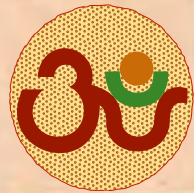


HINDUISM TODAY

April/May/June, 2007 US\$5.95

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



Finally, a Fair and Accurate Hindu History for Children



COVER: Brother and sister explore the wonders of their religion through our Educational Insight, "Hinduism from Ancient Times;" (above) an Indian market scene introduces our feature story on vegetarianism and meat-eating in eight world religions

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SARVAJIT, THE ALL-CONQUERING YEAR

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Yellow Rose



Zebrana



Kailaspati

FLOWERS

OF INDIA

The flower
trade's inside
story: Page 54



Rajnigandha



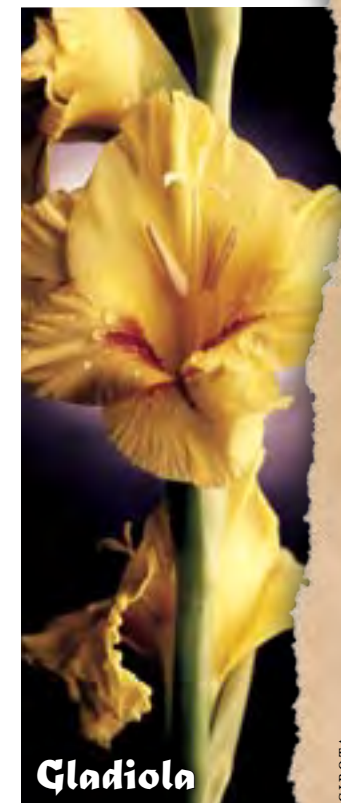
Orchid

"The devout are they who with
flowers and water pray.
The Lord, seeing that,
bestows His grace on them."

Tirumantiram 1828



Marigold



Gladiolus



Pink
Water Lily



Red Dahlia



Aster



Desi Gulab Rose



Jasmine



Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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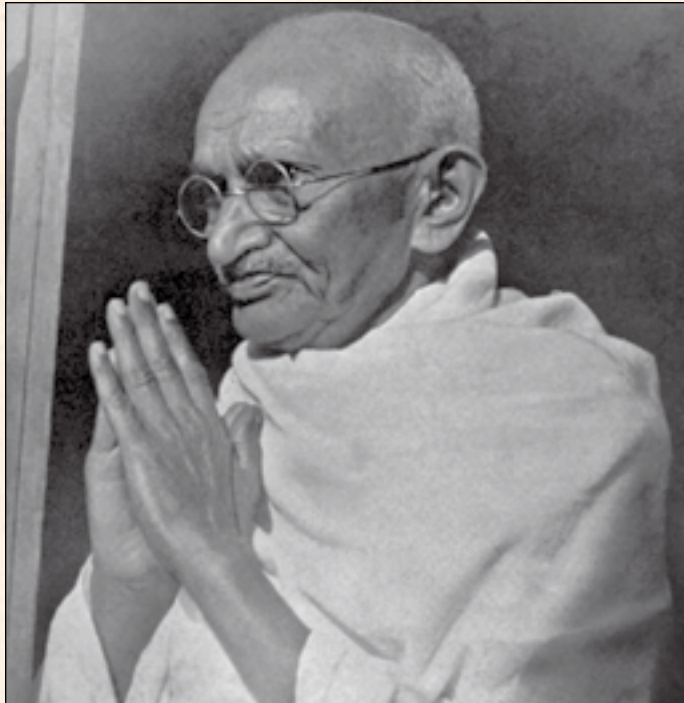
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New education guidelines present a sober side of Imperial rule

UNITED KINGDOM

Just What Did Churchill Say?

Chris McGovern, director of the traditionalist History Curriculum Association, has criticized England's new guidelines on how to teach about the British colonization of India. McGovern said, "The general tone of the unit is anti-British, with little about positive consequences of imperial rule." He in particular challenged a state-

ment that English PM Winston Churchill ever called Gandhi a "half-naked fakir..." It's true that Churchill didn't quite say that, but what he did say was close enough: "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious middle-temple lawyer now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the king-emperor."

U S A

Hindu Woman In Space

SUNITA WILLIAMS TOOK Lord Ganesha into space on



Sunita Williams on a space walk

December 11, 2006, aboard the space shuttle Discovery, along with the *Bhagavad Gita*—and a packet of samosas to spice up her rations—for a six-month stay on the International Space Station. On February 4th, she set the record for space walk time by a woman, amassing a total of 22 hours and 27 minutes in space. The previous woman's record was over 21 hours. Sunita was a US Navy test pilot and diver before joining the astronaut program. Her father is an Indian-born doctor and her mother a homemaker of Yugoslav descent.

DIASPORA

FRANCE

City of Lille Morphs Into Mumbai

FROM OCTOBER 14, 2006, TO January 14, 2007, the city of Lille in France was completely transformed for a three-month India cultural extravaganza. Following the rave success of its 2004 Cultural Capital of Europe festival, the 2006 *Lille 3000-Bombayers De Lille*, two years in the making, drew millions into a total immersion experience of "the heart of India and its multiple facets: festivals, metamorphoses, visions of the future, exhibitions, artists' installations, films, music, performances."

Opening on Navaratri, the festival began with a grand parade led by 1,200 dancers. Visi-

tors arrived at a Lille train station that was remodeled into an Indian palace with 20 full-sized elephant carvings across the street and Bollywood billboards adorning the town.

Variouly priced passes allowed visitors—who might never travel to India—to attend a few events or to spend 24 hours inside the exhibition grounds, for a total immersion experience in a modern Indian city.

Lille festivals cover both tradition and modern ways. Guests could roam through a Hindu temple, explore Indian spirituality in the Third Eye exhibition or listen to contemporary Indian jazz fusion artists. The festival was held in conjunction with a similar three-month-long Festival of India prepared by Bozar, the Brussels Centre for Fine Arts. Together these two festivals provided perhaps the largest-ever exposure to Indian culture in Europe.



Bombayers De Lille: Opening night Navaratri parade, October 14, 2006. Over 1,200 Indian dancers performed

U S A

Swadhyay Pariwar, Strong and Growing

THE SWADHYAY PARIWAR, founded by Pandurang Sashtri Athavale (1920–2003), is flourishing under the leader-



Ms. Neelam Patel: Gita elocution contestant. Swadhyay gets top marks among Hindu organizations for youth involvement.

ship of his adopted daughter and successor, "Didiji." The organization never aggressively publicized its work, and most are unaware of the Pariwar's huge scope. Recently the "Family of Millions" has begun releasing briefs to show how a positive seva enterprise can bring revolutionary changes in society. See www.swadhyay.org and click on "Recent News" for some success stories.

One small example of the Pariwar's dynamism was its four-day 2006 Thanksgiving program in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Put on by 500 volunteers, over 2,000 from the spiritual "extended family... gathered from all walks of life regardless of status." The Pariwar's *Bhagavad Gita* elocution contests are also noteworthy. Running for decades in thousands of locations each year, its participants just crossed the 3.5 million mark.



Inuits of Canada: Indigenous peoples carry genetic keys to mankind's history. Some question the research, wary of its impact.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Global DNA Search Snag

THE GENOGRAPHIC PROJECT launched by The National Geographic Society, IBM, geneticist Spencer Wells and the Waitt Family Foundation hopes to map mankind's migrations out of Africa. Most of the world's six billion people, however, are far removed from their ancient homes. So the Genographic Project wants 100,000 DNA samples from people still living in their ancestral homelands, because

they provide the crucial geographic link between genetic markers found today and ancient routes.

The five-year project, started in late 2006, was stalled by Alaskans who say the research could be misused to disprove tribal beliefs about living in one place since the beginning of time and possibly jeopardize land rights and other benefits extended to native peoples. Scientists are aghast that anyone would take such a position. But native rights advocates point out that—given the history of broken promises and dismal treatment of indigenous peoples—caution is wise and well-advised.

B A L I

Cakolosal—Massive Peace Dance

BOMBINGS IN BALI in 2002 had a devastating impact on Indonesia's spirit and Bali's economy. Tourism dropped along with national morale. In September, 2006, Hindus in the Tanaban district undertook a dramatic initiative to change the flow of energy. They planned, choreographed, rehearsed and performed was likely the largest prayer-dance in recorded history. It was a traditional *kecak* dance performed by 5,000 men at the entrance of Tanah Lot Temple. Dedicated to world peace and tourism

recovery, the proactive "destination management" marketing program was rooted in the native culture and environment. See: www.cakolosal.com



5,000 kecak dancers in performance



Priests consecrate the rooftop kalasams of the Murugan temple

MAURITIUS

Colorful Temple Renovation

ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF MAURITIUS, BEYOND THE coral reefs, is Gunners Coin, a spectacular green, wedge-shaped island jutting glistening in the azure blue ocean. In this idyllic setting stands the Siva Soopramaniam Kovil, a 20th century Saivite temple. Built in 1985, it was completely renovated in 2006 at a cost 1 million rupees (\$US34,000). The six-day consecration ceremonies in November drew 2,000 devotees. The sanctuary is one small example of the global renaissance of Agamic Saivism.



Smart choices: *High-IQ people are more likely to avoid meat*

HEALTH

Veggie-Related High IQs

TH BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL *Lancet* released results of a study based on IQ tests of 8,179 people taken in 1970. The 366 participants who were vegetarians at age 30 had IQs

of 104-106 at age ten. The 7,813 meat eaters had IQs of 99-101 at age ten. But researchers were left with a question. Dr. Frankie Phillips, of the British Dietetic Association said, "It is like the chicken and the egg. Do people become vegetarian because they have a very high IQ, or is it just that they tend to be more aware of health issues?"



Hit Man: *Will your children take on a game hero's identity?*

BRIEFLY...

THE HINDU COUNCIL OF UK AND others protested a proposal to ban the swastika throughout European Union. The ban was mooted by Germany, current EU president, in an apparent show of repentance for Germany's Nazi history. Hindus argue the ban would interfere with the Human Right to Freedom of Religion, and do irreparable harm to Hinduism, which has widely used the symbol since ancient times as an auspicious

sign. Without offering any explanation, the German lead-ersdropped the plan January 29. EU member states were unlikely to adopt such a ban.

SWAMINI TURIYASANGITANANDA (Alice Coltrane), known for her early jazz and New Age music, passed away on January 12, 2006, in Los Angeles, from respiratory failure at the age of 69. Following her conversion to Hinduism she became

MILITARY

Wiccan Wife Wins Cause

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2005, Sgt. Patrick D. Stewart, a Nevada resident, died in combat in Afghanistan. He belonged to the Wiccan faith. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) refused his wife Roberta's request that a Wiccan pentacle to be placed on his government-furnished grave marker, because Wicca is not an officially recognized religion in the military. Wiccan clergy were barred from the VA funeral service. Roberta and her friends petitioned for Patrick's Wiccan grave marker without success. In September she threatened to sue the VA. In October, Nevada officials finally approved the pentacle's placement on Sgt. Stewart's grave marker.

WICCAN

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has approved the use of a Wiccan symbol for use in military memorial plaques.

Wiccan symbol



Wicca is one of the fastest growing faiths in the country; the five-pointed star represents the five basic beliefs of the Wicca faith:

- "If it harm none, do what you will"
- The Law of Attraction
- Harmony and serenity
- Power through knowledge
- Progressive reincarnation

Approved symbols

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs allows 38 other approved symbols of faith for use in national veteran's cemeteries



Christian cross



Hebrew



Buddhist



Native American Church of North America



Muslim



Hindu



Sikh



Atheist

- Presbyterian cross
- Russian Orthodox cross
- Lutheran cross
- Episcopal cross
- Unitarian Church
- United Methodist Church
- Aaronic Order Church
- Mormon
- Serbian Orthodox
- Greek cross
- Bahai
- Konkio-Kyo Faith
- Community of Christ
- Seicho-no-ie
- Church of World Messianity
- United Church of Religion Science
- Christian Reformed Church
- United Moravian Church
- Eckankar
- Christian Church
- Christian and Missionary Alliance
- United Church of Christ
- Humanist Emblem of Spirit
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.)
- Izumo Taishakyo Mission of Hawaii
- Soka Gakkai International (U.S.)

Military approves pentacle

The US military is normally accommodating of different faiths, with 38 different symbols approved for headstones, ranging from the Christian cross to the Hindu Aum, and even including the "atomic whirl" of the American Atheists.

NONVIOLENCE

German Ban On Games

IN NOVEMBER 2006 IN Germany an 18-year-old avid Counter Strike player killed himself with a rifle after storming his school and injuring 11 of his schoolmates. German leaders responded with

a bill, soon to go before Parliament, that will put developers and players of games involving "cruel violence" in jail for up to one year. Fully 59 percent of the public support it.

Guenther Beckstein, Bavaria's interior minister, commented, "It is absolutely beyond any doubt that such killer games desensitize unstable characters to violence and can have a stimulating effect."

a much beloved American Hindu leader and taught Hinduism in Southern California for over 25 years.

TEN MILLION TOOK A CHILLY bath in Allahabad on *mauni amavasya*, January 19th, the second of four ablution days of the month-long Ardha ("half") Kumbha Mela.

THE VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD has succeeded in getting the Tamil Nadu state government to institute "social security" for hundreds of thousands of village temple priests. A welfare board will be established for

priests of *grama koyils*, small temples, that are not administered by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department.

HINDU-MUSLIM RIOTS WERE sparked in the hi-tech city of Bangalore on January 22 when Muslims protested Saddam Hussein's execution, ransacking Hindu shops and burning cars. Some Hindus responded in kind. The police fired on crowds killing a 12-year-old boy, before gaining control. The city's software industry, situated away from city center, was unaffected.



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. 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 a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others.

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IN MY OPINION

We Don't Worship Cows!

I am proud to be Hindu and happy to explain why

BY GAUTAM RAMA VARMA PATHIAL

I AM AN INDIAN HINDU living in the state of Oregon, on the west coast of the United States. There are only 11,000 Indians in this state. I am the only one in my school district, and there are none in the two neighboring districts. My nearest Indian neighbor lives 45 minutes away.

While I was attending public school, a lot of kids asked me questions about Hinduism. Some of these queries—like "Why do you worship cows?"—

are easier to answer than others. Especially challenging are the sarcastically nettling questions like: "You want a bite of beef?" or "Are you going to sacrifice me to your Goddess?" Usually, I am able to keep a level head. When I get asked the tough questions, I find myself thanking God for the chance to answer, but also praying that my responses are suitable.

That question about sacrificing people was almost certainly inspired by the film, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, in which a Kali cult is depicted as blood-thirsty murderers who sacrifice people. Movie director Steven Spielberg and story-writer George Lucas surely meant no harm in their movie, but their presentation innocently reflected an all-too-common ignorance among the non-Hindu public in their perception of Hinduism.

I have been attending regular classes at the Chinmaya Mission Balavihar since I was five years old. There I have been fortunate to learn of the deep mysticism of Hinduism, and also about Indian culture. The spiritual titan Swami Vivekananda said: "Unity is Knowledge, diversity is ignorance. This knowledge is your birthright. I have not to teach it to you. There were never different religions in the world." Inspired by this and a saying often repeated at the Chinmaya Mission, "knowledge is power," I find myself deeply rooted and firm in my beliefs. I am not one to be swayed.

Thanks to this training and the wisdom of my mother, I have been able to intelligently deflect many insults and answer



many antagonistic questions at school.

When I am asked about cows, I calmly reply: "First of all, we don't worship cows. We respect them. India is a land where farming is a common job, and thus, cows play a big part in the lives of many Indians. They help us in many ways. Even their cow dung is used. (Then, of course, I would go on to explain this). And besides, what does it matter if I don't eat cow? Do you

eat snakes? Or dogs? No? Dogs are quite a delicacy in Korea, you know."

As for the questions about human sacrifice, I explain to them that George Lucas just needed to create some villains who did horrific things. He was not trying to make a statement about Hinduism. Then I clarify that sacrificing human beings is definitely not in our scriptures.

Growing up Hindu in America was a bit unnerving at first. This was simply because many of the people that I met did not know anything about Hinduism. And people generally fear what they do not understand.

Being Hindu is something that I have always been proud of. I was raised that way. I feel sad when I see another Hindu kid laughing along with the jokes that are made about us and our culture.

When we put up barriers between people on the basis of religion or race, we are allowing ourselves to become ignoble bigots. If a fellow student ridicules my religion, I do not have to turn around and ridicule his.

Any advice I might have is directed toward other Hindu youth like myself, growing up in America. It is this: "Don't get heartened by the ridiculous questions and insulting comments that are flung upon you. Be proud of the religion that you belong to. Be a good, exemplary Hindu. If you can to that, you will have achieved something that you can truly be proud of."

GAUTAM PATHIAL, 15, *lives with his parents in Neuberg, Oregon, where he attends private school and aspires to be a lawyer.*

Hinduism and Modern Life

Does humanity's most enduring faith maintain its relevance amid the challenges of 21st-century life?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

SOME MONTHS BACK IN AUSTRALIA, A GROUP of Hindu teens asked me what relevance Hinduism and temples have to modern life. They said it as though the answer were obvious: None. But they were callow and yet to be schooled in the noble religion they had been born into. After our session, their question echoed in my mind for days. It is a question on many minds, deserving a complete answer. I would like to share with our readers the four major virtues that I singled out for those students, virtues which make Hinduism profoundly relevant in today's world: nonviolence, tolerance, worship and life's four noble goals.

The Virtue of Nonviolence: On November 13, 2006, we watched with interest a television report on the groundbreaking ceremony inaugurating a memorial to American civil rights hero Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Washington's front yard, the National Mall. President Bush said he was proud to dedicate the memorial in its "rightful place," between monuments to Thomas Jefferson, who "declared the promise of America," and Abraham Lincoln, "who defended the promise of America." Dr. King, Bush offered, "redeemed the promise of America."

Dr. King came from a staunch Christian family. His grandfather was a Baptist preacher. His father was pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. King earned his own Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozier Theological Seminary in 1951 and his Doctor of Philosophy from Boston University in 1955. While at the seminary, King became acquainted with Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent social protest. On a trip to India in 1959, King met with followers of Gandhi. During these intimate discussions, he became more convinced than ever that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

Dr. King went on to effectively utilize the Gandhian principles of nonviolent social protest to bring to the world's attention the unjustness of US racial discrimination laws, which were subsequently changed. Dr. King and all the millions he impacted would certainly affirm the relevance of the key Hindu principle of nonviolence in modern society.

The world has changed significantly in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Everyone has become more aware, and increasingly appalled, by the rampant incidents of brutality occurring worldwide every month. A great deal of violence is based upon the concept of the strategic necessity of retaliation—"An eye for an eye." "If they kill one of us, we must kill one of them." Contrarily, Hindu view retaliation as unwise. Gandhi made an insightful statement to counterpoint the call for revenge. He warned: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." He also declared, "I object to violence because when it appears to do



HINDUISM TODAY

good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

In a world awash in wars and conflict of every kind, Hinduism's gentleness and noninjury by thought, word and deed is more than a relevance. It is a necessity for the future of humanity.

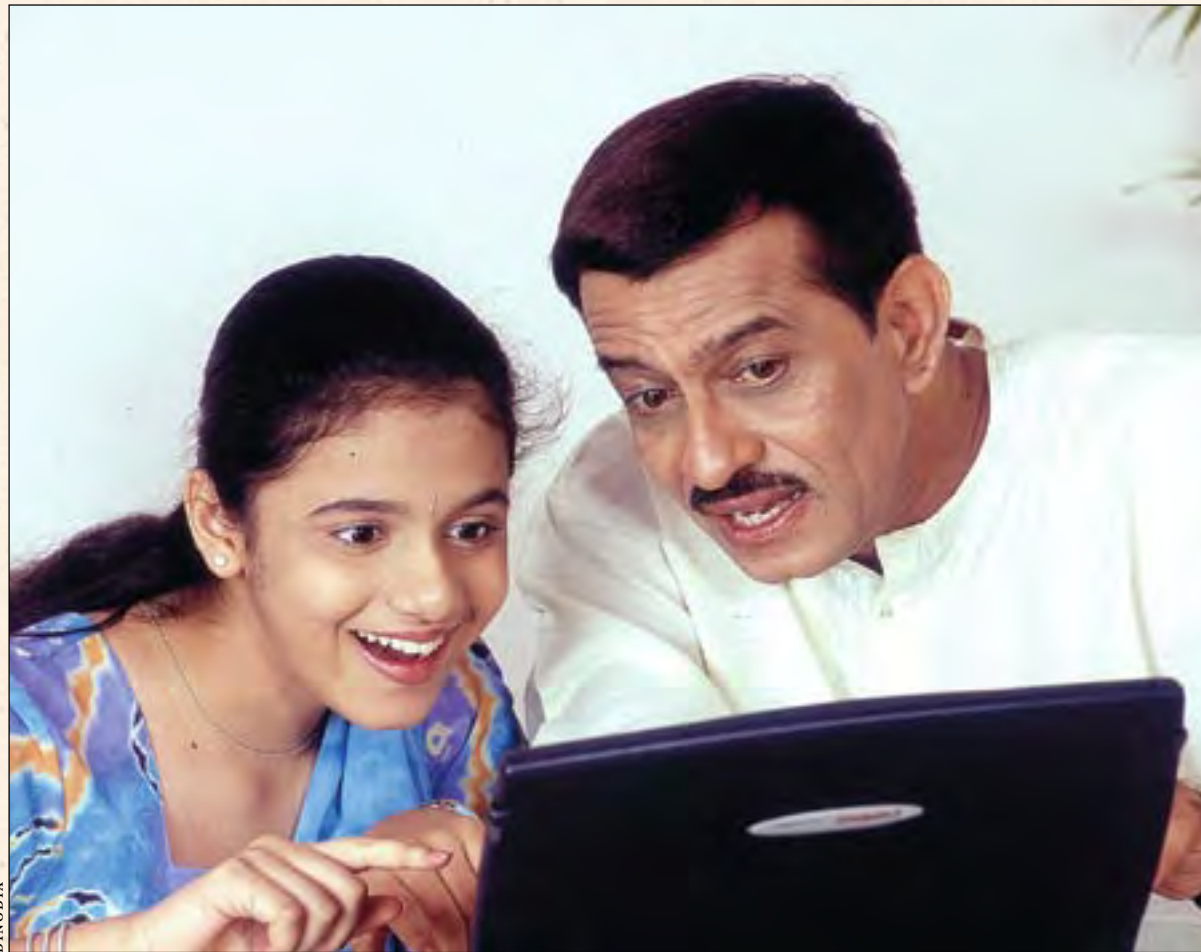
The Wisdom of Tolerance: The Hindu value that compliments and underlies the principle of nonviolence is that of tolerance. The Hindu belief that gives rise to tolerance of differences in race, religion and nationality is that all of mankind is good; we are all

divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. Hindus believe that each individual is a soul, a divine being, who is inherently good. The *Upanishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, and thence begins a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not. The Upanishadic *mahavakyam*, or great saying, that expresses this is *Ayam atma brahma*, "the soul is God." The Hindu practice of greeting one another with namaskara, worshipping God within the other person, is a way this philosophical truth is practiced on a daily basis.

This is taken one step further in the Vedic verse *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "The whole world is one family." Everyone is family oriented. All that we do is for the purpose of benefitting our family. We want them all to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. And when family is defined as the whole world, then it is clear that we wish everyone in the world to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. The Vedic verse that captures this sentiment is *Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu*, "May all people be happy." Certainly the key principle of tolerance is a major demonstration of the relevance of Hindu teachings to our modern world in providing a more compassionate and universalistic worldview, one that embraces the growing pluralism in world societies.

Effective Forms of Worship: One question the teens in Australia asked was, "If God is omnipresent, what is the need to build big temples to worship Him. The cost of construction is quite large; plus after it is built you have the ongoing cost of monthly maintenance. Couldn't all that money be spent in a better way?"

I asked them a question in response: "Since God is omnipresent, shouldn't we be able to experience Him equally everywhere? For example, God permeates this room. By looking intently at



DINODIA

the room shouldn't you be able to experience God? In theory you should." I then asked, "How many of you can see God permeating this room?" All present had to admit that they could not.

Practically speaking, God's omnipresence is a marvelously subtle form of consciousness, too subtle for most of us to experience unless we are skilled in meditation. I continued by giving the following series of analogies with other objects that are difficult to see. If we want to see a distant galaxy, we must go to an observatory and use a powerful telescope. To look into the nucleus of a cell, we go to a laboratory and use an electron microscope. Similarly, to see God, we go to the temple and experience God through the sanctified *murti*, or statue, of the Deity. Temples—and particularly the *murtis* within them—can connect us with the Divine because they are especially sacred. There are three reasons for this: construction, consecration and continuous daily worship.

A temple is designed and built according to strict rules laid down in scripture. This governs what shrines are included in the temple, the shrines' location and the overall dimensions of the temple. Consecration occurs through the powerful ceremony called *kumbhabhishekam*, during which a large number of priests perform elaborate rites for days on end. Thereafter begins the routine of daily worship conducted by professional priests. In these three ways, the temple and the *murtis* within them are sanctified and endowed with potent energies.

Hindu temples in every corner of the world offer Hindus an achievable way to experience God's sacred presence. Divinity's presence uplifts those attending the temple, inspiring them to bring forth and perpetuate traditional Hindu culture in the form

Kids want to know: Like so many children all over the world, this young girl enjoys ready access to information of every kind. He father wisely supervises her Internet explorations. Hinduism offers an ethical and philosophical framework that, if taught to the young, helps keep everything in proper perspective and guides them on a path of earthy success, intellectual growth and spiritual progress.

of sacred music, art and dance. As such, the temple becomes the hub of religious life in the surrounding Hindu community and thus is undeniably relevant to modern life.

Four Noble Pursuits: Hinduism's relevance to modern life is perhaps most personally important in the sphere of spiritual fulfillments and worldly attainments. Each Hindu seeks the highest and best for self and family, including closeness to God and blessings in every arena of experience. Hinduism has tools, maps and guidelines for reaching those very human goals. Consider the concept of the *purusharthas*, Hinduism's four traditional pursuits. The first two are wealth and love, known in Sanskrit as *artha* and *kama*. Common to all mankind, these embrace the pursuit of love, family, children, career and financial abundance. The third is *dharma*, which provides direction and balance to the first two. *Dharma* is piety, virtue and right living. It includes the ideals of seeking wealth and love in an ethical manner, being honest in business and loyal to one's spouse.

The fourth noble pursuit is *moksha*, spiritual illumination and liberation from rebirth on Earth. Liberation comes when all our karmas are resolved, *dharma* has been fulfilled and God has been realized. Hindus know that *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* are not ends in themselves. They provide the necessary surroundings, relationships and experiences which help the embodied soul mature over many lives and attain an ever-deepening God consciousness. This maturing process eventually culminates in *moksha*, at which point the soul has outgrown the need to continue its cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The goal of *moksha*, which sharply distinguishes Hinduism from Western religions, reminds us not to become so enthralled with the world that we neglect our foremost aim: God realization and liberation.

It is hard to imagine a mega-message greater than Hinduism's call for human concord, noble aims for our worldly existence and spiritualizing of our daily life. In addressing these fundamental human needs, no system of thought and theology is more germane. Having visited communities around the world, I am convinced that Hinduism remains vitally relevant in this era of space travel and global communications, and of worldliness and conflict on every continent. This vitality derives from its yoga, its teaching of all-pervasive Divinity, its health system of *ayurveda*, its mystical architectural system of *vastu*, its immense cultural gifts and so much more. It is relevant in providing the human race a profound self-understanding—illuminated insights into life and consciousness, into human nature and our highest purposes. We can restate the Australian youths' question: "Is there any religion in the world that is *more* relevant today than Hinduism?" Our answer is a resounding no.

LETTERS

South American Kudos

I WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE THE founder and the others who are responsible for the publication of this amazing magazine. The new Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir along the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi ("Pride of India," Apr/May/June, 2006) is a mark showing that Hindu culture is still vibrant. In "Fire on the Mountain" (Jul/Aug/Sep, 2006), we see how energized our Hindu society is presently. All the views of the swamis and saints, men and women, who have recently become a part of this magazine also add to the great work you are doing. Congratulations on a job well done.

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What Is Hinduism?

CONGRATULATIONS ON THE JAN/FEB/MAR, 2007, issue of HINDUISM TODAY. I had a look at the Digital Edition and think it is wonderful. The theme of "What Is Hinduism?" is excellent and needed now more than ever before. I look forward to reading the various sections in more detail. The images and design are also excellent, as ever.

BHAVIT MEHTA
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I WANT TO PERSONALLY THANK HINDUISM TODAY for its wonderful special issue on "What Is Hinduism?" that it just released. This issue should be in every Hindu temple and in the homes of all Hindus. It should be given to groups and libraries worldwide who wish to really understand Hindu Dharma. In its few pages, it presents what is probably the most concise, complete and clear presentation of Hinduism in all its many facets.

PANDIT VAMADEVA SHASTRI
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HINDUISM TODAY MAGAZINE HAS ONCE again done an excellent job by explaining Hinduism and its many facets in such a translucent and lucid manner. Being a Hindu, you assume you know everything only to find out how much you don't know about Hinduism and its profoundness until you come across such articles. Every article in this issue, including the principles of *vastu* for home design, is informative.

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Free Magazines for Students

I HAVE BEEN PART OF THE HINDU STUDENTS Council chapter at the University of Texas at Austin for over four years. From the

annual camps to regional retreats to chapter meetings, I have always seen HINDUISM TODAY magazines available free of charge. I really appreciate your support of what we are trying to collectively accomplish. In addition, I have seen many non-Hindus pick up copies of your magazine from our table in the student union area as a reference for Hindu materials and news. Thank you again for providing us with your amazing publication.

AASHISH KAPADIA
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Down with the Death Penalty

I AM INCARCERATED, AND I HAVE CONVERTED to Hinduism while in prison. I want to comment on your death penalty article ("Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?" Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006), but first let me explain that if I had never come to prison, I never would have studied religions or had the opportunity to find the path that I believe suits me best. I could not and would not choose a religion that believes all other religions are evil and rationalizes unjust treatment of others. I chose to worship Lord Siva and Lord Ganesha because I had this opportunity to educate myself. Please remember that the next time anyone thinks negatively toward prisoners and calls for harsher penalties.

More light needs to be shed on prison reform. The tendency in most states has been to be tough on crime—lock everyone up and throw away the keys. As a result, a population explosion has occurred in prisons in those states. Programs get cut to pay for the increasing population, and inmates are then left to rehabilitate themselves. As you can imagine, few do. When those same inmates get out, they go right back to the same places and circumstances as before they were locked up. Thus, recidivism rates are high.

Even though I cannot say that the death penalty affects me directly, I can comment on several of the people whom I have met who more than likely would have received a death sentence had there been such a law in the State of Wisconsin. Many have repented severely since being here and have taken pains to try to change themselves even though they are never getting out. I can honestly say that most of these very same men, whom I have eaten with, been in the same room with, even studied with, are good men who got caught up in bad situations. I believe most of them would never commit another crime if given a second chance. I'm not saying all, or even most, convicted murderers are like this, but those who have repented are. And I'm not advocating the release of convicted murderers, but I am advocating the humane and just treatment of these people. So, please think about reforming prisons to help inmates be-

come better people and have the opportunity to come closer to God. An eye for an eye never brought peace, nor will it ever. Only love brings peace. Siva is the Self of all. Mistreat one person, you mistreat Siva, because Siva is in that person! Love that person, and Siva feels that love!

MICHAEL WOODFORD
BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN, USA

THANK YOU FOR PUBLISHING SWAMINI Mayatitananda's teaching ("We Need to Stop," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). It gets to the bottom line very quickly regarding how to begin to rid the world of its insane "quantum violence." Perhaps a copy of this profound message should be sent to all the leaders of the "civilized world!" For now, however, I will start with myself—living a life of dharma, serving others, one person at a time, from a place of divine awareness as Mother reminds us.

DHIRA MICHAEL ROCCO
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Promoting Hinduism

I APPLAUD YOUR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE Hinduism around the world. It seems to me that Islam and Christianity have brought much suffering to this world and continue to do so. A Hindu world would be a peaceful world. Most times conversions take place when a person shows up and says he wants to change his faith. That is all right, but I think we Hindus should not only spread our faith, but also make sure that converts understand what it means to be a Hindu. I have, therefore, created this list for the new convert.

The most important tenet is to respect all faiths, realizing that all paths lead to the same God. You may have abused other faiths while you were a Christian or Muslim, but, once you become a Hindu, put a cork in it. Have we not seen enough examples of Hindus who have converted to other faiths and can't stop abusing their former faith? Ever seen a Hindu convert do the same?

Christians and Muslims are one-and-done. They get only one life, whereas Hindus know they live many lives, giving us a chance to correct our errors and follow career or life paths that we may have missed in this life.

Hinduism is inclusive, not exclusive. According to Christians and Muslims, their heavens are exclusive; only their faithful may enter. In Lord Rama's heaven, every good person is welcome.

The Hindu concept of heaven and hell makes perfect sense. Your stay is temporary, depending on the good or bad that you have done in this life. The Christian and Muslim view of eternal heaven or hell presents some problems. How can an ordinary person lead-

ing a dull life be sent to eternal hell? Remember that this is forever!

Lastly, I smile when I think of Lord Rama. Hindus say, "Love God," not "Fear God."

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Food Fight

BEING A STRICT VEGETARIAN, I THOROUGHLY enjoyed your article, "The Meat-Free Life" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2007). However, I tend to disagree with the claim "By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and the terrible fear of death, all of which is locked into the flesh of butchered creatures." First of all, how can a dead animal's flesh, devoid of soul and mind, harbor these emotions? Once a living being dies, its soul, accompanied by its mind, intellect and consciousness, departs to the other world; only its physical body, devoid of any life, emotions or consciousness, remains. Second, there are already enough compelling reasons to convince a reasonable person to become vegetarian; there is no need to use scare tactics which can create credibility issues and

make counterproductive the effort to convert somebody to vegetarianism. Third, in the article of the same issue, "How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater," the "food and consciousness" argument has not been advanced. If this were really a valid argument, I am sure you would have included it in this article, along with the other ten arguments that have been put forth.

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✓ *There are two responses to the question you raise about how eating meat can introduce lower emotions into the consumer. There is incontrovertible evidence that animals experience fear and anxiety in the moments leading up to their slaughter. On a chemical level, these emotions cause the release of hormones such as adrenaline into the bloodstream, in turn engaging the natural, instinctive, physiological fight-or-flight response. These chemicals remain in the butchered flesh after death and are ingested by humans. On a metaphysical level, the aura of a person or animal contains vibrations related to the emotions currently and recently experienced. Just as these vi-*

brations rub off on a person's clothes and remain even long after the clothes are removed, the vibrations associated with the emotions an animal experiences just prior to its demise are left behind in its flesh long afterward. The meat-eater absorbs these subtle vibrations with the flesh. Thus, his awareness tends to be drawn into the same lower emotions, especially fear, that sourced the chemical and vibratory responses in the first place. The same aggressive-defensive animal instincts that exist in man are fed by the subtle and physical chemistries within the dead flesh.

Correction

✓ *The photo of the dancer on the gatefold of the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2007, issue is attributable to B.K. Agarwal rather than Dinodia.*

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

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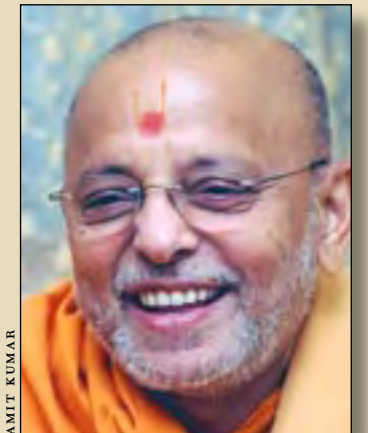
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The lifetime fee is US\$1,001 (or only \$800 if you are already subscribing) and payable in ten monthly installments. A

part of the fee is deemed as a donation in the US and is tax-deductible.

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HINDUISM TODAY mails free copies to a number of such noble recipients, and we pray we may have the means to reach many more. The copies are greatly appreciated. In testimony, Swami Vivekananda of the Omkarananda International Ashram, Switzerland, said, "The magazine is rendering a magnificent service. It helps us convey aspects of our venerable culture that are difficult if not impossible to acquire otherwise. This is especially valuable for the young, Hindu and non-Hindu alike." Please consider giving a lifetime subscription to such a swami or ashram. Imagine the long-term, positive effect!



AMIT KUMAR

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QUOTES & QUIPS

More often than not, I think I am in the presence of God.

Satguru Siva Yogaswami (1872-1964), *Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master*

Do you realize now the sacred significance and the supreme importance of the guru's role in the evolution of man? It was not without reason that the India of the past carefully tended and kept alive the lamp of guru-*tattva*. It is therefore not without reason that India, year after year, age after age, commemorates anew this ancient concept of the guru, adores it and pays homage to it again and again, and thereby reaffirms its belief and allegiance to it. For the true Indian knows that the guru is the only guarantee for the individual to transcend the bondage of sorrow and death, and experience the Consciousness of the Reality. **Swami Sivananda** (1887-1963), *founder of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh*

Acquire the transcendental knowledge from a Self-realized master by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry and by service. The wise ones who have realized the Truth will impart the Knowledge to you. **Bhagavad Gita**

Rely on the teachings to evaluate a guru: Do not have blind faith, but also no blind criticism. **His Holiness the Dalai Lama**, *Tibetan spiritual-political leader in exile*

Knowing others is wisdom; knowing the Self is enlightenment. Mastering others requires force; mastering the Self needs strength. **Lao-Tsu** (CA 600 BCE), *Chinese philosopher who inspired Taoism*

Dear is Plato, but dearer still is the truth. **Aristotle** (384-322 BCE), *Greek philosopher, Plato's disciple*

The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but he cannot do so when the clouds shut out his rays. When egotism veils the heart, God cannot shine upon you. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886), *guru of Swami Vivekananda*

To associate with a sadhu is like sitting near a seller of perfumes. You may not be able to own any of the wonders he holds,

but what emanates from them will envelop you. **Saint Kabir** (1440-1518), *Indian saint revered by Hindus and Muslims*

The syllable *gu* means shadows. The syllable *ru*, he who disperses them. Because of the power to disperse darkness, the guru is thus named. **Advayataraka Upanishad**

That which we call the Hindu religion is really the Eternal religion because it embraces all others. **Sri Aurobindo** (1879-1950), *philosopher and mystic*

Men are not disturbed by things, but by the view they take of things. **Epictetus** (55-135 A.D.), *Greek Stoic philosopher*

Whenever I climb I am followed by a dog called 'Ego.' **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900), *German philosopher and iconoclast*

Hinduism is the only ancient religious tradition on the Earth which talks about the right time-scale. In the West, people have the sense that what is natural is for the universe to be a few thousand years old, and that billions are numbers no one can understand. The Hindu concept is very clear. Here is a great world culture which has always talked about billions of years. **Carl Sagan** (1934-1996), *American astrophysicist*

To the philosophers of India, relativity is no new discovery. The fact that the wise men of India have not been concerned with technological applications of this knowledge arises from the circumstance that technology is but one of innumerable ways of applying it. **Alan Watts** (1915-1973), *American scholar of Comparative Religion and Harvard associate*

God used beautiful mathematics in creating the world. **Paul Dirac** (1902-1984), *Nobel prize in physics*

Frank and Ernest

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I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. **Galileo Galilei** (1564-1642), *Italian astronomer*

Hinduism has made marvelous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. We have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. Ancient India has survived because Hinduism was not developed along material but spiritual lines. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

I was an atheist until I found out I was God. *Spotted on a T-shirt in Auroville*

Hinduism does not see sins, but only mistakes. **Mother Sarada Devi**, *as quoted by Swami Gautamananda*

Everyone makes mistakes. It is natural and simply shows we do not understand something. Perceptive self-correction enables young ones to quickly learn from their mistakes, refine their still-developing behavior accordingly and thereby make rapid progress on the spiritual path. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Do not say that you do not have time for God. The busiest of men will have the most leisure, and the laziest will always be short of time, for the former utilizes time and the latter only wastes it. If you really want God, you will find time for Him. **Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati** (1912-1954), *34th pontiff of the Sarada Peetham*

Everything changes, everything passes; things appearing, things disappearing. But when all is over—being and extinction

both transcended—still, the basic emptiness and silence abide, and that is blissful peace. *Mystical song from a Hindu story*

Desire is a very dangerous thing. Sometimes we think we have killed all selfish desire, but somewhere in our mind there lingers some remnant; and as from a spark left in the corner of the hearth may come again a big fire, so out of that small remnant may spring a huge fire of desire. **Swami Ramakrishnananda** (1863-1911), *disciple of Sri Ramakrishna*

One does not suddenly reach a point where desire goes away. Desire is life. Desire can be directed according to the personal will. Through *sadhana* you can gain mastery over all the forces of your mind and body. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

The Hindu Concept of Time

HINDUISM'S UNDERSTANDING OF time is as grandiose as time itself. While most cultures base their cosmologies on familiar units such as a few hundreds or thousands of years, the Hindu concept of time embraces billions and trillions of years. The *Puranas* describe time units from the infinitesimal *truti*, lasting 1/1,000,000 of a second, to a *mahamantavara* of 311 trillion years. Hindu sages describe time as cyclic, an endless procession of creation, preservation and dissolution. Scientists such as Carl Sagan have expressed amazement at the accuracy of space and time

descriptions given by the ancient rishis and saints, who fathomed the secrets of the universe through their mystically awakened senses.



BASICS OF HINDUISM

Dharma

WHEN GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God's divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. Every form of life, every group of men, has its dharma, the law of its being. Related to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement,

the right and righteous path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. Adharma is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed—the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny.



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Mommy, kids at school are asking me all about our religion!

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Below are sample pages of the stunning 416-page, full-color book comprised of 46 educational insight sections from Hinduism Today magazine. \$39.95.



Available at www.MiniMela.com

FROM THE AGAMAS

“This Lord Siva Is All That”

The *Ajita Agama* explains God’s transcendent and immanent nature

AJITA AGAMA, FIFTH OF THE 28 SAIVA AGAMAS, deals mostly with temple construction, Deity installation and worship. Here we excerpt chapter two of the introduction, “The Nature of Siva.” As with all Agamas, the text is in the form of a dialogue, in this case between Siva as Rudra, the teacher, and Lord Vishnu, the student. In this chapter, Rudra alone speaks. The bond of anava, mentioned twice in the text, means the “impurity of smallness,” the individualizing veil of duality that enshrouds and binds the soul. Anava is a key concept of the Agamic Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

Only that One who is Siva, superior to all, the stable, Supreme Soul, Great Lord, whose form is existence, consciousness and bliss, who is free from existent and non-existent manifestations, and who is all-pervading, only He is named by the sages with the word *Brahman*.

He is the gross, the subtle and the supreme; the manifested, the unmanifested and that which is both; the external, the internal and that which is external-internal; the eternal; the non-eternal and that which is eternal and non-eternal; the male, the female and the third entity which is non-male and non-female. He is wakefulness, dream and deep sleep; the past, the present and the future; the instrument of knowledge, the knower and the known; the bonds of *anava*, karma and maya.

This Lord Siva is all that. There is nothing different from Him. Only He can be the Lord. He is I and you. He is God, i.e., Brahman, the creators, Kasyapa, etc. He is the seven sages, the Moon and Sun, the planetary lords. He is the king of Gods (i.e., Indra, Kubera, Varuna, Yama, Agni), all the chiefs of the Ganas, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the other excellent Gods and demons, the eight-fold celestial species, the five-fold animal one and the human one. Siva is revealed to be the entire universe.

The four *Vedas* with their secret section (the *Upanishads*) speak of Him. In the Siddhanta, the *Tantras*, the eighteen *Puranas*, the six branches of the *Vedas*, in the treatises of yoga and all sciences, whatever any of those sages, after examination, have said to be the true reality, this same eternal Lord of gods named Siva is that.

In the Saiva tradition, Siva is known as free from beginning, middle and end; free by nature from the bonds of the soul (i.e., *anava*, karma, maya); powerful, omniscient, endowed with plenitude. He is non-limited by directions of space, time, etc.; beyond the range of speech and mind; free of manifestation; immutable; all-pervading; always seeing everything.

The worship of Him can be the inner worship, which is especially suited for yogis. Men who take pleasure in the practice of yoga, whose mind is purified by the eight components of yoga—*yama*, *niyama*, etc.—worship Him in the middle of the lotus of their heart. The action of worshipping Him is superior. Without His worship as part of any other rite, there is no benefit for embodied souls.

Some are entitled to perform the inner worship; those who have little knowledge are entitled to perform the outer worship. Being aware of this, this Lord of Gods, Siva, who stands inside everything, who desires to extend His grace to all and gives creatures experience



Lord Siva saves the cosmos by drinking the deadly halahala poison released at the churning of the milk ocean

and liberation, this Siva becomes Sadasiva whose body is manifested as the five *brahma mantras* (ie, becomes God with a worshipful form). From Him was born Ishvara, the origin of all the manifested Gods, free from decline. The consciousness that inhabits Siva should be celebrated as Maya.

The *Ajita Agama* has been translated by N. RAMACHANDRA BHATT, JEAN FILLIOZAT (1906-1982), and PIERRE-SYLVAIN FILLIOZAT. Jean Filliozat is the founder of the French Institute of Pondicherry, at which N.R. Bhatt worked for many decades. Bhatt collected the original *ola* leaf bundles in which the *Saiva Agamas* were recorded and produced several printed *Agamas*. Pierre-Sylvain is Jean Filliozat’s son, and like Bhatt, now retired. The entire Sanskrit text with English translation of *Ajita Agama* was published in 2005 by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and is available from Motilal Banarsidass Publishers (mlbd.com).

The *Agamas*, like the *Vedas*, are divinely revealed and revered scriptures, *sruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the *Torah* (1,200 BCE), *Bible New Testament* (100 CE), *Koran* (630 CE) or *Zend Avesta* (600 BCE). There are many *Agamas* and subsidiary texts for each of Hinduism’s principle denominations—Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava. The *Agamas* are ancient, but dating is uncertain.

Vegetarianism and Meat-Eating in 8 Religions



While religions around the world share a quest for spirituality, they vary in their perception that respecting all forms of life is integral to that quest. In the following 13 pages, we focus on the subject of compassion as it is practiced by the adherents of eight religions—four East and four West—and reflected in their choice to eat meat, or not .



ALL RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD EXTOL COMPASSION, yet they vary in their commitment to expressing this virtue through nonviolence and vegetarianism. A growing number of today's vegetarians refrain from eating meat more for reasons pertaining to improved health, a cleaner environment and a better world economy than for religious concerns. Even those whose vegetarianism is inspired by compassion are oftentimes driven more by a sense of conscience than by theological principle.

BY JANE SRIVASTAVA,
SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THIS ARTICLE WE briefly explore the attitudes of eight world religions with regard to

meat-eating and the treatment of animals. It may be said with some degree of certainty that followers

of Eastern religions—like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism—generally agree in their support of nonviolence and a meatless lifestyle. But such a collective stance among followers of Western religions—like Judaism, Christianity and Islam—may not be asserted with the same confidence. Many deeply religious souls in the West eat meat because it is sanctioned in their holy books. Others refrain for a variety of reasons, including their sense of conscience that it is just not right, regardless of what scriptures say. Certainly, many scriptural references to food and diet are ambiguous at best. The issue is complicated.

Good Jains are exceptional examples of nonviolence and vegetarianism. Jainism, a deeply ascetic religion mainly centered in India, mandates that adherents refrain from harming even the simplest of life forms. Jains even follow dietary codes regulating the types of plants they eat.

Over the ages and around the world, Hindus have followed a variety of diets predicated on geography and

socio-economic status. Although vegetarianism has never been a requirement for Hindus and modern Hindus eat more meat than ever before, no follower of this oldest of world religions will ever deny that vegetarianism promotes spiritual life.

The dietary standards of Buddhists also vary in accordance with time and place. Although the cessation of suffering and an earnest commitment to nonviolence are central to Buddhist Dharma, most of the world's Buddhists are not vegetarian.

In Judaism, the oldest of the Abrahamic religions, there has long been a debate over whether meat should be eaten, with the view predominating that God allowed meat-eating as a concession to human weakness and need.

Muslim cultures are predominantly nonvegetarian, though abstaining from eating meat is generally permitted if the devotee acknowledges that such abstinence will not bring him closer to Allah.

Modern-day Christians may eat meat without restriction. Even though many Christians of the Middle Ages were vegetarian, a meat-eating interpretation of the Bible has slowly become the official position of the Christian Church.

Here follows a study of perspectives on vegetarianism and nonviolence in these eight world faiths.

HINDUISM TODAY



The virtuous compassion of the Jain lifestyle yields exemplary vegetarians

ALL GOOD JAINS ARE VEGETARIANS, for they believe that no living entity should be harmed or killed, especially for food. According to one famous Jain motto: "All living creatures must help each other." From its inception 2,600 years ago, Jainism has remained faithful in its commitment to nonviolence and vegetarianism.

Because followers of this gentle religion make compassion the central focus of their lives, their understanding and practice of ahimsa exceeds even that of many of the followers of other Eastern religions. Jains believe that humans, animals and plants are all sacred and can feel pain. Hence, they are careful to avoid harming even plants.

The concept of ahimsa, noninjury, permeates all aspects of Jain life. Some ascetics of this faith will sweep insects from their path as they walk and wear a face mask to prevent inadvertently killing small organisms as they breathe. Traditionally, these kindly souls adhere to the ideals of nonviolence with regard to the jobs they take to make a living. Often, they will work as traders of commodities. Even here, they follow rules. They will never handle goods made with animal products, such as hides, horns, ivory and silk. Farming and defending one's nation are allowed as exceptions to the rule.

Jains classify the life-quality of all living entities according to the number of senses they possess. The lowest forms of life have only one sense: touch. This group includes

plants. The highest life forms—including humans and most animals—have all five senses: touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. The earthworm is an example of a life form with only two senses: touch and taste. Lice have three: touch, taste and smell. Mosquitoes have four: touch, taste, smell and sight. Jains consume only plants, because plants have just one sense.

Jains have extensive dietary rules regarding the choice and preparation of the plants they eat. Generally, vegetables that grow underground are prohibited, because harvesting them usually means pulling them up by their roots, which destroys the entire plant, as well as all the microorganisms living around its roots. When possible, fruits are plucked only when they are ripe and ready to fall to the ground. Ideally, these are harvested after they have fallen of their own accord.

Grains, such as wheat, rice and beans, are collected only when the pods are dry and dead. Very orthodox Jains will not eat certain fruits and vegetables that contain a lot of seeds—like eggplant and guava—because these so often contain worms. Cauliflower, broccoli and other vegetables with velvety surfaces are also avoided by orthodox Jains because tiny insects get stuck on their surfaces and cannot be removed. Mushrooms are not consumed because they may contain parasites. Leafy vegetables, like cabbage and spinach, are carefully washed and inspected for insects and worms. Dairy products are allowed.

Jains follow restrictions on the timing of food preparation and its consumption. Meals must be cooked and eaten only during daylight hours. This rule evolved because cooking food at night could cause the death of small flying creatures like gnats and mosquitoes that would be attracted to the light and warmth of a fire.

Jains perform several kinds of fasts, including during festivals and on the eighth and fourteenth day of the full moon cycle. While fasting, only foods prepared from grains are allowed, and no fruits or vegetables are consumed. Besides protection of other living beings, the primary purpose of the Jains' dietary codes is to control desire and purify mind and body. In addition, their practices provide health and en-

vironmental benefits and help to conserve world resources. At a world environmental congress recently held in England, a comparative study of religions proclaimed Jainism the most environmentally friendly religion on Earth.

The lifestyle of modern Jain monks and nuns is more austere than that of even the strictest lay Jains. In their respect for Mahavira, Jainism's founder, monks of the Digambar (sky-clad) sect wear no clothes, shave their heads and walk barefoot. They eat only once a day, and then only what is offered to them as a sacrament.

Today there are roughly five million Jains worldwide, with the most orthodox residing in India. Although many modern Jains modify their dietary restrictions for convenience, most are faithful vegetarians. Some have entered non-traditional professions. A select few have migrated to foreign countries—and have become some of the wealthiest Indians in the world. 🍽️

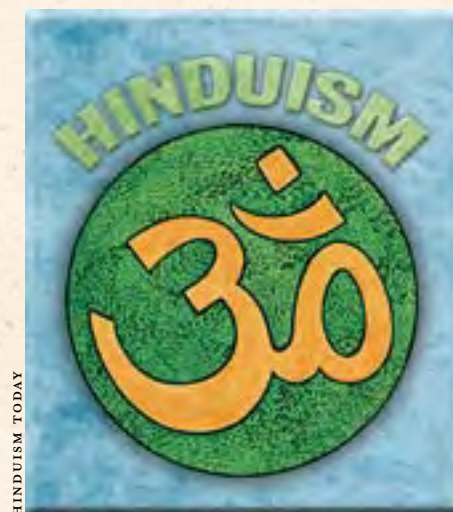


Setting a high standard: With her face mask and rajoharana (whisk broom), a young Jain lady seeks to move through the world harmlessly

ALL PHOTOS BY DINODIA



Going to market: Many of Hinduism's diverse cultures meet and merge in the marketplace where they buy and sell fruits and vegetables



HINDUISM TODAY

Hindus comprise the great majority of the world's vegetarians

THE VAST DIVERSITY OF HINDUISM'S multifaceted culture shines like gold in the variety of its numerous foods—both vegetarian and not. Geography, occupation, class and economic status play a significant role in determining the diets of modern-day Hindus. So does dedicated religious commitment.

Hindus are unmatched in their development of the art of enjoyable eating for healthy living. Their vegetarian food preparations are among the most varied in the world, and their ability to create a well-rounded nutritional diet without forfeiting taste is legendary. Many Westerners, inspired to be vegetarian but thinking a meatless diet might be boring or nutritionally lacking, derive renewed encouragement and inspiration from the many time-tested vegetarian traditions of India. One source of such wholesome eating dates back thousands of years to the health-care system of ayurveda, the "science of long life," which utilizes food both as medicine and sustenance.

India's cooking traditions vary greatly from North to South. One typical South Indian vegetarian meal might consist of an ample portion of rice centered on a banana-leaf plate, surrounded by small servings of vegetables prepared as curries, pickles and chutneys. This tasty assortment would be enhanced with soupy *sambars* and *rasam*, a few jagery sweets on the side and a small portion of yogurt to balance the tastes and soothe

digestion at the end of the entire meal.

Setting aside extenuating circumstances, most good Hindus would choose to follow a vegetarian way of life. All Hindu scriptures extol nonviolence and a meatless diet as being crucially important in the successful practice of worship and yoga. Most Hindu monastic orders are vegetarian. For centuries, Hindu temples and ashrams have served only vegetarian food. "Hindu dharma generally recommends vegetarianism," notes Vedacharya Vamadeva Shastri, "but it is not a requirement to be a Hindu."

The earliest scriptural texts show that vegetarianism has always been common throughout India. In the *Mahabharata*, the great warrior Bhishma explains to Yudhis-thira, eldest of the Pandava princes, that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one's own son, and that the foolish person who eats meat must be considered the vilest of human beings. The *Manusmriti* declares that one should "refrain from eating all kinds of meat" for such eating involves killing and leads to karmic bondage (*bandha*). The *Yajur Veda* states, "You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever." The *Atharva Veda* proclaims, "Those noble souls who practice meditation and other yogic ways, who are ever careful about all beings, who protect all animals, are committed to spiritual practices."

Over 2,000 years ago, Saint Tiruvalluvar wrote in the *Tirukural* (verse 251): "How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh?" and "Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living creature." (verse 259)

"They who are ignorant, though wicked and haughty, kill animals without feelings or remorse or fear of punishment. In their next lives, such sinful persons will be eaten by the same creatures they have killed."

SHRIMAD BHAGAVATAM, (11.5.14)

Vegetarianism, called *shakahara* in Sanskrit, is an essential virtue in Hindu thought and practice. It is rooted in the spiritual aspiration to maintain a balanced state of mind and body. Hindus also believe that eating meat is not only detrimental to one's spiritual life, but also harmful to one's health and the environment.

Most Hindus strive to live in the consciousness that their choice of foods bears consequences, according to the law of karma. Even the word "meat," *mamsa*, implies the karmic law of cause and effect. *Mam* means "me" and *sa* means "he," intimating that the giver of pain will be the receiver of that same pain in equal measure.

Historically, while a large portion of ancient Hindu society lived predominantly on a vegetarian diet for religious reasons, certain communities, like *kshatriyas* (the Hindu warrior class), consumed at least some meat and fish. Hindu royalty also ate meat. Nomadic Hindus, who did not farm, had to rely on animal flesh for food, because nothing else was available. Agricultural communities were among the best examples of Hindu vegetarianism, for they were not inclined to kill and eat the animals they needed for labor.

All animals are sacred to Hindus, but one stands out among all the rest—the cow. According to an ancient Hindu story, the original cow, Mother Surabhi, was one of the treasures churned from the cosmic ocean. The five products of the cow (*pancha-gavya*)—milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung—are considered sacramental.

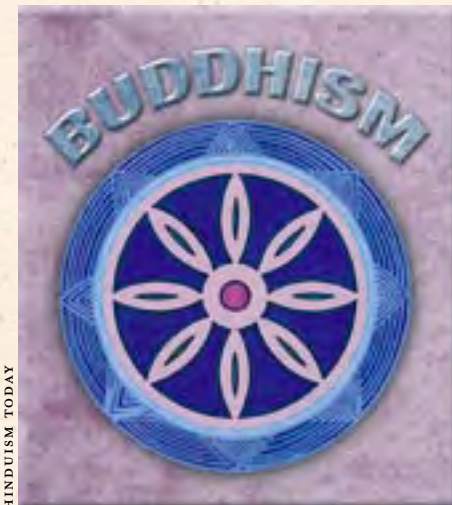
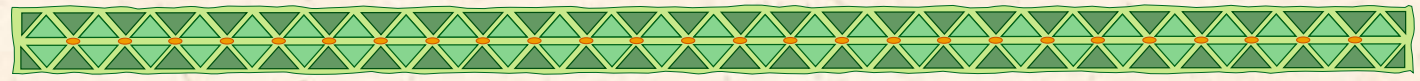
Although no temples have ever been constructed to honor the cow, she is respected as one of the seven mothers—alongside the Earth, one's natural mother, a midwife, the wife of a guru, the wife of a brahman and the wife of the king.

Some controversy exists with regard to the Vedic interpretation of meat-eating. The earliest of the *Vedas*, the *Rig Veda*, mentioned the consumption of meat offered in sacrifice at the altar, but even such ceremonial meat-eating was an exception, rather than a rule. Vedic offerings primarily consisted of plant and dairy products, such as ghee, honey, *soma* (an intoxicating plant juice), milk, yogurt and grain.

According to Vedacharya Vamadeva Shastri in his book, *Eating of Meat and Beef in the Hindu Tradition*: "Animal sacrifice (*pashu bandhu*) is outlined in several Vedic texts as one of many different possible offerings, not as the main offering. Even so, the animal could only be killed while performing certain mantras and rituals."

Today, according to a recent survey, 31 percent of all Indians are vegetarian. Meat is not even sold

or allowed in certain famous pilgrimage locations like Haridwar and Varanasi, and many non-vegetarian Hindus abstain from eating meat on holy days or during special religious practices. Most Indian states have a legal ban on the slaughter of cows, and beef is only available in non-Hindu stores and restaurants.



HINDUISM TODAY

Buddha condemned meat-eating, but advised his monks to accept the food they were served

LIKE JAINISM, BUDDHISM HAS EARNED well-deserved distinction for its ideals of nonviolence and compassion. Although animal sacrifice and meat-eating were common practices during Buddha's lifetime, the sage opposed animal slaughter and advised his followers to not eat meat under the following three conditions: if they saw the animal being killed; if they consented to its slaughter; or if they knew the animal was going to be killed for them.

As Buddhism spread around the world, many of its fundamental concepts were modified to fit changing times and different cultures. The concept of ahimsa acquired a less stringent interpretation, and meat-eating among Buddhists became more and more commonplace.

Today, the international Buddhist community is divided on the issue of vegetarianism. The Dalai Lama himself is not vegetarian. Many Buddhists feel that it is acceptable to eat meat if someone else does the killing. Those who believe in the vegetarian ideal assert that killing animals is avoidable and does not resonate with Buddhism's spirit of reverence for all life.

All Buddhist schools of thought agree that compassion and the cessation of suffering lies at the core of Buddha's teaching. But there are conflicting interpretations even regarding Buddha's own consumption of meat. While at least one tradition declares that Buddha died from eating tainted pork,

a number of nineteenth-century scholars asserted that it was a poisonous mushroom that caused his death. Most Buddhists favor the latter explanation.

Buddha did not teach vegetarianism in a formal way. In one scriptural verse, he made it clear that a Buddhist monk should receive with gratitude any food that was put into his begging bowl, even if it were meat. It is almost certain, however, that most Buddhists giving food to a monk would know that offering meat would not be proper.

The Buddhist view of animals is best described in *Jataka Tales*—stories Buddha himself is said to have narrated. These anecdotes tell of his previous incarnations as animals and as humans. They convey the message that all creatures are divine, and that slaying an animal is as heinous as killing a human.

The two prominent Buddhist traditions today are the Hinayana and Mahayana sects. Those of the Hinayana sect, most of whom are renunciate monks, seek spiritual liberation through the attainment of Self-realization. The Mahayana sect, by far the largest school, is comprised mainly of family men and women who pursue spiritual advancement through service—helping themselves by helping others. The Indo-Tibetan and Zen traditions, which are of the Mahayana sect, have many texts that praise the vegetarian ideal.

A good example is found in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, a central Mahayana scripture said to consist of Buddha's own words. In support of vegetarianism, the sage states: "For the sake of love and purity, the bodhisattva should refrain from eating flesh, which is born of semen and blood. For fear of causing terror to living beings, let the bodhisattva, who disciplines himself to attain compassion, refrain from eating flesh. It is not true that meat is proper food and permissible to eat. Meat-eating in any form, in any manner and in any place is unconditionally and once and for all prohibited. I do not permit it. I will not permit it."

A *Buddhist Bible*, written by in Dwight Goddard in 1932, echoes this vegetarian sentiment. This book strongly influenced the growth of Buddhism in the English-speaking world during the 20th century. It is famous for its transformatory effect on beat writers such as Jack Kerouac. "The reason for practicing *dhyana* (meditation) and seeking to attain *samadhi* (mystic contemplation) is to escape from the suffering of life," writes Goddard. "But

in seeking to escape from suffering ourselves, why should we inflict it upon others? How can a *bhikshu* (seeker), who hopes to become a deliverer of others, himself be living on the flesh of other sentient beings?"

The vegetarian flavor of the faith found fertile fields when Buddhism spread to China and Japan, where a nonviolent, meat-free culture had long been an established way of life. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, "In China and Japan the eating of meat was looked upon as an evil and was ostracized. The eating of meat gradually ceased and this tended to become general. It became a matter of course not to use any kind of meat in the meals of temples and monasteries."

Buddhism entered China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE—220 CE) when Confucianism and Taoism were already well established. The Chinese worshiped ancestral deities and followed strict dietary rules. Certain foods—pork, for example—were said to make the breath "obnoxious to the ancestors" and were frowned upon.

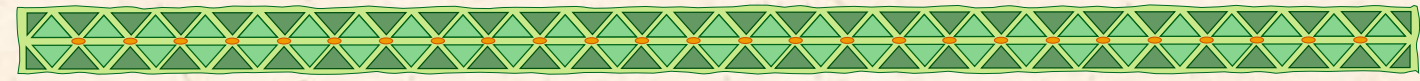
Ancient Japanese lived primarily on vegetables, rice and grains. When Buddhism began to gain a stronghold in Japan during the sixth century, the nation had already absorbed much of Chinese culture. Chinese Buddhism blended compatibly with the Shintoism of Japan, which was significantly vegetarian. According to Shinto tradition, no animal food is offered at a shrine, as it is taboo to shed blood in a sacred place. Today, the Buddhism of Japan constitutes a merge of Shintoism with Chinese Buddhism. Although eating meat, especially fish, is common in the Japanese Buddhist community, the deeply religious still consider it an inferior practice. No meat or fish is ever consumed in a Zen Buddhist monastery.

Today, most Buddhists are not vegetarian, though contemporary Buddhist movements, such as *Buddhists Concerned for Animal Rights*, are seeking to reestablish vegetarian ideals. One Buddhist denomination, called the Cao Dai sect, has two million vegetarian followers.

"The greatest progress of righteousness among men comes from the exhortation in favour of non-injury to life and abstention from killing."

The Edicts of Ashoka

So many choices: Although many modern-day Buddhists eat meat, some Buddhist monks hold strong to the vegetarian ideal



Jewish scholars believe God intended man to be vegetarian

ALTHOUGH ANCIENT HEBREWS ATE meat, they did so sparingly. This restraint was not religiously or even ethically motivated. Meat was expensive and its consumption was a luxury. As an agrarian society, biblical Jews used animals mainly for labor and were largely vegetarian. They also consumed a great quantity of milk and milk products, mainly from sheep and goats.

Today most Jews live on a predominantly meat-based diet. A typical Jewish *simcha* (private celebration) consists of brisket, gefilte fish cakes, fish and chicken soup or chopped liver. Roberta Kalechofsky points out in *Vegetarian Judaism—A Guide for Everyone* that “Western Jews have historically eaten as much meat as the non-Jews; and due to their growing prosperity, European Jews have started to fully identify themselves with the meat-based diet.”

Scholars of Judaism agree that God’s intention was for man to be vegetarian. “God did not permit Adam and his wife to kill a creature and to eat its flesh,” said Rashi, a highly respected, 12th-century, Jewish rabbi who wrote the first comprehensive commentaries on the *Talmud* and *Tanakh*. Ronald Isaacs states in *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition* that all Talmudic rabbis conclude that “the permission to eat meat [was granted to human kind] as a compromise, a divine concession to human weakness and human need.” Rabbi Elijah Judah Schochet, in *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, notes that “scripture does not command the Isra-

elite to eat meat, but permits this diet as a concession to lust.”

Jewish dietary laws are unique in including a prohibition against mixing meat and milk: “You shall not seethe a kid in its mother’s milk” (*Exodus* 23:19). This mandate of not boiling a young goat in the milk of its mother is an elaboration of the command against cruelty to animals. Also, because offering meat boiled in milk was a pagan form of hospitality, Jews saw ruling against the practice as a way of distancing themselves from pagan ways.

Judaism prohibits the consumption of blood: “Only flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall you not eat” (*Genesis* 9:4). “You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof” *Leviticus* 17:14). The rationale behind this injunction is that life belongs to God, and blood is life. “Blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh” (*Deuteronomy* 12:23).

In Jewish tradition, only certain animals are suitable as food. According to Elijah Schochet in his book *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*: “Only quadrupeds which chewed their cud and had parted hoofs, such as the cow, sheep, goat, gazelle and male deer, were fit for food, these being by and large the herbivorous ruminants. Animals possessing only one of the two required characteristics, however, such as the camel, the badger and the pig, were forbidden, as of course, were animals which neither had split hoofs nor chewed their cud. Animals which died of natural causes were prohibited, as were those torn by wild beasts. Only fish possessing both fins and scales were permitted, while the majority of insects were forbidden. All land creatures that crawled on their bellies or moved on many feet were prohibited. Numerous birds were outlawed, notably predatory fowl and wild waterfowl.”

Jewish scholars cite three characteristics that distinguish animals as not suitable for slaughter as kosher meat:

- 1) that they are injurious to health,
 - 2) that they are aesthetically repulsive and
 - 3) that they serve as symbolic reminders to Jews of their status as holy people.
- Rabbinical authority states that these guidelines are to be obeyed in order that Israel should be “a holy people unto the Lord,” and “distinguished from other nations by the avoidance of unclean and abominable things that defile them.”

The *Bible* does not provide direct support for the various

Jewish dietary laws pertaining to the koshering process. Still, ritual slaughter (*shechitah*) is one of the central elements of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws). *Kashrut* decrees that an animal’s throat must be cut with a single, swift, uninterrupted horizontal sweep of a perfectly smooth knife in such a way as to sever the trachea, esophagus, carotid arteries and jugular vein. The profuse loss of blood is supposed to render the animal unconscious quickly, thus minimizing suffering.

Cruelty can be measured by the length of time it takes for an animal to die. One study performed by the English Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals concluded that “there is often a time-lag of anything from seventeen seconds to six minutes from the moment the animal’s throat is cut until it actually loses consciousness. Although the throat may be cut, the animal is by no means free from pain and can in some cases have a considerable awareness of what is happening.” Clearly, Judaism’s animal slaughter for food is difficult to reconcile with its pro-vegetarian interpretation of the *Torah* and its mandate to not inflict pain on any living being.

Jewish dietary laws apply only to animal foods. All fruits, vegetables, unprocessed grains—and anything that does not contain meat or milk products—are intrinsically kosher. Making meat kosher involves a complex process of removing all blood from the flesh. The butcher must remove veins, sacs and various membranes that collect blood, then soak, salt and rinse the meat to extract any remaining blood. Some authorities point out, however, that while koshering removes blood from the larger blood vessels, it does not extract it from the smallest vessels, such as the capillaries.

Today, the number of Jewish vegetarians is increasing. Advocates promote the Jewish teaching that “humans are partners with God in the preservation of life and health.”

“The removal of blood [from meat] is one the most powerful means of making us constantly aware of the concession and compromise which the whole act of eating meat, in reality, is.”

The Jewish Dietary Law
BY RABBI SAMUEL DRESNER

Vegetables are pure: Although meat must be made kosher, fruits and vegetables need no sanctification to be consumed in the Jewish diet



DINODIA

HINDUISM TODAY



In a religion that praises the pleasures of meat, a few go vegetarian

IN ANCIENT TIMES, MEAT-EATING IN Islamic countries was predicated on necessity. Pre-Islamic Arabs led a pastoral and nomadic existence in harsh desert climates where it would have been challenging, if not impossible, to survive on a vegetarian diet.

When Islamic civilization spread into Asia in the eighth century, meat-eating became an important symbol of difference, separating them from the predominantly vegetarian Buddhist and Hindu faiths and practices.

Muslims adhere to dietary regulations which are similar to those of Jews. Forbidden foods, referred to as haram, are blood, pork and those animals that have not been slaughtered by cutting the jugular vein with a very sharp knife while reciting a prayer pronouncing the name of Allah.

According to his earliest biographies, the Prophet Mohammed preferred vegetarian food, particularly favoring milk blended with yogurt, butter, nuts, cucumber, dates, pomegranates, grapes, figs and honey.

Mohammed was said to have been compassionate toward animals, and Islamic scriptures often command that all creatures be treated with care. According to Islamic tradition, no creature should be harmed in

Mecca, the birthplace of Mohammed.

The *Qur'an* states that animals are like humans: "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings—but that they are communities like you. Nothing have We omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Lord in the end."

Richard C. Foltz writes in *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*: "[Even though] in mainstream Islam there is a tendency to see animals in terms of how they serve human interests, animals are to be valued, cared for, protected and acknowledged as having certain rights, needs and desires of their own. Their case is like that of human slaves albeit lower in the hierarchical scheme of things."

Some customs of the Sufis, an offshoot of Islam, recommend abstinence from meat-eating for bodily purification. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, a teacher in a 20th century school of Sufism, referred to as the Sri Lankan Qadiri, taught that the consumption of meat stimulates the animal nature, while the consumption of plant and dairy products brings peace. Chishti Inayat Khan, who helped introduce Sufi principles to Europe and America in modern times, observed that vegetarianism not only promotes compassion toward living creatures, it provides an important aid in the purification of the body for spiritual practices.

Nearly all of today's 1.4 billion Muslims eat meat. The practice is justified by the logic that "one must not forbid something which Allah permitted." According to the *Qur'an*, meat eating is one of the delights of heaven.

Some Islamic legal scholars assert that veg-

"In all that has been revealed unto me, I do not find anything forbidden to eat, unless it be carrion, or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine."

QUR'AN 5:3, 2:173, 6:145

etarianism is actually not allowed by Islam. According to Mawil Izzi Dien in *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam*, "In Islamic law, there are no grounds upon which one can argue that animals should not be killed for food. ... Muslims are not only prohibited from eating certain foods, but also may not choose to prohibit themselves food that is allowed by Islam. Accordingly, vegetarianism

is not permitted unless on grounds such as unavailability or medical necessity."

A few stalwart Muslim jurists insist that there should be no prohibition of vegetarianism in Islam and have actually issued legal rulings, known as *fatwas*, to this effect, asserting that Muslims may choose to be vegetarian, provided they realize and acknowledge that eating meat is allowed, and that vegetarianism will not bring them closer to Allah.

Iran has at least one vegetarian society. Turkey has several national vegetarian organizations. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has, at the suggestion of its Muslim members, launched a web site on Islam and vegetarianism.

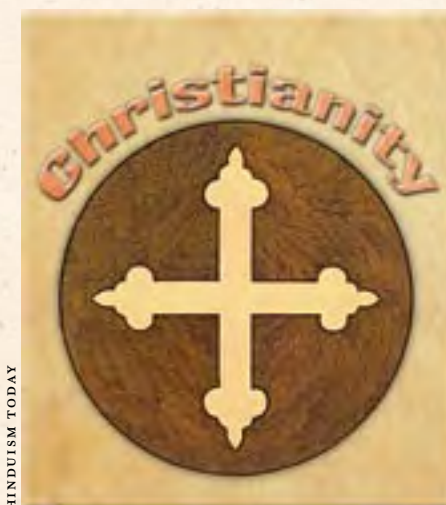
Muslims who choose to abstain from eating meat do so for a variety of reasons. Some argue that, especially in the West, truly halal meat does not and cannot exist—that making meat halal is impossible in today's industrialized world of factory farming. Even if the technical requirements of a halal slaughter are observed, the animals are not raised in humane and wholesome environments. They are physically abused and may be killed within view of other animals.

Some Muslims are choosing vegetarian lifestyles more for reasons of good health than upon religious principle. Dr. Shahid Athar of Indiana University School of Medicine asserts in www.IslamicConcern.com: "There is no doubt that a vegetarian diet is healthier."

Others are turning to vegetarianism because of the deleterious effect meat-eating has on the environment. Industrial meat production may render meat haram (Islamically unlawful), because it leads to environmental collapse and destruction. The *Qur'an* (7:56) states, "Waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters," and "Do not pollute the earth after it has been (so) wholesomely (set in order)...."

Muslims in the West face additional challenges in following dietary mandates of their faith. Halal meat is often not readily available. Restaurant and pre-packaged foods may contain forbidden ingredients. One option in the face of these challenges is a vegetarian meal, which avoids restricted ingredients. While some Muslims conclude that simply abstaining from eating meat is an obvious solution, others are adamant that following Islamic dietary law is far more complicated than just being vegetarian.

In the market for a change: A few young Muslims are finding reasons to be vegetarian



HINDUISM TODAY

Both vegetarians and meat-eaters find support in scriptures

MOST MODERN CHRISTIANS BELIEVE in the “dominion perspective,” an exclusively Christian theological stance asserting that human life has greater value than animal life and that all of nature exists for the sole purpose of serving the needs and interests of man. This perspective gained significant development and fortification from famous philosophers and theologians like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Descartes. Descartes asserted that animals were “automata,” soulless entities with no capacity to experience suffering.

Unlike the Jewish *Torah*, the *New Testament* sets no moral guidelines for man in dealing with animals. Apostle Paul, commenting on the *Torah*’s restriction of muzzling an ox that threshes corn, observed: “Does God care for oxen? Of course not. [Their purpose] is altogether for our sakes.” (1 *Corinthians* 9:9-10)

The *Old Testament*, known also as the Hebrew *Bible*, is the first part of the Christian *Bible*. Therefore, Jews and Christians share the concept that in the beginning, symbolized in the story of the Garden of Eden, mankind was nonviolent and vegetarian, later becoming corrupt, symbolized by the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.

Genesis 9:1-3 is the most significant Biblical text supporting the Christian tradition of eating meat. This famous verse states that “God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every

bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.’”

If rabbinical literature interprets *Genesis* 9:3 as divine concession to human weakness and human need, Christians consider it clear and unconditional approval of the consumption of animal flesh.

It is clear from the teachings of the *New Testament* that Christian tradition came to interpret in the teachings of Christ an express authorization to freely eat meat: “Thus, he declared all foods clean.” (*Mark* 7:19) This assessment is further rationalized with the argument that Jesus put much greater emphasis on man’s deeds than on his diet. It has also been postulated that, as a radical reformer, Jesus wanted to distance himself from the formalism of the Jewish faith, and that moving away from Jewish dietary laws toward a more virtue-based ethic might highlight this shift.

There are varying opinions with regard to whether or not Jesus himself ate meat. According to the *Bible*, he at least ate fish: “And when he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.” (*Luke* 24:40-43).

Christians seeking further justification for their meat-based dietary preferences cite many examples in *The New Testament* where Jesus asks for meat. Some scholars deny the validity of these citations, asserting that a closer study of the original Greek text reveals that the words understood as “meat” would more accurately be translated as “food.” Also, it has been asserted by some experts that *fish* in this context could also mean little bread rolls made from a submarine plant known as the “fish plant.” These soft plants were dried in the sun, ground into flour and baked into rolls. Fish-plant rolls were a significant feature of the ancient Babylonian diet.

There is a strong opinion among some scholars that the original teachings of Jesus were altered by the Church, particularly by the “correctors” who were appointed by ecclesiastical authorities of Nicea in 325 CE. Those scholars believe that these “corrections” most blatantly misrepresented the teachings of Jesus with regard to violence and meat-eating. In his foreword to the translation of *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve*, Rev. G.J. Ousley writes: “What these correctors did was to cut out of

the Gospels, with minute care, certain teachings of our Lord which they did not propose to follow—namely, those against the eating of flesh and the taking of strong drink.”

Scholars tend to agree that many early Christians were vegetarians. St. John Chrysostom wrote: “We, the Christian leaders, practice abstinence from the flesh of animals to subdue our bodies.” Some experts assert that Matthew and all the Apostles abstained from eating meat.

Prior to the Middle Ages, several monastic orders adhered to vegetarianism, including the Augustinian, Franciscan and Cistercian orders. With time, however, organized Christianity moved away from these vegetarian roots. Meat-eating was so much an accepted way of life during the time of the Roman Empire that vegetarian Christians had to follow their culinary choices in secrecy.

Before the end of the 18th century, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was the only major Christian leader who was a vegetarian. In 1809, in Safford, England, Reverend William Cowherd started the Bible Christian Church, Europe’s first vegetarian church in recent times. By 1817, Reverend Cowherd’s nephew, Reverend William Metcalfe, established a branch of this church in Philadelphia, bringing vegetarianism onto American soil.

More recently, several notable personages have adopted and/or encouraged vegetarianism. These include Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the Seventh Day Adventists; Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Nobel Peace Prize winner, theologian, musician and philosopher; Dr. John H. Kellogg, creator of corn flakes; Reverend Fred Rogers, host of TV show “Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood,” and Reverend Sylvester Graham, creator of graham crackers.

Reverend Sylvester Graham was a Presbyterian minister. He launched a modern food reform, campaigning to assure that essential nutrients were not removed from vegetarian foods. The Seventh day Adventists were the first official vegetarian Christians. Today, half of all Seven Day Adventists are vegetarian. The Trappist, Benedictine and Carthusian Orders of the Roman Catholic Church are also vegetarians.

A growing number of modern Christians not only perceive vegetarianism as being in consonance with core principles of Christianity, they also see it as at least a partial relief to problems like poor health, world hunger and global economy.

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Exodus 20:13

Back to the garden: With a deepening social conscience, an increasing number of Christians are turning to vegetarianism

Sikhism

The first Sikh guru established vegetarian community kitchens

SCHOLARS PERCEIVE SIKHISM AS a syncretic faith that combines elements of Hinduism and Islam. The Sikh religion began in the 16th century in northern India with the teachings of Guru Nanak and was continued by the nine gurus that followed him. Today most of the world's Sikh population live in the Indian state of Punjab. They are mostly meat-eaters, but a predilection for vegetarianism has been present from the faith's beginning.

According to Sikh scholar Swaran Singh Sanahi of the Academy of Namdhari Culture: "Sikh scriptures support vegetarianism fully. Sikhs living during the time of Guru Nanak had adopted the Hindu tradition and way of living in many ways. Their dislike for flesh-foods arose from that tradition. Guru Nanak considered meat-eating improper."

Nanak instituted a tradition of free community kitchens, *langar* (still flourishing today) where anyone—regardless of race, religion, gender or caste—can enjoy a simple meal. This was inspired by a belief in the equality of all men and rejection of the Hindu caste system. Such kitchens serve vegetarian food twice a day, every day of the year. Being vegetarian, the meals are acceptable to people from different religions and cultures. These langars have been appreciated during times of disaster, such as following the 2005 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

In the Sikh scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, meat consumption is strongly condemned in passages like the following: "You kill living beings, and call it a righteous action. Tell me, brother, what would you call an unrighteous action?"

Sikhs rigorously denounce animal sacrifice as well. This includes ritual slaughter to sanctify meat for eating, as in the preparation of halal or kosher meat.

The Indian saint and mystic Kabir, a contem-

porary of Guru Nanak who some believe may have been Nanak's preceptor, wrote: "If you say that God resides in all, why do you kill a hen?... It is foolish to kill an animal by cruelty and call that dead animal sanctified food.... You keep fasts in order to become acceptable to God, but kill a living animal for your relish."

The ten Gurus of Sikhism neither condoned nor condemned meat-eating in a formal way. Although they felt that it was unnecessary to kill animals and birds for food, they did not believe vegetarianism should become dogma. They emphasized controlling the contents of the mind more than controlling the contents of the body. Guru Nanak apparently considered it futile to argue about food. When pressed to comment on meat-eating, he said, "Only the foolish quarrel over the desirability of eating flesh. They are oblivious to true knowledge and meditation. What is flesh? What is vegetable? Which is sin-infested? Who can say what is good food and that which leads to sin?" Today, some Sikhs avoid beef and pork, observing the meat prohibitions of both Islam and Hinduism. Other groups, such as the Namdharis and Yogi Bhajan's 3HO Golden Temple Movement, are strictly vegetarian.



The contemporary look: A Sikh and a Parsee in today's traditional dress

Zoroastrianism

Zoroaster inspired compassion through the practice of virtue

ZOROASTRIANISM (SOMETIMES CALLED Magianism, Mazdaism or Parseeism) was founded in ancient Persia by the prophet Zoroaster, also known as Zarathushtra. Although estimates for the birth of Zoroaster vary greatly, it is popularly accepted that he lived in pastoral Iran around 600 BCE and was an ardent advocate of vegetarianism when it was not customary to be so. According to Colin Spencer in *The Heretic's Feast*, Zoroaster was not only a vegetarian, he also disavowed animal sacrifice.

Zoroaster emphasized moderation. With regard to food, this meant not eating too much—such as in gluttony, or too little—such as in fasting. He also taught compassion through the kind treatment of all living entities.

Zoroastrians have always had a great respect for nature. Today, this benevolence is incorporated into a lifestyle that highlights striving to live with a sensitivity to the soul force vibrant in all things. Zoroastrian festivals celebrate six seasons of the year, which correspond to six periods of creation in nature: mid-spring, mid-summer, the season of corn, the season of flocks, winter solstice and the fire festival of sacrifices.

In the ninth century, the High Priest Atrapat-e Emetan recorded in *Denkard*, Book VI, his request for Zoroastrians to be vegetarians: "Be plant eaters, O you men, so that you may live long. Keep away from the body of the cattle, and deeply reckon that Ohrmazd, the Lord, has created plants in great number for helping cattle and men."

Zoroastrian scriptures assert that when the "final Savior of the world" arrives, men will give up meat eating.

Jane Srivastava holds a bachelor's degree from Vilnius State University, Lithuania, and a degree from the Albany Law School, Albany, New York. She now lives in South Carolina.



Priestess at work: Anju Bhargava (at left), banker, management consultant and part-time Hindu priest, performs Satyanarayan puja

RELIGION

Women Augment the Priestly Ranks

Meet four US-based women *pujaris* whose well-honed sacerdotal skills have earned them respect and appreciation in the Hindu community

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

THE BRIDE WAS PRESENT, AS WAS THE groom, but where was the officiating priest? All the guests gathered in a Milwaukee home for the wedding ceremony were wondering aloud why he was so late. Little did they realize that the priest was already there, sitting amongst them. She is **Shashi Tandon**, an exuberant grandmother from New Delhi, clad in an orange silk sari and armed with Vedic knowledge. The guests expected a male *pujari*, as is traditional in Hindu ceremonies. But it was Shashi who calmly led them through the intricate rituals, creating a wonderful aura of spirituality. She has presided over not only weddings, but all the samskaras—Hindu rites of passage—from births and first feedings to funerals. Shashi is one of a small but growing number of women *pujaris*, or *pu-rohits*, who are changing the long-standing

tradition in which rituals are performed only by male priests of the brahmin caste.

Women Hindu priests in America are still so unusual that when **Neelima Shukla-Bhatt** performed the *upanayana* samskara—sacred thread ceremony—in New Jersey for the son of her cousin, Himanshu Shukla, the guests actually broke into appreciative applause. That's something which never happens at a religious gathering! Himanshu requested that Neelima perform the ceremony because she knew the traditions better than anyone else in the family. She also has a PhD in comparative religion from Harvard University and is fluent in Sanskrit, and the rituals are both meaningful and joyous to her.

Neelima says, "Hindus in India have quietly but steadily reintroduced women priests without any great fanfare, controversy or rioting. There are many women

priests around the country, particularly in the western state of Maharashtra, who officiate at various samskaras and yagnas."

Bhatt, a professor of South Asian Studies at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, points out that the *Rig Veda* refers to women priests making sacrifices and composing hymns. By the first millennium, however, it appears the priestly role was no longer open to women; and by Manu's time a patriarchal system had arisen in which women were forbidden even to study the *Vedas*.

The *Upanishads* contain references to strong women such as Gargi who engaged in philosophical debate with male counterparts such as Yagnavalkya. At least eight women religious luminaries are still known from ancient times, including Sati Ansuya, Shashi, Apala, Kaushalya and Arundhati. From the first millennium CE to the medieval period lived many poet-saints such as

Stepping into the family tradition: Neelima Shukla-Bhatt, a professor of South Asian Studies, performs the sacred thread ceremony for her cousin. She is the only family member in her generation who knows the priestly rituals, whereas once all the family men were priests.

Andal in Tamil Nadu, Lalleswari from Kashmir, Mahadevi Akka in Karnataka and Mirabai in Rajasthan. Although these women were not priests, they were revered in a religious context.

Bhatt says that in the latter half of the 20th century a small, quiet revolution has taken place in Pune, where women have been trained as priests and are becoming surprisingly popular. She observes, "People are preferring to have women priests, which is a phenomenon that is striking. It's happening here in the US, too, where women are seeing their work in the context of community need; and people seem to be accepting of it."

One catalyst for this change is the Dyana prabhodhini Centre in Pune, which for the past 15 years has trained women to conduct religious ceremonies. Jayavantrao Lele, who heads the center, told BBC News that he has been approached both by individuals and temples requesting women priests. On one occasion, 21 women priests went to a Pune temple to perform the rites. The temple officials were so impressed that they wanted to use women priests every year.

HINDUISM TODAY reported earlier on the Shankar Seva Samiti organization which had been training women priests since 1975 (see www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1997/1/1997-1-17.shtml). At the time, our journalist was told that the enthusiastic women priests were accepted in part because the community disliked the apathetic attitude of many male priests.

Another factor in the rise of women priests is that many men are leaving the occupation for more lucrative jobs. In times past the priestly class was highly respected, but this has changed. Today, despite the years of training and long hours of hard work, most temple priests are woefully underpaid. As a result, the sons of priests are leaving the family profession for white-collar jobs at an alarming rate.

Bhatt's family is a case in point. Three generations ago her forebears belonged to the priestly class in Surat in Southern Gujarat.



"Although my uncles were priests, my father became a professor," she recalls. "Education was redefined as secular education, and everyone was getting degrees such as in engineering and medicine. No one in my family is now a priest. So my cousin, who grew up in America, decided he would like me to do his son's sacred ceremony, as it's always been done by a priest from our own family."

Anju Bhargava, a banker and management consultant in New Jersey, did her first ritual for friends who were having a Satya Narayan puja for their home. She learned the meaning of the Sanskrit verses from Dr. M. G. Prasad of the Bridgewater Temple in New Jersey. She was motivated by her wish to pass on the Hindu culture to her young daughter. She says, "I grew as my daughter grew. I would say, actually, for me, doing pujas took 25 years of preparation. Most people go from ritual to philosophy; I have gone from philosophy to ritual. Puja has brought the philosophy to life for me."

"Most people do not understand Hinduism or the ritual process," Bhargava explains. "I have a computer presentation to explain the context, the meaning of the symbols and why we do the puja. It is not just a traditional recitation. I want people to come away with more of an understanding of the Vedantic Hindu tradition and the richness of the puja."

Bhargava stated that women priests have

limited access to trained teachers and schools. Ashrams generally do not teach the duties of a priest, so she feels there is a need for Hindu theological schools where people can get degrees. She suggests, "We definitely need to bridge the gap between philosophy and rituals. Only then will the rituals be meaningful and not just something we are doing because someone is telling us to do them and in a language we don't understand."

Ask Bhatt about the value of women priests and she thoughtfully responds, "Women here are the mothers and the nurturers and are more concerned about the continuity of religion and culture. We bring a different kind of energy, so the more women come into the field, the better it will be for the community."

Shashi Tandon, who came to America 24 years ago, has been regularly presiding at religious ceremonies in the Hindu communities in Chicago and Michigan. A high school teacher, she often performed *havans*, fire ceremonies, in her free time in India. When her children married and immigrated to the US, she was urged to come and look after the grandchildren. Shashi has performed marriages for intercultural couples, including Hindus who are marrying Muslims. The regular *pujaris* had refused to perform a wedding between a Muslim girl and a Hindu boy, but Tandon flew out to

the Virgin Islands to perform this ceremony. "The priests were not ready to do this, but I see it as a relationship of the soul—I have no problem with that," she says. "In ancient times there used to be a *swayamvara* where the woman chose her own husband."

Tandon believes many women are losing their culture here in America. She observes, "If the mother is not wise, the children are going to be frustrated. I have seen so many teenagers who ask me questions. They say their mothers don't know about those things."

"I have performed many weddings. Sometimes the boy doesn't even know who Lord Rama is!" she adds incredulously. "Teenagers want to know what we are, who we are, what we should do, which path we should follow. How can they succeed in another culture if they don't know their own culture? This has happened because parents have no guts to sit down and talk to them and tell them the realities of life."

And what would she say to those who claim you have to be a brahmin to perform the rituals? She replies: "You know what the definition of a brahmin is? He who walks on the path of Lord Brahma is a brahman. Sant Ravidas was a cobbler, Kabir a weaver. What you do has nothing to do with who you are. I've worked at Wal-Mart, but on Saturday and Sunday I served my society."

While most Hindu women priests are self-taught, a few are taking it to the next level—studying Hinduism in an organized fashion and becoming ordained as priests. When **Pandita Indrani Rampersad** got ordained in 1992 in Trinidad, there was considerable controversy. She recalls that the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, was supportive, but many of the more orthodox schools opposed her ordination. She notes,

Women in training: (left) Pandita Indrani Rampersad was ordained by the Arya Samaj in Trinidad in 1994; (right) Mr. Thatte of Shankar Seva Samiti in Pune training a women's class in the purnahuti, ghee offering, of Maharudra Yagna in Pune, India, 1981



"For me, the big thing was that it opened up the conversation."

Why did Rampersad want to become a priest? She explains, "In 1973 I first went to India to study more about Hindu dharma. I enrolled in Banaras Hindu University, but found there was no course on theology." She ended up studying Indian philosophy. On her return to Trinidad, she was encouraged by her grandfather, who was a priest, to get initiated. "As an activist for women's rights, one of the motivating factors was my feeling that if I wanted to, I should be able to be a priest," she explained. "I was already doing a lot of the priestly functions at the time, such as delivering the lectures in the temple, but I was not allowed to do the rituals. I asked myself, 'Why not?'"

Rampersad, who works as a school teacher, is qualified to do all 16 samskaras and performs them in both New York and Trinidad. She finds people are open to a woman doing these rituals. She says, "A lot of this is educational. When I perform rituals, I use a lot of the time for education. The ritual for me is the center around which I can teach. For a lot of the male priests, the ritual is the center, and that's it."

Unlike traditional male *pujaris*, most of whom speak little or no English, these part-time women *pujaris* are all fluent in English and can effectively reach out to the younger generation. Indrani says, "Definitely we need women priests. Women are half the population and they are more sensitive. We can counsel young women and they feel comfortable, while they would not confide in a male priest."

She also believes that women have to take charge of rituals, especially in the home. The mother is the center of the family and

determines the tone of the home. "If she is educated in the samskaras, then the samskaras will be passed on to the next generation. She should at least be able to do Deep-avali puja and teach it to her children."

Satish Prakash heads the Dayanand Gurukul in Jamaica, Queens, in New York. It is based on the Gurukul Kangra University in India and serves as a temple and spiritual school for the Guyanese Hindu community. Prakash is a Sanskrit scholar whose PhD dissertation was on rites and rituals. He recently conducted workshops in Hindu philosophy and the 16 samskaras for 268 delegates from across the US and Canada.

"There were more women than men," he recalls. "I ordained 49 women who got certification and the title of panditas." Most of the women were Hindus originally from the Caribbean countries. Some were from Fiji and Mauritius. Prakash says they will now go out and serve in their respective communities and temples. "That is one of our tenets," he concluded, "anyone who goes through the training can be a priest."

Women priests are special in that, for them, it is not just a job but a calling. They are willing to devote time and energy to explanations and interactions and are not driven by monetary considerations. Many of them have good day jobs or are comfortably retired. The future looks hopeful as more and more women take charge of passing on the dharma to the next generation.

Tandon's grandson was just one week old when she journeyed to America 24 years ago to impart the Hindu samskaras to him. Today he is a wonderful young man about to become a doctor. The other day he told her, "Grandma, when I have children you have to teach them all that you have taught me." As a priest, Shashi Tandon intends to do just that—not only for her own great-grandchildren but for all children of the Hindu community.



Protecting Great Birds Of Beauty

ANIMALS

India's one and only peacock sanctuary strives to survive in challenging times

BY TIRTHO BANERJEE, UTTAR PRADESH

EVERYONE IN THE SMALL VILLAGE OF Naigaon in the Beed district of Maharashtra remembers well the many legends of Mathersaheb Dev. This holy man, who lived about 100 years ago, was famous for his love and care of wild peacocks. He lavished such abundant affection upon these beautiful birds that a growing number of them took up residence around his humble cottage. Even though a few of them sometimes wandered onto local farms to dine on standing crops, farmers were more than willing to overlook the damage they did. Such was their respect for Mathersaheb Dev and his benevolent love. Over time, the saint's gracious attitude toward the peacocks was adopted by most of the surrounding community.

Eight years ago, long after the passing of Mathersaheb Dev, the residents of that small town were still providing extraordinary care for the wild peacocks in the area; and in response, the Central

Government of India established in Naigaon its one and only peacock sanctuary.

Today the sanctuary offers a compensation of US\$50 for each hectare of grain lost to peacock damage, but local landowners rarely collect their due. Although there are a few people who do not value the beauty of these glorious birds—and some who even hunt them for food—most of the people of Naigaon make special efforts to preserve the peace of the sanctuary and its peacocks.

The peacocks of Naigaon are fortunate. Elsewhere in India, peacocks—indeed, all forms of wildlife—are becoming increasingly threatened. More and more hunters are on the prowl, and drinking water is becoming scarce. Tree groves—essential to the peacocks—are vanishing due to encroaching technology and the escalating demand for cattle-grazing land. Never was the kindly spirit of Saint Mathersaheb Dev more needed than it is now. Certainly the beautiful but threatened peacocks of India would agree.

A royal ride:

In Hinduism, the lovely peacock is worshiped as the sacred mount of Lord Murugan, the second son of Lord Siva, also known as Lord Karttikeya.



HINDUISM TODAY



Showing compassion: (Clockwise from left) A male peacock shows off his beauty; Since childhood, Puru Bai has left grains for peacocks near her home in Naigaon where local farmers like Ganesh co-exist with the peacocks with seemingly infinite patience.

What About the Future?

The Naigaon Peacock Sanctuary is suffering from a lack of funds. Although it was established by the Central Government of India, it now receives only about US\$2,500 a year from the Maharashtra state government for the maintenance of its 20 square miles of land. This does not even meet the sanctuary's basic needs.

Sanctuary ranger Meera Iyer explains that managing the property is unusually difficult because it is not one continuous parcel of land but a collection of small fragments divided by privately owned properties. The sanctuary's current seven-man staff comprises two rangers and five guards. There are no vehicles, no phones, no firearms for the guards. More water wells must be dug; more trees must be planted. Some of this is being done, but not enough.

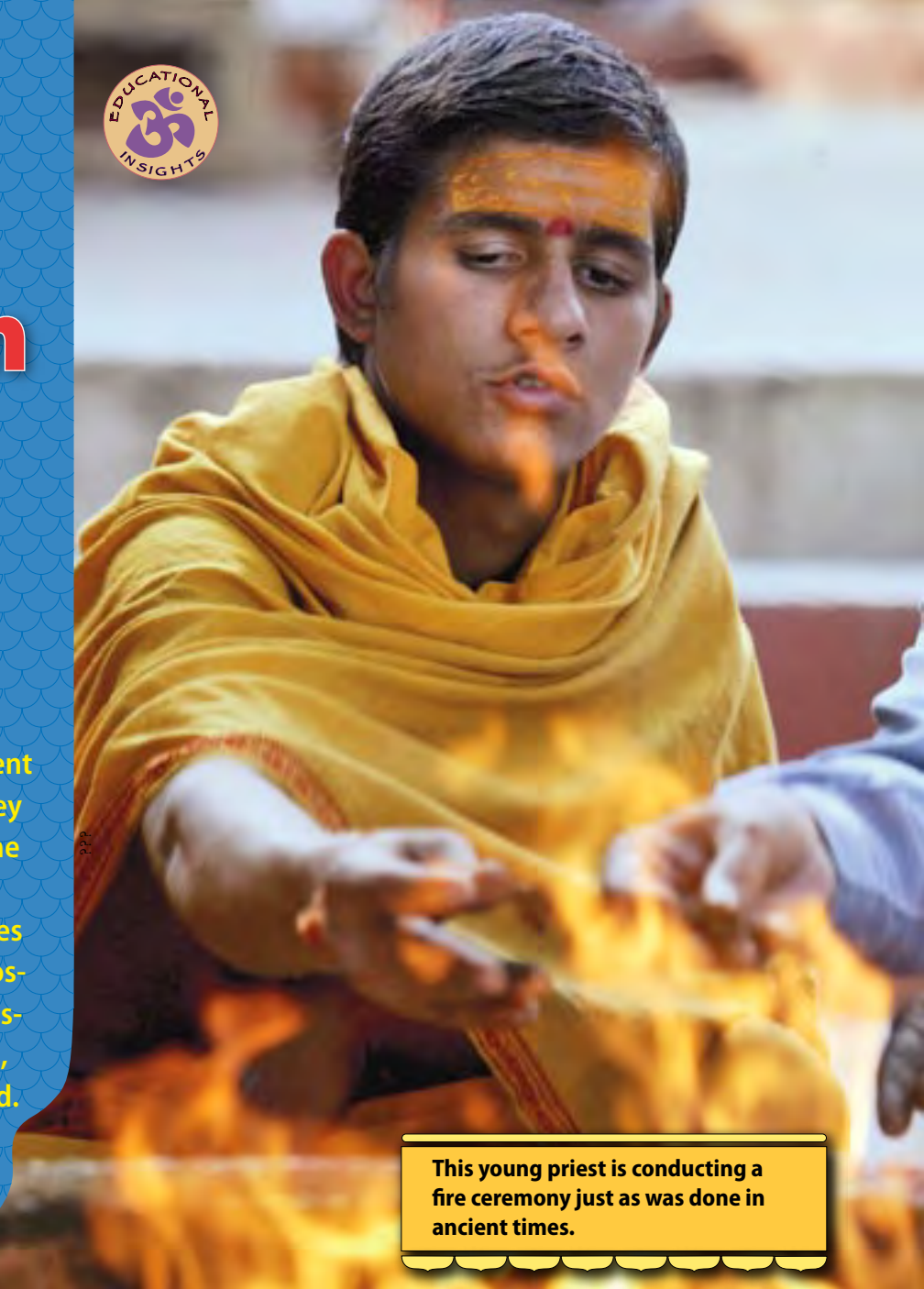
Will India's one and only peacock sanctuary survive? Time will certainly tell, but a little money wouldn't hurt.

Tirtho Banerjee is a freelance journalist living in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.



Hinduism From Ancient Times

The largest civilization in the ancient world developed in the Indus Valley of India over 5,000 years ago. In the thousands of years that followed, India produced many great empires under which science, art and philosophy flourished. Out of this rich history developed the Hindu religion, today the third largest in the world.



This young priest is conducting a fire ceremony just as was done in ancient times.

Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is HINDUISM TODAY magazine's response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books. It is a 16-page lesson on Hindu history, beliefs and practices for sixth graders written from the Hindu point of view. It is historically sound and acceptable in content and tone to the various denominations of the Hindu community.

The problem with every existing textbook for this grade level is that Hinduism is presented negatively, incompletely and inaccurately. This lesson is patterned after a typical chapter on the Jewish faith in these same books. It deliberately does not follow the specific California standards for

presenting the Hindu religion because we believe them to be deeply flawed and contrary to the State's own general rule that teaching material must: 1) be historically accurate, 2) "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage" and 3) avoid "adverse reflection" on a religion. It is our intent that this lesson will serve as a model for US textbooks, providing an authentic depiction of the eminent history and traditions of the faith while giving 10-year-old Hindu students justifiable pride in their religion.

In most states teachers are allowed to supplement the textbooks with additional material. This lesson may be offered as a more accurate basis for the classroom study of the origins and development of Hinduism in ancient India.

Origins of Hinduism

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

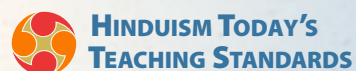
1. Many Hindu religious practices are seen in the archeological remains of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization.
2. The sacred texts of Hinduism are in the Sanskrit language and were originally memorized but unwritten.
3. Ancient Indian art and science were highly developed.

The Big Idea

Hinduism developed over thousands of years in India.

Key Terms

Indus and Sarasvati rivers, p. 2; *Vedas*, p. 3; Sanskrit, p. 3



This column in each of the three sections presents our outline for Hinduism in 6th grade history books. It is intended to replace existing lists of required topics, such as those found in the California Standards.

1. Explain the similarities between Indus-Sarasvati civilization and later Hindu culture.
2. Discuss why the Aryan Invasion theory has been disputed by many scholars.
3. Discuss the social and political system and advancement of science and culture.
4. Explain the development of religion in India between 1000 bce and 500 ce.

If YOU lived then...

Your house is built on a wide, waterless riverbed. Your father tells you it was once the giant Sarasvati River, five kilometers across. There is not enough rain to provide for the family's crops and cattle. Travelers tell of another great river, the Ganga, hundreds of miles away. Your father and other villagers decide they must move.

How would you feel about the long journey?

BUILDING BACKGROUND India's known history begins with the Indus-Sarasvati civilization, 5,500 years ago. We know from archeology that this culture shows many features of later Hindu practice.

Understanding Ancient Indian History

The early cities of India developed along the Indus and Sarasvati rivers starting around 3500 bce. They are called the Indus-Sarasvati civilization or, sometimes, the Harappan culture. It was the largest and most advanced civilization in the ancient world. But the mighty Sarasvati River dried up, and what was once a fertile area became a desert. The people of the region moved to other parts of India and beyond. By 2000 bce the civilization had entered a period of decline.

The Religion of the Indus-Sarasvati People

A great many artifacts have been discovered from the Indus-Sarasvati cities. These include pottery, seals, statues, beads, jewelry, tools, games, such as dice, and children's toys, such as miniature carts.

The flat, stone seals have pictures and writing on them. Scholars have not yet agreed on what the mysterious script on the seals means. They show deities, ceremonies, symbols, people, plants and animals. We learn from them that people at that time followed practices identical to those followed by Hindus today. One seal shows a meditating figure that scholars link to Lord Siva, while others show the lotus posture used by today's meditators. The swastika, a sacred symbol of good luck used throughout Hindu history, is common.

There are statues, including a small clay figure with its hands pressed together in the traditional Hindu greeting of "namaste."

A figurine of a married woman shows a red powder called *sindur* in the part of her hair. Hindu women today follow this same custom as a sign of their married status. The pipal tree and banyan tree are depicted often. These remain sacred to Hindus to this day.

The Vedas

The central holy books of Hinduism are the four *Vedas*. Hindus regard them as spoken by God. They are in Sanskrit. The *Vedas* were not written down but memorized. Students might spend twelve years learning these scriptures. Some would memorize one *Veda*, others all four. Even today there are priests who can chant an entire *Veda*—as many as 10,500 verses—from memory.

The relationship between the people of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization and those who composed the *Vedas* is not clearly understood. We know that the *Rig Veda* describes the Sarasvati as the "most mighty of rivers" flowing from the Himalayan

mountains to the ocean. Therefore, the holy texts had to be composed well before 2000 bce—by which time the river had dried up. The *Vedas* describe a powerful and spiritual people, their clans, kings and emperors. Their society was complex. The economy included agriculture, industry, trade, commerce and cattle raising. The *Vedas* contain thousands of hymns in praise of God and the Gods. They describe a form of fire worship, *yajna*, around a specially-built brick fire altar. In several Indus-Sarasvati cities archeologists have unearthed what look like fire altars.

The Aryan Invasion Theory

Many school books present an "Aryan Invasion" of India. It is the theory that Aryan invaders came from central Asia in 1500 bce and conquered the indigenous Indus-Sarasvati civilization. It was these foreigners, the theory states, who wrote the *Rig Veda* in Sanskrit. The theory was proposed in the 19th century by scholars in Europe,

HINDU SYMBOLS



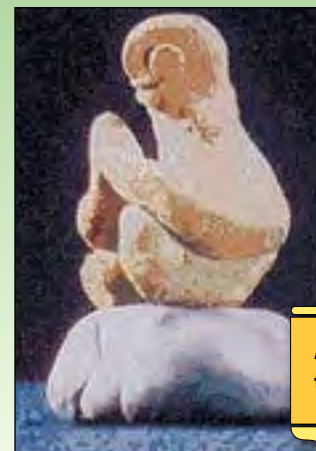
The banyan tree is a symbol of Hinduism because it gives shelter to all who approach

THE IMPACT Today

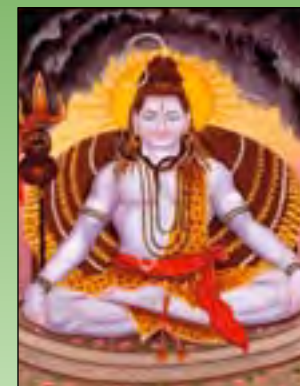
The disputed Aryan Invasion theory is still taught as fact in most books on India

FROM INDUS-SARASVATI TO MODERN TIMES

Indus-Sarasvati sculptures, seals and artifacts more than 5,000 years old display features of modern Hinduism



At left is a clay figure showing the typical Hindu greeting of "namaste"



Lord Siva in meditation is found on the Indus seals



This clay figure of a woman has red *sindur* in the hair part—a custom followed by married Hindu women to this day



based on language studies. In part, it tried to explain why Sanskrit is so closely related to European languages, including English. Many scholars now dispute this theory because all the evidence for it is questionable. Additionally, modern scientists have found no biological evidence, such as DNA, that people came from outside India in significant numbers since at least 6,000 bce.

Many common explanations about Indian history and culture are based on the Aryan Invasion theory. Those who defend it claim that Sanskrit, the caste system and Hindu ways of worship came from outside India. If you are studying India in school, you may read about this outdated theory.

Hinduism Emerges

As the Indus-Sarasvati culture declined, many of its people migrated to other places. They settled mostly in north and central India, especially along the Ganga River system. They interacted with tribes who had lived in those areas from ancient times. Around 1000 bce, the Tamil-speaking Dravidian people in the South had separately developed a sophisticated language and

culture. Because of inadequate archeological research, we do not know a lot about this period. However, by 600 bce, India had developed a common culture from north to south and east to west. By this time the social, religious and philosophical ideas and practices central to Hinduism are fully evident. These are in continuity with the religion of the Indus-Sarasvati culture, the teachings of the *Vedas*, Dravidian culture and elements of the tribal religions.

Hindu public worship, described in the *Vedas*, took place in temporary shelters built for that purpose. The earliest mention of permanent temples for the worship of God is in the *Grihya Sutras*, around 600 bce.

Indian Society

A distinctive feature of India at this time was the varna or class system. Society was classified into groups with specific occupations. These groups tended to become hereditary. There were four broad classes—priests, warriors, merchants and workers (including craftsmen). The system provided order and stability to society. Later on, the varnas divided into hundreds of sub-sections called *jatis* (castes). Individual *jatis* developed a

HINDU SYMBOLS



The sacred fire altar of the ancient Vedic rites. To this day Hindu weddings and other rites are conducted around fire altars.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

continuity

unbroken connection or line of development

hereditary

passed from parents to children

strong identity and pride in their occupation. From time to time people would move from one caste to another, or establish new ones. The evolving caste system became unfair to the people at the very bottom of the social order. Though caste is still an important factor in arranging marriages, caste discrimination is illegal in modern India.

Women have always been held in high regard in India. Some of India's foremost religious and political leaders are women. Hinduism is the only major religion in which God is worshiped in female form.

Life in ancient times was hard work for both men and women. The women were responsible for running the household; the men for their craft or farm, as well as security. In general, women had fewer property rights than men, but received lighter punishments for crimes and paid fewer taxes. They participated equally with their husband in religious ceremonies and festival celebrations. Some women were highly educated, and a few even composed several of the holy Vedic hymns.

The period from 1000 bce through the Gupta period up to the mid-6th century ce was a time of great advancement. Hindus discovered the zero and established the counting method, including the decimal system, we use today. Their astronomers knew that the Earth orbits the Sun and calculated the length of a year with great precision.

Medicine was so advanced that doctors were performing complex surgery not equaled in Europe until the 18th century. In ancient times India was one of the most advanced and wealthy nations on Earth. Since ancient times, a quarter of the world's people have lived in India.

Section 1 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- a. **Explain** What happened to the Sarasvati River?
b. **Analyze** What customs from modern Hinduism are depicted in artifacts of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization?
- Elaborate** What are the advantages of a hereditary occupation? What are the disadvantages?
- a. **Summarize** How are women regarded in Hindu society?
b. **Recall** What are some of the great scientific achievements in ancient India?
- a. **Explain** How were the *Vedas* preserved?
b. **List** What kind of information is in the *Vedas*?
c. **Explain** Why is it important that the Rig Veda mentions the Sarasvati River as a "mighty river?"

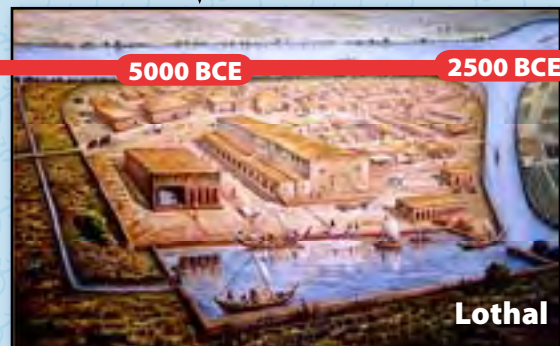
FOCUS ON WRITING

- Analyze** What does your school history book say about the Aryan Invasion? How does this lesson differ?

Timeline: Early Indian History

5000 BCE
Beginning of Indus-Sarasvati cities

2600-2000 BCE
Height of Indus-Sarasvati civilization. The city of Lothal includes large buildings and an enclosed harbor.



2000 BCE
Sarasvati River dries up. People move to North and Central India.

600 BCE
India is a unified culture at this time. Large cities flourish in the Gangetic Plains. Indian physician Sushruta develops complex methods of surgery. Tamil language flourishes in the South. First mention of temple worship appears in the *Grihya Sutras*.



Sushruta

500 BCE

500 BCE
Magadha Empire in the North and Pandyan Kingdom in the South flourish. Buddhism and Jainism, offshoots of Hinduism, become prominent religions.

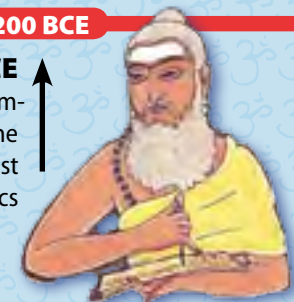
321 BCE
Foundation of the pan-Indian Maurya Empire. Time of great advancement in science, statecraft, economy, architecture, music and art.



Gupta Art

200 BCE

200 BCE
Tiruvalluvar composes *Tirukural*, one of India's greatest scriptures on ethics



S. RAJAM



Angkor Wat 1200 ce

200 CE
Hindu influence starts to spread into what is now Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. In 1200 ce, the Hindu temple called Angkor Wat is built in Cambodia. It is the world's largest religious structure.

320 CE
Gupta Empire reigns over most of India, with Tamil kingdoms in far south. This is the Golden Age of India and Hinduism, with respect and tolerance for all religions.

300 CE

Hindu Beliefs and Scriptures

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Hindus believe in a one Supreme God and also many Gods and Goddesses.
2. Dharma, karma and reincarnation are central Hindu beliefs. There is a special emphasis on nonviolence.
3. *Vedas* are the primary Hindu scriptures. There are other important scriptures as well.

The Big Idea

Hindus believe every soul will ultimately achieve God Realization.

Key Terms

Sanatana Dharma, p. 6
Brahman, p. 6
deva, p. 7
puja, p. 8
karma, p. 8
reincarnation, p. 8

HINDUISM TODAY'S TEACHING STANDARDS

5. Explain the basic Hindu beliefs regarding God, the Gods and Goddesses, dharma, karma and reincarnation. Describe basic Hindu practices.
6. Discuss the Hindu principles of nonviolence and religious tolerance.
7. Describe the *Vedas* and their *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* (including the *Bhagavad Gita*) and other important Hindu scriptures.

If YOU lived then...

The king has passed a new law increasing the taxes on farmers. The farmers in your village have not had a good year. The harvest is smaller than usual. The new tax may mean people will go hungry. Some in the village want to attack the tax collectors. Others want to lie about the amount of harvest. Still others say a peaceful protest will cause the king to change his mind on the tax increase.

How would you respond to the tax increase? Why?

BUILDING BACKGROUND From its beginnings, Hinduism has been an open-minded religion. It is a basic Hindu belief that there are many ways to approach God. Hinduism does not dictate one way as the only way. Hindus believe "Truth is one, paths are many" and that every person eventually finds spiritual salvation.

Religion Permeates the Hindu's Daily Life

Hindus base their way of life upon their religion. The Hindu culture comes from Hindu beliefs. The key beliefs are in a one Supreme God, subordinate Gods and Goddesses, heaven worlds, the divinity of the soul, dharma, karma, reincarnation, God Realization and liberation from rebirth. God Realization means the direct and personal experience of the Divine within oneself. The original Sanskrit name for Hinduism is *Sanatana Dharma*, meaning "eternal religion."

Belief in God and the Gods and Goddesses

Hindus believe in and worship a one Supreme God. In the scriptures, the Supreme God is called Brahman or Bhagavan, worshiped as both male and female. Brahman is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving and present in all things. God created everything in the universe out of Himself. This creation is not separate from Him. He guides the evolution of everything over vast spans of time. Ultimately, He absorbs the universe back into Himself. This cycle of creation, preservation and absorption repeats without end.

The Supreme God is both transcendent and immanent. These are two key philosophical concepts. As *transcendent*, God exists beyond

the physical universe. As *immanent*, His divine form pervades all nature and humanity.

In Hinduism, the soul is called atman. God exists within each soul. The *Chandogya Upanishad* explains it like this: "What you see when you look into another person's eyes, that is atman, immortal, beyond fear; that is God."

Hinduism has different branches with varying beliefs and practices. The four major branches are Saiva, Shakta, Vaishnava and Smarta. Saivas and Shaktas call the Supreme God Siva, though Shaktas worship the female aspect of God. Vaishnavas call Him Vishnu. Smartas may choose one of six Deities to worship as the Supreme. By whichever name or form, He is the same, one Supreme God. The *Rig Veda* says, "The seers call in many ways that which is One."

Hindus may also worship Gods and Goddesses, called devas, such as Ganesha and Sarasvati. In Sanskrit, *deva* means "shining one." In some ways, these divine beings who live in the heaven worlds are like the

angels and archangels in Western religions. Some Hindus consider the Gods and Goddesses as alternative forms of the Supreme God, and not as individual divine beings.

Each God and Goddess has particular powers and areas of responsibility. For example, Ganesha is the Lord of Obstacles. Before beginning a new project, a Hindu may pray to Ganesha to remove any obstacles blocking his way.

In the Vaishnava tradition, Lord Vishnu appears on Earth as a divine personality, or avatar, from time to time to restore morally right living. Of Vishnu's ten avatars, Lord Rama and Lord Krishna are the most important. Rama and Krishna are not separate Gods. They are two forms of the one Supreme God.

In temples and shrines, the Supreme God and the Gods and Goddesses are worshiped in a ritual called puja. Puja is a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, chanting and presenting of flowers, incense and other offerings

HINDU SYMBOLS



A *kalasha* is a husked coconut set in a brass pot with mango leaves. It is used in worship to represent the Supreme God or any of the Gods or Goddesses.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

subordinate

lower in rank, less important

pervade

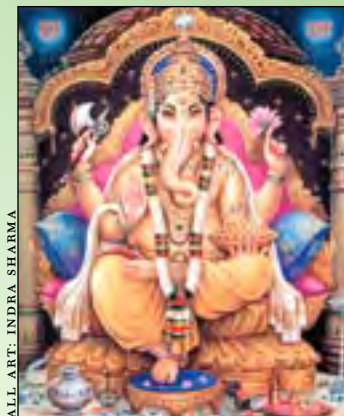
to be present throughout

encompass

to surround and hold within

ONE SUPREME GOD AND MANY GODS AND GODDESSES

Hindus believe in a one supreme and loving God. At the same time, they believe in Gods and Goddesses, great spiritual beings who help us.



Ganesha is the God prayed to before beginning any task or worship. His elephant head makes Him easy to recognize.

Sarasvati is the Goddess of learning and music. Below, She sits on a lotus flower playing the multi-stringed vina.



In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna shows Arjuna His universal form as the Supreme God encompassing all the other Gods

LINKING TO TODAY

NONVIOLENCE

The Hindu principle of ahimsa, or nonviolence, is important today. Mahatma Gandhi, a devout Hindu, said, "Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man." By nonviolent means Gandhi largely won India's independence, using peaceful protests, boycotts, strikes and speeches. In the 1950s, Martin Luther King, Jr. studied Gandhi's methods and went to India to meet his followers. He learned how India's nonviolent movement worked and applied the same methods to fight for and win civil rights for America's black minority. Aung San Suu Kyi, a devout Buddhist, has campaigned without violence for years to win democracy for the people of her native Myanmar (Burma). In 1991 she won the Nobel Peace Prize for her peaceful struggle against the country's military dictatorship. Another example is Cesar Chavez, who won rights for California farm workers using nonviolent methods.



BLACKSTAR PHOTOS/FLIP SCHULKE



DINODIA



REUTERS/APICHAET WEERAWONG

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

What are the advantages of nonviolence over violence in bringing about social change?

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

consecrated
made sacred through ceremony

invoke
summon a Deity; appeal to

HINDU SYMBOLS



The orange or red banner is the flag of Hinduism, which flies above temples, at festivals and in parades

invoke the Divine beings, who then come to bless and help the devotees. During the puja, through holy chants, gestures and sacred ritual, highly trained priests guide the worship. The priests treat the Deity with utmost care, attending to Him as the King of kings. The purpose of the puja is to create a high religious vibration and communicate with God or a deva through the *murti*, or consecrated statue, that is the focus of worship. *Deity* is the proper English word for *murti*. The word *idol* is often used, but it is incorrect.

Hindus also practice internal worship of God. Sitting quietly, they may repeat the name of God while counting on beads. Others may chant, sing or meditate upon God. In Hinduism, there are many ways to worship the Divine.

Dharma, Karma and Reincarnation

Dharma means righteousness, divine law, ethics, religion, duty, justice and truth. *Dharma* means the proper way one should live one's life. To follow dharma, one should be religious, truthful, kind, honest and generous. *Dharma* includes the practice of nonviolence, called ahimsa in Sanskrit. It is the ideal of not injuring others in thought, word or action.

Karma, a central Hindu belief, is the law of cause and effect. It means that anything you do will eventually return to you in this or future lives. If we do something selfish or hateful, we will in time experience the same pain and suffering we caused to others. If our acts are good and kind, we will receive goodness and kindness.

Reincarnation means literally to "re-enter the flesh." It is the belief that the soul, at-

man, is reborn in a new body, experiencing many lifetimes. The purpose of rebirth is to progressively achieve spiritual maturity and God Realization. Eventually each soul learns to live by religious principles and avoid creating negative karma. The process of reincarnation continues through many lives until the soul achieves liberation.

Hinduism's Sacred Scriptures

The four *Vedas* are the holiest scriptures for all Hindus. The *Upanishads*, an important part of the *Vedas*, explain the Hindu philosophy. The next most important scriptures, also in Sanskrit, are the *Agamas*. There are specific *Agamas* for each major tradition in Hinduism—Saiva, Shakta and Vaishnava. The *Agamas* explain philosophy, personal conduct, worship and temple construction. There are hundreds of other scriptural texts dealing with religious and secular law, government, social order, economics, ecology, health, architecture, science, music, astronomy and many other subjects. The *Puranas* are encyclopedic accounts of the forms and avatars of God, the many subordinate Gods and divine beings, creation, spiritual teachings, historical traditions, geography and culture. The *Tirukural* is a Tamil masterpiece on ethics and moral living. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patan-

jali explore yoga and meditation.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are two sacred epic histories of India. The *Ramayana* is the story of Lord Rama, who is the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and his divine wife Sita. This 24,000-verse poem describes Prince Rama's birth, His banishment to a forest for 14 years, the abduction of Sita by the demon Ravana and Rama's victory over Ravana. The *Ramayana* remains immensely popular to this day in India and Southeast Asia.

The *Mahabharata*, "Great India," is a 78,000-verse story of a massive war that took place in ancient times between the Pandavas and their cousins, the Kauravas, for the throne of a great kingdom. It also describes the nature of self and the world, karma, important family lineages of India, human loyalties, saints and sages, devotion to God and the ideals of dharma. Lord Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is a key figure in the epic. A central episode called the *Bhagavad Gita* narrates Krishna's dialogue with the Pandava archer, Arjuna, on the day of the battle. It is one of the most popular and revered among Vaishnava and Smarta scriptures. Hindu sacred music, dance, drama and the arts draw heavily on the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the many *Puranas*.

HINDU SYMBOLS



The *gopura* is the huge entrance tower of South Indian temples

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

secular

activities or things not related to religion

Section 2 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- Define** What is Sanatana Dharma?
 - Explain** What is a deva?
 - Elaborate** What are the two key terms used by Hindus to describe the Supreme God?
- Categorize** What are the four main branches of Hinduism?
- Recall** Why do Hindus pray first to Lord Ganesha?
 - Identify** What are the two most popular incarnations of Lord Vishnu?
 - Explain** What is the purpose of the Hindu puja?
- Explain** What is karma?
 - Illustrate** What are some examples of following dharma?

- Explain** What is the purpose of reincarnation?

- Summarize** Make a list of Hindu scriptures, starting with the *Vedas*.

CRITICAL THINKING

- Evaluate** Why do Hindus believe that there are many ways to approach the Supreme God?

FOCUS ON WRITING

7. Understanding nonviolence

Write a paragraph explaining your way to deal with the tax increase example given on page six. Do you think a nonviolent approach would succeed?



The sacred sound *aum* is chanted at the beginning and end of most prayers

GUIDED READING

Word Help

philosophy

a theory or attitude that guides behavior

vain

excessively proud

mysterious

unknown

consume

to destroy completely, as by fire

1 This verse says that the Gods were vain.

What test did the Supreme God put them through?

from the Upanishads

Translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester

The *Upanishads* are the part of the *Vedas* that teach philosophy. The word *upanishad* means “sitting by devotedly,” as a student sits near his guru to learn. This excerpt is taken from the *Kena Upanishad*. It explains the nature of the Supreme God, called *Brahman* in Sanskrit.

AS YOU READ

Try to sum up the meaning of each sentence in your own words.

Once the Gods won a victory over the demons, and though they had done so only through the power of Brahman, they were exceedingly vain. They thought to themselves, “It was we who beat our enemies, and the glory is ours.”

Brahman saw their vanity and appeared before them as a nature spirit. But they did not recognize Him. **1**

Then the other Gods said to the God of fire, “Fire, find out for us who this mysterious nature spirit is.”

“Yes,” said the God of fire, and approached the spirit. The spirit said to him: “Who are you?”

“I am the God of fire. As a matter of fact, I am very widely known.”

“And what power do you wield?”

“I can burn anything on Earth.”

“Burn this,” said the spirit, placing a straw before him. The God of fire fell upon it with all his might, but could not consume it. So he ran back to the other Gods and said, “I cannot discover who this mysterious spirit is.”

Then said the other Gods to the God of wind: “Wind, can you find out for us who he is?”

“Yes,” said the God of wind, and approached the spirit. The

spirit said to him: “Who are you?”

“I am the God of wind.

As a matter of fact, I am very widely known. I fly swiftly through the heavens.”

“And what power do you wield?”

“I can blow away anything on Earth.”

“Blow this away,” said the spirit, placing a straw before him. The God of wind fell upon it with all his might, but was unable to move it. So he ran back to the other Gods and said, “I cannot discover who this mysterious spirit is.”

Then said the other Gods to Indra, greatest of them all, “O respected one, find out for us, we pray you, who he is.”

“Yes,” said Indra and humbly approached the spirit. But the **2** spirit vanished, and in his place stood Goddess Uma, well adorned and of exceeding beauty. Beholding her, Indra asked:

“Who was the spirit that appeared to us?”

“That,” answered Uma, “was Brahman. Through Him it was, not of yourselves, that you attained your victory and your glory.”

Thus did Indra, and the God of fire, and the God of wind, come to recognize Brahman, the Supreme God.



The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* are written in Sanskrit, a language that is thousands of years old

GUIDED READING

Word Help

adorned

beautifully dressed

beholding

looking at something remarkable

attained

won; achieved

2 Indra took a different approach to finding out who the spirit was. **Why did he succeed when the others failed?**

Understanding Sacred Texts

- Analyzing** Hindus believe that the Supreme God is *immanent*. That means He exists everywhere in the universe, in everyone and everything. How does this belief appear in the story?
- Comparing** What is the difference between Brahman, the Supreme God, and the other Gods introduced here—Indra, the God of fire and the God of wind?

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

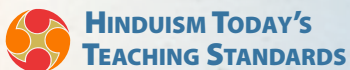
1. Hinduism has spread outside of India several times.
2. Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world.
3. Hindus practice religion at home and in temples and through the many festivals.

The Big Idea

Hinduism is the oldest world religion flourishing today.

Key Terms

samskara, p. 12
bindi, p. 12
puja, p. 13
swami, p. 14
Kumbha Mela, p. 15



8. Describe the spread of Hinduism outside of India in ancient and modern times.
9. Describe the daily observances of Hindus, home and temple worship, religious teachers and the major festivals.
10. Explain how Hinduism has survived over the last 5,000 years.

Hinduism in Practice

If YOU lived then...

You are born in Fiji in 1910. Your parents were brought from India by the British to work in the sugarcane fields as indentured laborers. Now they are free of debt and own farmland. The public school is OK, but your parents want you to go to the best private school. The principal there says you must leave Hinduism and convert to his religion before you can enroll.

What do you think your parents would do?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Hinduism is the only major religion from the distant past that is still vibrant today. It survived because of its tradition of home-centered worship, because of its rich teachings and many religious leaders, and because it is not merely tolerant of other religions but respects the validity of all spiritual paths.

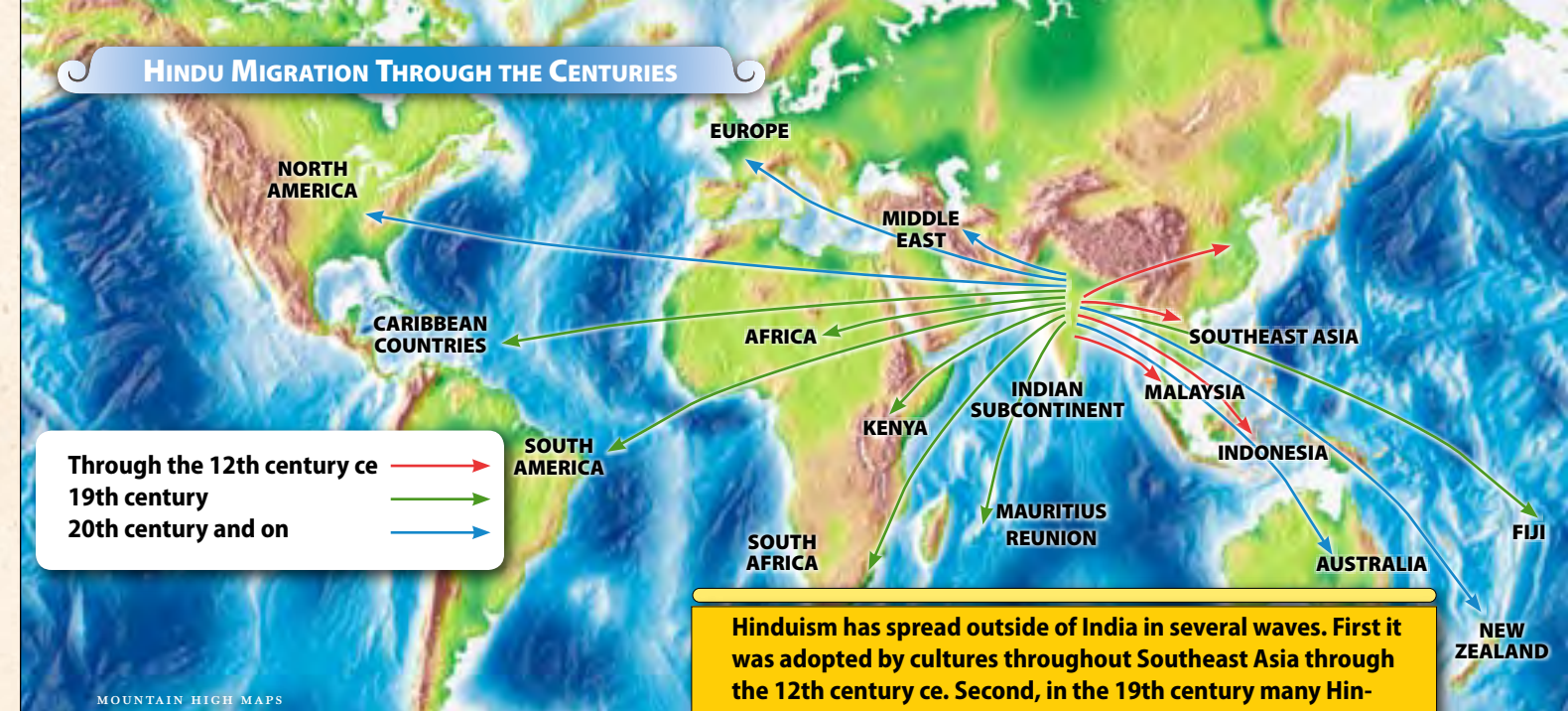
Traditions and Holy Days

Hinduism is the oldest living religion in the world. There are today nearly a billion Hindus worldwide, 95 percent of whom live on the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism continues to thrive for many reasons. Its followers find answers to their deepest questions about the mysteries of life. With personal religious practices, pilgrimage to sacred shrines, temple- and home-centered worship, Hindus strive for God Realization. And through celebration of the yearly cycle of vibrant and colorful festivals, they experience great blessings and joy.

Basic Practices

There are five basic practices, *pancha nitya karmas*, often observed by Hindus. They are to: 1) worship daily, 2) follow dharma, 3) observe the samskaras (rites of passage), 4) celebrate the holy days and 5) go on pilgrimage to sacred places. Other practices include meditation, chanting of mantras, study of scripture, hatha yoga and other yoga techniques, and simple austerities, such as fasting. There are many samskaras, including a child's name-giving ceremony, the first feeding of solid food, the beginning of formal education and marriage. It is a common practice for Hindu women to wear a bindi, a red dot on the forehead. A similar mark, called *tilaka*, is worn by

HINDU MIGRATION THROUGH THE CENTURIES



Through the 12th century ce
19th century
20th century and on

Hinduism has spread outside of India in several waves. First it was adopted by cultures throughout Southeast Asia through the 12th century ce. Second, in the 19th century many Hindus moved to the various European colonies, such as South Africa, the Caribbean and Fiji. And most recently, Hindus migrated to more than 150 countries in the 20th century.

men at the temple or on ceremonial occasions. This forehead mark symbolizes many things, especially spiritual vision.

Worship in the Home

Every Hindu home has a place of worship. It may be as simple as a shelf with pictures of God or an entire room dedicated to worship. Many families have a spiritual guide or guru whose picture is displayed in the shrine. There, the family may light a lamp, ring a bell and pray daily. The most devout hold a formal morning worship ritual. They offer flowers, incense, lights and food to God while chanting sacred verses. Individual members will often go to the shrine for blessings before leaving for school or work. At other times one may sit alone in the shrine, pray and chant the names of God, read from scripture, meditate silently or sing devotional songs.

Temple Worship

Hindus prefer to live within a day's journey of a temple. The temple is a special building, revered as the home of God. The main Deity is enshrined in the temple's central sanctum. In India, there are hundreds of

thousands of temples, most quite ancient. Temples in India can be enormous, covering many acres, having vast pillared hallways that can accommodate 500,000 devotees during a festival. Often one or more families of priests oversee the temple and conduct the worship over many generations. When Hindus migrate outside India, they build a temple as soon as possible. At first, community leaders themselves conduct the daily rituals. Later, professional priests are hired. There are now hundreds of Hindu temples in America. The largest are in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas and California.

The temple worship ceremony, or *puja*, is usually performed by a priest from India. During the ceremony, he worships God by chanting Sanskrit verses from the scriptures and performing *arati*. *Arati* is the waving of an oil lamp in front of the Deity while bells are rung. The priest also offers flowers, sweets and fruit. These offerings are then distributed to the devotees as a blessing from God. Hindus may visit the temple throughout the day to worship and meditate.

THE IMPACT TODAY

There are Hindu temples in nearly every country of the world

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

indentured

under contract to work for a certain number of years

austerity

a difficult practice of self-denial and discipline

meditate

think deeply about, go within yourself or seek God within

FESTIVALS

The biggest Hindu festival of the year is **Diwali**, or Dipavali, the Festival of Lights, celebrating the victory of good over evil, light over darkness. It takes place for five days around the new moon in October/November. It also honors the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after 14 years in exile. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth is invoked for prosperity, and Her presence is felt in every home. Hindus thoroughly clean the house, take a special bath and put on new clothes. Thousands of small lamps, including traditional clay oil lamps (pictured at right), are placed everywhere and fireworks signal hope for mankind. It is a national holiday in India and in many countries with large Hindu populations. Some Hindu festivals take place mostly at home, such as Raksha Bandhan, which is on the full moon in July/August. Sisters tie a *rakhi*, or colored thread, around the wrist of their brothers. In return, the brother gives his sister a present and promises to protect her. The *rakhi* can also be given to anyone chosen as an “adopted brother.”



DINODIA



DINODIA

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

How do festivals help remind people to be more kind and generous to one another?

Hinduism's Saints, Teachers and Swamis

Hinduism has a rich history of saints and sages, both men and women. Their lives are educational and inspiring. They come from all castes. Some saints, such as Adi Shankara, have written detailed explanations of the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Other saints, such as Mirabai, Tukaram and Sambandar, taught through devotional songs. Recent saints include Sri Ramakrishna and Anandamayi Ma. Their deeply religious lives have uplifted millions of Hindus and others worldwide.

There are hundreds of thousands of religious scholars and teachers, both men and women, known as pundits. Some give spell-binding discourses on sacred scriptures, including *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Tens of thousands may attend such gatherings, which include storytelling, preaching, devotional singing and drama. These events often go on for days or even a month.

Hinduism has millions of swamis and other holy persons. Swamis are unmarried men (and some women) who have taken up spiritual life full time. *Swami* means “he who knows himself.” Some live in monasteries; others wander as homeless mendicants. Swamis are the religious ministers of Hinduism. Many swamis teach, others run large institutions that perform social service for their communities, and still others live alone and meditate long hours each day in their pursuit of divine enlightenment. Special among these are the holy gurus. *Gu* means darkness and *ru* means remover. So *guru* literally means “the one who removes darkness.” These men and women are great religious teachers, some with millions of followers. Several gurus have popularized the Hindu practice of yoga by establishing training centers all over the world. No one person or institution is in charge of Hindu-

ism. Instead, there are thousands of independent spiritual traditions, monastic orders and religious institutions.

The Yearly Festival Cycle

There are many religious festivals celebrated by Hindus each year. They are observed at home, in temples and public places. Most Hindu festivals are observed according to an ancient solar-lunar calendar. Several festivals honor the avatars of Lord Vishnu. For example, Ram Navami celebrates the birth of Lord Rama in March/April. Krishna Janmashtami, in July/August, celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna.

Mahasivaratri takes place in February/March, when devotees fast and worship the transcendent Lord Siva all night in the temple. Diwali, or Dipavali, is the biggest festival of the year. It is dedicated to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, and takes place in October/November. Navaratri is the second largest festival. It lasts nine days and takes place in September/October. It is dedicated to the worship of the Goddess, Shakti, in her three forms: Durga, the Goddess of Protection; Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, and Sarasvati, the Goddess of Knowledge.

Holi, in March/April, is a highly spirited festival where everyone sprinkles each

other with colored water and powders. It signifies the triumph of good over evil and marks the beginning of the winter crop harvest. Vaikasi Visakham (May/June) is sacred to Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs. Guru Purnima is a special festival to honor one's spiritual teacher, or guru. It takes place on the full moon day in July. There are also many social festivals in India, such as Pongal. It is held in January and celebrates the incoming harvest.

One special festival, the Kumbha Mela, takes place in a twelve-year cycle. Hindu saints and millions of devotees travel to certain sacred rivers at an auspicious time for worship. The 2001 Kumbha Mela was held at Prayag (modern Allahabad) in North India. It was attended by 70 million people, including 30 million on January 24 alone. This was the largest religious gathering ever held on the Earth.

SUMMARY

Hinduism is the oldest world religion. It accepts that there are many ways to worship God. It has endured for so long because the religion and culture have instilled in each Hindu a unique and strong sense of identity and community. The *Rig Veda* concludes, “Let there be everlasting unity and peace among all human beings.”

HINDU SYMBOLS



The sacred oil lamp is used in the home and temple. Many Hindu events begin with the lighting of the lamp.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

auspicious
a favorable time—for the Mela, as determined by the Hindu calendar

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

mendicant
a holy person who lives by begging

HINDU SYMBOLS

The bell is used in Hindu worship because it can be heard in the world of the Gods



Section 3 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. a. **List** What are the five basic practices of Hinduism?
b. **Define** What does the bindi, red dot, signify?
c. **Explain** How do Hindus use their home shrine room?
2. **List** What are the various kinds of priests and holy men and women in Hinduism?
3. a. **Explain** What is the year's biggest Hindu festival?
b. **Define** What is the meaning of the rakhi bracelet?
c. **Recall** What is special about the Kumbha Mela?
d. **Elaborate** Why has Hinduism lasted so long?
4. **List** Make a list of three columns. In the first column write the name of a major Hindu festival. In the second, put the time of year it occurs. In the third list what it celebrates.
5. **Understanding Hindu practices**
Why do you think Hindus want to live near a temple?

FOCUS ON WRITING

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION AND CIRCLE THE LETTER OF THE BEST RESPONSE

- Evidence for what form of worship in the *Vedas* was found by archaeologists in the ruins of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization?
 - Temple worship
 - Worship at fire altars
 - Devotional singing
 - Sacred dancing
- The Indus-Sarasvati civilization ended because:
 - Aryans conquered it
 - The Sarasvati River dried up
 - There was a great famine
 - The people died of plague
- The Aryan Invasion theory was based upon:
 - Biological evidence, such as DNA
 - Archeological discoveries
 - Language study
 - Ancient histories
- Which discovery was not made in ancient India?
 - The concept of zero
 - Surgery
 - That the Earth orbits the Sun
 - The moons of Jupiter
- Evidence of Hindu temple worship can be as early as:
 - 1200 bce
 - 600 bce
 - 300 ce
 - 900 ce
- Which of these descriptions does not apply to women in ancient India?
 - Had fewer property rights than men
 - Were never educated
 - Wrote parts of the *Vedas*
 - Paid fewer taxes
- Which of these words does not describe the Hindu concept of the Supreme God?
 - Creator of the universe
 - Transcendent
 - Immanent
 - Jealous of other Gods
- Hindus believe that the devas, such as Lord Ganesha or Goddess Lakshmi, are like:
 - Archangels
 - Nature spirits
 - Mythical heroes
 - Imaginary people
- Which of the following is not used in nonviolent protests?
 - Peaceful rallies
 - Boycotts
 - Strikes
 - Vandalism
- The Hindu scriptures include:
 - The *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Bible*
 - The *Vedas*, *Ramayana* and *Qur'an*
 - The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*
 - The *Mahabharata* and the *Iliad*
- Hindus believe that every other religion:
 - Is an acceptable way to approach God
 - Is wrong
 - Is useful, but only Hindus go to heaven
 - Is not as good because Hinduism is older
- How many countries do Hindus live in today?
 - 20
 - 50
 - 100
 - More than 150
- The saints of Hinduism are:
 - Primarily high-caste men
 - Only people who lived a long time ago
 - Men and women of all castes
 - Mostly great scholars
- The biggest religious event in the world is:
 - The Kumbha Mela
 - Easter Sunday in Rome
 - The annual pilgrimage to Mecca
 - Christmas in New York City

Internet Resources: Go to <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/education/> for a PDF version of this lesson with clickable links to resources. Also at the same URL are additional teaching resources and letters of endorsement from academics and community leaders. To order additional copies of this educational insight, go to <http://www.minimela.com/booklets/>.



Keeping the culture: Sivakami Sivaloganathan, 18, born in Canada, enjoys playing the vina

YOUTH

Canada's Hindu Youth

Ontario's temples provide strong context for parents to pass Hinduism on to the next generation

CANADA IS HOME TO NEARLY HALF A million Hindus, most of whom arrived after 1960. Nearly 200,000 have settled on the shores of Lake Ontario in the highly developed Greater Toronto Area (GTA), creating a strong Hindu presence in this multicultural urban area. Skilled, industrious and tending to be highly educated, supporting over 100 temples in the GTA and 12 weekly publications in the Tamil language alone, they form a dynamic, prosperous community. They want to ensure that the next generation, the born Canadian Hindus, will carry forward the religious traditions of their ancestors. As in other areas of the diaspora, this is a major concern.

To investigate the situation and document success stories, HINDUISM TODAY spoke with several young Hindus and their families at the Ganesha Temple in Richmond Hill. Built in the 1970s in the Agama Shashtra tradition, this fine temple has a giant 20,000-square-foot worship hall with large, magnificent images of the Gods. With its profound sanctity it has become a strong support center for Hindus in the area. Our goal was to find young people who are committed to Hinduism and learn effective ways to transmit the Sanatana Dharma to Hindus born outside of India. We identified five

factors which help to create such successes: positive parenting skills, temple activities, religious practice at home, vegetarianism and cultural training:

Positive Parenting Skills

Typical of families which have succeeded is a loving and disciplined home blessed with regular prayer, along with unconditional love and respect for the child. "We never speak harshly to them," many of the parents emphasized, "because they are a gift from God. Children are God." HT has long noted that children who love their parents, rather than fearing or resenting them, are better prepared to love God, Gods and guru.

Temple Activities

Parental involvement in the temple and in the children's spiritual upbringing is a crucial factor. Balu and Mala, for example, volunteer much of their time and skills at the temple. They created the temple's website (www.thehindutemple.ca) and filled it with interesting information. In the process, they themselves have learned much that they now teach their children, Ashwin and Abhirami.

Though they may juggle two or three jobs to meet their family's needs, effective parents make it a priority to visit the temple

with their children at least once or twice a week, and definitely on all festival days. "It is a question of setting priorities," said one dad, "If you put God first, everything else will fall into place." The inspired youth have formed a Youth Forum associated with the temple which runs a food drive each year to assist the needy.

Daily Spiritual Practices at Home

Many successful parents established spiritual patterns of living and turned their homes into temples long before their children were born. Parents who insist their children do spiritual practices daily got the most kudos. Balu and Mala testify that regular prayer, lighting of the *deepam* at home, visiting the temple and bringing the spiritual vibration home with them have blessed them with a family that is beyond their wildest dreams.

Vegetarian Lifestyle

All of the children who participate regularly in the temple were raised vegetarian. As they reach their teens, they realize the wisdom of their parents' choices. When the son of priest Mohan Ketheeswaranatha arrived in Canada, he did not mix with non-Hindus because his family lived in the temple. Protected while young from Western culture, he is a strict vegetarian and neither smokes nor drinks. He does not eat out either, knowing how the food he eats can affect his general well-being. His classmates and colleagues respect his convictions and do not pressure him.

Immersion from Birth in Hindu Culture

Music and dance are key activities for the young people. Each student eagerly and respectfully told us the name of his or her music or dance teacher. Some of the parents are members of Bharatiya Kala Mandiram, which organizes monthly performances by famous Indian artists. This provides the young people with abundant exposure to good Carnatic music.

The well-known community activist and author, Ajit Adhopia, a father and grandfather, gave this advice: "Parents should not force their religion on their children like medicine. Instead, they should expose them to Hindu cultural activities by taking them to the temple regularly; involving them in celebrating festivals at home; motivating them to learn Indian music or dance; encouraging them to participate in cultural activities; and providing them with Hindu literature, like storybooks, comics, DVDs and coloring books. Cultural activities should begin early, starting from three or four years of age. Initiating them after the age of seven or eight may not be very effective."

On the next two pages are our interviews with eight children and young adults associated with the Richmond Hill Temple.



Myuran Thananjeyan



Vidya Vivekananda



Mohan Ketheeswaranatha



Vaaraki Wijayraj

Lives and Voices of Successful Hindu Youth

Sivakami Sivaloganathan, 18

Born in Canada, Sivakami (pictured on page 53 playing vina) is studying psychology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. She wants to be a lawyer and enter politics. She is learning vina from Jayanti Ratnakumar and Carnatic vocal music from Dr. Alakananda in Toronto and Raji Gopalkrishnan in Chennai. She joins her teacher in Chennai via the internet phone system, Skype. Religion did not seem very important to Sivakami until she got to high school where she had to discuss, write and explain Hinduism to her friends. That encouraged her find out more about Hindu Dharma. Sivakami says the only way she could have learned so much about Hindu culture is by being exposed to it. She says it certainly helped that her parents sought out Hindu events and pushed her to go to the temple every Friday, to cultural programs and to practice regularly. It was sometimes hard, but without their persistence she would have given up.

Mohan Ketheeswaranatha, 25

Mohan is the son of Ketheeswaranatha Kurukkal, priest of Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple. Mohan came to Canada from Sri Lanka when he was a teen, already firmly grounded in Hindu cultural values. Having completed courses in software development at a local college, he now works for a high-tech computer corporation. "Definitely my father's insistence that we do Sandhya Van-

danam, morning prayers, every day and go to the temple regularly helped us the most. We are reaping the benefits now." All of Ketheeswaranatha Kurukkal's children took courses in English as a second language and speak impeccable English. Mohan says the Hindu lifestyle came easily to him because his paternal grandfather is head priest in the Thiruketheeswaram Siva Temple in Mannar, Sri Lanka, and his maternal grandfather owns the Naguleswaram temple in Jaffna. It was only natural for Mohan to become a trained priest and lend his services at the Hindu temple during his time off from his computer job. Mohan is using his expertise to create a website for Sri Lanka's bombed-out Naguleswaram temple. He is an avid sports enthusiast and he loves playing soccer and cricket.

Myuran Thananjeyan, 13

Myuran, born in Canada, says that growing up Hindu here was not difficult for him. Like most of the youth interviewed, he said his religion did not prevent him from becoming fully integrated in Canadian society. "Canada is a multi-cultural country and very accepting of all cultures. I don't bother about the odd racist who hates Hindus, because it is his problem, not mine."

His whole family, originally from Sri Lanka—parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—are deeply involved in Carnatic music and temple worship. "When I sing, I can feel God," says Myuran. Devotees at the temple will attest to that, as there is rarely a dry eye in the temple when Myuran sings. His father fed, bathed, cooked and put Myuran to bed with devotional songs when he was young. The strict lifestyle of school, homework, sports, violin, piano, mridangam, and Carnatic vocal music classes can seem overwhelming for a young person; but Myuran

has the support of his extended family, who all live in the same neighborhood in Toronto and are extremely loving and tight-knit. Myuran regrets not having time to play sports like baseball—though he has been able to learn Tae Kwon Do and swimming.

He realizes that if his parents had not disciplined him when he was young, he would probably have ended up a gangster, wearing his hat backwards and dressed in baggy pants and oversized shirts. He is grateful that they did not allow him to be influenced by other cultures until he was older. Myuran excels in his studies and recently won the John Heino Award for Excellence in the Arts. He has been nominated Student of the Month many times.

Vidhya Vivekananda, 19

Vidhya is Myuran's cousin. Also born in Canada, she is a second-year science student at the University of Toronto. Vidya is learning dance from Dr. Alakananda and music from Vasumathi Nagarajan. She had her *arangetram* (debut performance) two years ago. She says if she has a hard time later in life, there will always be the *sangitam* to fall back on to help her understand. She loves to play soccer and swim, and she is a certified lifeguard.

Vaaraki Wijayraj, 14

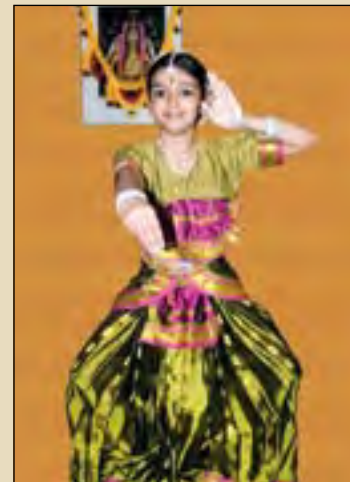
Vaaraki was born in Toronto and has never been to India or Sri Lanka. She has been singing regularly at the Hindu temple in Richmond Hill from the age of two. She is learning Carnatic vocal music, Bharata Natyam, classical violin and *mridangam*. This might seem a lot for a 14-year-old, but Vaaraki says there is a lot of time in the day to learn the culture she was born into. She says it would otherwise be spent watching



Ganesh Gangadharan



Swami Dayananda, Abhirami and Ashwin Balu



Abhirami Balu

TV, chatting on the phone or just hanging out at the mall. She notes that Hindu classical arts have taught her discipline, the ability to sit cross-legged on the floor for hours and to concentrate and listen. Vaaraki excels in her studies and won the Ontario Principals' Award for Student Leadership in Grade 7.

Vaaraki says growing up Hindu in Canada is difficult because most Canadians have little knowledge of Hinduism and therefore find the culture "weird." She does not listen to Carnatic music on her iPod in school or wear Indian clothes to school. Vaaraki laments that Canada's official multi-culturalism is only an acknowledgment that there are different colored people. There is no real blending. She says that multiculturalism has led to favoritism of different colors of people, depending on how long they have been in Canada.

Vaaraki is proud to be a Hindu. Her parents have been great role models, as they lived devout Hindu lives themselves and did not just lecture her. She says that this is the crucial difference between children who truly enjoy Hindu practices and those that get bored with it or even feel ashamed of being Hindu in North America. Vaaraki wishes that she could be growing up in India or Sri Lanka where she could go to more Carnatic concerts and live the Hindu culture more fully.

Ganesh Gangadharan, 8

Mohan's eight-year-old cousin Ganesh is the son of Hindu temple Priest Gangadharan. Little Ganesh was born in Canada but has already been to Sri Lanka and India three or four times. He is an expert at ringing the bell and is the only child allowed to do so at the Richmond Hill Temple. "I never re-

ally learned to ring the bell," says Ganesh matter of factly, "I always knew how to ring the bell." Young Ganesh does not like to play sports but has already learned to play the

Cultural activities should begin very early, starting from three or four years of age.

— AJIT ADHOPIA

harmonica, drum, trumpet and tuba. He excels in his studies and has many friends in the temple as well as some outside. His father has taught his son to offer *naivedyam* (food) to the Deity every day and perform pujas to Ganesha and Murugan on Fridays after school.

Ashwin Balu, 19

Ashwin arrived in Canada when he was just seven. He is studying biomedical computing at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and will graduate within a year. Ashwin recalls how his parents nurtured his interest in Hinduism by explaining the significance of the puja rituals. They visit the temple every week as a family and take part in all the festivities. Ashwin worships Ganesha and Saraswati daily and chants Sri Rudram and Pancha Suktams as often as he can. He says that his parents no longer have to remind him to do the spiritual practices, because he can't do without them. Ashwin has many friends outside of the temple community. He was a recipient of the Outstanding Academic Achievement Award from US President Bill Clinton in 1999, and in 2004 he received the Millennium Award from the Governor General of Canada. Like his

father, he loves listening to Western music, including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and plays several sports, including basketball, baseball, soccer, cricket and wrestling—in which he earned a medal. Ashwin often attends professional games and music concerts. A vegetarian, he says, "I understand now that eating vegetarian food is a better way of life because I am healthier, and will live longer." He has absolutely no doubt that the mantras his parents taught him have enhanced every aspect of his life. The things he appreciates most about his mother and father are their abundant love, clear boundaries and unlimited attention.

Abhirami Balu, 7

Ashwin's little sister, Abhirami, could dance before she could walk! Dance teacher Sumana Sen recognized Abhirami's potential when she was barely two years of age and taught her a few dance steps. Within six months, Abhirami performed in a public program at the University of Arizona.

Abhirami loves to help her parents in the temple with the weekly puja to Lord Vishnu. Young children there are encouraged to make flower garlands for the Gods and prepare offerings with which the priest will bathe the Deity. Abhirami's favorite temple activities are emptying the honey bottles into the big brass pots, cutting the milk bags and singing along with other devotees. She is now learning dance from the renowned Meneka Thakker, and music from Bhuma Krishnan.

These interviews give hope and inspiration for a positive transition of Hindu dharma to the next generation. In their stories are lessons for parents and temple leaders the world over.

Rehabilitating Hindu Studies

The ghosts of colonial scholarship still haunt our academic world

BY VAMSEE JULURI

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, PEOPLE HAVE lived Hinduism, knowing it to be an admirable way of understanding the world based upon values such as respect for diversity and sensitivity to the pain of fellow living beings. However, in the past few decades, even as the world has become supposedly better informed through the spread of mass media and modern education, it has barely grasped what either Hinduism, or the basic values it embodies, are about.

The contrast between how Hinduism sees the world and how some parts of the world are seeing Hinduism these days makes me wonder if this is the result of some cosmic challenge. Perhaps, just as Lord Siva asked Sage Markandeya's parents to choose between the boon of a son with a long but average life and that of a son with a short yet noble one, maybe some God or Goddess asked the sages to choose whether Hinduism would be a religion well understood by the world or one that would understand the world beautifully. Perhaps the sages, selfless and noble, gave up the allure of fame and chose the latter instead.

The result today is a huge gap between how Hinduism sees the world and what it is being made out to be in the media and the classroom. As someone who teaches about the media, I have found this to be a profound disservice to a great religion. It is even more of a disservice to a world caught up in a global catastrophe of epic proportions which sorely needs the insights of Hinduism today. Simply put, my concern is whether a world in which cruelty is a way of life, violence the language of communication, selfishness the touchstone of culture and falsehood truth, can ever overcome these problems if it continues to turn its back on the great truths enshrined in Hinduism.

Living Hinduism and Defining Hinduism

In the past, Hinduism was more a matter of how we lived it and less a question of how we defined it. We seldom bothered about the laughable gap between what the media and textbooks said Hinduism was and what it meant to us. I recall seeing, long ago, a British children's book about "monsters" which listed our beloved Ganesha as one! These days, the media has grown more pervasive but its content is not much better. It has, therefore, become imperative that we Hindus act to better define our cultures and traditions.

One challenge we face is that Hinduism has often been defined by outsiders, and their definitions have eclipsed what it means for us insiders—an obscuration compounded by Hinduism's inherent diversity. I cannot speak for everyone about what being a Hindu means to them, but I know at least one



COURTESY VAMSEE JULURI

etymology which means far more to me than the dry academic theories about what Hinduism supposedly is. *Hindu*, according to one saying, is derived from a combination of *himsa* (cruelty) and *duramu* (distant), and means "one who is distant from cruelty." When I think of myself as a "Hindu," this is the saying that has meaning for me, and not what the textbooks and media stereotypes might say.

We might have many such stories about what being a Hindu means to us, but these have seldom informed the theories about what Hinduism is laid down by the ostensible experts. The experts have not just ignored many of these stories, but have to a large extent been unsympathetic or even blatantly contemptuous. The reasons for this are not just personal ignorance, but a larger

historical and political tendency that has devalued not only Hinduism, but also the values it stands for.

Hinduism in the Western Academy

Hinduism has long had bad press in the West despite the occasional recognition of Gandhi and others. Ugly misrepresentations have equated Hindus and India with gory violence and bizarre rituals (like the movie, "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom"), inhuman oppression, lack of hygiene, lack of free will, wily priests, decadent kings, passive natives and many other deplorable things. Although Western societies have corrected many of their past prejudices about many other cultures, such stereotypes and fantasies are regrettably still the bedrock of Western perception, not only of Hindus, but also of India.

One reason these stereotypes are so powerful is that they were created at a time when European colonialism was ruling most of the world and had tremendous power to support its delusions about other cultures. The process through which colonial academics, writers, journalists and administrators constructed a nasty fantasy about the "orient" that justified their imperial and predatory intentions has been well researched. The term *Orientalism* (based on the book of that name by Edward Said, see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalism) has entered common usage now, and aptly describes the persistent stereotyping of Hinduism in parts of the academy and the press today. If, for instance, the controversial California textbooks cannot say "Hindu" without "caste" or "gender," or other such slanders, it is largely because that is how (false) knowledge about Hinduism has been propagated since colonial times—by rewarding power over truth, and by enabling so-called experts and authorities to say what they will at the expense of the sincere followers and believers.

Orientalism did not end with the demise of official colonialism

in the mid-20th century but acquired a new face to justify the Cold-War view of the world, with its free and rich "First World" and eternally poor "Third World." Hinduism and India were further misrepresented in this phase. U.S. academics would invoke the "Hindu" in concepts like the "Hindu rate of growth," a cultural stereotype used to evoke the notion that Indian poverty was largely because of Hindu superstition and not the aftermath of nearly a millennium of plunder. An interesting geopolitical angle in this phase is also apparent. In his book, *Comrades at Odds*, Andrew Rotter contends that the United States foreign policy establishment leaned towards Pakistan at this time not merely because of India's perceived pro-Soviet tilt (as is widely assumed), but primarily because the Christian conservative elites of Washington identified more closely with the Islamic military elites of Pakistan. Specifically, their perception of Hinduism as a polytheistic, vegetarian religion led them to see Islam as a closer natural ally to their own monotheistic, nonvegetarian culture.

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, the Western academy went through an intellectual uprising of sorts led by foreign and minority scholars who challenged many of the old stereotypes. The result of this was the rise of various intellectual approaches committed to critiquing power, such as Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism. Although these approaches challenged the old Orientalism and highlighted the plight of many oppressed minority groups, such as blacks, women and Muslims, when it came to Hindus, they fell silent. Worse, these approaches suddenly began to talk about Hinduism as the new bad guy or *hegemon*. Many scholars failed to make the distinction between Hinduism as a religion and the supposedly "Hindu" political groups in India they were often concerned about.

As much as I believe in the academic tradition's commitment to critiquing power, I have been deeply pained by the clichéd manner in which it has banded "Hindu" this or that as the source of all evils in India today. Not only is this inaccurate, it has also made present-day academics guilty of the same sort of racism as that of the old Orientalists. In an imaginary world in which Hinduism had the sort of power its critics impute to it, these allegations would have been more apt. But in the real world in which Hinduism has been the historical victim of foreign aggressions, these allegations are hurtful. The crisis over Hinduism in academics today is thus not only about Hinduism, but also about the failure of the academy to learn from and speak truthfully about Hinduism.

Hinduism for the Global Media Age

The present dilemma for Hinduism is that the global Hindu community has seen the imperative to define and protect it more clearly than the academic experts on Hinduism who fear that any attempt to define it is politically motivated. As an academic and a Hindu, I support the attempt to better understand and represent Hinduism now, and salute the efforts of the community in this regard. It is heartening that there are examples right here, such as the supplement in this issue of HINDUISM TODAY that may serve as an alternative to the untenable and sometimes malicious content of the California textbooks.

As we see more such endeavors to positively portray Hinduism for our times, perhaps we will begin to make more of an impact on the academics as well as the media. To return to my earlier parable, perhaps along with His cosmic challenge Lord Siva also sent Sage Narada to help us spread a better understanding of our religion by giving us a voice in the world today. As we face the questions of the world about what Hinduism is and who we are as Hindus, we will no doubt have many stories to tell. However, given the demands of conveying our infinitely rich and diverse

tradition in ten second sound-bites, I would like to suggest that we emphasize two core values in Hinduism when we are called upon to explain it for the global media age.

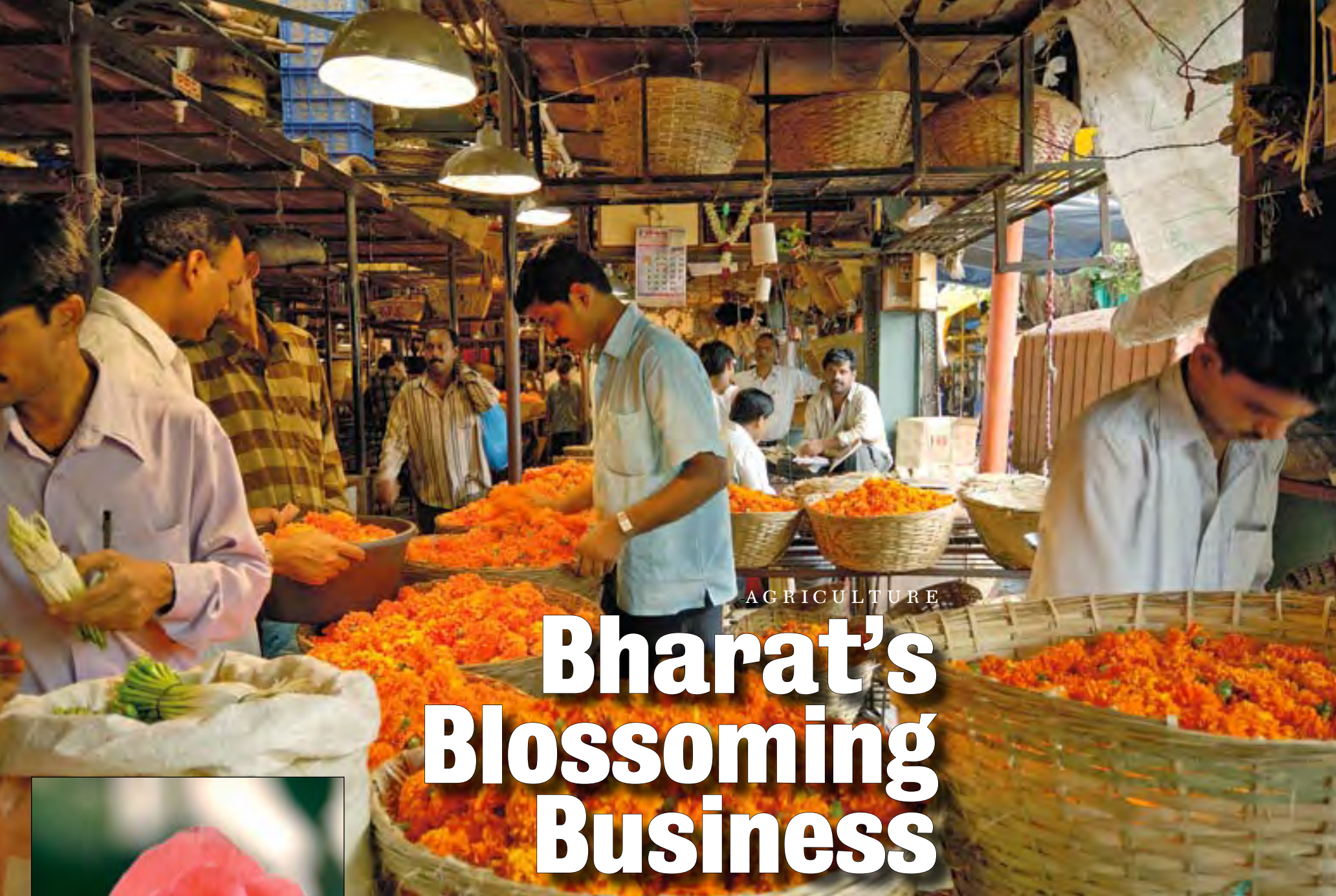
The first of these is the ideal of universalism. We should highlight how Hinduism refuses to claim it is the only true or correct religion, or that there is even one correct tradition within its folds. I am convinced that the liberality of Hinduism is something the world needs to know about. The second ideal in Hinduism we need to strongly identify with and speak out about is that of ahimsa. We must live our lives in full consciousness of the amount of violence the modern world is based on, and actively strive to minimize it. I say this not only because the significance of ahimsa, and vegetarianism, in Hinduism has been obfuscated, but simply because that is what the world needs.

I believe that Hinduism will be safeguarded as long as we remember its greatest lessons. There is no place for fear in Hinduism, and those of us who adore our myths know that there is no violence, too, notwithstanding the shallow charge sometimes made by critics that our Gods carry weapons, or that the *Mahabharata* was bloody. Our images and stories represent the vast spectrum of the human condition, but also exhort us to do what is right with it; to minimize cruelty and violence, to practice universal tolerance. It is to these that we must turn, with our hearts noble and minds clear, and then we may find that the ignorance that has shrouded the truths of Hinduism will melt away.

Vamsee Juluri is an Associate Professor of Media Studies at the University of San Francisco and the author of *Becoming a Global Audience: Longing and Belonging in Indian Music Television*.



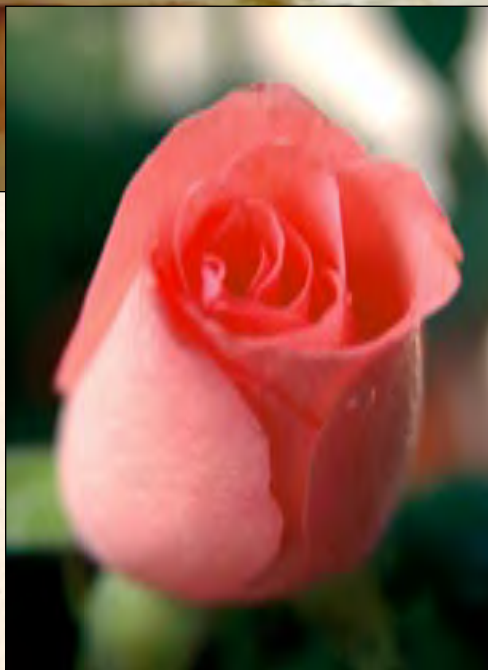
The Orientalist: In Edward Said's opinion, the 19th century colonial dominance of India and other Asian countries has left a legacy of stereotypes that continue to influence scholarship



AGRICULTURE

Bharat's Blossoming Business

HOW IS IT THAT YOU CAN TRAVEL FAR AND WIDE in India and never see a field of flowers? Where do all those billions of blossoms come from that adorn every temple and home shrine—not to mention the massive decorations at weddings and festivals? The answer is simple: the flowers are picked the morning they bloom. Hence you don't see fields of blooming flowers, except in Bollywood films—"Duh," as the kids say. But that reality check didn't stop us from sending our intrepid reporter, Rajiv Malik, to the farms and flower markets of India for the full story of what turns out to be one of India's promising industries.



Opportunity: Roses are a key export flower

BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI, INDIA
India's history as a great spiritual power is known to all, as is her emergent status as a great economic power. But few know that India could soon become a superpower in the field of flower production as well. Industry experts estimate the annual flower trade here at quarter billion dollars US, but India presently claims only a fraction of a percent of the 11-billion-dollar global export market. The federal and state governments, business people and ordinary farmers are fast becoming aware of the opportunity. From 1993 to 2002 the area under flower cultivation in India nearly doubled, from 131,000 acres to 254,000.

China is also cashing in on flowers, more than quadrupling her flower acreage to 1.7

million during the same time frame and achieving a total flower trade of US\$5.4 billion in 2004. Chinese farmers earn twice the per-acre income from flowers as from vegetables.

Flowers are a business of beauty and fragrance. Each bloom is relished for its power to please. But this is a tough business: flowers are highly perishable, and those left unsold by day's end are often worthless. Furthermore, the market is also subject to wide variations according to the festival and wedding seasons. The absolute peak time of year—despite the vocal opposition of some to this imported holiday—is Valentine's Day, when an \$0.11 rose sells for \$0.55.

I set out early one morning with photographer Phal S. Girota to meet with Gopi Chand, who manages a rose farm along the Yamuna River on the outskirts of Delhi. The farm was peaceful this August morning. An old man plucked roses, carefully and with total concentration. Other men piled the picked blossoms onto pieces of brown burlap about five feet square. When folded up and tied at the corners, such a bundle is called a *gathri* in Hindi; along with wicker baskets, these are the containers of choice for the wholesale market. We watched a young man speed by on a motorcycle, carrying a *gathri* of roses for the local market.

Gopi Chand outlined for us the basics of the trade: "We are mainly growing *desi gulab* (*Rosa damascena*), a local variety of rose. Very fragrant and reasonably priced,

it is popular with devotees as offerings to the Gods and Goddesses in the temples." Chand told us he sells his *desi gulab* roses at the Fateh Puri flower market in Old Delhi. Phal and I bid adieu to Chand and head for the market, our heads reeling from the intense perfume of the roses.

Fateh Puri is famous for its wholesale rates, especially for marigolds and roses, India's two most popular flowers. When we arrive at 7:00 am, hundreds of farmers are positioned all over the area's broad pavement area, seated beside their opened *gathris*. Our eyes feast upon a huge variety of flowers. Alongside the roses and marigolds are lovely lotuses, lilies, *rajnigandhas* (*Polianthes tuberosa*, like a lily but powerfully fragrant) and *chamelis* (*Jasminum grandiflorum*). Shouted prices mingle in the air with the heady fragrance of the flowers as each vendor strives to attract buyers. The flower market functions at a hectic pace from 4:00 am to 9:00 am—and then the flower vendors pack up and leave, yielding the space to food wholesalers.

Samanyu Das, a dealer from Kolkata, points out some significant commercial advantages of marigolds over other flowers: they grow all year round and stay fresh for a full week after picking. We are shown the West Bengal variety, which have a different look and finer finish than others here from North India. According to Khagesh Yadav, a wholesaler who trucks these from Kolkata, "Nowhere but in West Bengal can a mari-

Tracking the flow of flowers: (left) Flower vendors at the Meenatai Thackeray flower market at Dadar, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India; (above) Mangal Kumar Jha makes and sells garlands outside the Sai Pragya Dham Temple in Saket, South Delhi.



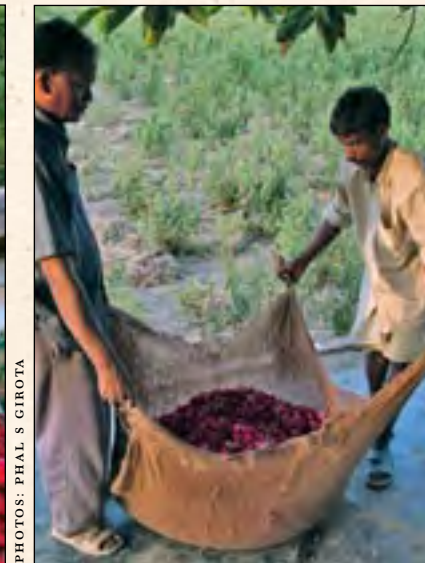
PHAL S. GIROTA

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From fields...



PHOTOS: PHAL S GIROTA

Harvesting the local rose: (left) An experienced picker harvests desi gulab in the early morning at a flower field on the banks of the Yamuna River outside Delhi; (middle) the flowers gathered for wrapping in burlap; (above) two men fold and tie the burlap into a gathri for transport to Delhi's wholesale market.

gold of this type be grown." Marigolds sell for \$0.68 to \$0.91 per kilo, going up to \$2.27 during festivals and in the wedding season. Roses bring about twice as much.

Shri Shyam Singh Saini, one of the market's leading commission agents, informs us that originally the Saini caste controlled the flower trade. Now everyone is in the business. Flowers are sold in three ways: 1) directly from farmer to consumer, 2) via a reseller who buys from the farmer and sells again in the same market or 3) through a licensed commission agent such as Saini. All three types of transactions occur simultaneously. A commission agent receives eight percent of the sale and can be held accountable for the overall transaction, whereas a customer who buys flowers directly from a farmer or reseller will have no recourse if the results are unsatisfactory.

Saini estimates the market's daily sales to be about 5,000 kilos. "A large number of farmers from neighboring states come here to sell their goods. This market employs thousands of people." The flowers' perishability puts pressure on both growers and agents, and the prices drop hourly as the morning progresses. "There is a saying," Saini ruefully relates to us, "that when a dead body comes to the cremation ground, it has to be cremated and not taken back. Similarly, once the flowers come here, they have to be sold at whatever price prevails in the market at that particular time. All the flowers you see here were picked yesterday morning and, even with ice storage, will be fresh for only one more day. When there is no demand, they are dumped in the garbage bin at the end of the day."

Adjacent to the open-air Fateh Puri market, independent commission agents are doing a

brisk business from their own properties. They charge ten percent—two percent more than the agents attached to the market—but also offer more services to the farmer. For example, they can receive shipments 24 hours a day, which is a great advantage to farmers.

After our visit to the Fateh Puri market, Phal and I made our way to Delhi's Connaught Place flower market, located just opposite the ancient Hanuman Temple in the heart of the city. While Fateh Puri deals mainly in loose flowers, the Connaught Place market sells fancy and decorative cut flowers of all types. As we draw near, the fragrance of roses, chrysanthemums and lilies overwhelms us. Gladioluses, orchids and choice imports abound. This is probably India's biggest wholesale flower market, with some 600 traders. Most of the buyers come from within a 400-kilometer radius around Delhi. As at Fateh Puri, the working hours are from 4:00 am to 9:00 am.

Our first contact here is Shri Brij Mohan Khanagwal, a founding member of Connaught Place market who started out decades ago selling flowers from his bicycle. Khanagwal is a seasoned veteran of this business, having witnessed at first hand the growth of the industry over the years. He reveals, "The trade has touched the sky since this market was started in 1995, with everyone from the farmer up getting better value." Delhi's September 2006 Flower Expo, opened by the President of India, gave a big boost to the

trade, Mohan tells us. Although fewer than ten percent of India's farmers currently grow flowers commercially, more and more are waking up to the potential of this business. India has a natural advantage in the flower trade, he says: "Every few hundred kilometers there is a climatic change in our country. Therefore, all round the year we can grow any flower in one part or the other of the country. If a flower needs a cold climate to grow, then we grow it in Himanchal Pradesh and Kashmir. If a flower needs hot climate, we grow it in arid places like Rajasthan."

The Mumbai markets

In August I explored two of Mumbai's most popular markets: Meena Tai Thackrey Flower Market in Dadar and the huge retail market in Matunga. The Thackrey market contains hundreds of flower shops, with bargain prices compared to the retail market. For instance, a decorative rose that retails for \$0.18 to \$0.23 is available here for \$0.45 per dozen—less than \$0.04 per flower. In addition to the crowds of merchants picking up goods for their retail outlets for resale purposes, many women come here to take advantage of the wonderful prices.

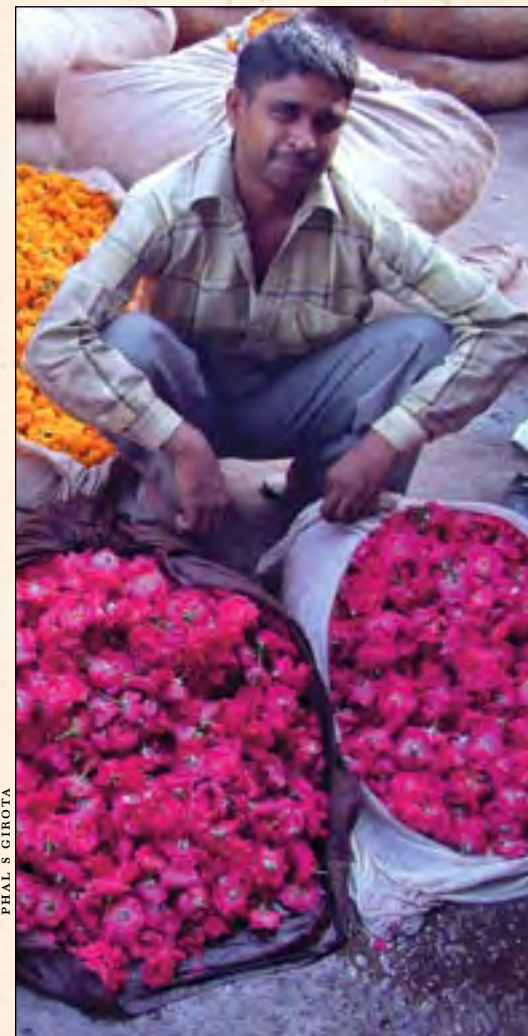
At the busy Matunga Market I count sixty to seventy small retail shops, mostly makeshift structures along a wide, long road. There is a mind-boggling variety of cut flowers, bouquets and garlands of all hues. But this is not just a flower market. Taking a



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...and greenhouses,

Greenhouse roses: (clockwise from top) Owner Balasaheb Sanas and his workers cut roses at his greenhouse in Pune, Maharashtra; workers load flowers into a truck at the Mumbai flower market; flower vendors at the Meenatai Thackeray flower market at Dadar, Mumbai; a farm worker sells marigolds and desi gulab roses on the pavement at Old Delhi's Fateh Puri wholesale flower market



PHAL S GIROTA



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...to wholesalers...

...and retailers...



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Marketplace: (above) Flower vendors crowd the pavement in the coffee home area of Connaught Place in Delhi; (left) Flower grower Sharad Sanas shows off his roses bound for the Mumbai flower markets from his greenhouse in Pune.

ricultural and sales work but freelance designing opportunities as well.

Here too, traders lament the perishable nature of flowers and the wide fluctuations in prices, though their sayings are not as morbid as Sainas. Here they say, "In the morning a flower is a flower, but by evening it is just a particle of dust," and "If you do not sell a flower in the morning, then the flower will sell you in the evening" (i.e., you will lose money because of the unsold flower).

Back to the fields

After leaving Mumbai, I visited some intriguing small-scale operations. Ulhas D. Ghewade and his family, for example, grow 12,000 carnations a year on a tiny but prolific 1/8-acre plot in Ambegaon. Depending on the season, he receives four to eighteen cents per flower, earning an annual income of about \$6,800—decent money for a small nursery. And on a one-acre farm in the Vasai area, Vikas Patil and his family make \$7,000 a year, working from 3:00 am to 10:00 pm growing three main flowers: roses, *sevanti* (chrysanthemum) and *sonataka* (*Hedychium coronarium*, the white ginger flower). Patil has made sound decisions and is content with his life and business. "We are able to make ends meet. The business is all cash. There is no credit involved. We are much

better off than the farmers of some Indian states who are committing suicide because their crops are not good and they are under huge debts."

Throughout my journey of blossoms I was told time and again about the immense growth potential for this industry in India. This is a labor-intensive industry, providing employment for up to 16 workers per acre. In India, most of these workers are women.

It's a proven fact that switching to flower production from vegetable crops can increase a farmer's income. But there are definite health risks in this industry. For the 100,000 flower workers in Columbia, South America—which recently became the world's second largest flower exporter—pesticide exposure has become a major issue. As a result of their action, there has developed in the United States a market for organic flowers grown without chemicals.

Flowers as a raw agricultural product are profitable but highly perishable. Value-added industries can increase the profit margin, as has designing in the Matunga Market. There is also much room for growth on the national level. Distribution methods could be improved, and exports to the profitable European market could be increased. If all goes well, India's future will soon be coming up roses. 🌹

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...to garland makers...

PHAL S. GIROTA



DINODIA/ARF

...to you...

Offerings: (clockwise from top left) Colorful garlands of various types and sizes for sale at the Matunga East market area which is frequented by South Indian Tamils; Bhola Prasad Saini making a garland at his pavement stand in Fateh Puri wholesale marketplace in Delhi; Lord Ganesha decked out in hundreds of flowers during the Ganesha Visarjana festival in Mumbai; elderly hands hold a lotus flower

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...and to God.

EDUCATION

Toward Effective Teaching

The teacher's personal spiritual life and depth of understanding are the keys to conveying religion to youth

In the fall of 2006, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami toured South India and Malaysia. As part of his tour, he met with more than a hundred Hindu youth and adults involved in teaching programs which used a variety of approaches to impart religion and spirituality. The following summary of three programs is intended to bring out the key elements useful for others involved in teaching.

AUROVILLE IS THE FUTURISTIC COMMUNITY FOUNDED NEAR Pondicherry in South India to implement the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is today an international collective of 2,000 dedicated people. On November 15, Bodhinatha gathered with about 20 teachers at Bharat Nivas, Auroville's India center, in a meeting arranged and chaired by Sri Ashok Chatterjee. Nearly all are Indians teaching in schools for children from the surrounding Tamil Hindu community, rather than for children of Auroville residents. These schools, supported by Auroville, follow a regular government curriculum, with the spiritual aspects tucked in as opportunities present themselves. Each teacher is closely associated with Auroville, and their personal spirituality inform their teaching approach in a most beneficial manner.

They begin each school day with a moment of silence or period of meditation. They teach what they called a "wide view" of Hinduism to the children, beginning with the concept that each one is a divine soul. They then explain that the Divine is both outside us and inside us, and that there are many ways to reach the Divine. Spirituality is also imparted through art, dance and storytelling. One teacher teaches her students a few simple Sanskrit slokas, a training with a remarkable impact. One girl's proud parents thanked the teacher, telling her, "My child is the first person in our family to ever know any Sanskrit." By knowing just this small bit of Sanskrit, the language of worship in Hinduism, both parents and children feel more a part of the religion. In one school, the children actually built their own temple.

The area is generally poor. Several teachers remarked on the children's rough home life, from which the schools served as a refuge of harmony and simplicity. One advantage they have is being able to keep class size to just 15 or 16. They have a strict policy against corporal punishment, and the small class size allows them the personal time with a student necessary to implement benign means of behavior modification. As enlightened educators around the world have discovered, the cause of bad behavior at school often lies in a child's difficult personal situation. The Auroville teachers approach misbehavior as a teaching opportunity. One teacher told the children, "The 16 of us in this class are all one, so the problems of one of us are the problems of all of us." In this way, they involve all the children in working out difficulties of any one child. They do have to be careful with this, however, as parents do not like the children discussing their home problems at school. Such problem-solving sessions offer the best opportunity for the teachers to personally demonstrate a spiritual approach to life.

Bodhinatha asked how they deal with racial stereotypes. They

explained that Auroville itself is a diverse community, with strong roots in the concept of spiritual unity. The teachers invite Auroville volunteers to the schools to expose the children to the many different cultures represented in the community. They also maintain pen pal programs and Internet chats to put the children in contact with children elsewhere in the world. The teachers asked Bodhinatha how to deal with youth between age 18 and 24, who tend to reject religion. He advised that if they get all the religious principles ingrained before that tumultuous age, the youth will eventually return to them.

In addition to the children's schools, they also run education programs for the young Tamil workers who are employed at Auroville. These schools have, the teachers said, sparked something of a Hindu renaissance in the area. For example, after the workers learned in their classes that a nearby temple was the topic of a song by Sambandar, the 7th century ce child saint, the entire community took an interest in the run-down temple. They renovated it, then located and renovated several nearby temples as well. The complex of temples is now a source of pride for the residents.

Spiritually motivated teachers provide Auroville's schools with an immense advantage. In a standard school, there will be religious and nonreligious teachers, and the attempts to impart religion will succeed or suffer accordingly.

Chinmaya Mission Yuva Kendra

Bodhinatha's second meeting was November 26 in Chennai, with the Chinmaya Mission Yuva Kendra participants. Most of them had completed the two-year Youth Empowerment Programme of study, teaching and community service within the Mission after college. Many testified to its dramatic impact on their religious lives.

The first four months take place at an ashram under the guidance of one of the Mission swamis. In this orientation and training program, the participants are taught basic Sanskrit, chanting, bhajan and hatha yoga. They study fundamental Vedantic texts, including the *Kaivalya Upanishad* and *Bhagavad Gita*. A typical assignment is for the student to read a section of one of the texts and then explain it to the other students. Each evening, satsang is held with chanting, lectures and questions and answers with the swami. The programs were described as "youth friendly and value based." The program includes not only basic exercises such as jogging and sports, but confidence building excursions such as river rafting and bungee jumping. One girl testified, "I came into the program confused. I learned a lot about India, but even more about myself. I came to better understand the scriptures and gained a lot of self-confidence." Following the four months of training, students are sent to a Chinmaya Mission center to participate in teaching and social service for the remainder of their two years.



PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY



The Mission also runs practical workshops for youth on business, time management and how to handle stress. One program, called "karma capitalism" teachings how one can make money without making bad karma. For this they brought in successful entrepreneurs, such as Vijay Easwaran of Malaysia, to talk to the students. The students were impressed to hear first-hand how business can be conducted within a spiritual framework. Like all their sessions, these meetings with the business leaders are not a passive experience of listening to a speech, but a dynamic dialogue in which students to present their concerns and questions. "Interactive is the key," said one student.

It was apparent that the Chinmaya Mission has achieved a certain "critical mass" in size which allows them to run a big youth program entirely within their own structure. Similarly, other large organizations, such as BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, have enough centers, swamis and adult leaders to create complex youth programs within the organization's established structure. Individual temples, by contrast, usually don't have sufficient infrastructure to provide such an full and enriching experience for youth.

Malaysian Hindu Sangam

On December 3, Bodhinatha met with more than two dozen teachers and coordinators involved in religious programs in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The largest are run by the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, with the most innovative being the new preschool program for three- to six-year-olds. Dato Vaithilingam, MHS president, said their intent is to establish within each child a strong sense of identity as a Hindu before they enter the public school system. Once in school, the children, far outnumbered by Muslim children, find themselves in an adverse religious environment. Especially as they grow older, there is increasing pressure upon them to convert, including enticement through college scholarship programs.

Headed by Dr. Rupa, 16 temples now have preschools, utilizing 30 trained teachers. These very young children are taught religion, music, dance and Tamil language, along with the government

Creating continuity of tradition: (clockwise from upper left) Bodhinatha meets with teachers at Bharat Nivas, Auroville; with Chinmaya Yuva Kendra, Chennai; and more than a dozen organizations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

preschool syllabus. There has been a good response from parents, with 200 children now involved and 300 expected for next year. The teachers are all volunteer women, including some single mothers. Because the programs are held in temples, the classes are not subject to Malaysian restrictions that would inhibit the teaching of religion if held elsewhere. The program has only just begun, and they intend to add ten more preschools next year.

Conclusion

A key factor in successful youth programs, whatever the model, is a shared spiritual philosophy, at least among the organizers, as seen at Auroville, and ideally including the youth also, as with Chinmaya Mission. Both organizations demonstrate the value of spiritually oriented teachers, which they are able to marshal on a significant scale, and who then conveyed religion through their own example. While the preschool program in Malaysia is excellent in concept, it is apparent that its main limitation is finding enough like-minded, spiritually oriented people to participate. Several temples in Malaysia, for example, expressed disinterest in the preschool program because it lacks any potential to generate income for the temple.

The transmission of Hinduism from generation to generation has always been primarily through oral training, a key element of *sampradaya*, literally, "transmission." A *sampradaya* is a living stream of tradition or theology. Hinduism may even be defined as the sum total of thousands of large and small *sampradayas*. In Auroville and the Chinmaya Mission, one can see the power of *sampradaya*, as the personal commitment of each adult member to a clear spiritual tradition provides the spark resulting in successful transmission of the sacred teachings to the youth.

In Praise of Siva's Singers

A talented *oduvār* devotes his life to preserving a two-thousand-year-old temple tradition

By ANANTHA KRISHNAN, CHENNAI

AS A FAST-SETTING SUN THROWS shadows upon the eighth-century Kapaleeshwarar Siva temple of Mylapore, local vendors hustle to finish business before another day draws to a close in the bustling South Indian seaport city of Chennai. Providing counterpoint to the clamor and confusion, the sweet tones of a soft but perfectly articulated Tamil hymn come floating through the crevices of the temple wall, entrancing those who manage to distinguish the magical lyrics over the hubbub of the city. Captivated, I step inside the temple to track the source of this heart-melting music. The all-pervasive fragrances of flowers and incense and the overlapping sounds of bells, drums, cymbals and Sanskrit chanting have no power to distract me as I wade through the milling devotees crowded around the main temple sanctum. In the divine confusion of it all, one man stands out from all of the rest. He is young—about thirty—bare-chested and clad in white. Sacred ash is smeared on all visible parts of his thin body. He is sitting before the main sanctum, singing to Lord Siva. His name is Satgurunathan Oduvar, and he is a professional temple singer.

After the puja I introduce myself to Satgurunathan and ask if we might talk. He graciously complies, and we find a quiet spot. I am eager to discover the world of *oduvārs* through his eyes and to understand why some say his quintessentially devotional mu-

sic is fading into obscurity.

The literal translation of the Tamil word *oduvār* is simply “a person who sings with great devotional reverence.” In the tradition of South India, however, this name is conferred as a title upon certain well-trained musicians, like Satgurunathan, who sing only from the *Panniru-Tirumurai*, a 12-volume collection of hymns authored by 64 famous South Indian saints who lived more than 1,000 years ago.

Rigorous training

Satgurunathan speaks to me of the rigorous training required of an *oduvār*. Each aspirant studies from a young age with a personal teacher or at a school dedicated only to this instruction. Tamil language skills and a thorough knowledge of the *Tirumurai* are essential. Most *oduvārs* are Tamil Saivite males, but there are no restrictions against women learning and performing this sacred music. “Being born into an *oduvār* lineage,” says Satgurunathan, “I was trained in music from my youth. School lessons did not interest me much. At my father’s suggestion I entered the *Thevaram* school, VS Trust, in Chidambaram, run by my uncle, Thiruvavadudurai Somasundara Desikar, who was frequently featured on radio programs. As a young boy I was greatly influenced by this popular man. I was deeply impressed by the respect he commanded wherever he went.”

Even 15 years ago, when Satgurunathan attended *Thevaram* school, the popularity

of this profession was waning. There were only seven students in his class, even though the tuition, lodging, medical assistance and food were provided for free by generous benefactors. The training was strict. During the five-year program, Satgurunathan and his fellow students received a complete training, including instruction in Pann, an ancient Tamil music system (see sidebar).

“We would begin the day by picking flowers for Lord Nataraja in the five-acre garden that grew a variety of blooms in all hues,” Satgurunathan recalls. “This would be followed by classes in music and literature that lasted all day, ending with practice sessions in the temple. These sessions helped us get over the fear of singing in public. Also, being at Chidambaram Temple and often listening to the priests chanting *Vedas* gravitated me more towards a spiritual life.”

The life of an oduvar

For the next stage of his professional development, Satgurunathan sought the promising atmosphere of a big, bright city, hoping to shape his ethereal aspirations and years of study and practice into an actual vocation. “I came to Chennai after graduating from *Thevaram* school in 1991,” he explained. “Although it was overwhelming at first, I quite naturally started to settle into a life of singing and listening to various musicians at the numerous festivals here and there. On one such occasion, the popular singer Dharmapuram Swaminathan heard my performance and strongly recommended that I take up private music lessons. That led me to B. Achutharaman, an *All India Radio* musician, who taught me South Indian classical music for three years and helped make me the performer I am today.”

.....
Singing to Siva: *The many moods of Satgurunathan Oduvar as he performs in the Kapaleeshwarar temple and in concert (opposite page)*

Singing well as an *oduvār* requires a level of talent and dedication that very few have. The life demands strict discipline in character, personal hygiene, purity, devotion and humility. “Unless we follow a strict regimen, we cannot help others in worshipping God,” says Satgurunathan. “It is such a privilege to stand in front of the Lord and sing for Him every single day. I attribute all to Him.” A strong sense of humility is essential in order to embody and project the devotional fervor of the *Tirumurai* hymns. The remarkable eloquence of this singing style, when properly performed, inspires devotion in both listener and performer.

Satgurunathan Oduvar has a no-nonsense approach to performing. He dresses simply and always wears sacred ash and the red *kumkum* dot on his forehead. He sits erect, and he begins and ends his performances promptly.

After I first heard him by chance at the Kapaleeshwarar Siva temple, I made a point of attending his performance at the Tamil Nadu Music College during the Tirumurai festival. Although he only sang three songs, the magnificence of his performance completely won me over. Since then I have listened to him at every opportunity, and over the past few years I have watched him grow dramatically as a singing artist. He has the power to enchant an audience anywhere, in India or overseas.

Satgurunathan has performed widely at festivals, temples and concert halls, including the prestigious Music Academy in Chennai. He has also performed on radio and television and has been invited to Sri Lanka three times, where his singing during a temple consecration ceremony was telecast live on Rupavahini, the national television station of Sri Lanka. He also sang in the theater production of “Sundarar,” which featured the legendary dancer, Dr. Padma Subramanyam.

The Past and Future of Thevaram

In the seventh century CE the Vedic ways of living were being lost as Buddhism and Jainism dominated South India. The lives and songs of four renowned saints—Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar—helped to revive Saivism in Tamil Nadu during the sixth to ninth centuries. Known as the four *samayacharyas*, “teachers of the faith,” these saints pilgrimaged through South India from temple to temple, 274 in

**“Because He, Sivan, within my thought abides,
By His grace alone, bowing before His feet,
With joyous thought, Sivan’s Ways of old I’ll tell
That thus my former deeds may wholly pass.”**

From the Tiruvāsagam by Manikkavasagar

all, beseeching the grace of Siva through their soul-stirring songs. The hymns of Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar are collectively referred to as the *Thevaram*; Manikkavasagar wrote and sang the *Tiruvāsagam*. Both works, scribed on *ola* leaves, form part of the *Tirumurai*.

Several centuries later, during the reign of the great emperor Rajaraja Cholan (985-1014 CE), these irreplaceable *ola* leaves were thought to be lost. Rajaraja Cholan—best known for constructing the magnificent Brihadisvara Temple in Thanjavur—made a crucial contribution to the preservation of the *samayacharyas’* hymns: he instigated a great search which finally located the precious leaf bundles, badly damaged by leaf-eating bugs, in the Nataraja temple of Chidambaram. Rajaraja Cholan had the leaves collected, cleaned and preserved, then engaged a scholarly devotee named Nambandar Nambi to compile them for posterity.

Now these songs are again facing the threat of extinction. There are only two

Thevaram schools in Tamil Nadu, both patronized by the Chettiar community. Only a few students are enrolled in these schools.

“There are about 50 *oduvārs* at temples in Tamil Nadu,” Satgurunathan says, “but the well-trained ones are few. It makes me sad that so few youth are coming forward to follow this tradition of serving God. Finance is one reason for this decline. This profession just does not pay enough for singers to be able to meet today’s living demands. I teach

about 20 students who come from different occupations: a policeman, a student, a man who works in the film industry. They are all learning purely out of their interest. No one plans to take it up as a profession. Unless the government or temples intervene, the future looks bleak. I plan to continue teaching just to keep the songs alive. Unfortunately, I don’t think that we are not going to have another Rajarajan. I hope to build my own school and offer this honey I have tasted to others until my end.”

Satgurunathan has been serving at the Kapaleeshwarar temple at Mylapore for over eight years now. Very few people come up to express appreciation for his extraordinary talent—just a handful of other similarly trained musicians who occasionally visit the temple to worship, pray and perform.

Satgurunathan Oduvar has a rare gift for this unique music. I could see him becoming popular like a Bollywood star, if only his genius could be exposed to a larger audience. If anyone has the ability to revive and re-inspire this fading tradition, it is he. But until that happens, the community of *oduvārs* need encouragement and support, financial and otherwise. How can they inspire others to a higher life if they themselves are in need of inspiration? Their gift to us is their song. Our gift to them should at least be our thanks. 



What Is Pann?

Pann is a South Indian system of music that dates back to 400 BCE. It utilizes a melodic structure that was developed by the Tamil people exclusively for performing devotional songs and preceded the development of the raga system of Carnatic music now famous in Tamil Nadu. The tones of Pann consist of what has come to be known in modern times as the pentatonic scale, which consists of five rather than seven notes per octave. This scale corresponds to the modern-day, Western major scale of seven notes, with the fourth and seventh omitted. Today, the pentatonic scale is commonly used in the Indonesian gamelan, the melodies of African-American spirituals and Celtic folk music. It has also been used by French composer Claude Debussy, as well as other Western classical composers, like Maurice Ravel and Frederic Chopin. Because of their simplicity, pentatonic scales are often used to introduce music to children.

Two Huge, Fabulous Collections: Hindu Art and 1,008 Ganeshas

HIMALAYAN ACADEMY PUBLICATIONS, now in its 46th year, has amassed an enormous archive of digital imagery. For decades the monks have photographed, scanned, collected, invented, designed, bartered and exchanged Hindu art. Working with gifted artists from India, Bali, Malaysia and anywhere talent could be found, we assembled a treasure-trove of traditional spiritual paintings and imagery. We are proud to release two royalty-free treasure chests of Hindu graphics. These resources will empower parents, teachers, web designers and communicators in passing on the great Sanatana Dharma to the next generation.

The *Hindu Art DVD* has an astonishing 4,800 images depicting Hinduism in all its glory and nuances. In this collection one finds art and illustrations of Gods, scripture, temples, beliefs, traditions, karma, dharma, saints, yoga and art created for children. Artists bring the *Vedas*, the *Puranas* and the *Holy Kural* to life with hundreds of beautiful paintings, Indian-style borders, motifs and clip art; the ten Avatars of Vishnu; the all-encompassing Pradosha Siva; Shanmugan mounting lightning-fast Mayil; the *yamas* and *niyamas*; ashtanga yoga for children and much more—all for just \$149.95.

Lord Ganesha plays a special role in this collection. An impressive 1,008 images of the much beloved one-tusked God can be found in the *Hindu Art DVD*. For those who would like to have just these images of Lord Ganesha, they are available as a single collection on a smaller, separate DVD called *1,008 Ganeshas* for \$49.95.

This royalty-free art is comprised of mostly mid-resolution files for e-mails, news bulletins, small publications, web pages, computer graphics or just for your home shrine. Over 1,000 images are high resolution, suitable for print production.

For more information and to order, see: www.hinduart.org/art/.



Hindu Art DVD, above, clockwise: Pradosha Siva Nataraja, the cover art of What Is Hinduism? book; Vishnu and the serpent Shesha; Ardhanarishwara on the DVD label; Chandra and Surya; Valli the cow; Shanmugan, six-faced Muruga.
1,008 Ganeshas, right, clockwise: Golden Vinayaka, a beautiful stone Ganesha by Indra Sharma, Dancing Ganesha, watercolor Ganesha and the Lord of Categories with His brother Karttikeya.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

USA DOCTOR GIVES LEGACY FOR VILLAGE OF HIS YOUTH

The recently retired Dr. C.K. Hiranya Gowda, 72, still seems mildly surprised that he survived his childhood. At age eight, he walked with four other children three miles each day from his village to attend middle school in Mulabagal town in Southern India. The trip entailed twice-a-day passage through a forest and occasional confrontations with cobras, bears and wild elephants. As a Mulabagal high school student, he felt fortunate to have avoided the perils of plague, cholera, small pox, diphtheria, typhoid and malaria that cut short the lives of some of his classmates.

Surviving these dangers, he studied medicine at Mysore Medical College, completing in 1960 his MBBS, the equivalent of an MD in the United States. He married Saraswathi Devi in 1961 and moved with her to the United States where he continued his medical training. A journey that started with a young child padding through an Indian rain forest led to a forty-year medical career as a teacher and practitioner of Otolaryngology, the diagnosis and treatment of ear, nose, throat, and head and neck disorders.



Dr. Gowda and wife Saraswathi

Now with his professional career behind him, Dr. Gowda and his wife continue to help children from small villages in India like his own. They have done so both directly and through a fund he and his wife have established at the Hindu Heritage Endowment. “I am very passionate about the philosophy of the Hindu religion,” Dr. Gowda said. “The Hindu scripture was given by God. But Hinduism is not monolithic. People pray in many different ways. Hinduism respects those paths.” His devotion to Hinduism continued in the United States where he became a founding member of the Hindu Cultural Center of Tennessee in 1980 and helped build the magnificent Sri Ganesha Temple in Nashville. He wanted to repair and build temples in India as well.

“In our small village we had no temple, no place to reflect together and set goals for ourselves,” he said. His plans to build a Sri Ganesha Temple in his home village of Chamaraddahally began to unfold during his annual visit in September 2006. “We held the groundbreaking ceremony with villagers and former villagers attending. Their enthusiasm was overwhelming.” The Gowdas have also funded the repair of five temples serving small villages in Mulabagal Taluk. In 1985, they underwrote the completion of a water supply system in his home village, complete with a bore well and a storage tank for the 500 villagers. “This was a preventive medicine project,” he said. “There have been almost no gastroenteritis cases in my village since then.”

Dr. and Mrs. Gowda have adopted five children in India through the Adopt-a-Child program of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, supported a variety of high schools in India, and funded student scholarships. The couple believes deeply in preserving Hindu religion and culture. Their fund at the Hindu Heritage Endowment aims to build one small Hindu temple for every five villages. “We hope to bring together successful people from these villages and encourage them to contribute financially to building these monuments to preserve Hinduism” (Contributions to HHE Fund #55 are tax-deductible for US residents). Dr. Gowda has returned to India almost every year since 1971, lecturing at medical schools and treating patients without charge. The breadth of the Gowdas’ interests is reflected in their charitable remainder trust, which lists 18 causes, from HHE, to the Red Cross, to the Nashville Rescue Mission, to the Elephant Sanctuary in Howenwald, Tennessee. The Hindu Heritage Endowment is pleased to enroll Dr. C.K. Hiranya Gowda and Saraswathi Devi Gowda as members of its Legacy Sangha which honors those who have included HHE in their estate plan. For information on bequests, charitable trusts and other estate-planning tools, contact Swami Shanmuganatha at 808-822-3012 extension 244 or hhe@hindu.org.



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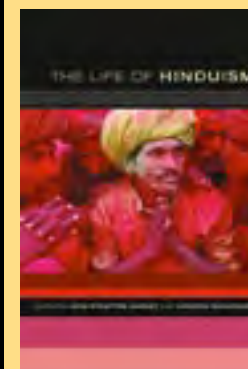
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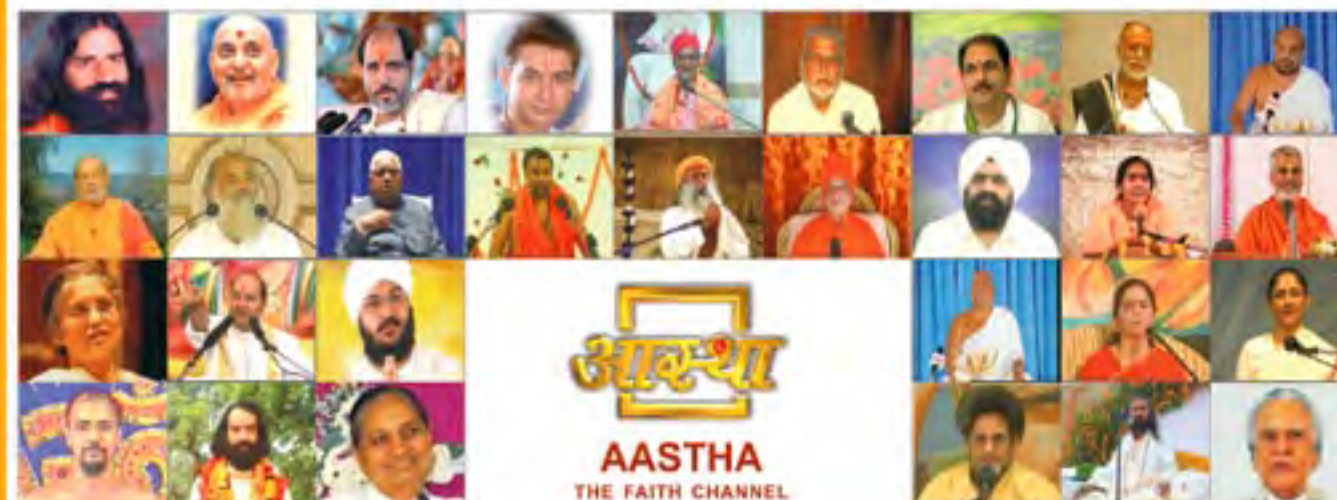
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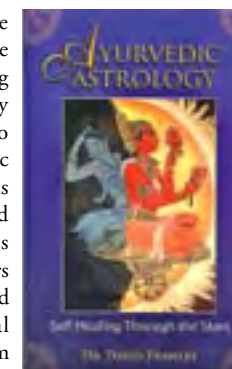
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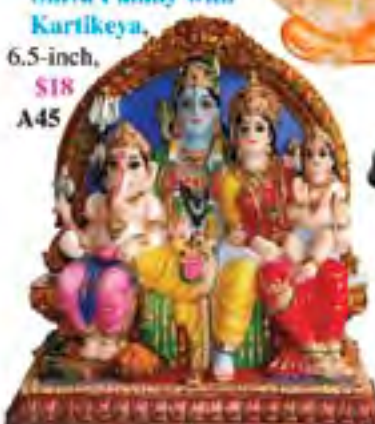
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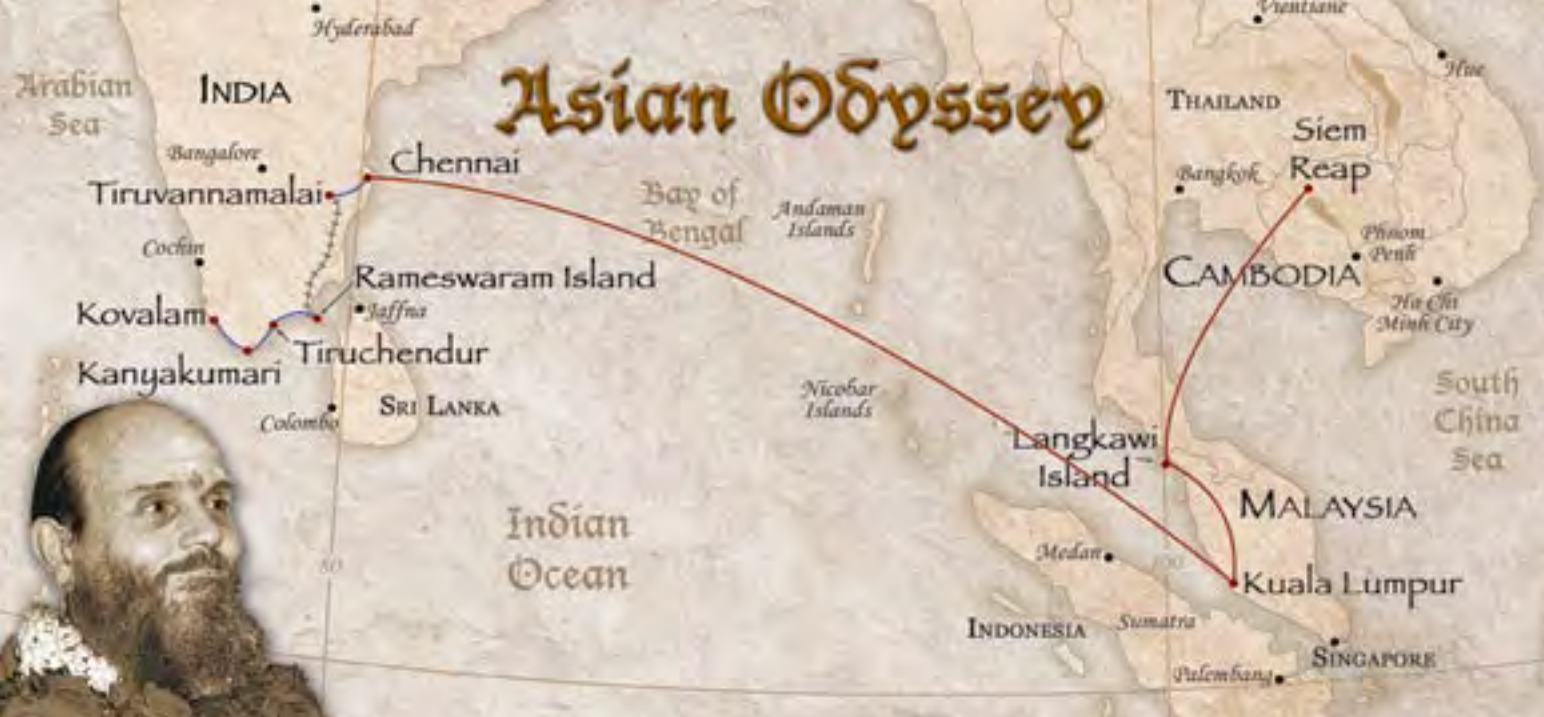


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