the sankalpa to be chanted at each puja; the colors in which to dress the Deities; rahu, gulika and yama kala periods; three kinds of yogas; the rasi; sunrise and sunset; guru pujas, pradosha days and festivals.

For use in the monastery, the panchangam follows a schedule typical of a priestly gurukulam in India, four to six days of service followed by two or three days of retreat during the new, full and quarterly phases of the moon. One or two days of each retreat is named Guha Day, a time when monks are free to enjoy seclusion in their guhas (private caves for meditation and sleeping). The remaining day is dedicated to guruthondu, taking care of the monastery and maintaining the grounds. Gurudeva also designated that Ashram Sadhana Day be placed on the calendar, a morning for housekeeping and cleaning, as well as Iraivan Day, when the monks work on the monastery newsletter and other tasks.

In each of the following years Shanmuganathswami generated a new panchangam, and in the process refined the accuracy of the programming. By 2004, the year Facebook was launched, the calendar was deemed reliable enough to go public. Panchangams calculated for 137 cities worldwide were made available for download at www.gurudeva.org/panchang. The panchangam was distributed for free until 2009, when a nominal fee of 99¢ was reluctantly imposed to help cover the costs of web hosting and upgrades to the 4D database software used to generate the calendars.

By 2010, calendars for 240 cities were online in PDF, and iCalendar panchangams for iCal and Google Calendar were introduced by popular demand. As the panchangam became accessible on the iPhone and other mobile devices, the monks began using it during temple pujas on a water-proofed iPad. Until the monastery’s panchangam emerged, it was difficult to acquire a calendar calculated for cities outside Sri Lanka and India. It is widely appreciated as accurate and user friendly, presented in a simple, consistent format, year after year.

In an endeavor to once again offer the panchangam for no charge as a public service, the Panchangam Endowment Fund has been created with Hindu Heritage Endowment. When the principal reaches \$45,000, the charge will switch from 99¢ back to zero. To learn how you can support this fund—one of the eighty-four HHE charitable funds—through a donation, will, life insurance or other planned gift, contact Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 extension 244 or hhe@hindu.org. Donate to the Panchangam Endowment Fund (fund #84) at www.bheonline.org.



Gurudeva & Shanmuganathaswami in the early years of panchangam development, visit Muniji at a Pittsburg temple in 1987

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Ramgopal Venkataraman	499.00	Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		Rajendra Giri	15.00
Anonymous	\$837.50	Chandran & Mathini Wigneswaran	499.00	Anonymous	5397.76	Kathiravelpillai Nadanachandran	531.74
Tina Desai	200.00	Total	13,086.17	Tamnash Gupta	108.00	Padmaja Patel	150.00
Rajan Deva	25.00			Total	5,505.76	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Hanumaiah Gowda	50.00	Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund				Ganga Sivanathan	150.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Soondiren Arnasalon	6.99			Sivaruban Sivanesan	150.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	376.42	Manogaran Mardemootoo	34.43	A. Shanmugam Family Fund		Anonymous	45.00
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00	Total	41.42	Rajendra Giri	85.00	Soma Sundaram	10.00
Larry Sherrer	500.00					Marianne Hvidsten Thompson	108.00
Niraj Thaker	76.50	Hindu of the Year Fund				Total	2,041.75
Michael Zimmermann	8.00	Thamby Kumaran	54.00	Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund			
Other Donations	75,000.00			Rajadeva Alahan	102.00	Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund	
Total	77,698.42	Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood		Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Vinaya Alahan	150.00
		Bala Sivaceyon	25.65	Total	202.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	20.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment						Kathiravelpillai Nadanachandran	43.51
Latha Kannan	153.00	Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund				Anonymous	60.00
Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00	Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		Total	273.51
Larry Sherrer	1,000.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	25.31	Hotranatha Ajaya	11.00	India Hindu Tribals Endowment	
Sankara Skandanatha	120.00	Carmen Debora Murbach	150.00	Anonymous	2,793.00	Niraj Thaker	15.00
Pregassen Soobramaney	60.00	Gowri Nadason	173.65	James H. Daugherty	352.00		
Niraj Thaker	76.50	Aran Sambandar	162.00	Amarnath & Latha Devarmalai	324.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	
Other Donations	51,723.99	Burke Tran	13.00	Sakuntalai Krishnan	156.63	Vayudeva Varadan	36.00
Total	53,233.49	Vayudeva Varadan	36.00	Richard D. Ligas	168.00		
		Other Donations	4,800.00	Thulasidas Nadarajah	25.00		
		Total	5,422.96	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00		
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund				Mrunal Patel	1,509.00		
Eric & Heidi Aas	84.75	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment		Shanta Devi Periasamy	420.00	Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund	
Gunavadee Caremben	7.87	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Suselah Periasamy	100.00	Danyse Crotti	150.00
Somasundaram Caremben	7.87			Namrata Ragade	200.00	Hiranya Gowda	99.00
Sukanta Caremben	7.87			Alex Ruberto	45.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	68.87
Sharath Chigurupati	369.00	Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		Aran Sambandar	162.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	10.26
Tina Desai	250.00	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Sankara Skandanatha	162.55	Toshadevi Nataraja	60.00
Maruthu Dharmalingam	177.60			Vignesh Sukumaran	54.00	Ganga Sivanathan	300.00
Rajendra Giri	101.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Vayudeva Varadan	42.00	Niraj Thaker	33.00
Tarakini Gunasegaran	6.13	Narani Arasaratham	600.00	Raja Vishnu	45.00	Total	721.13
Tirunyanam Gunasegaran	41.47	Anonymous	21.00	Total	6,719.18	Hindu American Foundation Endowment	
Lalita Devi Gurumurthi	251.00	Vayudeva Varadan	32.40			Niraj Thaker	33.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	31.00	Total	653.40	Mathvasi Travel Fund			
Darshan Kandasamy	30.04			Anonymous	25.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
Juhivasana Koothan	1.75	Malaysian Hindu Youth Education Trust				Victoria Lynne Johnson	11.00
Saroja Devi Manickam	7.50	Srirengarajan Sampath	11.00	Udayan Care Endowment Fund		Anonymous	50.00
Bhavesan Moorghen	10.37			Rajendra Giri	15.00	Melinda Moore	25.00
Jogendra Moorghen	3.44	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Burke Tran	13.00	Total	86.00
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	10.37	Anonymous	400.00	Total	28.00		
Udeyadeva Moorghen	10.37	Thamby Kumaran	54.00			Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Vidyadevi Moorogeen	3.44	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired		Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	110.00
Natraj Narayanswami	11.00	Total	529.00	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00		
Toshadevi Nataraja	60.00	Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund		Alex Ruberto	60.00	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
David O'Reilly	25.00	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Total	160.00	Anonymous	101.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98					Pawan Deshpande	200.00
Rajakumar Ramasamy	60.00	Hinduism Today Production Fund		Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		Ashwin Krishnan	50.00
Logavalli Sinsamy	10.49	Anonymous	422.00	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	50.00	Tapesh Lall	250.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	2.97	Tina Desai	200.00			Chandresh S Saraiya	500.00
Javanya Skanda	19.41	Rajendra Giri	85.00	Puri Monasteries Fund		Raj Sundaram	25.00
Sankara Skandanatha	92.00	Hanumaiah Gowda	50.00	Gowri Shankar	15.00	Total	1,126.00
Sivam U. Thillaikanthan	36.00	Hiranya Gowda	93.00			Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Anonymous	126.00	Anonymous	25.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		Anil Ananda Badhwar	25.00
Mangaleswary Vimalanathan	17.00	Sakuntalai Krishnan	1,000.00	Bala Sivaceyon	51.29	Anonymous	60.00
Total	1,922.69	Arun & Sri Mamta Misra	201.00			V. Rao Bhamidipati	25.00
		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Taos Hanuman Fund		Jennifer Cooper	25.00
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Chamundi Sabanathan	101.00	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Toshadeva Guhan	25.00
Rajesh Aggarwal	499.00	Ganga Sivanathan	172.00			Carole Kahn	25.00
Aubrey Burke	247.40	Total	2,399.01	Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage		Michael Krieger	25.00
Venkata Dasari	499.00			R. S. Narayani	72.00	Kalpna & Muralikumar Krishnamurthi	25.00
Raj Dave	499.00	Vishwamata Gayatri Trust Fund				Gautam Malhotra	25.00
Tina Desai	150.00	Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		Arsha Vijnana Mandiram	25.00
Suren N Dwivedi	499.00			Rajendra Giri	85.00	Ananda Manickam	11.00
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Gangadhara Swami Mathad	499.00			Anushia Mohan	300.00	Ganga Sivanathan	25.00
Tiviapragassen Maureemootoo	35.59			Natraj Narayanswami	50.00	Owen Slavin	30.00
Raghuath P. Misra	499.00			Alex Ruberto	75.00	Nagula & Sutha Suthaker	30.00
Dayavati Murugan	50.00			Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Aran Veylan	25.00
Thara Narasimhan	499.00			Total	1,879.42	Total	531.00
Gajanan Nataraj	134.00					Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Eesan Pasupathi	93.02			Hindu Education Endowment		Other Donations	600.00
Mrunal Patel	499.00			Naran D. Patel & Mani N. Patel Fami	100.00		
Rama Pemmaraju Rao	63.00					Insurance Premiums	
Suselah Periasamy	550.94			Suntheram Family Trust Fund		Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Kirtideva Peruman	20.50			Ramachandran Suntheram	1,500.00	Shun K. Sunder	2,500.00
Niroshnee Peruman	25.63					Total	5,503.00
Karthik Ramamurthy	499.00			Hindu Press International Endowment Fund			
Hari H. Ramasubbu	499.00			Hiranya Gowda	63.00		
Ashok & Sudha Rao	998.00					Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund	
Kakarala J. Rao	499.00			Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund		Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00
Amooda Sagum	61.98			Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00		
Akileiswaran Samuthiran	249.52			Vayudeva Varadan	108.00	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
Jayasutha Samuthiran	177.69			Total	333.00	Victoria Lynne Johnson	17.00
Thiru Satkunendran	499.00						
Parimala Selvaraj	600.00			Saiva Agamas Trust		Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
Udit Shah	499.00			Ganga Sivanathan	210.00	Vinaya Alahan	150.00
Egambrum Sinsamy	52.45					Jeri Arin	300.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	25.65			Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund		Marlene Carter	162.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	25.65			Shyamadeva Dandapani	63.00	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	20.00
Patudeva Sivaceyon	25.65					Tina Desai	200.00
Potriyan Sivanathan	10.05			Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund			
Sankara Skandanatha	389.00			Vigna Kumar Logarajah	100.00		
Kalavathy Srinivasan	499.00						
A. K. Vaitamuthu	160.00						
Siven Veerasamy	85.82						

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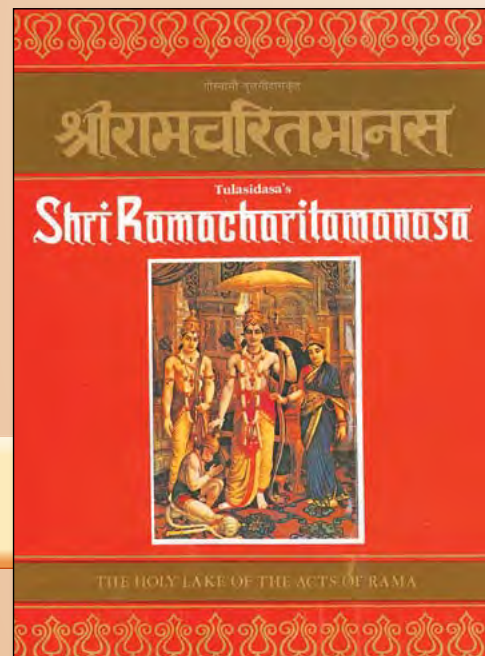
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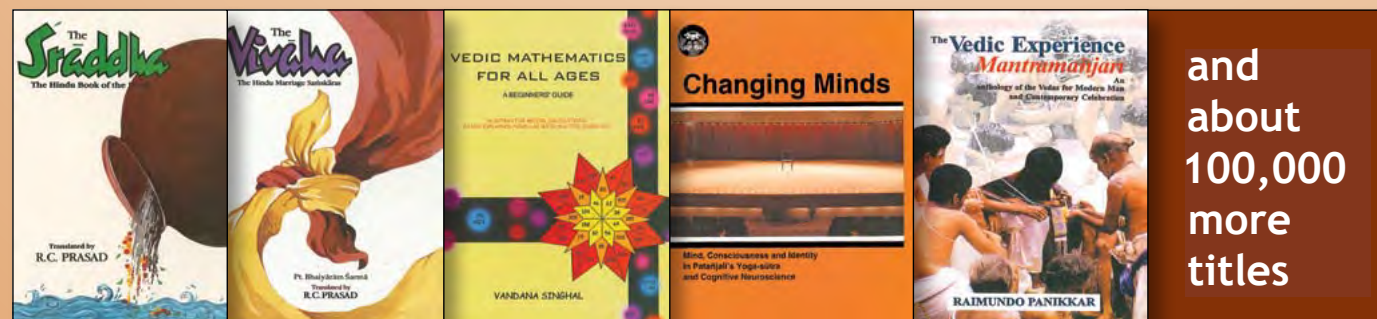
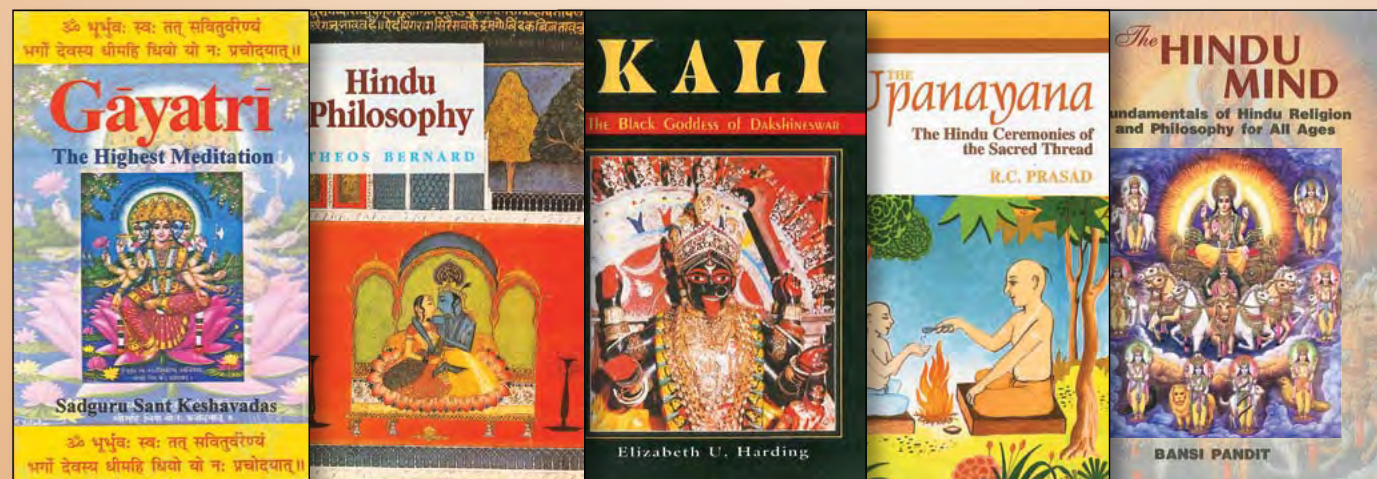
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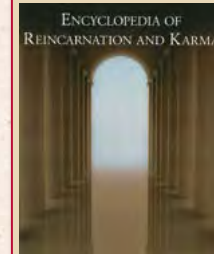
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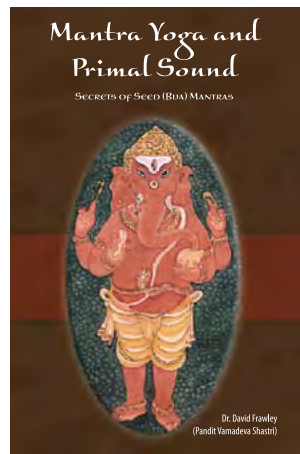
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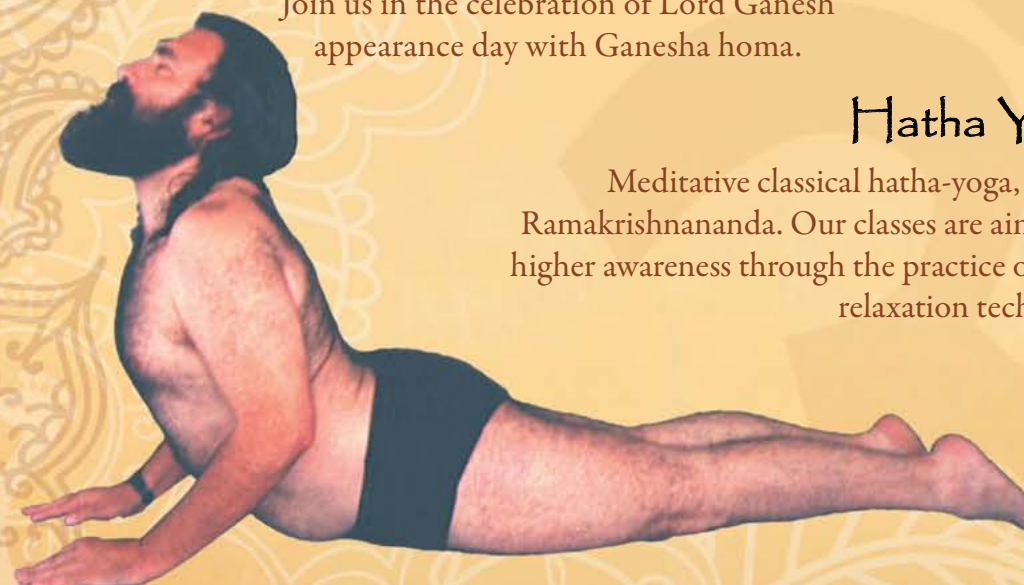
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DIGITAL DHARMA

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Digital Hindu Resources for Kids

BY MADHURI SHEKHAR, LOS ANGELES

ASK ANY OVERWORKED PARENT—computers and smartphones are doubling up these days as virtual babysitters. Kids can get lost for long stretches of time playing with apps on their parents' phones, online games or interactive websites. The iPhone is so appealing for young children that the *New York Times* called it "Toddlers' Favorite Toy" for 2010.

With so much of children's time and focus now on these gadgets, it would be a wonderful opportunity to use them to educate children about Hindu teachings and culture. Apps and games could help them learn Hindu concepts, read stories and discover different aspects of their religion and culture in a fun and entertaining way.

Sridevi Sundar, a working mother of two young children in San Ramon, CA, would especially appreciate an iPhone app for her five-year-old daughter. "Something bright and visual would be nice, perhaps an app

where she could learn the names of the different Hindu Deities, and maybe dress up the Goddesses in new saris like she sees the priests do at the temple."

To our surprise, a survey of digital Hindu resources reveals a scarcity of apps, games and websites devoted especially to kids. Here is a list for parents who want to guide their young ones on these devices.

The Sanatan Society's website includes a dedicated "Hindu Kids Corner" featuring coloring pages to print out. <http://bit.ly/sanatana-org-children>. HinduKids.org is a website that includes Flash-based animations of stories, shlokas and history lessons.

In the mobile device apps department, by far one of the best is the iRemedi series of *Amar Chitra Katha* comics for iOS and Android. These comic books introduced a whole new generation to ancient stories and Indian history through its simple and entertaining format. Now they are available on the iPhone and the iPad at \$199 per title. The comic panels are fun and easy to flip through, and can keep kids engrossed in tales of devotion and valor.

There is also a "Kids Hindu Puzzles" app by Appventors LLC (<http://bit.ly/hindu-puzzles>) and a "BalVihar" app that helps kids memorize basic Sanskrit shlokas.

Video is always captivating. The channel RajShriKids, www.youtube.com/user/RajShriKids, has several animated videos that illustrate the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, along with other epics and folktales.

If your child likes to read or if you read to your children, Scribd has "Hinduism for Kids," www.scribd.com/doc/36383204/Hinduism-for-Kids. *Amar Chitra Katha* stories are also available as animated features on DVDs and VCDs. See www.amarchitrahatha.com/products/DVDs-and-VCDs.

The scarcity of digital Hindu resources can be taken as an opportunity for new development. Even if we just consider the Indian American population in the US, the market is obviously ripe for innovations. According to a survey (rww.to/hk2GRj) done in February 2011, 63 percent of Indian

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Above: Bal Vihar app iPhone app.
Left: Amar Chitra Katha app.



immigrants in the US plan on purchasing an iPad, while 80 percent of tablet owners already own an iPad.

We would like to challenge developers and designers to explore this niche area and create fun and engaging digital resources to teach kids about Hinduism. Here are few suggestions to help you get started:

- ❖ games based on identifying and learning about Deities,
- ❖ digital flash cards to teach Indian languages and Hindu shlokas;
- ❖ eBooks and Comic Books along the lines of the *Amar Chitra Katha* apps;
- ❖ YouTube channels dedicated to video diaries of young Hindu kids detailing their experiences practising Hinduism in the US and around the world.

If we have missed out on any resources in this article, please visit www.hinduismtoday.com/letters and let us know. If any developers do take up the challenge to create digital resources for kids, tell us about them so that we can feature them in a future Digital Dharma column.