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Vol. XXXIX

No. 3

July - September 2019

HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest

KASHMIR

Story of Hindu Dharma: Why It Lives On

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- Engaging Hindu American Vanaprasthi for Strengthening the Next Generation
- My Journey through Greece, a Discovery of India
- Adi Shankaracharya, the Great Yogi
- Incredible Stories in Balvihar Startalk Camp to See Incredible India

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Volume XXXIX

No. 3

July-September 2019

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।
मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ।।

भगवद् गीता १५-०७

*mamaivamso jiva loke jiva bhutah sanatana
manah sasthanindriyani prakrti sthani karsati*

Bhagvad Gita 15.07

Verily the embodied living entity is my infinitesimal potency and eternal; in the world of embodied living entities the influence of the material energy is carried by the mind and the six perceptual senses

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About the HINDU VISHWA

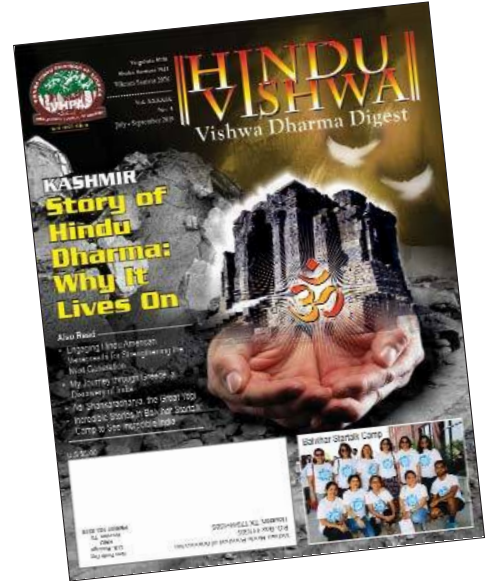
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World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), founded in 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York in 1974, is an independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in USA. It aims to build a dynamic and vibrant Hindu society rooted in the eternal values of Dharma and inspired by the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. the entire creation is one family.

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Letter to the Editor Hindu Reforms Need of the Hour

This is regarding the main article in the last issue "Hindu Reforms Need of the Hour". Though the author makes tall claims of being a practicing Hindu, a priest and a masters in Hinduism, but he seems not to have any understanding of eternal way of life that is called 'Sanatana Dharma' neither he has any understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the tradition nor of its practices and rituals.

Being eternal dharma when was it that topped reforming with times? With every epoch and age it adjusted to the life of the times. It is the only dharma that tends to Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika, Adhidharmika through pursuit of four Purushartha - Dharma, Arth, Kaam and Moksha with utmost freedom to every individual, as Ramkrishna Paramhansa stated - "Jato mat Tato path" means as many are intellects so are the ways to pursue this eternal dharma. By reforms the author wants to create a new sect, sampradaya or religion as many are floating around. Talking of creating a centralized organization like church in Hinduism will kill this eternal way of life. The article seems to have been written with an external eye on Hinduism instead of having a sympathetic view of our traditions, culture and practices.

Aniruddha. H. Mittal

Take a Look Inside ...

The Story of Hindu Dharma: Why It Lives On

COVER STORY

'THE INFIDEL NEXT DOOR' IS THE STORY OF AN INDIAN PRIEST. ADITYA IS A HINDU PRIEST WHO JOURNEYS BACK TO HIS TEMPLE AFTER HIS FOREFATHERS WERE MASSACRED THERE CENTURIES AGO. HE GOES TO REBUILD IT ONLY TO FIND THAT KASHMIR IS IN MIDST OF AN ISLAMIZATION PROCESS BY JIHADISTS AND HE IS NOT WANTED. HE HAS A CONFLICT WITH HIS NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR ANWAR, WHO WON'T LET HIM STAY THERE BECAUSE HE BELIEVES IN CREATING AN ISLAMIC KASHMIR - SAYS AUTHOR RAJAT MITRA WHILE ON A TOUR TO AMERICA.



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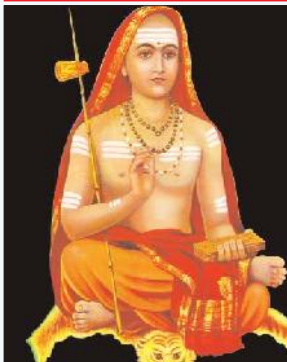


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Family Ties & Values

How often have we heard the saying that, "A family that prays together, stays together". While this statement is not meant to be taken literally, it should also not be taken lightly.

Years ago, Hindu families lived together, or near to each other, in the same village, or country, and "staying together" was never an issue. We were taught that 'Hinduism' is a way of life, and that family ties and values were significant and meant a lot. Then, the west was 'discovered'. And, because the west offered better opportunities for higher education and lifestyle, many left their homelands, to travel to the west, in pursuit of the higher education, and to live better lives.

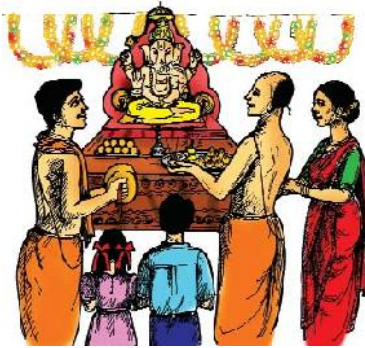
This led to high levels of emigration from the homelands, to different countries, mostly North America, and also, separation of families. Many who came to North America did not return home after studies, as was expected, and parents did not see them for years after years. During the 50's, 60's, and even the 70's, communications were limited, and, it was not so easy to maintain the culture, religious practices, and diets, that were familiar to them. It was not easy to get ingredients for puja and worship, nor the spices, fruits and vegetables that we were used to having. But, through dedication and perseverance, the culture and religion continued to grow, and temples, and, Hindu Institutions, began to appear in North America. The family ties and

values prevailed.

Later on, thanks to immigration policies, and improvements in transportation, communication and finances, communications became easier; and, people could travel around the world, and migrate to different countries, making it easier for families to reunite. As they migrated to the west, they brought along their values, lifestyle, culture, and practices of the east, with them. They reconnected with their children, and the Hindu customs, and culture began to evolve in the west. Hindu Temples and community halls were built to facilitate worship, and social activities, and before you know it, the Hindu religion and culture propagated throughout the western world. Families were reunited, and ties were reconnected. Familiar foods became available, values were reinstated, and customs openly practiced.

Today, the Hindu family ties and values are alive, and vibrant, even in the western world, and the teachings of our Gurus and our Scriptures, continue to propagate. Although we have adopted some of the western ways, as some of them have adopted our ways, we should all be proud that Hindu Dharma is vibrant, and alive, and, our traditions and values continue to pave the way for healthy, happy and prosperous way of life, forever!

Editorial



Reply to Hindu Reforms and Protecting Our Gurus



"Hindu Reforms and Protecting Our Gurus" article in the last issue of Hindu Vishwa (April-June) by Jayant Mehta and Rajiv Malhotra are eye openers for the Hindus all over the world, but in particular in USA. As per Mr. Mehta's summary "Hinduism needs to be simplified. Truth about history and mythology must be told. We are to offend the leaders of different Sampradayas (sects), so we remain silent. This creates multiple contradictions and Confusions. New generation wants logical, simple and honest religion". In the last paragraph, Mr. Malhotra says

Letter to the Editor

"Most important of all Hindus must stop being internally divisive. There is too much emphasis on trying to falsify another guru's philosophy, rituals and practices" Both articles bring out the same problem e.g. internal divisions in Hinduism. I have lived in USA for last about 50 years and we were more united when there were only ISKCON Hindu temples at that time. The more waves of Hindus came to USA, the encouraged their own sects as well as lingual divisions. I know some leaders avoid visiting temples of other Hindu sects. I urge VHPA to take a lead in (1) uniting the Hindus in USA and (2) outreach second generation Hindus, majority of whom do not understand the language of the temple priests. We also need to ask from a dozen Indian US Congressmen, how many attend Hindu temples?

Bal K. Gupta,

Author "Forgotten Atrocities: memoirs of A Survivor of 1947 Partition of India"

By Dr. Bhakti Modi

On Saturday, June 1st, 2019, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America hosted the Hindu American Vanaprasthi (Senior Adults) Network (HAVAN) Conference at the Hindu Temple of Minnesota (HSMN- Hindu Society of Minnesota) in Maple Grove, MN. The one-day conference brought in speakers from several states: Minnesota, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, Washington, and

Pennsylvania.

The local team, led by President Vallabha Tantry, included many volunteers and youth. This team did a wonderful job of accommodating attendees, volunteers, speakers and members of the HSMN Senior Enrichment Services. The feedback from the conference was very positive. Many people who attended for the first time were impressed and appreciative of the variety of topics and speakers. Most sessions included some questions and answers, which led to productive conversations with the panel of speakers. This led to informal and open discussion within the audience after the sessions were over.

The conference had seven sessions. During the inauguration, Vishal Agarwal, MN led the keynote address with his perspective on approaching the vanaprasthi stage, focusing more on spiritual activities, living an active life for the community, and continuing to learn & evolve. Many speakers in the conference talked about Jiv Yatra (the 4 stages of life), and how goals, perspectives, and actions need to change during vanaprasthi stage. Kumar Dave, IN, also approached the idea of an adjusted "practical" Jiv Yatra, where, in this day and age, instead of 4 stages, there are 3 stages: 0-30, 30-65, 65-100.

In the session "Identifying Core Areas



Deep Prajvalan by Dr. Dash & HAVAN team

Engaging Hindu American **Vanaprasthi** for Strengthening the Next Generation





Local MN & HAVAN National team

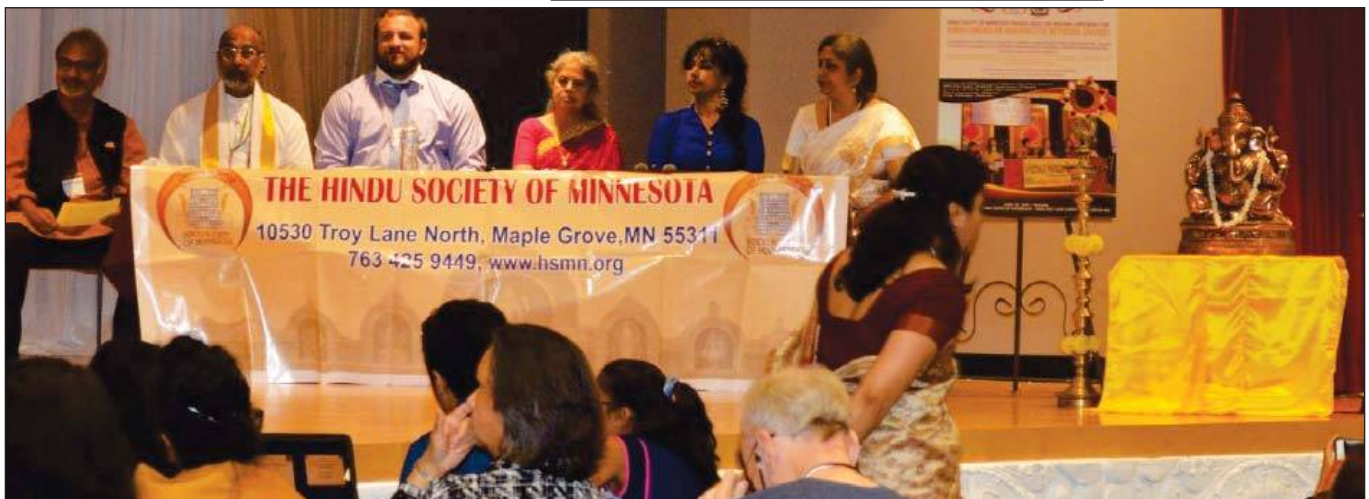
of Engagement" speakers talked about what kind of social and networking programs can be introduced for vanaprasthis. An example of this is HSMN's Social Enrichment Services program, where seniors can regularly meet and interact informally, and for formal events. Baskar Gopalan, MN, spoke about how social media can positively influence networking, engagement, and knowledge sharing. The conference also had some informational sessions about the healthcare system (Medicare and payer services) and understanding the care

and legal needs of the aging population.

The speakers in "Current Challenges and Resolution" session talked about how the approach to a fulfilling life comes from good mental and physical health. "Don't do what you like, like what you do." -Pt. Ram Hardowar, NY. The panel speakers also discussed the importance of good company and avoiding loneliness. It is also important to know specifics about care and the healthcare industry, as these issues can cause additional stress on the vanaprasthi and their



"Roles of Vanaprasthi Women" Session Speakers



"Current Challenges" Session Speakers



"Vanaprasthi & Youth" Panel Speakers

family members. Jaya Asthana, MA, discussed the significance of advance directives, and approaching mental health and care during end of life.

The "Roles of Vanaprasthi Women" was led by a group of women from across the country who shared their perspective on raising children, being leaders, leading families, and being productive members of society. Rama Lingampally, WI, talked about how women work hard to teach children how to adapt and grow in this world. Satya Balroop, MN, presented the arsenals of feminine power as the 4 B's: Brains, Brawns, Beauty, and Bhakti. Nagalatha Murali, MN, and Radha

"I gained a tremendous amount of unbiased knowledge seeding from Hindu scriptures to naturopathy. I definitely went home with much more than what I had come in with."

- Dr. Rewati Teerpati

Hardwar, NY, gave their perspective of staying involved and understanding of their position as women in priest families.

The "Vanaprasthis & Youth: Learning From Each Other" comprised of local youth of ages 11-30. Aayush Goud led off the session with a talk on how technology can be used as a medium to bridge the gap between the generations by developing mentorship programs in local communities and temples. Sarang and Siddhi Tantry gave a presentation on their perspective and advantages of growing up with a grandparent in the home. The panel discussion resulted in a valuable conversation, led by Ankush & Bhakti Modi, on the importance of vanaprasthis' involvement in the local community, news, and politics, as much as they are with what is happening in



Conference Attendees at HSMN



Dance Performances

India. This is one of the best ways to connect and communicate with younger generations.

The conference culminated with a summary and 'next steps' by Sanjay Mehta, PA. The HAVAN conference goals will include programs to help transition into a life of service and wisdom (with a focus on happiness), enhancing roles of vanaprasthi women, using social media to provide seminars/trainings/sessions, using technology to bridge the experiences between vanaprasthi and youth, and increasing home visits and multigenerational interactions. The conference wrapped up with a beautiful Odissi performances by Arpita

Ganguly and group.

The conference, as a whole, was a major success. The collaboration of the national team, led by Vinod Gupta, PA, and the local HSMN group resulted in a very well-planned and well-executed day.



About the Author

Bhakti Modi,
Hindu Society of Minnesota, Maple Grove, MN



Conference at Hindu Temple of MN

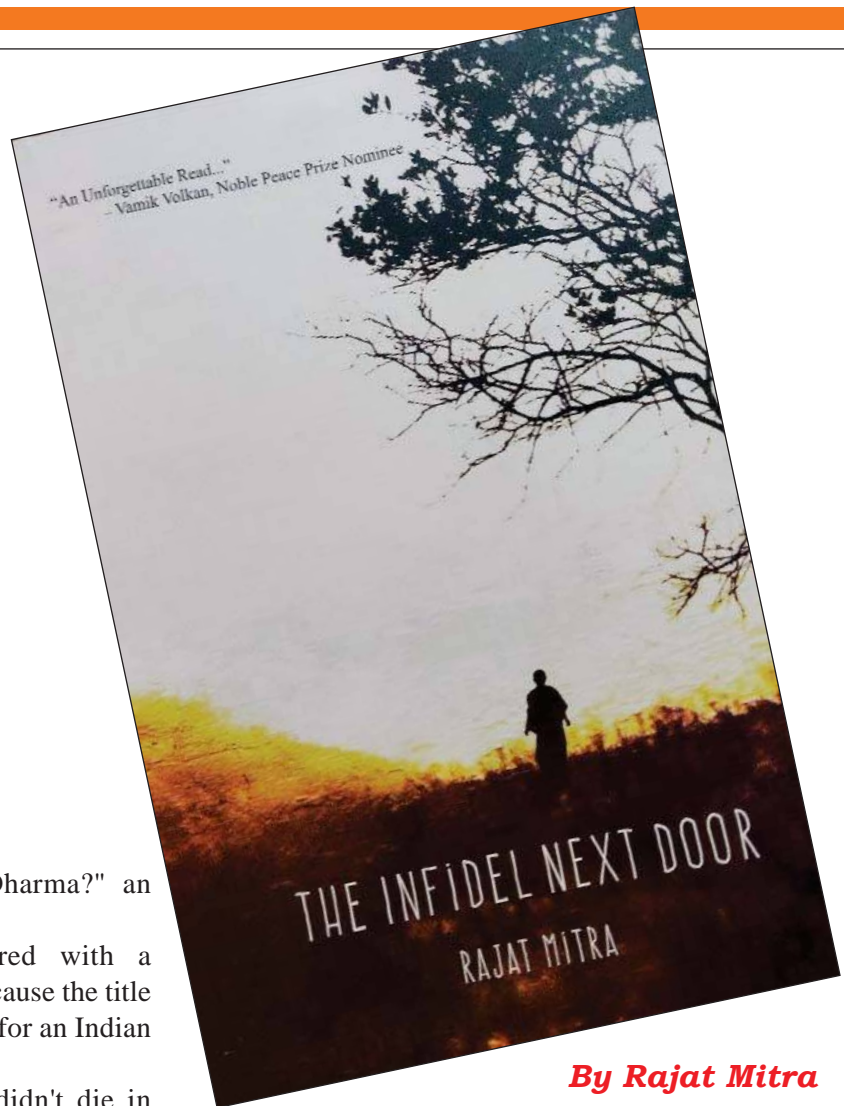
The Story of Hindu Dharma: Why It Lives On

"So, is this a novel about Hindu Dharma?" an American lady asked me looking at the title.

She was a senior lady, grey haired with a distinguishing look. "I came for the talk because the title interested me and I thought it was unusual for an Indian author to write about."

"My book tells why Hindu Dharma didn't die in Kashmir like other religions died in other lands which Islam conquered. It tells why it survived and resisted attempts to destroy it through its characters," I told her. "I am on a book tour of America, having been invited by my American friends who after reading my novel 'The Infidel Next Door' arranged a tour to different cities to share how Hindus survived repeated assaults on their civilization."

The woman smiled. "I have been to India several times. I read 'Siddhartha' by Hermann Hesse and 'The Razor's Edge' by Somerset Maugham and almost every book on India. India fascinates me," she said.



By Rajat Mitra

"My book is the story of an Indian priest. Aditya is a Hindu priest who journeys back to his temple after his forefathers were massacred there centuries ago. He goes to rebuild it only to find that Kashmir is in midst of an Islamization process by jihadists and he is not wanted. He has a conflict with his next door neighbor Anwar, who won't let him stay there because he believes in creating an Islamic Kashmir."

"Does your book say why Muslims find it difficult to stay in peace with non-Muslims?" she asked.

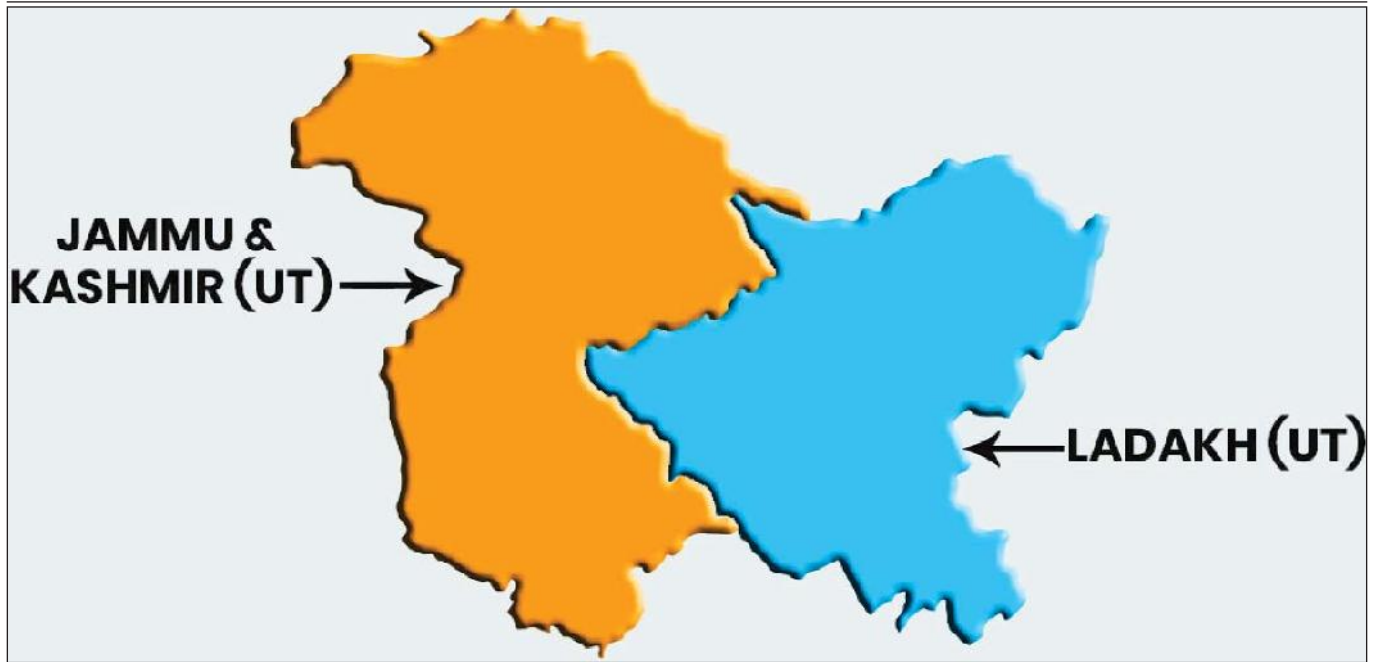
"Yes, it does," I answered taken aback by the directness. "My book also tries to answer about future of Muslims and their relationship with others in India and the world."

"Does your book say about iconoclasm in India?"

"Yes, it does and also tells the impact of destruction of temples on the Hindu psyche."

"How did you do your research?"

I went and talked to priests of temples whose temples were desecrated in medieval times, used oral history from people. I worked for years in the Kashmiri refugee camps and with stone throwers of Kashmir and terrorists



in Tihar prisons in Delhi."

"Were a lot of temples destroyed in India?" she asked.

"Yes, they were. The trauma of it has begun to emerge now," I answered.

"I am not surprised. It is high time the Indian people asked questions about their civilization."

"Thanks for saying this. You are the first one to say it in this trip. Most criticize the Hindus for intolerance and bigotry."

"I would imagine so," she answered and picked up my book. "Do you know I have actually seen a temple being burnt down?"

"Where did you see that?" I asked.

"I was in Bangladesh where my husband was posted. I actually saw a riotous mob once burn down a Hindu temple. It was a horrible sight. I couldn't watch it. I sometimes wonder how you Hindus faced it. Anyway, good luck with your book. I have taken a lot of your time. It is a courageous step to write on such a subject." She got the book autographed by me and left.

"How did you Hindus face it?" Her question had left me in a pensive mood. Not so long ago I had learnt that the Birla temple in Delhi was built after a period of almost thousand years.

The fear that Hindus felt for centuries to not build another magnificent temple of the kind that existed in the past, has it left our psyche or does it still live like a shadow, a remnant of another era in us? As a psychologist who has studied fear and how it is transferred through generations in societies, I believe it still exists deep down and we need to understand it rather than live in denial.

One wonders what it must have been for Hindus of

medieval times to see their temples, numbering in thousands, being brought down, and destroyed in front of their eyes. How did it feel to gather around and see the Mughal forces bring down the magnificent temple? Did they not feel angry or felt deeply fragmented to see their cultural centers and peace destroyed?

There are no written accounts from those times about those events. Writing was prohibited in those times and brought instant beheading. Hindus stored it inside and passed it on in silence.

I talked to several priests whose temples had faced desecration and whose ancestors were in charge then. They could trace their lineage to past fifteen to twenty generations. One such priest told me he recalls being told how his ancestor had wrapped his arms around the Shivling and not let it go, preferring his attacker to cut his hand with a sword rather than separate him from his beloved deity. Another priest told me he finds it very difficult to look at the minarets of a mosque next door that were built after destroying the original temple.

The priests of our ancient temples may have played an important role in preserving the Hindu dharma which is not so well known to the present generation weighing under the onslaught of secular historians and have forgotten their contribution. My novel is the story of one such priest through whose eyes the struggle that Hindu Dharma faced in medieval times to preserve its precious heritage can be read about.

Bruno Bettelheim, the Jewish psychiatrist, once famously said, "What cannot be talked about can also not be put to rest and if it is not, the wounds continue to fester from generation to generation." He had said it in reference to those societies that have gone through

Around 50,000 temples closed over years in Kashmir, survey ordered

Will restore 50k vandalised temples in J&K: Minister

Bengaluru: The Union Government is set to reopen about 50,000 temples and several schools, which were shut in the Kashmir Valley. The Government will also revive and open up cinema theatres shut down years ago on the dictates of the militants.

Elaborating on the development plan laid out for J&K, to be changed into two Union Territories effectively from October 31-Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy on Monday said the Central Government is focused on unleashing new activities in J&K and elections will be held there once the situation returns to normalcy.

The Minister said a survey of about 50,000 temples that are shut in Jammu & Kashmir will be done while plans are also on to open cinema theatres there.

“Assembly elections will also be held as soon as things are normal. We have successfully conducted sarpanch elections, now we will conduct block development council elections by November or December and then we will conduct district development council election. This will give a push to our development plan for Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh,” Reddy said in Bengaluru. Speaking to reporters, he said the newly elected sarpanchs will be trained in implementing new acts, schemes and developmental work. “In Kashmir Valley many schools are shut for several years now. They will be reopened in the days to come. About 50,000 temples are closed, some are 90 per cent destroyed, and those temples will be surveyed. There are no cinema theatres in the Valley. They are shut for many years. Plan is on to open them,” he added.

The Centre had recently scrapped special status to Jammu & Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution. Pointing out that two Union Territories will come into force from October 31, coincides with birth anniversary of Sardar Patel, he said Lt Governors will be appointed to them. Listing out various initiatives taken up by the Government in Jammu & Kashmir, he said, “Five youths from each village will be given Government employment based on merit. Also, recruitment will be made into the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, CRPF, BSF among other others. Central Government departments have been asked to prepare an action plan for development of J&K.”



enslavement, annihilation and genocide. Seeing that people in those societies chose to keep quiet about their experiences of facing annihilation, it is important that the descendants of the survivors speak about the experiences of their ancestors believing that talking about it will release the society from the chains of memory that binds them.

Today, from researches we know that trauma is passed through epigenetic transmission across generations and lives as powerful as ever in the collective memory of the society. That is what explains why the memory of Hindus around Ram Janma Bhumi hasn't weakened a bit even after five hundred years.

Hindu society has turned into a land of silence in the last few centuries. Invasions and colonialism have reduced us to a land of discontinuity. Bharat that lived in a civilizational continuity for thousands of years had to face a barbarism it was not prepared for and dealt with without sacrificing its deepest core principles.

Hindu Dharma exists deep within our hearts, while

having been exterminated with its most visible symbols, its temples. Hindu society became a society of forgetting and not that of keeping its memories intact, something that the present generation needs to do through the rejuvenation of its memory, of its past to keep it alive.

The silence that dots our land tells a story that is telling. It is the story of sacrifice, of courage taught by Sri Krishna and can be listened to if we listen to that voice. My book tries to capture that voice that can be heard in the air of Kashmir and the breeze that flows from its mountains.

About the Author



Rajat Mitra

is a Psychologist, Speaker and Author of
'The Infidel Next Door'

www.rajatmitra.co.in

The book is available on Amazon.

World Hindu Council of America Holds its 4th Hindu Heritage Day in New Jersey

The New Jersey chapter of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) held its 4th annual Hindu Heritage Day on Saturday., June 15, 2018 at the Hindu Community Center in Kearny, NJ. The event attracted hundreds of attendees throughout the day, and was recognized by the State of New Jersey for its contributions to the NJ community.

VHPA organizes this event every year to celebrate the diverse culture of Bharat through a fusion of music, dance, food and cultural activities. This year the festival was themed "The Contribution of the American Hindu". It featured beautiful cultural program, children's quiz on Hindu heritage, an inspiring Poster Competition, a College Admissions Panel with students from Ivy League universities, delicious food prepared on-site by the VHPA volunteers as well as young children games and other fun activities.

The event was made even more special by the recognition received from the State of New Jersey. Indeed, the joint legislative assembly of the State of NJ formally declared June 15, 2019 as the official Hindu Heritage Day. The state proclamation and the letter from the Hon. Governor Bill Murphy can be viewed on our website (www.vhpanj.org).

The event was a smashing success. Local vendors and sponsors enjoyed the community exposure, and attendees commented that program was engaging and well-run. Numerous volunteers, along with a core Planning Committee, joined forces to make sure the event ran smoothly.

"The Cultural Program was the main attraction and featured youth performances in music, dance, and theatre. The Children's Quiz challenged students on their knowledge of Hindu history, with prizes for the winning team.

A Poster Competition was held in the main hall, with 15 beautifully-designed entries on the contributions of the Hindus in America. Cash prizes from \$75 to \$350 were awarded.

A special feature this year was the College Admissions Panel where a number of students from prestigious universities like Harvard University, Princeton University, and the University of Oxford, answered audience questions and gave their perspectives on the college admissions process.

"VHPA wants to provide today's youth with a platform to exhibit their talent and skills and connect these second-generation youth and their families with their rich heritage," says Brahm Sharma, President of the NJ Chapter.

Arun Joshi, Secretary of the NJ Chapter, adds, "By making HHD an annual event, we want to help the public understand cherished Hindu values and various aspects of the vibrant Indian tradition."

Dr. Jai Bansal, the national Governing Council member, pointed out, "Features like the poster competition act as a catalyst for our youth and their families to collaboratively explore their heritage and the richness of their cultural roots."

In the future, the organizers of this event plan to bring an even more diverse crowd to the event, especially youth and those curious about Hinduism. They look forward to expanding the event to include more activities and attractions, while inviting more youth to perform in the cultural program and to volunteer at the event.





Incredible Stories in Balvihar Startalk Camp to See Incredible India

By Smita Daftardar

The VHPA Balvihar Hindi School conducted yet another successful STARTALK Summer Immersion Hindi Language Camp, held at Lakeside Middle School

in Forsyth County, in June 2019. The 3-week blended online and face-to-face camp has been serving the Greater Atlanta community, especially the Indian diaspora, for close to a decade now. STARTALK is a federally funded initiative of the National Security Agency that offers immersion camps for World Languages across the US. The objective of the camp is to teach learners to speak, read and write Hindi, in an activity based, learner-centered environment that encourages students to learn the language by using it, based on the philosophy of "learn by doing."

The Balvihar STARTALK camp strives to teach students Hindi language as well as the associated Indian culture and traditions. In today's global world, intercultural competence is the new buzz word - the ability to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, in a manner that demonstrates knowledge and respect for their language and culture. To achieve this objective, the camp



curriculum and instruction is planned in accordance with the 2014 World-Readiness Standards For Language Learning and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines. What this means for the language learners, is that they learn the language such that they can communicate in real-world situations, in authentic language, and in a socially and culturally acceptable manner.



Every year, the camp is based on an interesting theme that is relevant to kids. This year, the theme was "Incredible India through its Incredible Stories." Stories provide an exquisite window into any culture; they are an entertaining and engaging means for learning the social, religious and historical aspects of the target culture. Stories provide a context to the language being learned, an approach that studies have shown to be highly effective in learning a new language. The cultural or historical context provided by the stories serves as a vehicle for language learning; the stories also teach the values and virtues ingrained in the Indian society. This

year, over the course of the camp, students read and watched stories from Panchtantra and PuraNas, and legendary Indian kings from Medieval India. Enrollment in the camp did not mandate any prior knowledge of Hindi, however, students were grouped as beginner, intermediate and advanced, based on their knowledge of the Hindi language. This ensured that all students learned at their highest level.

The beginner class watched the famous Panchtantra story about the little mouse who was turned into a girl by a sage, and turned down powerful suiters like the Surya Dev and Varun Dev, and ultimately married the mouse





king. This story gives the important message of being aware of one's roots, and of appreciating our true identity, which is especially relevant to the young children of Indian origin, growing up in the American culture, who need to feel comfortable about their roots. The story may also be used as an example of women empowerment prevalent since ancient times in India, to dispel the myths about "forced marriages" as perceived by the Western cultures. From a linguistic point of view, the richness of the characters and the setting provided many opportunities for learning the Hindi language. The intermediate students read and watched the pauranik katha of Dhruv, the son of King Uttanpaad, who attained the position of the "Dhruv Tara." Through the story of "Dhruv Tara" students learned the importance of goal

setting, perseverance and steadfastness, as well as negative and positive character traits. Students were also introduced to the STEM related facts about the North Star, in Hindi, to extend their knowledge of Hindi to other disciplines as well. The third group of students, at a higher level of proficiency than the rest of the campers, read and watched the stories of Raja Bhoj, starting with the legend of Raja Vikramaditya's throne, famously known as "Sinhaasan Batteesi." These stories provide valuable life-lessons, while defining the characteristics of a good leader. Apart from this, students were amazed by the scientific and engineering acumen of Raja Bhoj, available in the historical account of the innovations carried out during his reign. Since this group of students already had a good knowledge of Hindi, this camp



helped them learn a higher register of Hindi, using metaphors and idioms to make their language more refined. As the final product of the camp, students created their own storybooks and presented these stories in the form of a play or a puppet show, or a short movie.

The STARTALK summer camp is a full day camp, and is packed with a variety of activities to keep the students engaged throughout the day. A typical time-table for the day included classroom sessions, an hour of sports, a Yog session led



by a certified Yog instructor, language games, computer based activities, Hindi movie time during lunch and an hour-long club. The classroom sessions followed Project Based Learning, and activities were designed so that learners got to use the language in meaningful ways. The sports hour included Indian games such as *kabaddi*, *kho-kho*, *saakhali* etc. Students participated in three different clubs during the camp - arts and craft, science & environment, and food club. In both the arts & craft, and the science club, students completed projects related to the theme, taking care to use mostly recycled material. This year, students built a small planetarium, made the "Surya-Yantra", and created cloth puppets. They also made a deck of playing cards that they played with, in class. All these activities, while being hands-on, helped them learn Hindi in a variety of contexts, making it both fun and educational. In the food club, students tried their hand at preparing a variety of Indian snacks and traditional drinks, such as *Kachchhi Dabeli*, chocolate *laddoos* and *Aam Pana*. The food club is always a popular activity among students, and is also a great way to learn a language in action.

One of the greatest attractions of the camp, undoubtedly, is the delicious, authentic Indian food served to the campers. Students get to experience the amazing culinary diversity of India, from Kachori-Aloo ki Subzi to Idli-Sambar, and popular street foods such as Pav-Bhaji & Pani-Puri. A common complaint among Indian parents, that kids prefer non-Indian foods like Pizza and Pasta, seems to disappear in the camp setting. Preserving and appreciating Indian food habits is

definitely an integral part of the objective of the camp, because culinary identity is one of the most important aspects of one's cultural identity and needs to be consciously preserved.

The Balvihar Hindi School STARTALK summer camp, is the culmination of a joint effort of a dedicated team of educators. The camp was led by Manju Tiwariji in the role of Director, and a team of teachers, trained by Startalk professionals. Most of this team is also part of the Balvihar volunteer team, teaching year-round in the Balvihar Hindi School. The teachers were assisted in class by teaching assistants, Balvihar and Startalk alumni who are currently high school seniors or college students. The presence of these young adults in leadership roles was beneficial for students as well as the TAs themselves and provided positive reinforcement for learning Hindi. The camp administration was run by Vivek Patel, a young and dynamic entrepreneur, another Balvihar and Startalk Alumni, who has been part of Startalk for an extended period. The food was managed by Lata Chatkaraji, a long-term volunteer with the Balvihar team, who kept the students well-fed with wholesome breakfast, lunch and tiffin. A dedicated team of student volunteers helped with the smooth running of the camp. The camp was very well received by the families of participants, and got excellent ratings from the team of observers from STARTALK. The VHPA Balvihar Hindi School team is geared up for another exciting camp in the summer of 2020.



Adi Shankaracharya, the Great Yogi



Shankaracharya, or Adi Shankara the teacher, is one of the greatest spiritual masters in the history of India. Shankara has often been called the greatest philosopher of India, if not of all time and the entire world. His teaching is highly rational, clear and concise, as well deeply mystical, unfolding all the mysteries of Self, God, the universe, the Absolute and immortality. Most of what today is called Advaita (non-dualistic) Vedanta reflects the mark of his insights. He is the main classical teacher of the Advaita Vedanta tradition.

Shankara's greatness has been hailed by such monumental modern gurus of India as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Ramana Maharshi, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Paramahansa Yogananda, to name a few. In fact, most of what Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta taught as Advaita is pure Shankara Advaita. Perhaps more notably, most of the original Yoga that came to the West starting with Vivekananda was styled "Yoga-Vedanta," reflecting Shankara's influence, and aimed at Self-realization through meditation, not simply at skill in asana practice. Indeed

By Dr. David Frawley
(Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

Shankara has been a more dominant figure than Patanjali for these great Yoga-Vedanta masters and for India as a whole historically. He has been regarded as a veritable manifestation of Lord Shiva, the king of the Yogis himself, evidenced by his name Shankara, which is one of the main names for Shiva as well.

Shankara is the main traditional teacher of Jnana Yoga or the "Yoga of Knowledge," which is usually regarded as the highest yogic path. Even Patanjali states that liberation or Self-realization is gained by knowledge, not by any other means and makes Yoga a means of achieving that higher knowledge. Shankara's many written works, including extensive commentaries on the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma Sutras, and shorter philosophical works like Vivekachudamani or the Crest Jewel of Discrimination remain the core teachings behind Jnana Yoga even today.

However, people tend to forget that Shankara was a great Raja Yogi as well, one of the greatest of all time.

Shankara discusses all the main aspects of Raja Yoga in his different books and shows he knew the secrets of the chakras, mantra, pranayama, concentration and meditation, as well as the intricacies of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the highest yogic state. Shankara's great poem Saundarya Lahiri or the Wave of Bliss remains the most famous work of Tantric Yoga and Shakti Sadhana reflecting all the secrets of Sri Vidya, mantra, yantra and Tantra.

In addition, Shankara composed beautiful chants to the Hindu Gods and Goddesses that remain repeated and sung today probably more than any other poet. These include chants to Shiva, Sundari, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Rama, Krishna and Ganesha. In these hymns he shows that he also mastered all the intricacies of Bhakti Yoga or the Yoga of Devotion and was not a mere dry philosopher. The musical cadence of some of his chants like Shivo'ham, or "I am Shiva," has entered into the western kirtan movement as well.

Shankara is usually dated to the eighth century by western scholars but is placed much earlier by most Indian scholars. Though he lived only to the short age of 32, he left a legacy of teachings, temples and lineages that affected the whole of India and marked an entire era.

Shankara's Non-dualistic Raja Yoga

It is often highlighted, particularly by academics, that Shankara does refute Samkhya-Yoga philosophy, particularly in his commentaries on Vedic texts, and so appears to be against Yoga. This is a misunderstanding. It is not the practice of Yoga overall that Shankara criticizes but the ideas of Purusha and Prakriti as separate realities and that the Purushas are many, which do occur in Samkhya and Yoga Sutra philosophy. Counter to these ideas, Shankara proclaims Kevala Advaita or pure unity as the highest reality instead.

Shankara has a slightly different view of Raja Yoga than the philosophy of Samkhya or Patanjali, and teaches his own system of Raja Yoga based upon Advaita or the non-dualistic view. It is not Yoga per se that Shankara refutes, but simply the dualistic aspects of Samkhya and Yoga philosophy, which are arguably not their real implication, or necessary for the practice of Yoga overall, which after all aims at unity consciousness. Shankara never criticizes the Yoga of Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita but promotes it strongly.

Specifically, Shankara taught a fifteen-fold Raja Yoga in his important short work Aparokshanubhuti. Aparoksha refers to the knowledge gained by direct perception in consciousness itself, which is beyond both reason and sensory perception. Anubhuti is the experience of that from moment to moment as the ground of one's own being. This is the knowledge born of Samadhi that is the highest form of knowledge.

Shankara's fifteen-fold Yoga combines Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga rather than the physical practices of Hatha Yoga. This fifteen-fold Raja Yoga of Shankara is quite advanced, even for advanced Yogis. There may be not a single person in the world, much less in the West, who can follow it directly without already having undergone considerable training and preliminary support practices. We are not necessarily recommending that the ordinary Yoga student take up Shankara's Raja Yoga as their primary practice, but rather to use it to see greater depths of Yoga that remain far beyond what modern Yoga has become, particularly in its commercial and exercise approaches. Shankara takes the main outer practices and techniques of Yoga and replaces them with inner meditational ways or ways of Self knowledge or the realization of non-duality.

The following is a translation and short commentary of the portion of Aparokshanubhuti that deals with Raja Yoga, which also occurs in the Tejobindu Upanishad. The Sanskrit idiom is at times terse and difficult to be literal with, so I have in places opted for a degree of simplification, as well as including in brackets some important Sanskrit terms. Shankara's Yogataravalli and Saundarya Lahiri have similar ideas. We begin with a few verses earlier on in the text to put it into context.



The Importance of Vichara or Inquiry

Jnana Yoga or the Yoga of Knowledge is based upon deep thought, observation and inquiry (vichara). This is also the background of Shankara's Raja Yoga, without which one cannot understand it. Shankara states:

11. Without inquiry (*vichara*) there is no knowledge, which is not gained by any other means, just as an object is revealed only by light and not by anything else.

12. "Who am I? How did this world come into being? Who is its creator? What is its material cause?" This inquiry is of that kind.

13. "I am not the body which is a collection of the elements, nor am I the conglomerate of the sense organs. I am distinct from all that." This inquiry is of that kind.

14. "Everything arises through ignorance and is dissolved by knowledge. The different thoughts are the creator of all this." This inquiry is of that kind.

15. "Of all this universe, the material cause is the One subtle unchangeable being, just as one finds pots made of clay." This inquiry is of that kind.

16. "I am the One, subtle knower, witness and unchangeable being, of that there is no doubt." This inquiry is of that kind.

Yoga is a means of gaining this higher knowledge, a practice called Sadhana in Sanskrit. In this regard, Yoga consists of two factors:

■ The first is outer practices to purify the body and the

mind so that they have the capacity to gain the higher knowledge. This consists of the outer limbs and practices of Yoga as Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, and Pratyahara, as well as the preparatory practices and sattvic life-style necessary to even begin the practice of Yoga.

■ The second consists of Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi (yogic Samyama as all three together) as developing the higher knowledge through deep meditation. However, it must be noted that the yogic Samadhi or Samyama can be used for lesser goals than the higher Self-knowledge (Atma-Vidya or Purusha-vidya), but that is another issue and is not the true goal of Yoga.

Shankara and Jnana Yoga bring clarity to the higher goal of Yoga. Shankara states that Self-realization requires knowledge, not merely Samadhi, and that this knowledge rests upon inquiry or vichara, which is a higher mental activity, not simply actions like asana or pranayama, which have value more for

purifying the mind and body than for the direct realization of the Self. This means that one can practice asana and pranayama forever and still not gain liberation, though these practices may aid with physical health and psychological well-being. We must move beyond them to a deeper meditation.

Even meditation cannot bring us Self-realization unless it is allied with a deeper inquiry or vichara, meaning meditation on the Self, rather than on other objects or ideas. On the other hand, without deep meditation, vichara or inquiry is not enough either, as it can remain merely at a conceptual level. In this regard Shankara teaches his fifteen-fold Raja Yoga to aid in the realization of the knowledge generated by vichara or inquiry, and as a deeper level of inquiry. Clearly the role of knowledge and vichara has not been given its proper central place in most of modern Yoga. Shankara teaches us how to bring it back.

★★★

Shankara's Fifteen-fold Raja Yoga

100. I will declare a fifteen limbed Yoga, for the

accomplishment of the Self-knowledge taught in the previous verses. These should be practiced by all as a meditative inquiry (Nididhyasana).

The previous part of the text deals with the knowledge of Advaita or non-duality. This section provides a Yoga sadhana or practice to help reveal that knowledge, without which it is likely to remain only a theory. Meditative inquiry or *Nididhyasana* is the third aspect of *Advaitic* practice following receptive listening (Shravana) and deep contemplation (*Manana*). In the following verses Shankara provides a complete structure or system for its practice.

101. Without continual practice (*nitya abhyasa*), there is no attainment of the Self of Being and Consciousness (*Sacchidatman*). Therefore, those aspiring to the truth should continually meditate upon Brahman for their highest good.

102-103. *Yama, Niyama, Renunciation (Tyaga), Non-speaking (Mauna), Place (Desha), Time (Kala), Asana, Mulabandha, Balance of Body (Dehasamyam), Fixing of the Gaze (Drik Sthithi), Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Atma-Dhyana, and Samadhi* are the various limbs of this Yoga in order.

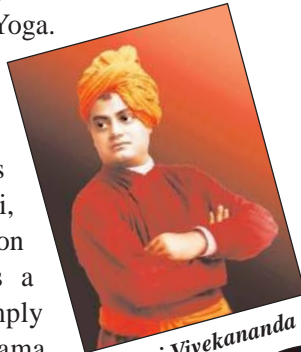
Classical Yoga also emphasizes continual practice, meaning the practice to control the mind through discrimination and detachment. Shankara adds several other limbs or aspects to the eight of *Ashtanga Yoga*, which reflect other important yogic concerns.

104. "Everything is Brahman (*sarvam Brahma*):" from that

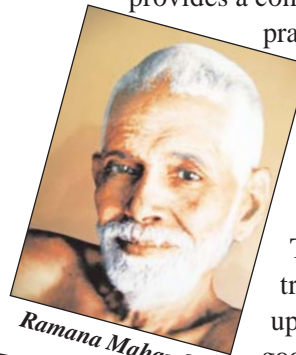
knowledge arises the control of the senses (indriya samyama). This is said to be Yama or self-control, which should be practiced at every moment.

105. Increasing the sense of unity and decreasing the sense of difference, which grants the supreme bliss, that Niyama or restraint is practiced by the wise.

Shankara dispenses with the longer description of the five or ten Yamas and Niyamas found in other Yoga texts.



Swami Vivekananda



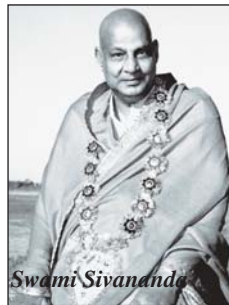
Ramana Maharshi



Maharishi Mahesh Yogi



Paramahansa Yogananda



Swami Sivananda

Shankara's greatness has been hailed by such monumental modern gurus of India as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Ramana Maharshi, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Paramahansa Yogananda

He emphasizes seeing everything as Brahman or God as the primary means of Yama or self-control. He also simplifies the Niyamas into promoting a greater recognition of the consciousness of oneness and the harmony of feelings arising from it.

106. Renunciation is giving up the form of the outer world from the ascertainment of the Self of pure consciousness behind it. This Tyaga is honored by the great, from which liberation rises quickly.

Shankara adds renunciation or Tyaga as an additional principle to the eight limbs of Yoga, showing the foundation of Yoga as a movement from an outer vision to the inner awareness of the supreme Self. He is not asking us to give up anything in particular but to renounce the vision of the outer world as a separate reality, replacing it with recognizing the world as our own Self.

107. From which speech and mind return, not being able to reach, that Mauna which is attained by the Yogis should always be honored by the wise.

108. That from which speech turns back, by what can it be spoken? What can even be said about the world by that which is devoid of sound?

109. Thus should be the practice of Mauna which is the natural state of those who know their own being. The mere refraining from speaking recommended by the sages is but a practice for those who are immature.

Mauna is usually regarded as the practice of not speaking, which is an important observance along many Yoga paths. Here Shankara clarifies its higher meaning as an inner practice of dwelling in the reality beyond speech and mind. Dwelling in the higher reality beyond all words is the real Mauna, not merely refraining from verbal communication. It is a state of awareness beyond sound, from which there is no basis to speak about anything else as real.

110. Where no person is found in the beginning, end or middle, by which everything is pervaded, that place (Desha) is known to be solitude.

Yoga emphasizes the right place for practice, which usually requires solitude and space. Shankara clarifies the true yogic solitude as abiding in the all-pervasive space that is beyond all divisions of person or ego, not simply going to a location where there are no people.

111. From which all beings are counted, beginning with the Creator, in the blinking of an eye, that is set forth by the word Time (Kala), which is unbroken non-dual bliss.

Yoga emphasizes the right time for practice, which includes special times like sunrise, sunset, new and full moons, solstices and equinoxes, eclipses and other favorable days. Shankara's fifteen-fold Yoga emphasizes the importance of abiding in the eternal as the primary consideration of time of practice. In that state one can

experience the creation of the entire universe in every blinking of the eyes.

112. The joy that exists in the continual contemplation of Brahman, that should be known as Asana (posture or seat), not the others that destroy one's happiness.

113. By which all beings are perfected, the unchanging support of all, into which, all the Siddhas (great yogis) have entered, the wise know as Siddhasana.

Shankara here defines Asana not as a sitting pose or any physical posture at all but as dwelling in the continual contemplation of the Supreme Reality, a fixed state of awareness. Our true dwelling should be on that ever-abiding Divine essence. Shankara only defines one Asana, which is Siddhasana, not as a physical posture but as dwelling in the consciousness of the Siddhas that perfects all things.

114. Which is the root of all beings, which root brings about the restraint of the mind, that Mulabandha should always be followed in the Yoga of the Raja Yogis.

Jnana Yoga is the supreme Yoga at the summit of Raja Yoga. Its Mulabandha consists of holding to that Brahman which is the root of all beings and the root of the mind through which the mind is naturally controlled. The physical Mulabandha of holding a steady foundation in the root chakra is but an outer reflection of this much greater consideration of holding to the root of all existence.

115. Balance of the limbs should be known as merging into the Supreme Brahman that is the same in all beings. It is not simply the balance and straightness of the body like a dry tree trunk.

Shankara even explains balance of the body not simply as keeping the spine straight, but highlights the greater practice of merging one's awareness into the Supreme Being that is the same in all as means of a greater universal balance and merging.

116. Making one's vision of the nature of knowledge, one should see the entire world as Brahman. This is the supreme and most exalted vision, not merely gazing at the tip of the nose.

117. Where there is the cessation of the seer, the seeing and the seen, that vision should be practiced, not merely looking at the tip of the nose.

Focusing or holding the gaze is another important Yoga practice. Here Shankara spiritualizes the Yogic practice of gazing at the tip of the nose and prefers the vision of the entire world as God as the real practice. If we awaken the eye of inner knowledge, wherever we look we see the supreme Reality.

118. Starting with the deeper mind holding to the reality of Brahman in all one's experiences, that restraint of all the mental activities (Nirodha sarvavrittinam) is said to be Pranayama.

119. Exhalation is said to be the negation of the reality of the outer world. The mental state of 'I am Brahman (aham Brahmasmi)' is said to be the inhalation of the breath.

120. The resulting state of changelessness of mind is said to be retention and the Pranayama practiced by the wise. While for the ignorant, Pranayama is giving pain to the nose.

Here we see Pranayama from the standpoint of Jnana Yoga. Exhalation is rejecting the outer world appearance as unreal. Inhalation is affirming the reality of God or the Absolute Brahman. Abiding in that state of Brahman consciousness is retention. In that state, the breath gets merged into the Supreme, even without the need for any overt pranayama techniques.

121. Seeing the state of the Self in all the objects of the senses, while diving deeply with the mind; this should be known as Pratyahara and should be practiced at every moment.

Shankara's Pratyahara or control of the senses is not simply closing the senses but perceiving the inner Self behind the movement of the senses. Then all sensory activity becomes a natural type of Pratyahara.

122. Wherever the mind goes, there is the vision of Brahman. That is the Dharana of the mind, which is regarded as the supreme Dharana.

Shankara defines Dharana not simply as concentration of the mind or holding it to a particular location as in the Yoga Sutras, but as seeing the Divine reality wherever the mind goes. Then all which one does is a kind of Dharana.

123. Holding the true state of mind of "I am Brahman," without any other support, that is known as meditation (Dhyana) and is the giver of the supreme bliss.

Shankara dispenses with preliminary meditation techniques which focus on various objects or states of mind and teaches the highest method of Atma Dhyana or meditation upon the Supreme Self.

124. The formless state of the mind that assumes the nature of Brahman again, forgetting all other thoughts, is the complete Samadhi, regarded as the state of true knowledge.

Here too Shankara emphasizes the highest Samadhi of becoming one with Brahman, the supreme Reality of Being-Consciousness-Bliss. This is the highest Samadhi, the Kaivalya of the Yoga Sutras, in which there is Dharma Megha or rain cloud of the highest truth.

125. As such is the natural state of bliss, so the Yogi should practice it. All things come under his control in an instant who applies this teaching in himself.

126. Thus having completed the Sadhana, the accomplished one becomes the King of Yogis (Yogiraj). The nature of such a one is not in the sphere of speech and

mind.

Shankara's King of Yogis is one who has mastered this deeper Jnana Yoga, not simply one adept at asanas, pranayama or even mantras. He has full control of the mind and complete Self-realization.

127-128. In the practice of Samadhi, powerful obstacles do arise, such as break in attention, dullness, dwelling on outer enjoyments, dissolution, darkness, distraction, attachment to bliss, and blankness: Thus these many obstacles should be slowly removed by the knower of Brahman.

129. Through dwelling on an object, one becomes that object. Through dwelling on the void, one becomes the void. Through dwelling on Brahman one becomes perfect and full (Purna). So one should practice dwelling on that which is perfect and full.

Shankara mentions in brief the obstacles (vighna) to Yoga practice, which are many and strong for all aspirants because ignorance is deeply seated within us along with its powerful karmas and samskaras. His main point is that we become whatever we most hold our minds to. Therefore if we meditate upon what is full, perfect and pure (Purna), we become everything. That is the way to overcome all obstacles.

130. Those who abandon this dwelling on Brahman that is the supreme purifier, their lives are in vain; such men are the same as animals.

131. Those who know that state of dwelling on Brahman, and knowing it give increase to it, they are the real sages (Sat Purusha), they are to be welcomed and honored in all the three worlds.

132. Those whose thought of Brahman is ever increasing and becomes ripened again, they indeed attain the state of pure Being (Sad Brahmatam), not others who merely speak words.

133. Those who are adept in discussions of Brahman but are full of desire and devoid of the inner cognition of Brahman, they are the most ignorant, they come and go again and again.

134. One should not abide even for half a second apart from the dwelling on the state of Brahman, such as the Creator Brahma and the great sages like Sanaka and Shuka ever abide in.

Shankara makes it clear that one must continually dwell on Brahman, the supreme Reality or true Self in one's mind and heart, or to speak of these teachings is only vanity and illusion.

Patanjali defines Yoga as 'Chitta vritti nirodha' or the restraint of the modalities of the mind. Shankara describes the goal of Yoga as abiding in the 'Brahma Vritti' or the 'mode of the mind that assumes the nature of Brahman'. It is through nirodha or restraint of the other vrittis that the

Brahmavritti becomes manifest. Yet the development of the Brahmavritti is also the best means of restraining the other vrittis of the mind. The Brahmavritti merges the mind in the depths of pure consciousness. The other outer vrittis of the mind can continue at the surface like the waves on the sea or go entirely silent. It does not matter to one who dwells in Brahman.

Shankara's fifteen-fold Raja Yoga expands and deepens the eightfold Yoga such as taught by Patanjali. His discussion of it clears up many misconceptions about the nature of Yoga, which should lead us to pure unity consciousness. Shankara makes clear the nature of Brahman consciousness that is the real goal of Raja Yoga and that is the Supreme Self, Paramatman, and Original Purusha, Adi-Purusha.

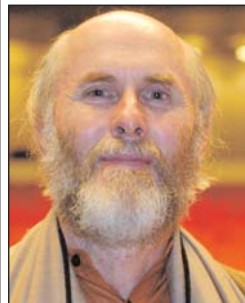
143. By the connection of these fifteen limbs, Raja Yoga is explained. Those who are not yet spiritually ripe for this knowledge should take up Hatha Yoga.

144. For those whose minds are ripe, this knowledge is enough for realization. For all those who are devoted to guru and God, it can be attained quickly and easily.

For those who are not yet ripe in their spiritual life or sadhana, the more ordinary practices of Hatha Yoga should also be included. This includes almost everyone. Thus Shankara makes it clear he is not rejecting these lesser practices but simply adding a higher dimension to them. He also ends stressing the need for devotion as a foundation for the knowledge, which otherwise is likely to remain dry and conceptual only.

Ramana Maharshi similarly states that a ripe mind

(pakva manas or pakva chitta) is necessary to be able to benefit from the higher knowledge. We see here that such a ripe mind is already a high state of awareness and requires some proficiency in Hatha Yoga already or already have a strong state of sattva guna or purity in mind and body. Shankara's Jnana Yoga or Yoga of Knowledge is gained through the application of his Raja Yoga or higher Yoga practices. This in turn rests upon Hatha Yoga. In other works of Shankara, these Hatha Yoga practices are also described, including Kundalini, the chakras, nadis, different pranayamas, mantras and rituals.



Dr. David Frawley
(Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

D. Litt., author of several books, is a western born teacher or guru in the Vedic tradition. In India, Vamadeva is recognized as a Vedacharya (Vedic teacher), and includes in his scope of studies Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedanta and Vedic astrology, as well as the ancient Vedic teachings going back to the oldest Rigveda. Vamadeva is a recipient of the prestigious Padma Bhushan award, one of the highest civilian awards by the government of India, "for distinguished service of a higher order to the nation," honoring his work and writings as a Vedic teacher, which he received in March 2015.

Hindu Temple Officially Recognized by Emirati Authorities

Abu Dhabi (AsiaNews) - From the United Arab Emirates comes another, important signal of tolerance and openness towards non-Islamic religions. On the weekend, the authorities granted official recognition to a Hindu temple and 17 Christian places of worship, including churches built decades ago.

The historic ceremony was held last Saturday at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi. Under the banner "A call for harmony", the Department of Community Development (DCD) in Abu Dhabi decided to bring all religious institutions in the Emirates under a single umbrella so that the authorities could support them.

"For decades, our great leaders have welcomed people from various religions, making the UAE a place for all. Abu Dhabi is now a leading model for tolerance and co-existence," said Dr Mugheer Al Khaili, chairman of the DCD. In a country where most of the population is foreign, "The UAE is keen on embracing unity and promoting the inclusion of everyone who had contributed to the development of the country," Al Khaili explained. "With this new initiative, the places of worship will now be working and operating under one umbrella."

Still, the Emirates remain a "happy island" in a region characterized by widespread intolerance and persecution, like in Saudi Arabia where only Sunni Wahhabi Islam is allowed. (NC)



Source: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Emirati-authorities-officially-recognise-17-churches-and-a-Hindu-temple-48074.html>

How does one measure him/herself on the scale of spirituality? Normally, spirituality is considered to be different from religiosity. It is the abstract sense of connectedness of one's self to the greater and grander, somewhat undefined, existence. Religiosity on the other hand indicates a stricter adherence to a better-defined set of habits, thoughts and rituals. Many people who would strongly deny being religious will gladly call themselves spiritual. So, spirituality is a vague, yet comfortable sense of connectedness to the whole, a sense of knowledge of oneself, or simply a matter of self-realization. Alternatively, the original question may be posed: "how far has one advanced on the path of self-realization. How do we make the sense of vague understanding clearer?" I suggest that the answer lies in that person's state of mind, his/her level of awareness, what goes on in his/her mind, and the quality of thoughts. Because a person's conduct reflects what he or she thinks, there are corresponding clues in the

person's behavior.

This analysis is based on the Upanishadic and Patanjali's explanation of human construct. Many of us are familiar with the onion-peel *Panch-Kosha* (Five Sheaths) concept of a man in Vedantic thoughts. This Vedantic discovery provides an elegant and comprehensive method to assess spiritual progress on this ladder. To this we combine the guidance from the *Ashtaanga Yog*. The first five steps in the *Ashtaanga Yog*: namely, *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Aasana*, *Praanaayaama*, and *Pratyaahaara*, are the way to build a solid foundation for an enlightened person and mind. With the *Pratyaahaara* stage, one starts to gain control of one's mind. The three later stages of human evolution are *Dhaaranaa*, *Dhyaan* and *Samaadhi*. This progression of mind and sense control, and progression of internal reflection capacity, can be combined to describe the characteristic of the various rungs on the spiritual ladder as follows.

THE COGNITIVE LADDER OF SPIRITUALITY- SELF REALIZATION

By Satyajit Verma

First Level: *Anna-maya Kosha* (Food sheath, Body awareness)

If your spiritual progress is at this level, your awareness or your thoughts are limited to your physical body, and your inclination is to attend to bodily comfort. Your primary interest is in food, clothes, money and comfortable environment. You get happy, sad, angry, upset etc. if any of these are not to your satisfaction, and you continue to live a life absorbed in highs and lows. You are unable to change your eating and living habits, even after realizing that they are harmful to your body. Your emotions change without your being conscious of it, and if someone points it out to you, you feel it is your right to be upset if your expectations are not met.

Second Level: *Praan-maya Kosha* (Vital air sheath, Functional awareness)

You are aware of what is going on inside your body, and you can correlate how food and environment are affecting your physical wellbeing. Your behavior and thoughts are more controlled. You have healthy food habits, take good care of your body, and know that even if the physical, personal or environmental conditions around you are unfavorable, staying upset is not good for you. You may or may not realize when you get upset or happy, however, you do not take any action to control your response and may regret later.

Third Level: *Mano-maya Kosha* (Mental sheath, Emotional awareness)

At this stage of mental development, you can monitor your emotions, and become aware right away that you are happy, sad or angry etc. and can take actions to moderate your mental, verbal, and physical response to the external agent that may be causing you the discomfort. Here you are still a slave of your mind and emotions, however, you have control over your emotions. How do you move up? Ask yourself why are you exhibiting the emotion (anger, sad, happy, afraid etc.), what is the root desire which is causing you to become happy or angry?

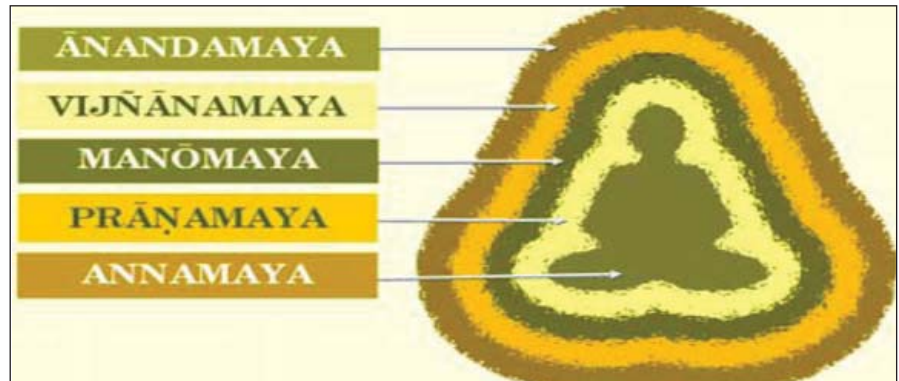
Fourth Level: *Vijyaan-maya Kosha* (Intellectual sheath, Reasoning awareness)

As mentioned above, at this stage, you become aware of the thought (your desire, the root cause) that is pushing you into an emotional/physical response, if the reality on the ground does not meet it. Here you can make appropriate moves to control your responses. Essentially you are aware that you have a set of standards/expectations from yourself and others, and your state of mind is determined by whether these

expectations are met or not. You are starting to become the master of your mind. How do you move up? Think of why you have those personal /social standards, and how natural and universally valid are they?

Fifth Level: *Aanand-maya Kosha* (Bliss sheath, Self-awareness)

You are aware of why you are thinking of whatever you are thinking. You have distilled the causes down to minimum fundamental thoughts, in alignment with natural, or universal values. This is, the reason, the seed, for your existence; your coming into being. This is what has been driving you. You come to realize that only those actions of yours, which are in concordance with these seed thoughts, will keep you consciously, or subconsciously happy. And, if you make any decision/action, or are forced to make any decision/action, against these fundamental guiding thoughts, you would be subconsciously unhappy - perhaps even consciously unhappy. This knowledge and



Panch-Kosha

progress empowers you to be in control of your behavior, and response. Your response and behavior become in accordance with the universal values. The outside world events do not affect you. At this stage you have very few thoughts that agitate your mental equilibrium. At this stage, you have realized your true self, you are self-realized. Further progressing on this path, you can, at will, go into meditation (samadhi) and enjoy the bliss of tranquility (no thoughts).

Now, you can see the progression on spiritual ladder is based on focused, vigilant and determined observation, and control of your mind and thoughts.

Note 1: Self-realization vs. Self-Actualization

Self-realization is coming face-to-face with your fundamental cause of coming into being. This is different from self-actualization; which is putting all your mental and physical capacity to their fullest practical application.

Note 2: self-realization vs. Self-realization

self-realization (with a small case s, signifying realization at an individual level) is

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HOW ANCIENT IS YOGA?

By Brishti Guha

A Tibetan monastery in north India, 1985: Harvard scholar Herbert Benson and his team visited this monastery, high in the Himalayas. They found that the monks practiced a form of yoga resulting in a meditative trance so deep it affected their body temperatures. The team filmed monks using their own bodies to dry wet clothes when the outside temperature was -20°C. The monks were able to sleep peacefully on rocky ledges at 15,000 ft, dressed just in light shawls. Benson's videos stimulated great interest in yoga in the West. Can we say anything about the origins of yoga? To answer this, let's skip to a different time and place.

Seals recovered from Indus valley civilization sites tell a fascinating story

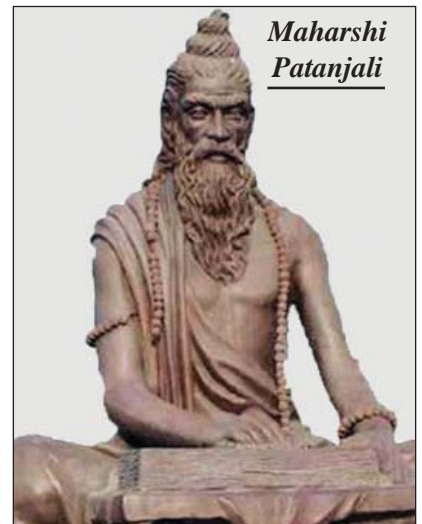
The Indus valley, third millennium BC: Just as prehistoric cave dwellers acted on their creative impulses and produced beautiful and powerful cave art, Indus valley civilization (IVC) dwellers inscribed visuals of their own stories on seals decorated with narrative imagery. As archaeologist Rita Wright shows, these seals are inscribed with quite a variety of tales. In one, a woman simultaneously attempts to tame two tigers, while in another, two men are uprooting acacia trees, but a woman tries to prevent them. These seals might

indicate that women had an important role in nurturing plants as well as animals (going to the extent of trying to tame wild animals instead of hunting them).

Quite a few seals concern yogis. In one, a seated figure is locked in a yogic stance, completely oblivious to a great deal of commotion all around him. He is surrounded by wild animals, but shows no alarm. Near him, another man is

spearing a water buffalo, but the yogi is undisturbed, totally immersed in his inner world. In another seal, two kneeling people present an offering to a figure seated in a yogic posture. These kneeling people seem to be important personages, because two snakes spread their hoods over their heads, symbolically associated only with royalty or nobility.

Probably the most well-known of the Mohenjo-daro seals is the "Pashupati" seal - in which a three-faced



**Maharshi
Patanjali**

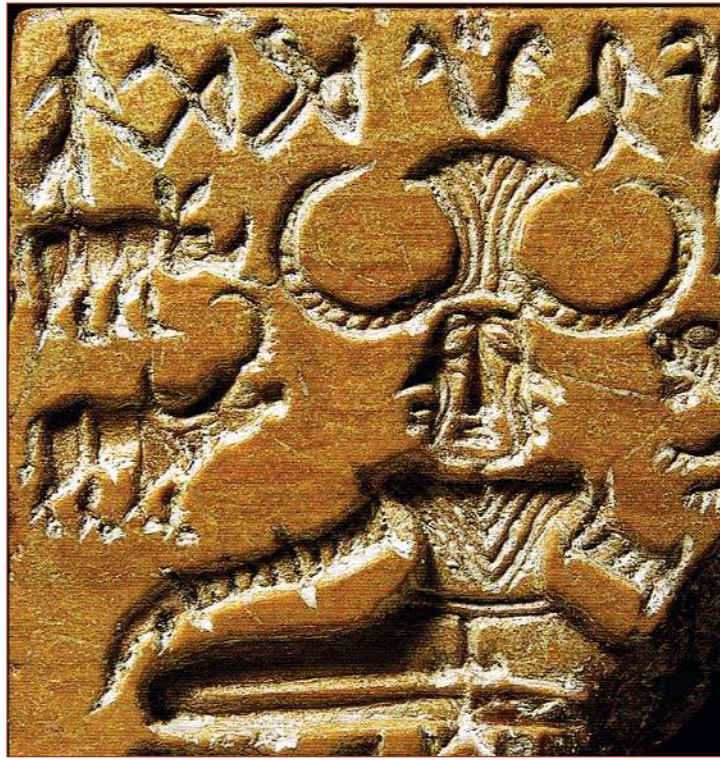
being wearing horned headgear is seated in a yogic trance, surrounded by Indus animals such as lions, elephants, and buffaloes. "Pashupati" is associated with Rudra (who later transformed into Shiva, the ultimate yogi). Shiva is said to have five faces, of which three are visible in the Pashupati seal.

Obviously, since many of the seals contain figures in yogic postures, we can say that yoga existed during the time of IVC. However, we can go beyond that. In the imagery on the seals, the individuals performing yoga are treated with a great deal of respect.

The figures in the seals show utmost concentration, and are not disturbed in the least by all the hunting going on around them, nor do they get distracted by the various humans or animals approaching them. So, it is unlikely that the people who made the seals were beginners exploring and experimenting with yoga - yogic practitioners seem to have already attained a very high degree of proficiency, so they commanded reverence and were known for their powers of mindfulness.

This suggests that yoga originated even earlier than the IVC seals. However, in Mehrgarh - an older site to the northwest of IVC sites - which flourished between 7,000 BC and 2,800 BC - archaeologists did not find any figures in yogic postures, though they did find many figurines of normal human beings. Moreover, while Mesopotamian and Persian seals at the time of IVC also show narrative imagery - they lack any figures seated in yogic poses.

While cities of the IVC declined, yoga survived and was formally codified by Patanjali much later in his Yoga Sutra (Patanjali's date is estimated to be the 1st century BC). For Patanjali, yoga was not just about a variety of physical stances (asanas). Rather, it was a holistic system with both psychological and physical aspects. It included meditation, pranayama, and even introspective exercises such as learning to accept oneself and others. According to Patanjali, yoga was the ability



Pashupati seal

to restrain random thoughts (yogah chitta-vritti-nirodhah). Those who could achieve a high level of concentration in meditation continued to be regarded very highly, as is evident from literature of the subsequent centuries.

For example the 6th century AD mahakavya (epic poem) "Kiratarjuniya", by the poet Bharavi, depicts Arjuna as a hero, not because of his abilities in battle, but because of his power to still all contemplation and meditate. (The sixth canto of the poem

describes how Arjuna's meditation made even wild beasts in the forests on the hill feel more tranquil, by the power of influence).

The astounding feats of the Tibetan monks recorded by Benson can be accomplished by very advanced yogis, but the beneficial mental and physical effects of yoga even for completely normal and less advanced practitioners are well documented. In fact Benson, who was a professor at the Harvard Medical School, used his findings about yoga and meditation to perfect relaxation and meditation-based treatments of many diseases (including high blood pressure, heart diseases, anxiety, and insomnia) at the Mind/Body Institute at Boston.

To return to the question posed by the title of this article, yoga appears to be even older than the IVC, which would mean that it has existed for at least 5,000 years. Many other ancient accomplishments of ours died out, such as our skills in metallurgy, town planning, and our surgical knowledge as evident from the samhitas of Charaka and Sushruta. Yoga, however, thrived and even spread to other countries - whether we think of asanas, meditation, or pranayama. As yoga lovers in India and elsewhere celebrate International Yoga Day today, they can rejoice in its enduring legacy.



Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/how-ancient-is-yoga-seals-recovered-from-indus-valley-civilisation-sites-tell-a-fascinating-story/>

Defining God: A Vedic Interpretation - II

By Gauri Shankar Gupta

Editor's Note: This is the second part of two part essay.

Infinity

Brahman is infinite. Infinity has three elements; space, time and cause. Anything that has a place, a time or a cause of origin cannot be infinite. Since the very origin of time, space and cause lies in Brahman, He has to be beyond all these three. Infinite can never be turned into finite no matter how much you take out. This is a mathematical reality. Similarly, no matter how much goes out of Brahman, it remains undiluted and complete in every respect. Let us take the example of a candle. With a burning candle we could light millions and billions of candles, still the original flame remains undiluted. The same analogy applies to a compact disc in modern era.

Universal Consciousness

There exists nothing but Brahman - one single reality encompassing the entire universe, also called as bodiless universal consciousness. Brahman is unbroken and irreducible pure consciousness giving rise to all diversity in the same way as millions of waves arise out of the ocean, innumerable thoughts arise out of mind and millions of sparks arise from the blazing fire. This irreducible pure consciousness with infinite potentiality is also known as Shiva. It is this irreducible pure consciousness that gives rise to mind and matter due to movement in the same way as thoughts arise due to

movement in the mind and waves due to movement in the ocean. Mind and matter on the other hand limit consciousness to a finite experience. For example, human body limits individual consciousness to the boundary of that body. However, once the body dies the consciousness becomes part of infinite consciousness in the same way as the space in a pot merges into infinite space once the pot is broken into pieces. In terms of degree, individual consciousness has been divided into four broad categories - mineral regime, plant regime, animal regime and human regime. Where there is no mind or matter there is no such variation. The power of movement leading to plurality is called Shakti. Thus, plurality is a mere manifestation of this singular reality in the same way as millions of forms with different shapes and sizes could be made out of clay and millions of different ornaments could be made out of gold. In essence they are nothing but clay and gold.

Source of all Existence/Singularity

Brahman is the source of all that exists. The five great elements (space/ether, air, fire, water and earth) and mind, intellect and ego arise out of Brahman's external energy (*apara Shakti*), while what keeps living species alive arises out of His more powerful inner energy (*para Shakti*). Vedic writings divide life into 8.4 million species living in water, on the Earth and those in space. Consciousness that exists in the form of soul in these living species is called jeevatma in Sanskrit.

Everything that exists in any form anywhere is made-up of a combination of these two. On dissolution they all return back to the Brahman. Modern science also agrees that nothing can be created nor destroyed. What happens is, mere transformation. In this sense the entire Universe originates from one single source and dissolves back to the same source. While the physical universe keeps on transforming, the eternal universal consciousness remains static supporting the ceaseless

consciousness) leaves the body all these faculties are rendered ineffective. Even the body starts decomposing instantly. Therefore, any attempt to perceive Him through sense organs is futile.

Source of Knowledge and Bliss

Brahman alone had been described as the source and culmination of all knowledge and infinite bliss (ananda in Sanskrit). We as humans also inherit these characteristics as part of our primeval nature for they are embedded in human soul. Precisely for this reason we have inherent curiosity to know and eternal desire for happiness. Can we find anyone who wishes to remain ignorant and is looking for distress? It is not possible because this is against the very nature of our Self. Matter and mind reduces these infinite attributes to finite and transient pushing us into the cycle of pain and pleasure experienced in the material world.

Contradictions

On the face of it, description of the Brahman looks somewhat self-contradictory to human intellect. How can He be static and fastest of the fast at the same time? How could He be smallest of the small and largest of the large? Although without any attributes; how could He be the source of all attributes and forms? In order to understand these contradictions better, let us have a brief look at time and its characteristics because time is closer to our thought process. Time has no



change; as the ocean supporting the ever-changing waves. Thus, the Universe is one single unified entity with multiple manifestations.

Sans Attributes/Most Subtle

Brahman has no attributes and form but at the same time He is the only source of all attributes and forms. Attributes limit functionality. For example, the attribute of hearing of our ears limit their functions to hearing alone. They cannot see, smell or taste. Similarly, the attributes of sunlight, water, sugar, salt, wood or iron limit their functionality to those defined attributes. Therefore, anything that has attributes can never be infinite, all pervasive and source of all. Moreover, since Brahman is sans attributes, naturally He cannot be perceived through our sense organs. Sense organs are designed to perceive attributes like sound, form, color, smell and taste. Since Brahman has no such attributes, how can He be perceived through our senses. On the contrary, the sense organs and the mind function because of His energy. He is the only power behind all sense perception. Once this energy (soul or

physical existence yet it is all-pervasive. Since it has no form, no color, no sound, no smell and no taste, it is beyond the perception of our senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste or smell. We calculate time based on sunrise and sunset and change of seasons. However, time existed before the Sun came into existence and will exist even after the Sun vanishes. The Sun itself is subject to the vagaries of time. Therefore, although time has no tangible existence of its own, it forms an integral part of all that exists - a stone, a fly, an animal, a human being or a planet. The very definition of their life and existence is in terms of time. If we say that the Planet Earth is 4 billion years, Mount Everest 5 million years and John 50 years old, this is nothing but time. Hence time pervades and defines the entire creation sans existence of its own. These are contradictions but true. Similarly, Brahman has neither physical existence nor any attributes yet He is omnipresent and is the source of all attributes. Let us now consider another facet of time. Time is static, still it moves. If we meditate for a moment we will find that time has no movement of its

own. Imagine the Universe without anything, simply vast empty space. Can we imagine the movement of time? No, we cannot. We calculate the movement of time based on the movement of physical universe. Relative movements of the Sun, the Earth and the Moon define the day, the month and the year (solar year, lunar year, solar month and lunar month). Even light-year (spatial distance) is calculated on the basis of speed of sunrays. Thus time, in itself does not move yet we cannot imagine any movement without time. Our lives move with time. With time we ceaselessly grow from childhood to adulthood, from adulthood to old age and from old age to death. We cannot imagine any physical existence without movement whether it's a galaxy, a planet, a plant, an animal or a human being.

Life and existence themselves are defined in terms of movement. Since no movement is possible without time, time moves. Therefore, time is static, still it moves. Similarly, Brahman is static, still it moves. Let us now consider the beginning of time. Can we imagine the origin of time? No, we cannot, because if we take point X as the origin of time, immediately a question will arise: what existed before X? This means we are going into time before the origin of time. How can that be possible? This is illogical. Therefore, the very thought of the origin of time is fallacious. This is equally true for the end of time.

Similarly, the Brahman has no beginning, no middle and no end. He is beyond creation and destruction. Time is also infinite in its expanse. It cannot be confined to any defined area. Wherever there is space there is time, so is the expanse of Brahman. He is everywhere. No existence can be imagined or defined without Him. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between time and Brahman. While both are all-pervasive, infinite and without any beginning and end; Brahman is universal consciousness, time is not. That's why time is also called as the shadow of Brahman. Therefore, the description of Brahman in the Vedic writings is not self-contradictory but a reflection of the reality. This reality cannot be explained through intellect or lab tests but could only be experienced by the individuals. If the world is to be what we perceive with our senses, then there would be no riddle or mystery. The hidden, nonsensible and omnipresent existence of Brahman in all appearances and forms is what makes it mysterious.

Conclusion

It is therefore apparent that Brahman is the only reality behind the ever-changing universal manifestation. He is infinite, eternal and irreducible pure consciousness with no attributes. Since He is the

only source of all that exists and seed of all seeds, everything rests in Him. Simultaneously, He rests in everything; moving or non-moving, conscious or non-conscious for He is the only cause and source of all existence. Hence according to Vedic writings, the Universe is nothing but a mere manifestation of invisible Brahman. When the visible manifestation is annihilated it returns to the invisible Brahman. Everything in the Universe rests upon Brahman as the beads made of thread in a necklace are strung on a thread. Like thousands of sparks appear from fire and then dissolve back into fire, like a large variety of plants and herbs originate from earth and then they return back to earth and like millions of waves appear in the ocean and then dissolve back into the same ocean, like millions of thoughts appear and then they dissolve back into the same mind; everything in this universe appears from the Brahman and returns back to Him. All existences are emanating from the one Supreme Being. Precisely for this reason in the Vedic writings Brahman (God) self-extended in time and space has been defined as the Universe. Thus, the Universe and all that exists in the Universe is nothing but Divine and must not be abused. It is a single unified entity with multiple ever-changing manifestations.



About the Author

Gauri Shankar Gupta,
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Malvika-Agnimitram Show Captivates Viewers in 21 Cities in US

In a technology driven world, it's a rare treat to see a form of storytelling that goes back 5000 years ago and still retains its charm and appeal. "MalvikaAgnimitram" a musical comedy by Dhaatu Puppet Theater was one such show that not only captivated the viewer with its brilliant production and old world vibe, but is also reviving the dying art of puppetry. The show was organized in 21 cities in the US to raise funds for Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America's (VHPA) initiative "Support a Child" (SAC). **By Manu Shah**

Internationally famed Bengaluru based puppeteer Anupama Hoskere and her crew of artists have performed in 21 cities and have drawn huge crowds at every venue with the last show in Atlanta. Hoskere, a trained classical dancer brings Mahakavi Kalidasa's story of King Agnimitra and Malvika to life through the medium of puppets. The skillful manipulation of strings, the unique combination of beautifully decorated puppets with a live Bharatnatyam dancer who is par excellence, vibrant costumes and an English narration with its touches of dry humor made the 70 minute presentation a must-see, particularly for the next generation.

Hoskere, who has a Masters in Engineering, carves the puppets herself and has designed 575 puppets to date. Incidentally, she received the news that she has been conferred with the State Sangeet Natak Academy Award while on her 21-city tour of the US.

The performances were part of a fundraiser effort for SAC, a Seva program of VHPA. Established in 1985 to eradicate illiteracy among under privileged children, SAC believes that only education can transform the life of a child and a country, break generational poverty and open the doors of opportunity when socio-economic reasons often rob them of that choice.

The visit to one of SAC's hostels before coming to the US was an eye opener for Hoskere. She was not only impressed at the way the children were being educated and trained in vocational skills but was struck by how "clean the place was." Raising funds for SAC, she realized, was an opportunity for her to "do seva." The driving force behind the project is Vice President - Seva, VHPA Renu Gupta. The project supports 2500 children who are housed in 30 plus hostels in 15 States in Bharat. The children come from socially and economically backward areas affected by Naxalites or other separatist groups or are orphans, runaways or children of sex workers. Renu Gupta and her husband Arun Gupta, who is equally involved, make it a point to visit one hostel each time they visit Bharat.

The hostels not only educate the children till the 12th grade in Central Board Certified Schools but also teach yoga, music, arts, sports, and values that build character. Children are encouraged to go to college and have become engineers, doctors and professionals. Kalpana Raout, the Commonwealth Olympic medalist is a SAC product. Likewise Sejal Nayar won a gold medal in the Special Olympics. What's heartening is that many children move back to their villages to uplift their communities. Apart from providing a safe haven and an education, SAC also provides skills such as tailoring, computers, mechanics, auto repair and commercial driving.

SAC's annual fundraisers such as this one help the organization support 2500 children but this year the goal has jumped to 2900 children. A donation of just \$250 dollars a year can give a child a new life. Donors who sponsor a child receive a child's picture, a short biography, an academic report card and are encouraged to keep in touch with the child and visit the hostel. Administration costs are a bare 9%.

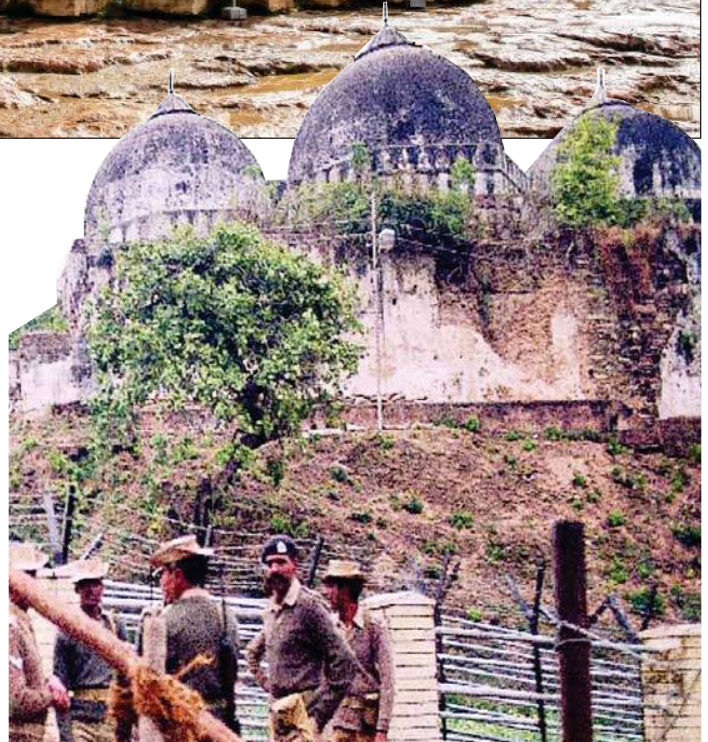


For more information about SAC, visit www.sacusa.org





My Journey through Greece, a Discovery of India



By Sanjay Gupta

Touring Greece this summer, I found below in the magazine on the flight from island of Crete to capital Athens.
“...this land on earth, inhabited and sanctified by the Gods, this land whose history was written and continues over the centuries to be written by people, sent by distant Gods. ... you will constantly wonder if the distant Gods settled here or if the people brought the gods from distant centuries, places and planets and settled them here, there to have them far and close to them. These Gods ... their creation, a creation that is quintessential of the human mind, of the restless human spirit.

... And you will discover, that by philosophizing like those people, that is, by mobilizing the utmost function of the spirit in search of Gods existence, you will find the path to the truth.

..., that this revolution of the human mind, this struggle between good and evil, between the beautiful and the ugly, amongst all that is contrary, the paths open towards finding of truth about our existence. And on this path, the divine philosophy was founded, the supreme functioning of the human mind to the true God, far from false visions, prophecies and hallucinations away from phobias and prejudices.

..., you will find the ancient Kingdoms that accepted the people from distant lands, who were persecuted by barbaric traditions, by welcoming them and giving them asylum, defying the threats of great stranger.

..., born by gods, conquered looted and mutilated over the centuries by foreign and cruel conquerors. And through this pillage and anguish, within the fire that burned everything, remained a small spark that gave birth once again, to assimilate amongst all, the values of this land."

Bereft of context, one might think of India upon reading this; however, it was written by the CEO of Sky Express describing Greece to tourists. This piece prompted me to further explore Greek history, and soon I found many similarities with our own Indian experience.

Greece was conquered by the Romans and then converted to Christianity by brutal force. Afterwards, Greece was ruled by the Ottoman Turks who perpetrated another barbaric and savage Islamic rule beginning in the 15th century. Pre-Christian Greece is credited with some of the most revolutionary ideas and advances known to mankind. Those same advances are now claimed by the Christian world as their own that they tried so hard to obliterate. Again, we can find parallels here for the claims which the Islamic world makes for many advances in mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, health, medicines and other sciences that originated in pre-Islamic India.

The similarities don't end here. To the Ramayana and Mahabharata are the Iliad and the Odyssey, and to the trichotomy of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. They even have many mythological characters with human bodies and animal heads like our own. Finally, they are proud for surviving Islamic rule and retaining their pre-Islamic characteristics. The Greeks held back the advance of marauding Islamists from dominating Europe just as Indians fought on their western frontier over centuries that was responsible for holding back the invaders of Islam from expanding further in Asia.

Additionally, the Greek countryside continues to have many roadside shrines not unlike our own small temples at every street corner. They have had several periods of puritanical iconoclastic campaigns in their history to remove these images by fundamentalists, a vital link and

a reminder of the pre-Christian Greece that the Abrahamic religions often derisively call idolatrous pagan culture. This also reminds me of the various roadside shrines in Mexico and other Latin American countries that the Catholic church in their hatred of native cultures and idols tried so hard



to erase. This is similar to the fundamentalist Islamists' campaigns in the Indian subcontinent against various Hindu temples under their occupation in the past and even Islamic dargahs now.

However, there are also some noticeable differences between how India and modern Greece handled their affairs post-independence. They made a clean break from their colonized past and implemented a transfer of population, not unlike what was proposed by Dr. Ambedkar in India, and avoided the tragic riots and massacres that occurred post Indian independence. They also reclaimed their places of worship immediately after independence, changing converted mosques back into churches and thus avoiding the festering religious controversies that bedevil modern India.

My physical journey through Greece has ended but my discovery of India through Greece has continued. Now read this:

Ayodhya, AD 1528

The destroyers came from out of the desert. Ayodhya must have been expecting them: for years, marauding bands of bearded, black-robed zealots, armed with little more than stones, iron bars and an iron sense of righteousness had been terrorizing the Hindu kingdoms.

Their attacks were primitive, thuggish, and very effective. These men moved in packs - later in swarms of as many as five hundred - and when they descended utter destruction followed. Their targets were the temples and the attacks could be astonishingly swift. Great stone

columns that had stood for centuries collapsed in an afternoon; statues that had stood for half a millennium had their faces mutilated in a moment; temples that had seen the rise of the Hindu Kingdoms fell in a single day.

This was violent work, but it was by no means solemn. The zealots roared with laughter as they smashed the 'evil', 'idolatrous' statues; the faithful jeered as they tore down temples, stripped roofs and defaced tombs. Chants appeared, immortalizing these glorious moments. ...

In this atmosphere, Ayodhya's temple of Ramlalla (infant Ram) was an obvious target. The handsome building was an unapologetic celebration of all the believers loathed: a monumental rebuke to monotheism. Go through its great doors and it would have taken your eyes a moment, after the brightness of an Indian sun, to adjust to the cool gloom within. As they did, you might have noticed that the air was heavy with the smoky tang of incense, or perhaps that what little light there was came from a scatter of lamps left by the faithful. Look up and, in their flickering glow, you would have seen the great figure of Ramlalla himself.

Did they notice this, the destroyers, as they entered? Were they, even fleetingly, impressed by the sophistication of an empire that could quarry, sculpt then transport marble over such vast distances? Did they, even for a moment, admire the skill that could make a kissably soft-looking mouth out of hard marble? Did they, even for a second, wonder at its beauty?

It seems not. Because when the men entered the temple they took a weapon and smashed the back of Ramlalla's head with a single blow so hard that it decapitated the god. The head fell to the floor, slicing off that nose, crushing the once-smooth cheeks. Ramlalla's eyes, untouched, looked out over a now disfigured face.

Mere decapitation wasn't enough. More blows fell, scalping Ramlalla, striking the helmet from the god's head, smashing it into pieces. Further blows followed. The statue fell from its pedestal, then the arms and shoulders were chopped off. The body was left on its front in the dirt; the nearby altar was sliced off just above its base.

Only then does it seem that these men - these Muslims - felt satisfied that their work was done. They melted out once again into the desert. Behind them the temple fell silent. The votive lamps no longer tended, went out. On the floor, the head of Ramlalla slowly started to be covered by the sands...

The 'triumph' of Islam had begun.

This is a prologue to the book published in 2018 by Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age - The Christian Destruction of The Classical World*. I haven't changed any word but have transplanted the story from Palmyra, Syria AD 385 to Ayodhya, India AD 1528.¹ The only replacements are Athena with Ramlalla, Christianity/Christians with Islam/Muslims and Roman Empire with Hindu Kingdoms. Every time I read through this, I relive my own history. Just change the title and it could easily be Kashi in AD 1669,² Mathura in 1670³ or Somnath^a in 725, 1024, 1299, 1395, 1451, 1546 and 1665.

There has been so much destruction and violence committed by self-righteous possessors of 'one true god', 'only true savior/prophet', 'only true book' and 'only true way of worship' that the diversity of spiritual and faith traditions around the world is being destroyed. Palmyra destruction described above is more than a millennium old, but we see the same pattern repeated even today with the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas by Taliban and Palmyra again by ISIS in recent times.

While the physical structures are poignant reminders of what has been lost, the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in the form of diverse languages, native and ethnic traditions, and myriad ways of worship are under attack continuously by zealots facilitated by petro dollars and missionary money. When the world has been turned into a competing marketplace for harvesting souls and dominating the earth by Abrahamic religions, you can see in Greece what could be lost further and forever if India with its critical mass of resources, philosophy and 'pagan' worship doesn't stand for all the native and diverse traditions that are under attack throughout the world, be it in Asia, Africa or Latin America.



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References: ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayodhya_dispute ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashi_Vishwanath_Temple

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna_Janasthan_Temple_Complex ^a https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somnath_temple

Rakhigarhi and After

Editor's note: This is the first part of the multipart article.

By Shrikant G Talageri

The 5th of September 2019 was a momentous day for researchers in ancient Indian history: two very long-awaited international genetic reports on ancient India, with huge potential for generating heated controversial debate, were released on one and the same day. These reports were:

1. "An Ancient Harappan Genome Lacks Ancestry from Steppe Pastoralists or Iranian Farmers", Shinde et al.

2. "The formation of human populations in South and Central Asia", Narasimhan et al.

The extremely intriguing phenomenon of these two reports - both delayed for a long time under very suspicious circumstances (although the first report was kept a closely guarded secret while the second was unofficially published more than a year ago) - being released on the same day, as well as the fact that both the papers have four of the co-authors in common, and that statements and reactions to these two reports have led to conclusions diametrically opposed to each other, all indicate deep politics behind the whole process. The four common co-authors of both the papers, incidentally, are Vagheesh M. Narasimhan, David Reich, Vasant S. Shinde, and Niraj Rai.

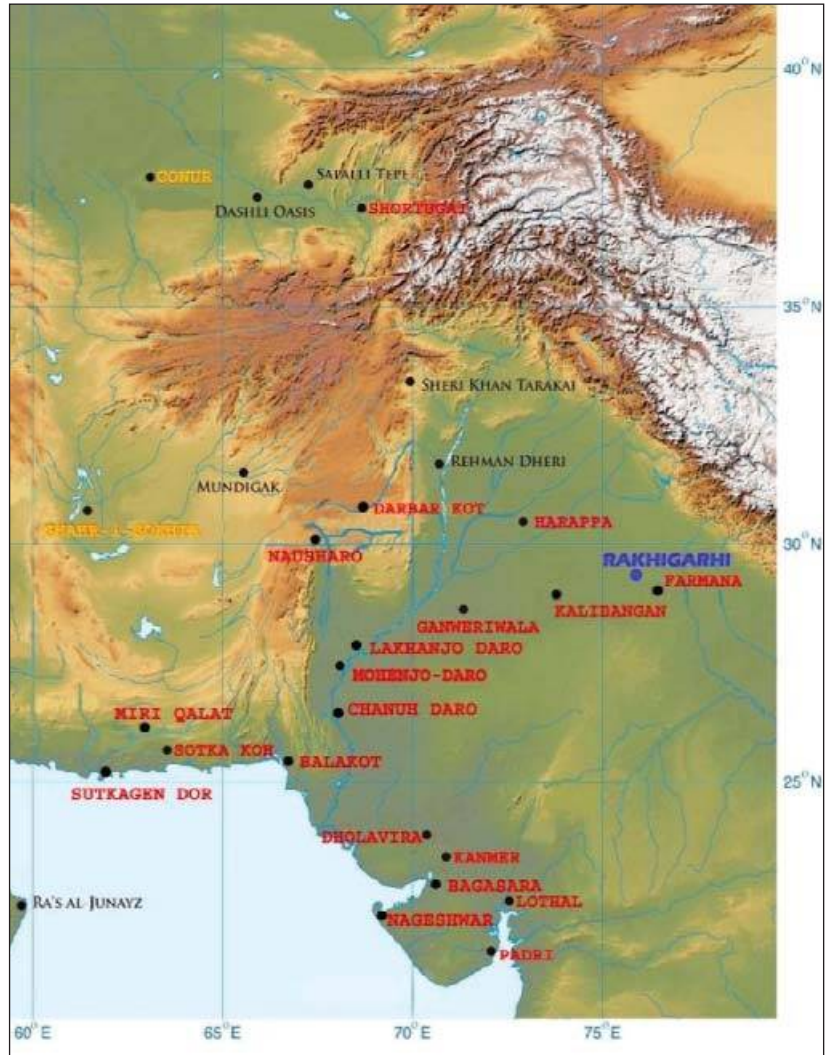
The two papers, dealing with two different genetic issues, contain the following clear statements in support of the theory that Indo-European languages originated in the Steppes and were brought to India after 2000 BCE:

Narasimhan et al repeatedly refers to this "evidence for a Steppe origin for South Asia's Indo-European languages ~ 2000 BCE", and "evidence for the theory that these languages spread from the Steppe". This point is also reiterated in Shinde et al, which also tells us that "a natural route for Indo-European languages to have spread into South Asia is from Eastern Europe via Central Asia in the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE, a chain of transmission that did occur as has been documented in detail with ancient DNA. The fact that the Steppe pastoralist ancestry in

South Asia matches that in Bronze Age Eastern Europe (but not Western Europe) provides additional evidence for this theory, as it elegantly explains the shared distinctive features of Balto-Slavic and Indo-Iranian languages".

Part I

Things have been complicated by the fact that two of the co-authors of the two papers have been holding press conferences and giving interviews where they are reiterating in very strong and categorical terms that the theory of the Indo-European languages spreading into South Asia from the Steppes through Central Asia stands disproved by the genetic data in the paper Shinde et al. This has led to a veritable storm of



A map of the Indus Valley, or Harappan, Civilization. Rakhigarhi, the location of the burial that yielded ancient DNA for analysis, is highlighted in blue. (Image credit: Vasant Shinde)



Ancient DNA from the Indus Valley Civilization was found in this individual buried at India's Rakhigarhi archaeological site.

(Image credit: Vasant Shinde)

articles in AIT-supporting papers and internet journals, questioning the motives and honesty of these two scientists with regard to their undeniably contradictory positions in the papers and in the media.

Some hostile articles which have recently appeared in the print or internet media (the second one below, from 2018, is included because it has been cited in the third one below by the same writer):

1. "Why a 4500-year-old skull is key to the politics of India's Hindu-Muslim divide", by Vir Sanghvi in This Week in Asia on 4/9/2019.

2. "Why Hindutva is Out of Steppe with new discoveries about the Indus Valley people", by Girish Shahane in scroll.in on 6/9/2018.

3. "Why Hindutva supporters love to hate the discredited Aryan invasion Theory", by Girish Shahane in scroll.in on 14/9/2019.

4. "New reports clearly confirm 'Arya' migration into India", by Tony Joseph in The Hindu, on 13-14/9/2019.

5. "We are all migrants", Tony Joseph interviewed by Siddhartha Mishra in Outlook, 12/9/2019.

6. "Two new genetic studies upheld Indo-Aryan migration. So why did Indian media report the opposite?" by Shoaib Daniyal in scroll.in on 2/9/2019.

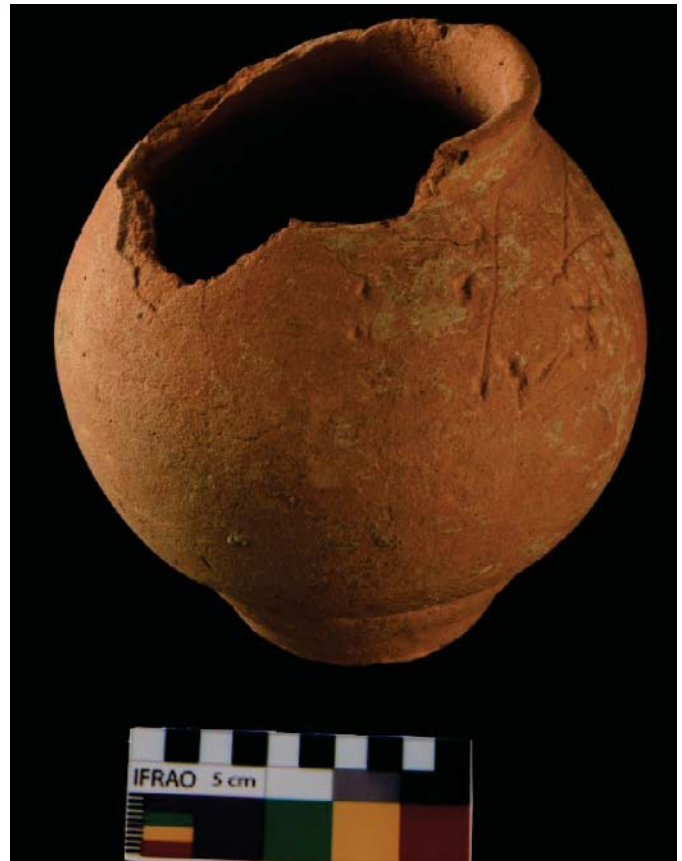
7. "Scientists Part of Studies Supporting Aryan Migration Endorse Party Line Instead", by C.P. Rajendran, in The Wire, 13/9/2019.

I am sorry to say I cannot contest the criticism on this particular matter.

Further, none of the people, not favoring the AIT, interviewing the two scientists sympathetically, have thought it necessary to ask the really relevant questions to them: since you are also co-authors of the two papers, are you in agreement with the clearly worded statements (quoted above) in the two papers claiming genetic and

linguistic evidence for the spread of Indo-European languages into South Asia from the Steppes? If not, do you disassociate yourselves from those quoted statements? And, if you do, what are your reasons for disassociating yourselves from them?

The sum result of all this is an extremely piquant situation where everyone seems determined to make a mess of everything, and everyone seems to be colluding with each other in diverse ways in order to keep things



A red pot found near the head of the Indus Valley skeleton that yielded ancient DNA. (Image credit: Vasant Shinde)

ambiguous: the two scientists want to please the powers-that-be in India at the moment by announcing that the theory of external origin of the Indo-European languages stands disproved even as they keep their geneticist colleagues happy by lending their names to the reports which claim that the theory stands proved. Those who support the external-origin theory are happy that they can expose this doublespeak in order to claim that this shows that the external-origin theory is right. Those who oppose the theory are careful to avoid embarrassing questions even as they quote these scientists and make them repeatedly reiterate that the external-origin theory is wrong. No-one dares to call a spade a spade, when it comes to the question of Genetics. It is up to the geneticists who claim that the external origin of the Indo-European languages is not proved by the genetic evidence, to state, if possible in a joint statement, and definitely in writing, that Genetics can tell us about the different ancestral strands in any individual or population, but it cannot tell us about the languages spoken by the original carriers of those ancestral strands, and that that can only be shown by the linguistic, archaeological and textual data and evidence. Further, it is up to these geneticists to ask the other geneticists and non-geneticists, who are claiming that the "genetic evidence" proves this Indo-European expansion from the Steppes after 2000 BCE, to first disprove my chronological case for the Rigveda showing the date of the Old Rigveda to be far before 2500 BCE in a purely Indo-European environment within India in Haryana to the east of the Sarasvat? - without this, the "genetic evidence" is a big zero, and all discussion on this "genetic evidence" is pointless. This sane logic, and sane

advice, has already been given by me umpteen times, but the vested interests can simply stonewall it, which they will not be able to do when these geneticists speak up. It is time people stopped playing safe and indulging in double-games and doublespeak, while all the time continuing to draw linguistic conclusions out of genetic data in defiance of and in direct contradiction to the linguistic, archaeological and textual data and evidence, and thereby muddying the waters and turning the whole discussion into a joke. The only casualty is the Truth.

Let us leave the two scientists to speak for themselves. Here I will only concentrate on and examine a few anti-Hindu comments of those who are using the two reports to reiterate the Aryan Invasion Theory or AIT, without mincing words or pussyfooting around the relevant aspects of the whole debate in order to save face for anyone.

But before going into that detailed exercise, let us in fact examine in short what the data in the two papers (Shinde et al and Narasimhan et al) really says, and which of the conclusions of these papers are warranted, and which are unwarranted, and why.



About the Author



Shrikant G. Talageri,
based in Mumbai and author of several books, has been interested in Wildlife, Comparative Music, Religion and Philosophy, History and Culture and Linguistics. His major work appears in his book *The Rigveda: A Historical Analysis*.

Source: <https://talageri.blogspot.com/2019/09/rakhigarhi-and-after.html>

The Cognitive Ladder of Spirituality- Self Realization

From Page 23 different from Self-realization (with capital S, realization at universal level). One has to transcend several more layers of awareness within deeper stages of meditation to realize the Self. This is a much rarer state indeed - coming to face to face with the all unifying entity Self/ Consciousness/ Brahman.

Note 3: Spiritual Ladder vs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

A side to side comparison of the above analysis, with the widely known five tiers in Maslow's Hierarchy of human needs in Western psychology, is as follows. A sixth tier, as suggested by Maslow in his later years, is also added to complete the comparison:

Tiers 1 and 2 (Physiological and Safety): Anna-maya Kosha

Tier 3 (Love/Belonging): Mano-maya Kosha

Tiers 4 and 5 (Esteem and Self-actualization): Vijyan-maya Kosha

Tier 6 (Transcendence): Aanand-maya Kosha. Note that there is no explicit acknowledgement of the *Praana-maya Kosha* in Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.



About the Author

Satyajit Verma
has a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering and has worked in the chemicals manufacturing, research and consulting areas for several multinational companies for more than thirty-five years. Now retired, he and his wife live in Houston, Texas.



Gather Courage

You may be an adult being told by parents that you will not amount to anything and that you will not be able to survive on your own. You may be a woman being told by your spouse that you will never learn to drive on the highway or handle the banking. You may be a man who has always been told that you cannot cook to save your life. You may be an employee who is being told that you will not be able to handle the senior position in the company that you are applying for. Without realizing it, we allow others to convince us that there are many things we cannot do, and even that we are not worth anything.

How do you gather courage in the face of negativity? Start out slow. Take baby steps. Solicit help. Do small things. Score small victories. When someone says that you are incapable of sending an email, become all the more determined to accomplish this simple task. Learn from others who know how to do it, ask questions, make mistakes, and learn from them. Also know that if one person can do something, everyone else can do it also.

Determination and effort will work hand in hand to give you success. Once you are determined, you will find that the entire universe will move to help you. You are a special child of God and you can do anything you want to do. Believe this. Believe in yourself. Have faith in God. You can accomplish the most challenging task. However, do not think that you will be able to change yourself overnight. Change will come gradually.

Gather courage and move ahead.

★ ★ ★

Expect Criticism

It is a given that no matter what you do, you are sure to be criticized. Even if you are trying to bring about a positive change in your life, family, work place,

organization or country, you will face criticism. You may even be working for the good of humanity, but you will still be criticized. Sainly souls are proof of this.



If you are wondering how much importance to give to the criticism you are receiving, look at the person doing the criticizing. Is there a vested interest behind his remarks? If you are trying to quit drinking, your drinking buddies may criticize you and encourage you to drink for 'old times' sake.' Are the critic's comments constructive, or derogatory and mean-spirited? Is he threatened by your views or your actions, or are his remarks truly a wakeup call for you? Determine to the best of your ability whether you should accept the criticism as feedback, or ignore it.

When you are doing something you believe in, do not give more importance to the critics than to your own views. History gives us evidence that visionaries were most often not popular with the masses.

Another thing: Remain positive in the face of criticism. Do not be disheartened. A certain politician was giving a speech when a heckler called out, "You are a dog." The clever politician said with a smile, "Thank you, and my brother." Another was criticized by a leading magazine of his time as a 'filthy storyteller, despot, liar, thief, braggart, buffoon, usurper, monster, old scoundrel, perjurer, swindler, tyrant, field-butcher, and land-pirate.' Even his hometown newspaper called him 'the craftiest and most dishonest politician that ever disgraced an office in America.' Who was he? Abraham Lincoln!

Expect criticism.



Apologize Sincerely

To err is human; everyone makes mistakes. A sincere apology from the heart goes a long way in making things right. Saying 'sorry' alone does not fix everything. The word has lost its impact because of overuse and inappropriate use. It has become the norm to rant and rave and be impolite, and say at the end of the tirade, "I am sorry if I sounded rude." This is insincerity masquerading as an apology. The offender seems to be asking for forgiveness, but is not really asking for it. He is not taking the responsibility for his rude behavior. He is in fact saying, "I wasn't rude, but if you think so, then you are wrong, and let me say I'm sorry, which I'm not."

At times the apology is accompanied by some reason, but unfortunately, the wrong reason. "I'm sorry I got angry at you, but I had a bad day at work. My boss drove me crazy from morning till evening." Is this an apology? No; it's a justification. A real apology would go something like this, "I'm sorry I spoke harshly to you. I took out my frustration on you, which is not fair. You don't deserve this."

Many people say 'sorry' and in so doing insult the person they are apologizing to. For instance, "I am sorry you misunderstood me," really means, "You are so stupid that you are not capable of understanding my words." "I am sorry you got offended," is like saying, "You are too sensitive; get over it." "I am sorry you feel this way," really means, "There is something wrong with you; you shouldn't be feeling this way."

To apologize sincerely, you need to regret your behavior, take responsibility, and show willingness to do better. If you have screamed at someone for an hour, a one-second 'sorry' or a 1.5 second 'I apologize' is not sufficient.

We should not shy away from apologizing sincerely.

Stress Management and Spirituality

While explaining stress management to an audience, a lecturer raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" Answers ranged from 20g to

500g. The lecturer replied, "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long you try to hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes." He continued, "And that's the way it is with life. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, the burden becomes increasingly heavy and we won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to



put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the burden."

We all carry several burdens throughout life. These are related to matters such as work, family and health, and can leave us feeling 'heavy' after a while. If you let it go on for long, it will consume you and it can affect your physical, mental and emotional health. We see and experience this in our lives on a daily basis. Unfortunately, we either do not rest and refresh ourselves or we seek that refreshment in wrong places and things.

How can we best mitigate the stress of our lives? You can start by setting the glass down and handing it over to God. Your burden will start to lighten immediately. Slowly, you will learn to trust Him to hold the glass for a while. You slowly start to feel renewed and refreshed.



Visit www.radhamadhavsociety.org
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Forced Conversions, Marriages Spike in Pakistan

Lahore, Pakistan (RNS) - Sixteen-year-old Suneeta and her 12-year-old sister were walking home in March when they were kidnapped. The men who took them forced the girls to convert to Islam.

"We were walking back to our house after working on the farm when men in a car came out of nowhere and dragged us in with them," said Suneeta, who is Hindu and lives in Badin, a small city in the south of Pakistan. "The next thing we knew, we were in a shrine being forced to say the kalma (acceptance of Islam) by a cleric."

The men who kidnapped the girls told their mother to pay the equivalent of \$365 - an enormous amount for the poor farming family - or the men would marry off the girls. Their mother begged and borrowed from within the Hindu community and paid the ransom. She got her girls back. The family considers itself lucky.

Every year, thousands of Hindu and Christian girls and young women are kidnapped in Pakistan and forcibly married, disappearing from their families. And while these forced conversions have been going on for decades, a recent surge in reported cases has brought the issue back into the limelight.

Around 1,000 cases of Hindu and Christian girls being forced to convert were estimated in the province of southern Sindh alone in 2018, according to the annual report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. There are no concrete numbers for the rest of the conservative country, which is around 96 percent Muslim.

"This appears to be a systematic, organized trend and it needs to be seen in the broader context of the coercion of vulnerable girls and young women from communities that are



Suneeta, 16, is a Hindu girl who was abducted and converted to Islam in the city of Badin, Pakistan. Photographed on March 14, 2019, Suneeta is now back with her mother but is wary about her future, fearing another abduction.

RNS photo by Naila Inayat

already marginalized by their faith, class and socioeconomic status," said Mehdi Hasan, chairperson of the independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. "The ugly reality of forced conversions is that they are not seen as a crime, much less as a problem that should concern 'mainstream' (Muslim) Pakistan." In the majority of these cases, the girls are under 18. And while marriage under the age of 18 is illegal in Pakistan, the law is often ignored. There is no law banning forced conversions.

Child advocates say there is a clear lack of will by the government to tackle the problem. "The government has done little in the past to stop such forced marriages," the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said in its annual report. "(The executive branch) asked lawmakers to pass effective legislation to

end the practice," the report added, but nothing happened. The parents of victims are often ignored by authorities and have

Two Pakistani Hindu girls wearing black veils, arrive at a court in Islamabad on March 26, 2019. Court placed the two teenage sisters in a government shelter as authorities launched an investigation into whether the girls were abducted and forced to convert and marry two Muslim men.



few options, say civil rights activists.

One case that made it to court was that of Shalet Javed, 15, a Christian from the city of Faisalabad in the east of Pakistan, who was kidnapped, raped, forcibly converted and married to a Muslim man in February.

As a result of the kidnappings and conversions, thousands of Hindus seek asylum in India every year. Others are thinking about it. "We were saved once from the abduction but I am afraid that it will happen again to us," said Suneeta, the 16-year-old who was kidnapped with her sister. "What if this time they come for us and there is no one to bring us back. We are not safe here in our own country."



Pakistani civil society activists call for protection of Hindu girls at a protest in Hyderabad, Pakistan, on April 5, 2019.

Source: <https://religionnews.com/2019/06/06/forced-conversions-marriages-spike-in-pakistan/>

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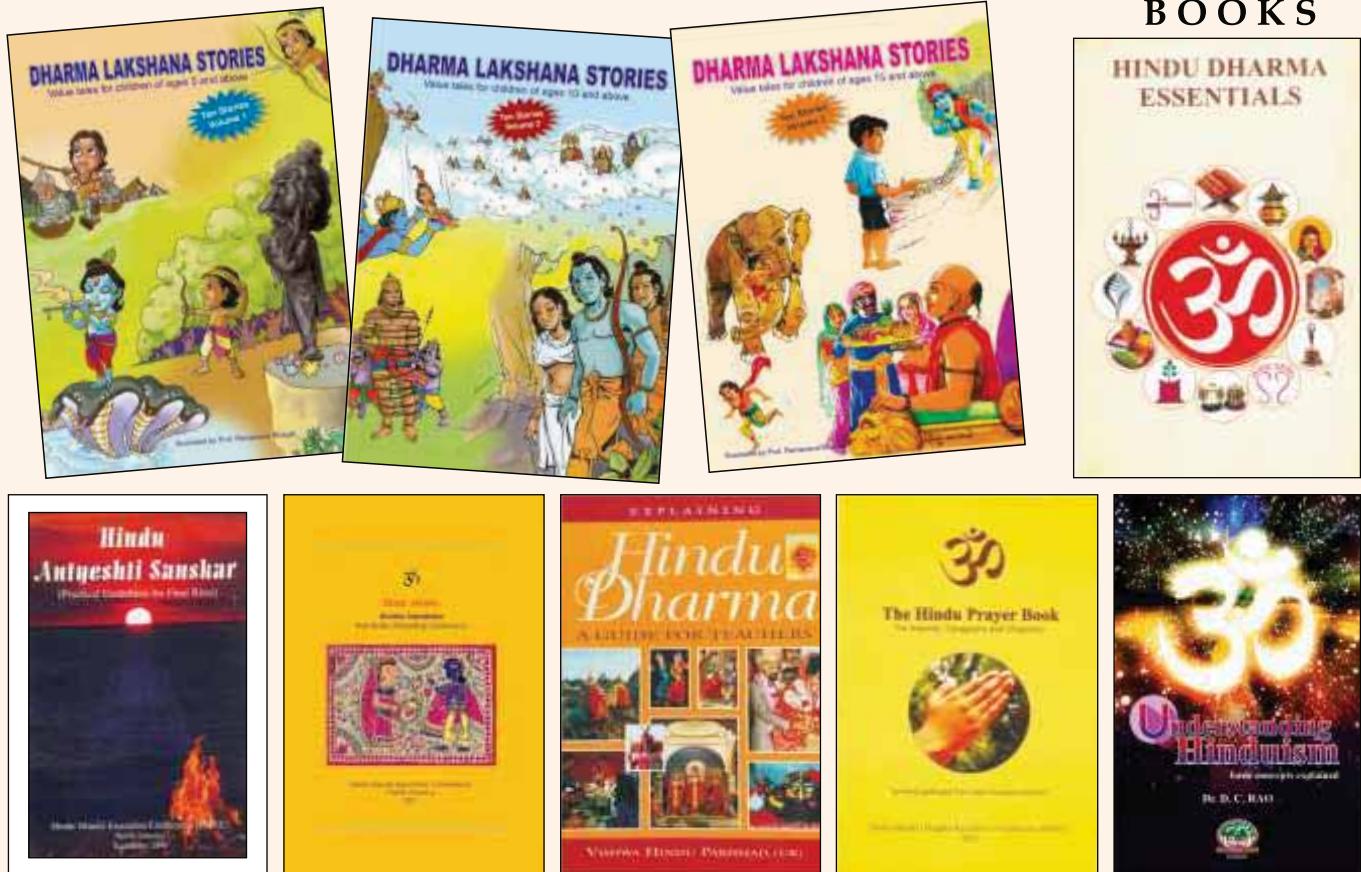
ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्माऽमृतम् गमय ।।

Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

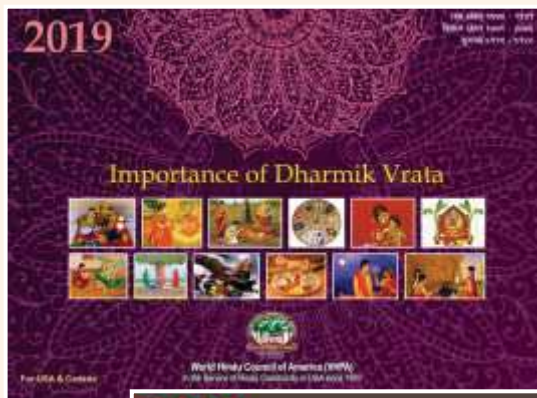
ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

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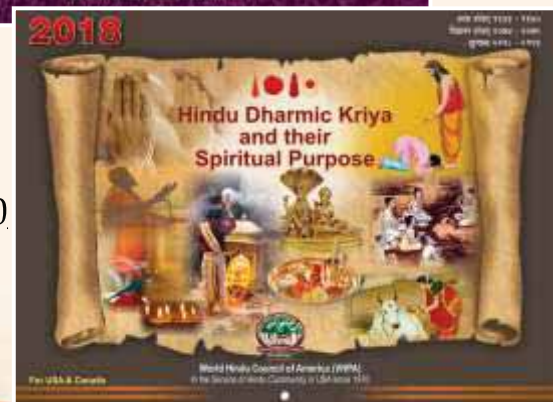
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