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# || HINDU || || VISHWA ||

## Vishwa Dharma Digest

**5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2020**  
**A DAY OF INDEPENDENCE**  
**FROM FEAR**



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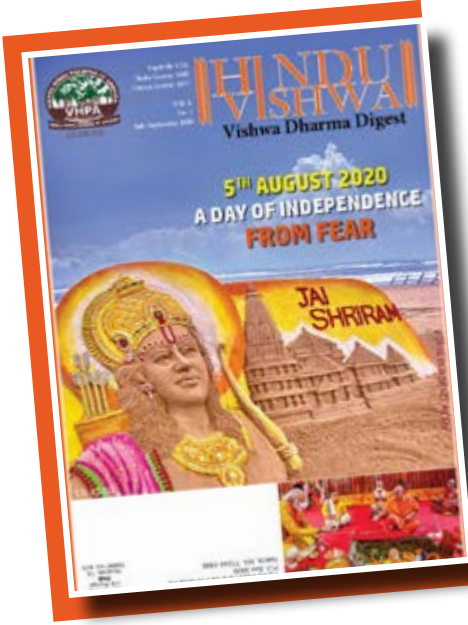
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मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।  
मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥

-श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 9.4

*mayā tatam idam sarvaṁ jagad avyakta-mūrtinā  
mat-sṭhāni sarva-bhūtāni na chāham teshvavaśṭhitaḥ ॥*

-Bhagvad Gita 9.4

This entire cosmic manifestation is pervaded by Me in My unmanifest form. All living beings dwell in Me, but I do not dwell in them.

## 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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## 5TH AUGUST 2020 - A DAY OF INDEPENDENCE FROM FEAR



## WE NEED TO EMBRACE SHRI KRISHNA NOW MORE THAN EVER



## WHY I BECAME A HINDU - A KRISHNA BHAKTA



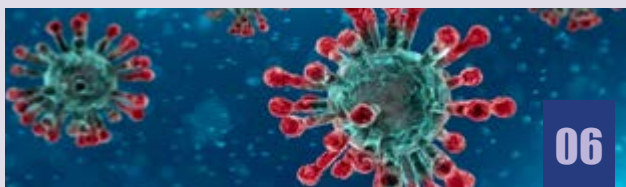
## RAKHIGARHI AND AFTER V: INDUS SCRIPT AT KEEZHADI



## VHPA 41ST ANNUAL SVF CAMP



## HOW CORONA HAS CHANGED OUR LIVES







## EDITORIAL

# RAM JANAM BHOOMI

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF LORD RAMA

The Ram Janam Bhoomi Puja, or the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a grand new temple, dedicated to Lord Sri Rama, took place in Ayodhya, on Wednesday August 5th, 2020, and marks a new beginning, and the end, of a long battle between Hindus and Moslems, as to who had legal claims to the site. These claims took nearly five decades to resolve, and, gained mixed opinions and views. One view is that the rising Ram temple signifies the end of perceived humiliation of the Hindus, and the beginning of a new phase of their political ascendancy. Another view portrayed the end of strife, and a new dawn of fraternity, among the religious communities.

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi attended the function, and took part in the pooja and darshan, after which, he unveiled a plaque to mark the laying of the cornerstone, and, released

a commemorative stamp.

This function was an amazing, and significant event, which bore great historical memories for both Hindus and Moslems all over - in the city of Ayodhya, in all of India, and, throughout the world. For centuries, this site was claimed by Moslems to be their land, and the home of their Babri structure. For Hindus who totally believed that the site was the exact spot of Shri Rama's birthplace, the struggle to regain the site, ended in a victory for them, and ultimately allowed them to build a grand Ram Temple, at the very site.

The ceremony itself manifested multiple possibilities for the country's future and the construction of the Temple should mark the end of an older, bitter phase of India and the beginning of a new, harmonious phase among all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs.



# VHPPA 41<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL SVF CAMP: FIRST EVER VIRTUAL FAMILY CAMP

In April of 2020, it seemed that the streak of 40 years in a row of the Vivekananda Family Camp was in serious jeopardy. This year of 2020 posed a unique challenge due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Camp committee decided upon an innovative idea. Although it would not be nearly as ideal as holding the Camp in the beautiful foothills of the Berkshire mountains: the Camp can go virtual in 2020!

The 41st Vivekananda Family Camp was conducted virtually for the first time ever over the weekend of 31-Jul (Friday), 01-Aug (Saturday), and 02-Aug-2020 (Sunday). The Camp had over 50 attendees of which one-fourth were first-time campers.

The Camp was organized and executed almost entirely by second generation Hindu Americans who have attended Camp for many

years and now as adults (junior volunteers) actively participate in the committee.

This virtual Camp had elements of the in-person Camp that included fun games, prayers and aarti, education program, and cultural performances. The logistical and technical challenge of executing virtually for three days via Zoom was met head on by the junior volunteers.



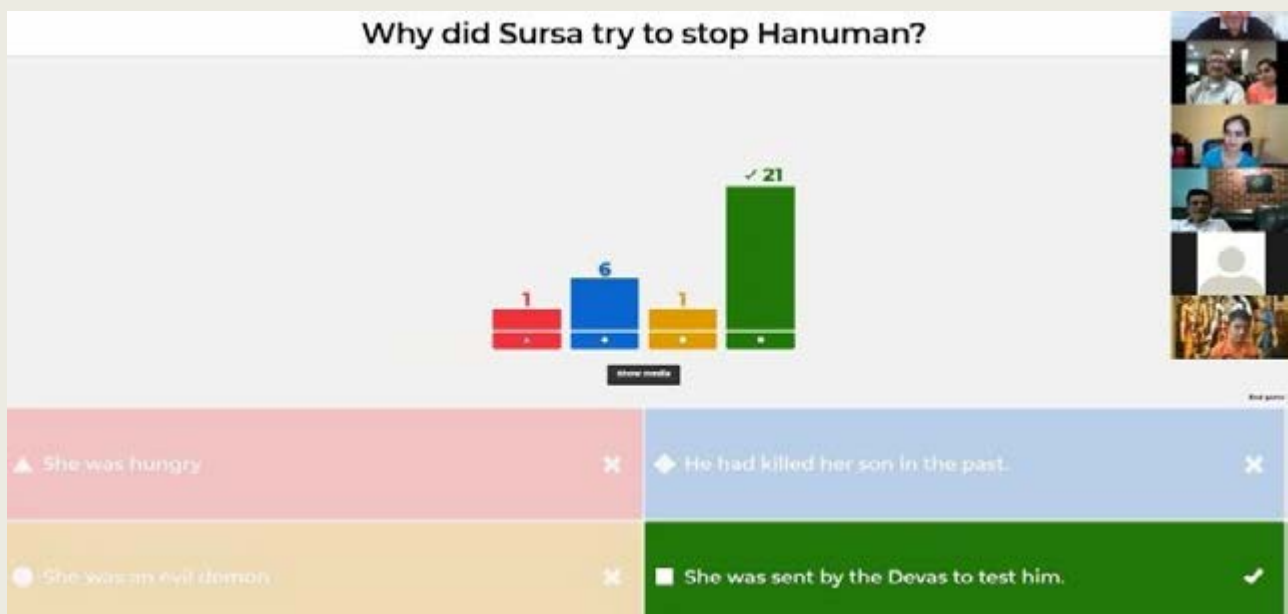
The first session on Friday started with a welcome message followed by prarthana and aarti that were chanted by everyone in the call but what made it truly special was that the aarti with mandir, diya, and bells was conducted in one of the attendee's homes and was broadcast in the Zoom session in all the sessions. The large number of family members in the home made it seem as if we were in the real Camp with 150 attendees all singing in unison. That was followed by an exciting treasure hunt game led by junior volunteers in which all the attendees ran around in their homes trying to find various items.

The Saturday and Sunday sessions also included the educational program for which the theme was choosing the Right Path: Selected episodes from Ramayan and Bhagvatam and people were introduced to some fun with Vedic math. During the education program, the campers were divided into three grade-



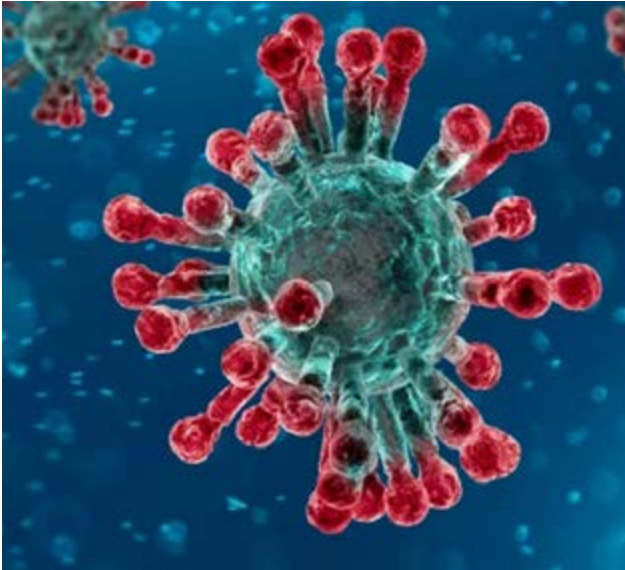
appropriate groups each of which had 15-17 and the adults into their own group that included almost 30 adults.

All sessions also incorporated live cultural performances by the campers who played instruments, danced, or sang bhajans. There was also some reminiscing of past years Camps where we viewed previous cultural performances and looked through some old pictures. The Sunday session included a fun quiz about what we learned during the Camp using Kahoot. The virtual Camp ended on Sunday with virtual milk and cookies. We hope to see everyone in the real Camp next year in 2021!





# How Corona has Changed Our Lives



Since January of this year, the USA has experienced, and confirmed the existence of the corona virus, and its spread throughout the country.

As the virus continued to gain strength, and maintain its course of spreading, we have seen major increases in the numbers of persons affected, and, in those who have also lost their lives, and their loved ones. We have all experienced the effects of quarantines, and shutdowns of businesses, and institutions. Children have not been able to go to schools. Many adults have lost jobs, and have not been able to go to work. Some have been fortunate to work from home, and many are still experiencing hardships. In total, this virus has robbed many of their lives, good health, and the ability to move around freely, as we do under normal circumstances.

Social interaction is at its minimal, as we cannot entertain, and be a part of crowds. Our Temples have been either closed to the public, or seeing minimal worshippers, and, so many social and cultural events have been curtailed and cancelled. In general, we have become a population of masked beings, and have lost our freedom to corona!

While some still take chances at congregating, many are playing it safe! At present we are seeing some relief in areas due to the shutdowns, and emphasis on quarantines. But, will this help to curtail the spread of the virus, and even end it? And, how will it end? The rules for diminishing the spread have been set. But, as humans who need to, and want to get out of this situation, are we following the rules and requests, to act in a manner that will reduce, and eventually stop the spread?

We still have a way to go. The virus is only going to “lose its steam” and itself die, if everyone follows the instructions given by the experts. So, if we all have the same strong desire to slowdown, and eventually get rid of Coronavirus, we must all be aware, and follow the rules of the experts, who plead with us each day, to wear our masks, wash our hands often, stay away from crowds, and, at the least, keep a six feet distance from others. Remember too, that it is possible that people without symptoms can still spread the virus. So stay safe, take precautions, and stay alive! All lives matter!



# 5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2020 - A DAY OF INDEPENDENCE FROM FEAR



## *Rajat Mitra*

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020, perhaps for the first time, in the history of India, by building the Ram Mandir, the Hindu community may finally be said to reclaim something it has never done before from the Muslim community. The Hindu community hasn't been in the habit of reclaiming. They have only seen what belonged to them, taken away. The Ram Mandir is a role reversal, a transmission of trauma reversed uphill, one that may have far reaching consequences for both. The balance that tilted in favor of the latter in the garb of secularism may have just received its first death knell.

When the British left the shores of India on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, Indians celebrated thinking it to be our independence. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020, they may just celebrate another independence, a task that was left unfinished, that 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 didn't accomplish, a freedom from fear, injustice and humiliation for a people used to slavery.

In school textbooks every school child in India is taught that when the British left us on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 we became independent. Future generations might just say, "No, we didn't," and write, "It was the day when a group of White men who ruled us left our shores in fear. They left behind a people filled with shame to be ruled by a group of men who had brown skin but thought like them, had the same mindset. Everything that makes a man free was left untouched."

My father, a scholar of history would often ask his friends, the generation that saw the times before 1947 and afterwards, "What, if any, had changed for Indians after 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947?" He never got an answer.

The question above never left my imagination. As I grew up, I began to explore by asking people. Did centuries of fear we lived in vanish on that day? Did we undo the slavery of thousand years and it vanished like magic?





Growing up on the works of Frantz Fanon and liberation psychology, I learnt that real independence from fear is not the day when your perpetrator leaves you, but the day when you throw off the symbols that chained you, when the deepest recesses of mind, chained and shackled that stopped you from being equal and claiming it once again to become yours.

5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 will be that Independence Day for millions of Indians. We will reclaim what we had lost.

On that day Hindus, their children would throw off a symbol of oppression, an injustice of history heaped on them. On that day many will feel the Hindu has finally come of age, to claim his rights over owning the piece of land where his God was born. That perhaps is the real freedom

that he has been waiting for. The chain of fear has come undone, not just to liberate his land, but for him too.

The Hindu society has remained a society frozen in grief for a thousand years. Ever since the first temple was destroyed by the invader and every blow on the stone that destroyed the temples from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, the grief of a society only increased remaining an indelible part of psyche, one that saw no escape, would pass on from generation to generation, a burden for our children, a shame that we wouldn't open about to them.

That frozen sea of ice inside us will finally melt on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020. It is a day that I believe will become important for a billion Indians, not just



because the temple is being built, but because it will be counted as a moment when centuries of injustice came to an end. It will be the day when the hopes, aspirations of an entire nation trampled under the feet will rise again. It will be the day when the world may learn that religion can't be foisted by force on others through fear or atrocities. That it was not possible to do so in a town called Ayodhya.

When Native Americans stood and encircled around the Dakota pipeline stopping it from being built because it belonged to their ancestors, the world gathered around them. I hear the same yearning in a man who in Ayodhya, connected to his land in an inalienable way, a symbiotic bond that couldn't be ruptured, tried the same. That a land, a temple desecrated and ruptured a million times to end a civilization by invaders couldn't be stifled, rose again as a voice that is being heard again. It is the voice of longing, more real than food, shelter and clothing. I believe there are a million such voices around the world waiting to be heard and which will rise now.

When the history of India is written in the future, three events will be marked as turning points, as being transformative that changed the minds of us Indians forever out of fear, shame and humiliation. The first is the building of the Birla temple in 1939. Before it came up, there was no big temple in Delhi for almost a thousand years. Where have they gone? When the oldest church is more than two hundred years old, a hundred and odd mosques can be seen from far away in every part of the city, why is there no temple whose spire can be seen? Is it because no one dared to build one for fear of punishment in a land ruled by Muslims? Did the fear run so deep that the coming of British only took it deeper? Was it the freedom struggle that for a moment, however brief, lit that spark to build the Birla temple before it died again for absence of a political leadership?

The second was the building of the Somnath temple. Destroyed many times and built at the initiative of Sardar Patel, it was a step taken forward in the midst of uncertainty and doubt for a nation that hadn't come to terms with the meaning of freedom as it didn't equate it with the blood spilled of its sons hanged and killed. A destroyed temple in India still remained and symbolized a defeat for its slave sons, likened to a structure of humiliation that couldn't be erased ever, evoking fear and pain. A denial that could have been ended if we had a leadership who could see the devastation of colonialism and hated them for it.

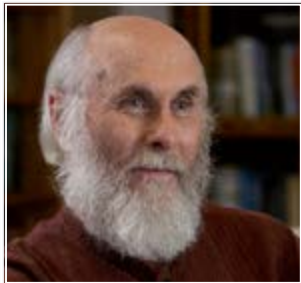
The third and perhaps the most important of the three is the building of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. It signifies the eternal spirit of a nation that doesn't give up. It marks a perseverance, a tenacity of a people who stand and wait. It shows the everlasting nature of faith in the God and the wait of the people for him. The people of Ayodhya waited fourteen years for Shri Ram to complete his vanvaas (exile) and come back home. The people of India have waited five hundred years for him to come back to his temple. A perseverance marked in stone with the blood of thousands who were slaughtered for it.

Where does the Hindu go, after building his three temples most symbolic of his slavery? The answer is easy to guess. The three temples built over a century represent the coming of age of a race who is rising after a millennium unlike any other example in history. Maybe the Hindu will take wings now, undo the very injustice of a thousand years to say 'Satyamev Jayate'.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajat Mitra is a Psychologist, Speaker and Author of 'The Infidel Next Door'  
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# WE NEED TO EMBRACE SHRI KRISHNA NOW MORE THAN EVER



*Dr. David Frawley*

**I**f there is any single figure who represents India, its yogic spirituality, vibrant culture and great history, it is Shri Krishna. This is not any easy choice as India is also the land of Buddha, Rama, Shankara and other sages of the highest order.

**For the practice of yoga, Krishna is the Yogavatara, the incarnation of yoga in all its aspects of knowledge, devotion and action.**

**If there is any single figure who represents India, its yogic spirituality, vibrant culture and great history, it is Shri Krishna.** This is not an easy choice as India is also the land of Buddha, Rama, Shankara and other sages and yogis of the highest order.

Similarly, if there is any single book that conveys the wisdom of India to the world, with its synthesis of yogic teachings and cosmic consciousness, it is Krishna's Bhagavad Gita. The Gita remains the most read and published book from India after many thousands of years.

The Bhagavad Gita is the prime scripture of Hindu dharma and Shri Krishna is its most visible teacher. Yet this fact has occurred not because Krishna gave us a simple dogma or en masse prescription, or claimed to have spoken the last word – but because Shri Krishna brings together all that is profound, beautiful and wonderful in human thought and action, and links it with the Supreme Divine.

Shri Krishna was a multisided personality, a renaissance man who mastered every domain of human life according to the highest inner vision. He was not simply a monk, a prophet or a saint, but a master of our full human potential, in the world and beyond the world, as illumined by an unlimited Divine Light from within the heart.

**On Krishna Janmashtami we must remember this great avatar of Yoga, who taught Jnana, Bhakti and Karma Yoga in an integral manner.**



## Shri Krishna's many teachings

For the study of the most transcendent Vedantic philosophy of Atman and Brahman, Krishna's key teachings in the Bhagavad Gita remain central, unlocking the Upanishadic wisdom of the highest Self-realisation.

For the practice of yoga, Krishna is the Yogavatara, the incarnation of yoga in all its aspects. His Gita is one of the most important Yoga Shastras with each chapter forming a special yogic approach of its own, covering all branches of Yoga in more detail than the Yoga Sutras.

For Karma Yoga and transformative action, Krishna's counselling to Arjuna in the Gita is the foundational teaching. As a statesman and diplomat par excellent no one compares with Krishna.

That is why Krishna and the Gita became the inspiration for India's Independence movement with Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi.

## Shri Krishna and the beauty of life

Yet besides his towering spiritual and philosophical stature, Krishna became the splendorous icon of art, music and dance – lauded in India's literary and artistic traditions and temple worship, north and south, east and west. His flute is the basis of all music. His ras lila is the ultimate dance. Indian painting revolves around his colorful image.

As a teacher of devotion, Shri Krishna reigns supreme as the ultimate image and guide of Divine Love, as detailed in the many heart-rending stories about him. These we find in the Srimad Bhagavatam and other Vaishnava teachings.

Moreover,

Krishna has a special form and teaching for every age group and every phase of human life. There is the infant or bal Krishna delighting his mother, the trickster youthful Krishna fascinating his friends, Krishna as the enchanting lover with his consort Radha, extending to Krishna as the husband, friend, warrior, king, and supreme guru, each with its own wide dimension of experience and wisdom.

Krishna holds all the colors of the rainbow of human life, extending into all the colors of the boundless universe, represented by the peacock feather that he wears, and the all-encompassing cosmic form that he assumes in the Gita.

## The need to connect with Krishna today

Krishna reflects the beauty, diversity, abundance, paradox and profundity of India as a whole and its many-sided dharmic traditions. On his birth date one can honor any or all the many facets of the bejeweled light of Krishna.

The world today needs the vast wisdom of Krishna, along with his creative inspiration, diplomatic sagacity, and divine sense of play and delight.

Our world is too heavy with material attachment, intellectual opinions, exploitation of nature, and violence inciting cults in the name of God.

We should listen to Krishna's flute once more and open up to our own inner reality in the divine play of consciousness and bliss.

We can contact Krishna in any way we wish, with or without form, within or without, in music or in silence, in dance or in stillness. He will surely

respond.

The message of Krishna is to carefully face all life's difficulties directly and decisively but remember to affirm that bliss is eternal, from Kurukshetra to Vaikuntha. Though we may need to take our role as Arjuna, we must remember that Krishna is taking us to the highest truth.

**Jai Shri Krishna!**

**Vamadeva Shastri**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

Source: <https://www.vedanet.com/we-need-to-embrace-shri-krishna-now-more-than-ever/>





# WHY I BECAME A HINDU - A KRISHNA BHAKTA



*Stephen Knapp*

**W**hen I go to India one of the most common questions I get is why did I start following Vedic culture, or what attracted me so much to India and its traditions. Many people wonder why, if I'm born in the opulence and decadence of the West, would I be so interested in India? Why would I be so fascinated by their ancient Vedic tradition? Wouldn't I already have everything I would want, everything I need? Maybe not. Maybe the American dream is not all it's cracked up to be, at least not without a higher level of spirituality for balance and completeness. Maybe Western religion also does not give all we need. So, let me provide a little insight into why I took up the Dharmic path.

Now this is about "why" I became a follower of Sanatana-dharma, not "how" I became a Dharmist, which is a longer story. But this does include a little of how it happened.

Back when I was a teenager, I felt like I did not fit into this world and thought ill of the premise that the whole purpose of life seemed to be based on the idea that you have to get an education

to learn a skill so you could find a career that should last the rest of your life, even if you don't know what you want to do. So, I was cynical toward everyone because of that, and would have fun playing the subtle game of tearing apart anyone's paltry purpose for their existence. In that process, I would find that most people also had little reason for what they were doing. They just went along with the crowd because it seemed right, or because their parents wanted them to do something. Of course, it was amusing to my friends to make sarcastic jokes at others' expense, but I was just irritated for being pushed into a world with social patterns and expectations that didn't make sense to me.

In my mid-teens I became a musician. Music was the only thing I liked. It saved my life. I learned how to play guitar and specialized in bass guitar, and became quite good at it. So, I spent time hanging out with other musicians, artists, and hippies of the area, and though we would express ourselves in various ways, we would still get serious at times and sit down and wonder what was our real purpose in this life and where did we really fit into this world. Then, in my late teenage years, I had to set my guitar down for a while and do some considerable research into the various philosophies and spiritual paths of the world to find some solid answers for the real purpose of life.

Having grown up as a Christian, which was typical of most people in America, I decided to seriously look into it. I studied the Bible, not only in Sunday school and Church, but privately I read the Bible from cover to cover. It took me a year



to do that, so I was fairly determined, but I did it. This was simply to see what was really contained in its pages. I knew of few other people, especially of my age, who had read the Bible from cover to cover. But I had more questions than it could answer. So, I had to keep searching for the spiritual knowledge I wanted to know, because if you look deeply into the Bible, it mostly covers moralistic principles, what to do or not do. These, of course, are necessary for any religious path, but it is only the beginning. I wanted to know more about spiritual knowledge and the process to increase my spiritual perception. The fact of the matter is that most religions start with faith and end with faith, without any real spiritual experiences or realizations in between. There is often nothing to take you to a deeper level of self-perception, but merely the same beliefs in concepts that remain outside your own encounters, and often times with no encouragement from the church authorities to reach that higher level of consciousness. So, I obviously had to look elsewhere for the information I needed.

Now is that being difficult? I don't think so. I was just asking the kind of questions that any inquisitive and decent human being would ask. But if you look, what does the Bible say about God, even in simple matters such as what is His form, what does He look like? Other than mentioning that He appeared as a burning bush or a dove, etc., it does not say much. It also says he is a jealous and angry God. But why would God be angry and jealous, and of who? He already owns everything, and everyone is under His control, so what is the problem? Or is it actually a matter of humanity merely projecting their own weaknesses on their conception of God? Then the conception of God that is presented is not really God at all, but merely mankind's idea of what God must be, based on their own weaknesses and imagination. Well, this was not what I wanted to learn.

Furthermore, what does the Bible really say about the soul, about our spiritual nature, about our spiritual relationship with God and each other, or even about heaven and hell, or things like that? Furthermore, it was completely absent



of any description of the soul. Thus, it really does not say all that much regarding higher spiritual knowledge, which means there are numerous questions left unanswered. This also means that we have to rely mostly on faith that we are doing what is necessary to reach heaven. After all, this is one of the goals of Christianity. Everyone has hopes of going to heaven. In this way, it offers a very elementary level of spiritual knowledge based on the idea that you have to do whatever the church tells you if you expect to have any relationship with God. Without that, you may face excommunication, which is synonymous with going to hell. Sorry folks, but that is not enough for me, or any sensible person for that matter.

However, another problem is that the church took out most references to the topics of karma and reincarnation, which I later found out in my research had been a part of a political ploy to keep people in line with the demands of the church. Without such obedience, they would not be good Christians, and, thus, have no standing in the eyes of God, or so they say. So, you cannot expect to

get the whole spiritual truth out of such books when these kinds of things are done to them.

So, where do we go to find the answers? Therefore, I also studied Judaism, Egyptology, magic, witchcraft, I Ching, palmistry, Tarot, Voodoo, Zen Buddhism, mysticism, Yoga, and many other esoteric topics. I even read most of the Koran. However, as anyone who reads the Koran will see, in comparison with other scriptures, it is not a book which focuses much on theology or spiritual doctrine. It does not dwell on describing our eternal spiritual identity, the characteristics of the soul, or the spiritual nature of God. In fact, it provides a harsh view of God when compared to other religious texts like the Vedic literature. It presents God, Allah, as a God who gives out much punishment with little or no mercy for those fallen ones who do not follow the Islamic path, even though verses within it say how merciful He is. But this mercy is shown mostly to those who are already followers of Islam or who convert to Islam, while apostates deserve to be killed. But, again, is this really God, or only



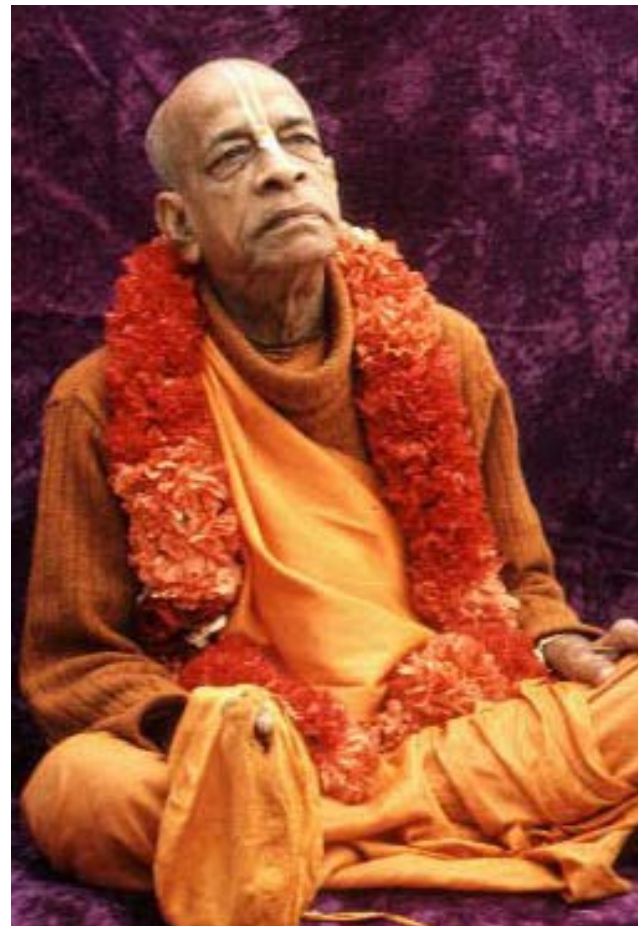
mankind projecting their own characteristics and demands into their concept of God?

In this way, it became obvious to me that all religions are not the same. They definitely take you to different levels of understanding. The Bible and Koran, for example, deal mostly with moralistic principles, which are, of course, necessary if a person is to begin any spiritual process. However, books of the western religions consist mostly of rules, or dos and don'ts with the promise that if you follow all of them properly, you will go to heaven. Otherwise, you go to hell with no second chance. In the conventional monotheistic religions, it's like you are walking a tightrope just to make sure you do not make the mistakes that will take you to hell, what to speak of trying to make any genuine spiritual advancement. But anyone who is spiritually experienced and knowledgeable knows that you cannot go to heaven by faith alone. It just does not work that way. The only way you can go to a higher dimension is by changing your consciousness to a higher level of perception and activity, and doing it right here in this life. And I found few genuine spiritual paths that provided the means or the processes by which you could do that.

Thus, I had to continue looking for the answers I needed for a higher understanding and for things to make sense to me, including the purpose of life. But fear-based religions, those that promise hell and punishment if not followed, were not for me. I did not want the fear of going to hell as the main motivation for accepting a particular spiritual path, or a dogma that everyone was supposed to accept in order to go to heaven, or to maintain an approved connection with an institution or church to keep from being excommunicated and, thus, going to eternal damnation. This did not seem logical to me. I wanted a path that could give me a natural and progressive way to attain a clear perception of the spiritual dimension, not dogma

or fear-based indoctrination or blind faith.

In all my research, I finally read the Bhagavad-gita As It Is by His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada, which was like the final piece of the puzzle that I had been putting together from all of my philosophical and spiritual investigation. I could see that all of the spiritual paths were connected. Through the knowledge they offer, they can bring a person to different levels of consciousness, some higher and some lower. But the Bhagavad-gita gave me exactly what I needed, which was a big boost in spiritual understanding, and I knew I needed more. So, I went on to read the Upanishads, Vedanta Sutras, Yoga Sutras, and other texts including the Puranas. These all gave me profound insights into the purpose of life, and, finally, let me know that this world is not my real home. It is not like I have to find a permanent place here, or an occupation that has to last forever, like I was being taught in school at the time, and



which was expected of me by my parents. I was a spiritual being and only a passing tourist on this planet as I moved forward, preparing for higher realms.

As I studied the Eastern texts, it became clear that we all have a connection with God regardless of what our religion is, or whether we have a connection with a religious institution or church. All we have to do is reawaken that relationship. And the Vedic system gives you many tools to choose from to help you do that, such as gurus and teachers, sacred texts, temples for worship and learning, systems of yoga, and processes of development. Nothing is forced on you.

In the Vedic process, you choose your own speed at which you advance, your own methods that work best for you, the level of understanding and the spiritual texts you want to use. You decide whatever lessons you need to learn in order to proceed. And whatever advancement you make is never lost.

It's not a question of having a dogma forced on you. It is a matter of proceeding at the rate that works best for you so that your spiritual progress unfolds naturally, not artificially or superficially. The Vedic system expects you to have your own spiritual awakenings and experiences when you are ready for them or developed enough.

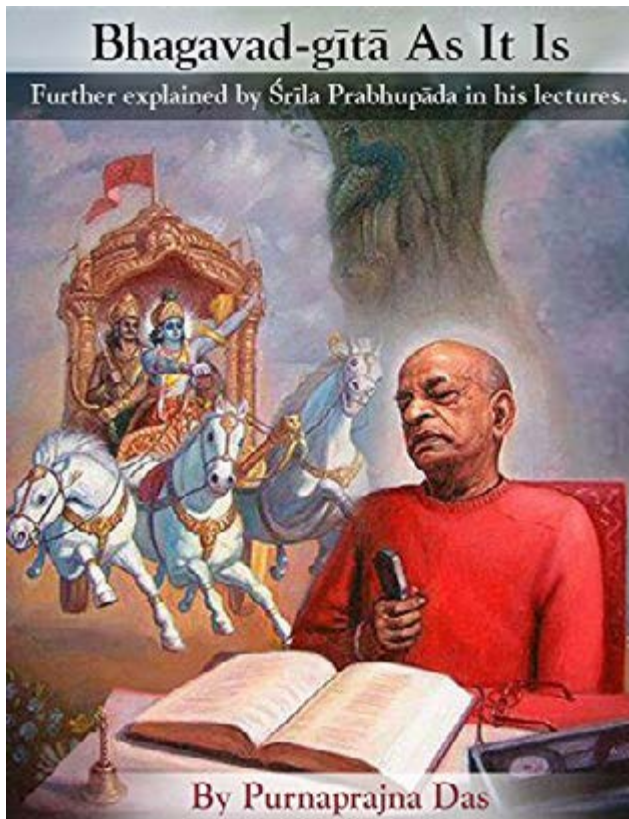
I did not want to merely read about the spiritual dimension, and what it must be like. I wanted to see it. I did not want to merely read about the Supreme Being, which is more than you can get in most Western religions anyway. Most of them have no idea about His appearance, characteristics, how He acts, jokes with His devotees, or displays His pastimes and love towards them. But I wanted direct evidence and realizations, a connection to fill my soul, and to complete my purpose in life. I did not get that

from anything else, whether it was material pursuits or Western religions. They all remained too shallow for me. I must admit that even parts of Hinduism were more like intellectual exercises or pursuits until I came to the teachings of Lord Krishna, especially in Bhagavad-gita and then in the Bhagavata Purana. These provided deep teachings that awakened a higher awareness of life and the spiritual nature of us all.

I also did not try to learn this spiritual knowledge through an academic pursuit. Most academics have never experienced whatever spiritual culture they teach anyway, or may even teach outright wrong information about it. Armchair philosophers often lack the necessary direct insight and awareness to qualify for teaching others. It is known amongst all Eastern mystics that anyone, regardless of qualifications, academic or otherwise, who does not engage in the spiritual practices described in the Vedic texts, cannot actually enter into understanding the depths of the Vedic spiritual science, nor acquire the realizations that should accompany it. So, rather than pursuing my research in an academic atmosphere at a university, I directly engaged in the spiritual disciplines that have been recommended for hundreds of years. Thus, in time, I studied the Vedic knowledge and spiritual practice under the guidance of a spiritual master.

After several years of serious independent study, I earnestly took to the Dharmic process of yoga and became a steady follower of it. This was because it gives a person the means or the system to spiritualize one's consciousness, and, thus, actually begin to have insights into perceiving the spiritual dimension. It does not merely prescribe faith that such a thing exists, but it gives you the descriptions of it and the process by which you can have your own spiritual experiences. The point is that the more spiritual you become, the more you can perceive that which is spiritual.





This is the key. Thus, the spiritual dimension no longer remains a mystery, or merely something you study or learn about, but it becomes a reality, something to experience. And that makes all the difference. Thus, I imbibed the teachings within the Vedic texts and that of Lord Krishna and took up the path of yoga, especially bhakti-yoga or devotional yoga and became a Krishna bhakta. Thereafter, I lived in an ashram to practice, study, and be trained in the Vedic teachings and learn the way of regulated spiritual life, sadhana, along with temple rituals, puja, and so forth until I became initiated into the Brahma-Gaudiya sampradaya under the auspices of Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and was given the name of Sri Nandanandana dasa. Several months later I was brahminically initiated as well.

One of the reasons why I became a Krishna bhakta is that He is the God of unconditional love, which is something that everyone is looking for, and He also instructed in the Bhagavad-gita that we should stand up and protect Sanatana-

dharma for the benefit of others. At the battle of Kuruksetra, Arjuna wanted to leave the battlefield and go to the forest and meditate, but Lord Krishna said no. It was best to do one's duty and stand up to protect Dharma, not only for oneself but for all others as well. By working for the benefit of others in such a way, a person simultaneously helps oneself. You get a little of the spiritual credit, or punya, for whatever advancement others make because of your endeavors. And now this is one of my main activities, not only pursuing my own practice of Sanatana-dharma, but helping to preserve, protect, and promote or explain Vedic culture so others can understand, utilize and benefit from it.

If we look at the library of Vedic texts like the Bhagavad-gita, Upanishads, Mahabharata, or Vishnu Purana, or especially the Bhagavata Purana, they all explain various aspects of the nature of God, what our spiritual identity is, what is this universe, where we came from and where we are going based on whatever our actions are, and what are the pastimes, characteristics, attributes, and nature of the Supreme Being. How else are we supposed to learn this knowledge, and where else can it be found in such a complete fashion? I have studied all of the world religions and no other texts or scripture offers such a depth of spiritual information. That is why I have concluded that the Vedic philosophy is the last bastion of deep spiritual truth and knowledge. Nothing offers what it does. Vedic culture, essentially, takes up where the Western religions leave off.

That is why I never went back to the Western religions, though I may respect all paths and still study portions of them for comparative reasons. But what is the point of going back to something less profound, less expansive, less spiritual, less dynamic than what we have in the Dharmic tradition and philosophy as found in India? To do so makes no sense. Though raised in the West with

its Christian beliefs and its modern facilities, many of us Westerners look toward the East, especially India, for our inspiration and spirituality. We are rejecting some of the very aspects of the Western religions that some of the present day Indians are accepting when they convert to them. This means that possibly they have not looked into them as deeply as we have, at least when it comes to seeking the deeper aspects of spiritual knowledge, beyond the moral principles. They also may not be looking at the bloody history they have left in their trails through the past. Horrible crimes against humanity have been committed in the name of these religions, mostly in order to control such people and make them convert, not by their spiritual purity, but by political force whether they wanted to or not.

In this way, Vedic culture, Sanatana-dharma, by giving me this spiritual knowledge, saved my life, more than music did. It gave me the insights I needed to understand the purpose of life, what I was doing here, where I came from, where I'm going based on my actions in this life, and how to acquire the highest levels of spiritual perception. It gave me the means to keep going in this world. For me, without those things, my life remained incomplete and void of real meaning. It meant that I had little purpose to continue living. Why bother with something that made little sense to me? And materialistic life was just that, something that made no sense.

However, anyone who grasps the big picture of things, meaning to understand that our existence spans many lifetimes, will know that this is not my first life as a follower of Sanatana-dharma. I was obviously an Indian devotee in India in a previous life. I'm only taking up where I left off from before. And I will continue to follow Sanatana-dharma, as well as work to preserve, protect, and promote it for the benefit of others until the day I die. And I invite others to join me on this great path.



The thing is that I was not born into Vedic culture in this life. I did not learn about it because my parents or grandparents followed it, like most Indians do. I was born in a small Midwestern town in America where there was no hint of any Vedic tradition. So, I had to search for it and fight to attain it. That is why I do not take it for granted at all. And no one is going to take it away from me now that I have found it.

I know what my life was like when I did not have it, and it has made such a difference in my life compared to when all I had was the elementary form of religion that I started with. I learned the benefits of the Dharmic path and how it can relate to my life, and the many improvements of understanding it has given me.



So, as a typical American, when we find something good, positive, and advantageous, we want to share it with others. Our enthusiasm makes us want others to take a look at it and see what they think because they might like it as well. And I have seen what it has done for others with its deep spiritual knowledge, peace, insights into the purpose of life, and how to increase our own spiritual perception, over and above mere faith and hope. This is why I have gone on to write various books on the many aspects of Vedic culture, so others can learn about it, use it in their life, and benefit from it. I especially try to write in a way to make the lofty and sophisticated Vedic philosophy understandable for the regular layman. But amazingly, even though I started out writing for Westerners, many Indian Hindus have also appreciated what I do and have expressed how they have gathered much from my own learning, research, realizations, and experiences about which I have written. This enthuses me to continue the work I do to help preserve, protect, and promote the Vedic knowledge and its traditions. Its timeless wisdom and spiritual knowledge still serves a most important purpose.

However, as things stand today, we may think that the battle of Kuruksetra was just a story in the Mahabharata, a scene for the Bhagavad-gita in which Lord Krishna told Arjuna that it was foolish for him to want to go off to the forest to meditate when his duty was to stand and fight. But fight for what? To fight for Sanatana-dharma and our freedom to pursue the spiritual Dharmic path. Thus, we should all follow in the footsteps of Arjuna in this way, under the direction of Lord Krishna to do our parts to take a stand to help protect Vedic culture. In this way, I have worked with a wide number of organizations, both within India and outside, and numerous individuals who have similar ideas for doing this.

It is not our time to be timid about standing

up for our rights to follow the Dharma. It is not time to be afraid to come together and work to preserve our culture from those forces, whether they be different religions, non-Hindu politicians, Marxists, or secularists who still wish to destroy it or see its demise. We should be on the forefront to work with each other to maintain our spiritual traditions. We should be on the forefront to create a spiritual revolution in India through the promotion of Vedic spiritual knowledge, and allowing all other interested people to participate in it without restriction. If we can do this, we could change India in 18 days, which was the same length of time as the Battle of Kuruksetra. Vedic culture is, as I call it, the last bastion of deep spiritual truth. We must all do our part to preserve and protect it, and make sure that India remains the homeland of a dynamic and thriving Vedic tradition.

Why am I so enthused and determined about this? It is because my life has been so much blessed because of it. I cannot imagine what my life would have been without it. I love this Vedic culture. I love India. I love Sanatana-dharma, and I love being a devotee of Lord Krishna, and I think everyone should take a serious look at it.

Bharata Mata ki jaya! Jai Hind! Sanatana-dharma ki jaya! Hari Om, and Jai Sri Krishna!

*This article and more information at [www.stephen-knapp.com](http://www.stephen-knapp.com)*

# WALKING IN DHARMA: REFLECTIONS ON 50 YEARS OF VHPA'S SERVICE

*Manu Shah*

**T**he Hindu way of life and thinking, far from being a mystical eastern religion, has had a profound influence on the west, leading to successes on American soil, not in terms of material wealth, but in individual satisfaction with immense self-content.

Four outstanding personalities from different walks of life bore testimony to realizing this principle in their lives and showcased their stories during the 50th anniversary celebrations of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).

The keynote speakers set the “virtual” stage for “Reflections@50: Walking in Dharma” on Sept. 19 and 20 for an upcoming real life congregation and grand celebration next year to commemorate World Hindu Council of America’s 50 years of fostering the Hindu socio-cultural-spiritual movement.

The four speakers, Vyomesh Joshi, CEO, 3D Systems; Vandana Tilak, CEO & Director, Akshaya Patra USA; Dr. Raj Vedam, scholar in Indian history and Benny Tillman, President, Vedic Friends Association, narrated their pioneering efforts and accomplishments, based on the ancient Hindu philosophy and how it paved the way for their fruitful journey.

**Vyomesh Joshi**, one of the biggest names in the printing industry and an influential Indian



**Vyomesh Joshi**  
CEO - 3D Systems

American, Vyomesh Joshi was the opening Keynote speaker at the “Reflections @50: Walking the Dharma” virtual conference held on September 19 and 20.

As Executive VP, Vyomesh Joshi led market leader Hewlett-Packard’s printing unit and other operations and is widely credited with increasing revenues from \$19 billion to \$28 billion during his 31- year tenure. He presently helms 3D systems, a leading manufacturing solutions company, as President and CEO.

Interweaving references from the Bhagwad Gita and attributing his success to its core values, Vyomesh spoke on “Authentic Leadership” and how Hindu scriptures guided him in leading global companies and world class teams as well as dealing with triumphs and setbacks.

Citing a Gallup poll, he noted that followers look for four attributes in a leader, namely – Trust,



Compassion, Stability and Hope.

Trust, he expounded, comes from Trustworthiness which in turn comes from competence and character. Humility is equally important and there's no room for ego. A key learning experience came from his first job as a Project Manager at HP. Vyomesh was always looking to impress until an employee - Jenny Hollis told him that he "would get all the credit if his team was successful. That's what you want to focus on, not yourself." The lesson hit home and Vyomesh realized an authentic leader always puts "his company first, employees second and himself last." He implemented this advice when 3D acquired 51 diverse companies and a fractured culture. Vyomesh spent the first two years building a unified culture. Quoting from the Gita, he says, "it's all about detaching yourself."

Life, he continued, is about making the right choices and the most important choice one can make is a positive attitude. He spoke of his mother who succumbed to breast cancer when he was 16 years old but always remembers her smiling even during her pain. It taught him that when times are tough, what counts is a positive attitude and empathy.

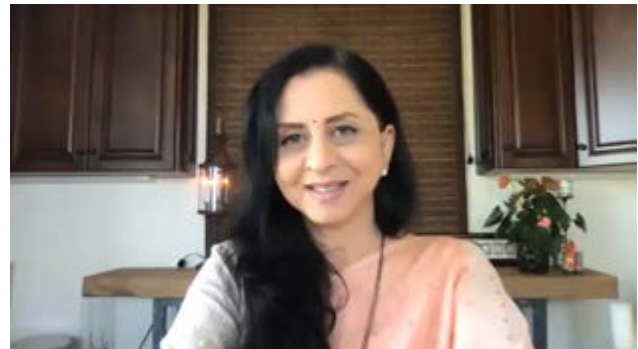
Stability is the third attribute in an authentic leader. Referring to the Second Chapter in the Gita, Verse 54, Arjuna asks for help in understanding "Sthita prajna" or a stable intellect to control the senses, mind and desires. It is important to be calm and composed in the face of successes and challenges. Recalling the head of BAPS, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's response to the terrorist attack on the Akshardham temple in 2002, Vyomesh noted that the leader was not only composed but in fact, prayed for the attackers. Had he lost control, there would have been riots. In yet another instance, HP's revenues plummeted during the 2007 financial crisis and

25,000 employees worldwide looked to him for guidance. Innovation, he told them, would guide them and HP not only survived but did very well.

Stability is about the present but what is needed for the future is Hope – the fourth attribute of an authentic leader: Arjuna did not want to fight but Bhagwan Krishna explains that only the body perishes, the atma or the soul never dies. Every leader must offer hope in difficult times.

Vyomesh topped off his address by reminding us that we all have an important decision to make in the coming days. The authentic leader will have all the four attributes listed by him.

**Vandana Tilak**, CEO of Akshaya Patra USA  
Vandana Tilak calls "children who have to go hungry an injustice." In her keynote address on "Seva – the First and Last Frontier," she dwelt on her philosophy of looking beyond oneself and her seva through a leading non-profit organization - Akshaya Patra.



**Vandana Tilak**  
CEO & Director - Akshaya Patra USA

Seva, for Vandana, is an unconditional exchange of love, thoughts, words and action. There is no differentiation, whether it is a person, animal or this planet – each one is a living breathing organism and they all "deserve the respect and dignity of seva."

She believes that we all need to go beyond the self, connect with the universe, trust that

the universe has a plan to take care of those in need. We are just mechanisms and the universe conspires to do good through us, the “divinity in each of us is fulfilling the destiny of those we meet.”

Continuing in the same vein, she noted that the Universe ensures that 1.8 million children are fed every day through Akshaya Patra. This one single thought connects her to what she does. This is an opportunity for us, she emphasized, not the beneficiaries. It is a sense of empathy that allows her to place herself in their shoes. More importantly, seva doesn’t tolerate an ego. The minute you put yourself on a pedestal, the Universe will find a way to bring you down to earth.

**How did she become involved with Akshaya Patra?** Vandana believes that the job found her, in the form of becoming a volunteer for Akshaya Patra, starting the Los Angeles Chapter, joining the Board in 2015 and assuming the role of its CEO in 2018. However, this is only a part of it. Two years ago, while on a walk with her husband, she stopped, pointed to the sky as if making a pact with the universe and out of nowhere told her husband: “You know, I’m going to be travelling a lot, I’m going to meet amazing people and I’m going to make tons of money.” By design, she did not say it was for her or her family.

Using a beautiful example of sharing, she says that as a student of Ayurveda, one of the first things that is taught is the nature of hunger. When we are hungry, we eat healthy food and exercise. This is Prakriti or the natural flow. When we are not hungry and overeat, it’s vikruti. But when you keep a little bit aside knowing that someone else needs it and both of you are happy and fed, that is sanskriti.

Akshaya Patra was started in the year 2000

by ISKCON and interestingly, was named by the former Member of Parliament Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi. Its mission is simple: to provide food for education. It stands for the single meal a child gets in school, it brings the child to school, helps them focus, learn and become productive members of society. That one meal impacts future generations and breaks the cycle of poverty for the entire family.

Dr. Raj Vedam, an acclaimed scholar and co-founder of the thinktank on Indian History Awareness & Research based in Houston, Dr. Vedam’s keynote addressed how Hindu identity has steadily come to be defined not by us but by others and has been used as a weapon to subvert our identity.



**Dr. Raj Vedam**  
Scholar - Indian History

As a scientist, Dr. Vedam traced the roots of modern sciences, mathematics and technology, a quest that led him to study the histories of Babylon, Greece, Egypt, China and other ancient civilizations. His findings contradict western narratives, one of them being the Indian civilization’s knowledge of Mathematics and Science came from outside India.

This brings us to the question of the need for an identity? Dr. Vedam clarified that our ancient Rishis understood that we are all one or Brahman but conquests by the Turks and the Arabs and their destruction of our temples and libraries

followed by the colonial powers of the British with their notion of one god reduced us to a country of fractured identities.

What is the impact of this identity crisis, what has it done to us and how do people view us today? One of its serious consequences are attacks on Hindu identity by well organized groups with huge funding from abroad and within the country. The media and universities have also turned into “hotbeds of Hinduphobia”

Hindu children are not spared even in the United States. The case of author Vivek Agnihotri who was invited to Rutgers University for a talk is a case in point. The Hindu student group faced enormous backlash and anti-Hindu pressure by hate based organizations. This story is not unique and is repeated in major universities across the US, making Hindu children wary of expressing their identity on campus or on social media for fear of ridicule from peers. Equally disquieting is the California textbook controversy of 2017 where Hindus urged the California State Board to remove the negative portrayal of Hindus in school textbooks.

How did we get here and which agencies were complicit in pinning us with such an identity and why did they do that? The systemic ethnocide of Indians by the British is one reason and they did this by perpetuating poverty, distorting history, undermining our religions and demolishing the indigenous education system by introducing English.

One of the direct consequences of the introduction of English in India was the discontinuation of publications of books in Sanskrit and funds were instead used for the propagation of English. This distancing from Sanskrit meant that Indians could no longer connect to their roots.

Without “sugarcoating” the situation, Dr. Vedam said that the Hindu ecosystem, whether it is temples, universities, cultural practices, marks that you wear as a Hindu, festivals celebrated, the foods that you eat are all “perverted, distorted and shamed.”

One way to reclaim the Hindu identity, he says, is by becoming ambassadors to exemplify Dharma as a logical, rational, responsible system with solutions for global problems, living a dharmic lifestyle, learning about Hinduism, celebrating festivals, visiting temples, supporting scholars, institutions and organizing outreach talks and conferences.

Benny Tillman or Balabhadra Bhattacharya Dasa is a direct disciple of his Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He joined the Hare Krishna movement in 1973 and has traveled extensively in India and other parts of the world practicing and teaching ancient Vedic philosophy. He serves as the first African American President of the Vedic Friends Association dedicated to the preservation, promotion and application of Vedic culture and philosophy.



**Benny Tillman (Balabhadra Bhattacharya Dasa)**  
President - Vedic Friends Association (VFA)

Society, he points out, is confused about the real purpose of life, which according to our Vedic teachings should focus on self-realization as well as material development. We are not this physical body, we are spiritual beings inside this body and



we have an eternal relationship with God. While living in this world we must learn to connect these two and that's yoga. Contrary to popular belief, yoga is not just a form of exercise, it is much deeper than that.

The uncertain situation in the world today presents an opportunity for our Hindu leaders to offer practical solutions derived from the Vedas. Quoting a verse from Chapter 3 of the Gita, he explains that Bhagwan Krishan says whatever action a great man performs, common men follow and whatever standards he says by exemplary acts, all the world pursues. This verse, in his experience, resonated with everyone - non-Indian and Indian because it doesn't talk about religion - it talks about setting the proper example.

The need of the hour is to create a more accessible process to introduce our culture and philosophy to the general public and reaching out to communities. Vedic Friends Association has teamed up with the Hindu Service Foundation in Atlanta which helps uplift families with a special focus on the youth and children. Similarly, Hindus of Greater Houston have facilitated the scholarship of four African Americans to learn and take yoga to their communities. He also lauded the Hindu youth in Houston for their support in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Benny concluded his address with the one word that "encapsulates the entire Vedic culture" – the word where you put your hands together, touch your chest and say Namaste. It is a recognition of the divine within each one of us and respecting the spiritual existence within us. We need to lift the word "Namaste" and teach people all over the world to use this to develop a better sense of love and respect for each other which in turn would help society as a whole.

Among the highlights of the two day-webinar were eight enlightening panel discussions with well-known speakers - entrepreneurs, heads of organizations, religious leaders, academicians, dignitaries, and youth leaders.

Engaging youth in community service has been a cornerstone of the VHPA's mission. Two panels: "Hindu Youth – Being the Change Today for Better Tomorrow" and "Evolving Nature of Seva (service) in North America" were dedicated to youth and volunteerism to focusing on their current relevance.

Other topics like, "The Hindu Woman as Sustainer of our Timeless Tradition," "Influence of Hindu Heritage on Life Choices and Decisions" and on early teaching, "Learning Through play," "The Role of Dharmic Houses of Worship - Challenges and Opportunities," "The Power of Dharma in Action" and "The Legacy of the Hindus in North America," were discussed. World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) had earlier planned Swarna Jayanti gala event to mark its jubilee milestone, however, the occasion had to be moved to September 2021 due to the Covid-19 crisis. The virtual community conference served as a glimpse into the jubilee event planned next year

About 3,200 people registered and participated in the virtual conference.

"2020 is a landmark year for Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. Established in 1970, we have completed 50 years of leading and serving the Hindu community," Dr. Abhaya Asthana, President, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America said.

"That humble initiative of 1970 has blossomed into a formidable movement over five decades, with many Hindu organizations joining in partnership along the way. Every aspect of Hindu

American life, for four generations, has been positively touched by VHPA through its visionary and transformational programs. As we stand at this crossroad, and behold the future, filled with aspirations and hope, we must also turn our gaze back on the amazing journey of 50 years, walking with Dharma in this land of America,” Asthana said.

“As a community, how far have we travelled on this four-laned highway of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha? Where are we? Where do we want to be? And, what do we have to do, to get there,” he asked?

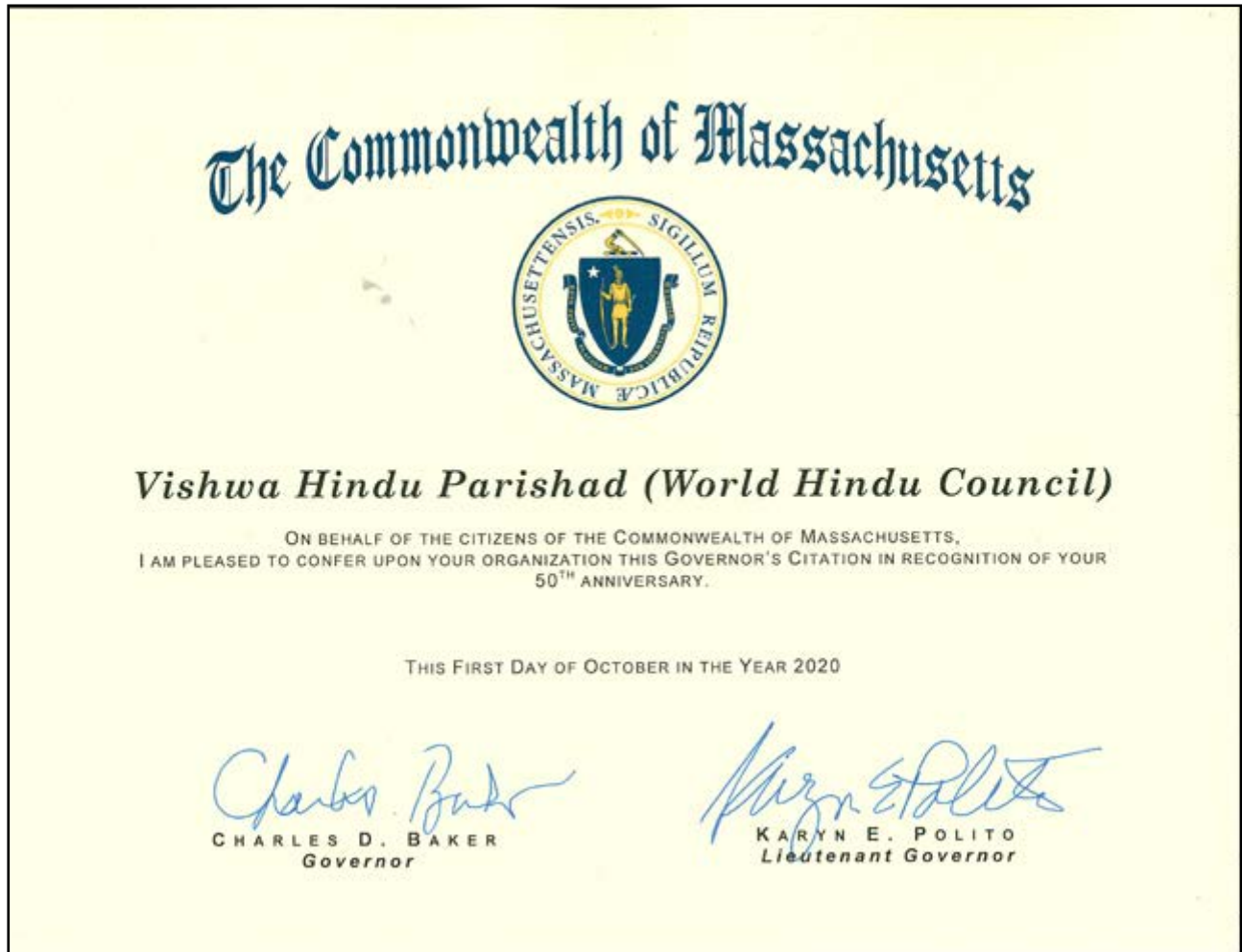
Dr. Siddhesh Shevade, National Executive Director of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, congratulated all VHPA karyakartas for a very

inspiring 50 years of tireless efforts.

“In this reflection conference, we learned about many new dimensions of Hindu unity and realized the needs of Hindu Society in modern times. As Hindu Americans, let us achieve those by our own efforts ‘Swayamev Mrugendrata’ in the near future, he said.

“Reflections@50: Walking in Dharma” represented a confluence of prominent Hindu thought leaders to do a “manthan” of the history of Hindu Americans in the last half century, and chart its course for the next half century and beyond, according to Dr. Jai Bansal , Conference convener.

Visit Impressions-50.org for more information.



*Citation from Governor and Lt. Governor of MA on 50th anniversary of VHPA*



# LEGACY OF HINDUS IN NORTH AMERICA

*Thara Narasimhan*

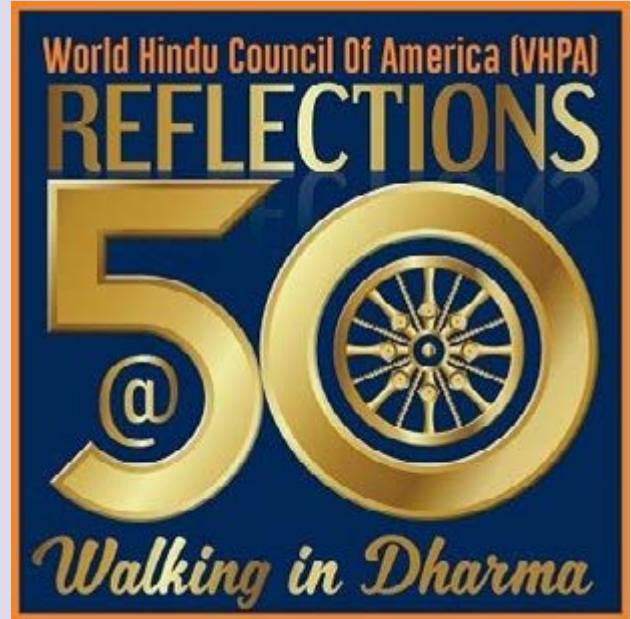
The legacy of Hindus in North America, came out brilliantly through the prism of Vanaprastis or senior citizens of Hindu American Vanaprasti Network, in a panel discussion during Reflections@50, golden jubilee virtual conference of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America on Sept. 20.

Panelists from diverse backgrounds shared their views on the contribution of Hindus in America in the past five decades and their legacy to the younger generation. Dr. Prasad Jayanti, Thara Narasimhan, Dr. Jai Bansal and Dr. Revati Teeparti were the panelists. Dr. Yash Lakra was the moderator.

Dr. Lakra, Past President of VHPA, Ekal Vidyalaya and Bharatiya Temple in Detroit, in his opening remarks quoted the Sanskrit verse suggesting any Assembly or Conference is not complete where wise old men are not included. The older generation should not be considered as dispensable because their wealth of knowledge is a treasure for all to cherish, he said.

Dr. Prasad Jayanthi, Professor of computer science at Dartmouth College highlighted the need for both Jnana, spiritual knowledge and Vijnana, material science. They are not opposite to each other and help bring about harmony to the entire society.

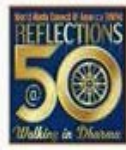
He shared with pride that Dartmouth College is the first and only University in the USA to have Saraswati Mandir inside the College campus. Shanti is the official organization, under the Tucker Foundation, representing the Hindu faith at Dartmouth. It was established in 2002 in order



to cater for the religious needs of the growing Hindu community at the college. Today, it has expanded to not only serve the religious, cultural and philosophical needs of undergraduate community at Dartmouth, but also the graduate student and Upper Valley Hindu communities.

Mrs. Thara Narasimhan, President of Hindus of Grater Houston, host of a weekly radio program on Sanatan Dharma and Sanatan Hindu Center, spoke about "Prachar" on the Radio and "Prasar," the medium of reaching out to the community. She made America her home for 40 years and her husband arrived in here 53 years ago. Now retired, they are enjoying their "Vanaprasti Status".

Prachar was started by the late Padmakant Khambhati, the Voice of Sanatan Hindusim Radio program nearly 30 years ago. His idea was to share the Sanatan Vedic Dharma and the core principles Eternal religion. The radio features special guest interviews and creates an opportunity for Hindu Temples and organizations to publicize to the



## Panel 6 : Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network (HAVAN)



**Coordinator - Kumar Dave**  
Professional Engineer,  
Balgokulam teacher



**Coordinator - Dr. Vinod Gupta**  
R&D - Optical Systems



**Dr. Yash Lakra**  
Past President  
VHPA & EKAL



**Prasad Jayanti**  
James Frank Prof.  
Computer Science,  
Dartmouth college



**Thara Narasimhan**  
President  
Hindus of Greater Houston



**Dr. Jai Bansal**  
Distinguished Fellow  
Argonne National Labs  
(retd.)



**Dr. Rewati Teeparti, MD,**  
Internal Medicine

community their announcements and festivals.

Prasar, reaching out to the Community was accomplished by Raj Syal, another visionary who started the Hindus of Greater Houston. An outstanding example of bringing Hindus together and “Unity among Hindus”, was made possible in Houston for the last 30 years. She talked about outstanding work of the Hindus in Houston in celebrating Janmashtami, the annual Hindu Youth Awards for Selfless Service, Hindu Leaders Meeting, Young Hindus of Greater Houston and the Youth Heritage camp and several other projects.

Dr. Jai Bansal retired in 2014 as the Chief Scientific Officer and Global Technology Advisor from a global petrochemical company, after a 38-year long career in variety of leadership roles. Following his retirement, he has become an active member World Hindu Council and VHPA. He is also the convener of Reflections@50 conference.

Talking about “Vanaprastis” he reflected how the golden years of the early immigrants could be a huge asset for the Hindu community.

Retired seniors with highly qualified skills and valuable experience can become resources for the community at large. Seniors should not be ignored as they set a great example for the future generation to imbibe their hard work and learn from their wisdom, he said.

Engaging Vanasprasti in meaningful activities and engaging them to involve in guiding the next generation of Hindus with their knowledge and expertise should be undertaken seriously. In an age of technological progress, he said “if two machines can talk, two generations can come together that will engage and benefit both generations.” He suggested that a Match Making facility be established between the young and the old, where the young seek expert advice on questions relevant to them..

Dr. Rewati Teeparti, is a Medical Practitioner and Hospitalist specializing in Geriatrics. She discussed the “Purusharthas,” the four aims of human life and how it relates to health.

Artha recognizes the level of physical or material need, which is not contrary to spiritual life. Currently, we have developed technology

and screening of the whole spectrum in Geriatric health in the hospitals, she said. Ancient holistic approach to deal with many health conditions is recommended. Use of turmeric for instance has become a global treatment to develop immunity. Yoga and meditation have its roots from ancient Hindu practices and it is a gift to the world, she said.

The synchronization of body, mind and spirit our bodies work together. Understanding this connection can have a positive impact on wellness, and that's especially beneficial for all in Vanasprasti status.

She suggested the use of the "Grandmother Effect," that has a huge impact when it comes to building a strong society and culture when they

bond together.

Dr. Yash Lakra summed up the talks with a humorous Urdu quote, "Scars lighted the heart's blisters / this home was set on fire by its own lamp."

Do not ignore the invaluable assets built by legacy that lives for generations and the pioneers who lead the way to develop and nurture the greatness of Sanatan Dharma, was the message.

Vinod Gupta concluded "When all are inspired all around the world, Hinduism and Sanatan Dharma has upheld the legacy as the pioneering generation of Hindu Americans".

The overall coordinators of the panel discussion were Kumar Dave and Vinod Gupta from World Hindu Council (VHPA).

## AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL HINDU PARENTS FROM A PARENT AND SCHOOLTEACHER

*Sachin Vora, Schoolteacher*

*Dear Hindu Parents,*

Our culture has produced some of the best students in America's schools, but is their happiness valued as much as parental ambitions?

I believe the readers here know that the answer is a resounding NO. Ambition and status have marred the American Dream, even though America remains a land of unlimited opportunities. My parents, like many of you, came here with next to nothing besides their

education in search of those opportunities. They worked hard, taught my sister and me to value our education, but their ambitions were never part of our daily life. Vegetarianism, the local Hindu community, and prayer were a much more significant part of our life. We were also taught a deep respect of the country that we called our home. I see a new generation of immigrants coming here just for financial gain. "Like the Parsees who settled in our native Gujarat, we too must mix like sugar in milk, making America sweeter," my father was fond of saying.



My father was a physician, but he had a passion for learning that was infectious. As a result of this culture of learning in our household, my sister and I excelled in academics. My sister and I ultimately chose teaching, despite our degrees from Top 10 Universities.

I should make it clear that the deep love we have for our father placed my sister and me in the teaching field. Unfortunately, as a teacher in a school with a 40% Hindu population, I can see that my family culture differs drastically from my students' family cultures. The majority of my students' parents would be disappointed if their child even had the slightest notion to teach in the future. But my job is wonderful, and I can pass on the wisdom of my father to a new generation of students; this is the wisdom that helped me to both achieve and become a lifelong learner.

It has been my observation that a troublingly high percentage of Hindu parents are grade-obsessed instead of learning-focused. Why? Sustainable gains over the course of a student's career can only be made with importance placed on growth. Grades are meant to be instructive, yet they are somehow interpreted to be a measure of a child's value. Too many WhatsApp conversations feature children being compared with siblings and family friends, teachers being blamed for a child's academic performance. These critical mistakes must be avoided at all costs. The first nurtures digital addiction in children. The number one comment I hear from students when I chastise them about their screen time habits is, "You should see what my parents do--the WhatsApp notifications are ringing all day, and even while I sleep. They are more interested in chatting with some auntie I've never heard of than talking to me." Self-esteem is being damaged in the comparisons, and the hurt caused can be crippling at a tender age. Thirdly, blaming teachers shows disregard for the educational process. Teachers are not perfect, but they are revered in our traditional culture. That reverence enables a deep respect for the learning process and teaches humility.

Ultimately, this brings us back to the most troubling fact of all: too many parents are using their children in some kind of game of social

hierarchy within the Hindu community. They are putting pressure on their children to attend Stanford, Harvard, and the like. As a teacher, I can tell you that only a small percentage of students are cut out for such programs. Out of the 150-180 students on my roster, I only recognize five per year with that potential, even though the student population at my school has just shy of 50% GATE identified students. The end result of this pressure is a larger population of disengaged, despondent, and desperate students. A recent report published in my district shows that the number of Hindu children arrested in my district's schools doubled in the last year.

Opportunities are still plentiful for those who work hard and pursue their passion. Life becomes more stress free for students if parents support the possibility of many career paths and the option of attending many different categories of universities. Our children will rise to the top in their chosen fields because of our culture and the values that it inculcates--values that are needed more than ever within our ambition-centered and status-oriented Hindu community.

**Respectfully yours,**  
A schoolteacher

# RAKHIGARHI AND AFTER V: INDUS SCRIPT AT KEEZHADI

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



**Shrikant G Talageri**

## V. POST-SCRIPT: Indus Script at Keezhadi.

**A**t the last minute I have to add this postscript to the article because today, 20/9/2019, Scroll.in has just published an article claiming that the archaeological findings in Keezhadi in Tamilnadu have revealed a continuation with the Indus Script. The article entitled **“Tamil Nadu: Artefacts dated to 580 BCE hint at script continuity from Indus Valley Civilization”** with the subtitle **“The findings at Keezhadi, near Madurai, push back the date of Tamil Brahmi script, which is the precursor to modern Tamil, by another century”**, tells us: **“Artefacts found at the archaeological site in Keezhadi, about 12 km from Madurai in Tamil Nadu, have been dated to 580 BCE, with “graffiti marks” on them pointing to a possible continuity in script from the Indus Valley Civilisation. The findings were made in a report by a**

**team that conducted excavations at the site. The report is significant because Dravidian movement politicians in Tamil Nadu have long claimed that the people of the Indus Valley Civilisation could be ancestors of the modern Tamils. However, archaeological and genetic evidence to establish the link was not strong so far. None of the three earlier major excavations in the region had provided strong evidence of an ancient urban settlement – a significant feature of the Indus Valley Civilisation.”**

<https://scroll.in/latest/937821/tamil-nadu-artifacts-dated-to-583-bce-hint-at-script-continuity-from-indus-valley-civilisation>

On the warpath, the AIT-mongers in scroll.in seem to be in a tearing hurry to do what they would probably choose to describe as **“driving the last nail into the coffin of the OIT”** - one more in an unending series of last nails! However, their present attempt raises many curious points.

The Keezhadi excavations had certainly uncovered an important part of our great heritage in Tamil Nadu, and this predictably resulted in a tussle between two extremist ideologues in India: the Dravidianists in the South for whom the AIT forms the base of their separatist tendencies, and the extreme Vedicists in the North who view any part of our native Indian heritage not derived from the



*Ancient DNA from the Indus Valley Civilization was found in this individual buried at India's Rakhigarhi archaeological site. (Image credit: Vasant Shinde)*

Vedas as something to be looked at askance. I have already dealt with this issue in an earlier article in Swarajya published on 4/4/2017:

<https://swarajyamag.com/culture/leave-history-alone-why-an-archaeological-discovery-in-tamil-nadu-has-ruffled-feathers>

Now the two recent genetic reports have suddenly heightened the adrenaline in the hearts of these ardent AIT-warriors, and this article on Keezhadi is one of the results of this. But what are the facts in the case behind the venomous innuendo in the article? The main point made seems to be that the report by the archaeologists conducting the excavation shows that **“56 potsherds were recovered from the excavation conducted by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology, with inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi, the precursor to modern**

**Tamil. ‘The recent scientific dates obtained for Keezhadi findings push back the date of Tamil-Brahmi to another century i.e. 6th century BCE,’ the report said.”** Great news, but does it show what the scroll.in article is claiming?

The article goes on to quote the report: **“One kind of script that survived between the disappearance of Indus script and the emergence of Brahmi script is called as graffiti marks by the scholars,’ the report said. ‘These graffiti marks are the one evolved or transformed from Indus script and served as precursor for the emergence of Brahmi script. Therefore, these graffiti marks cannot be set aside as mere scratches. Like Indus script, this also could not be deciphered till date.”**

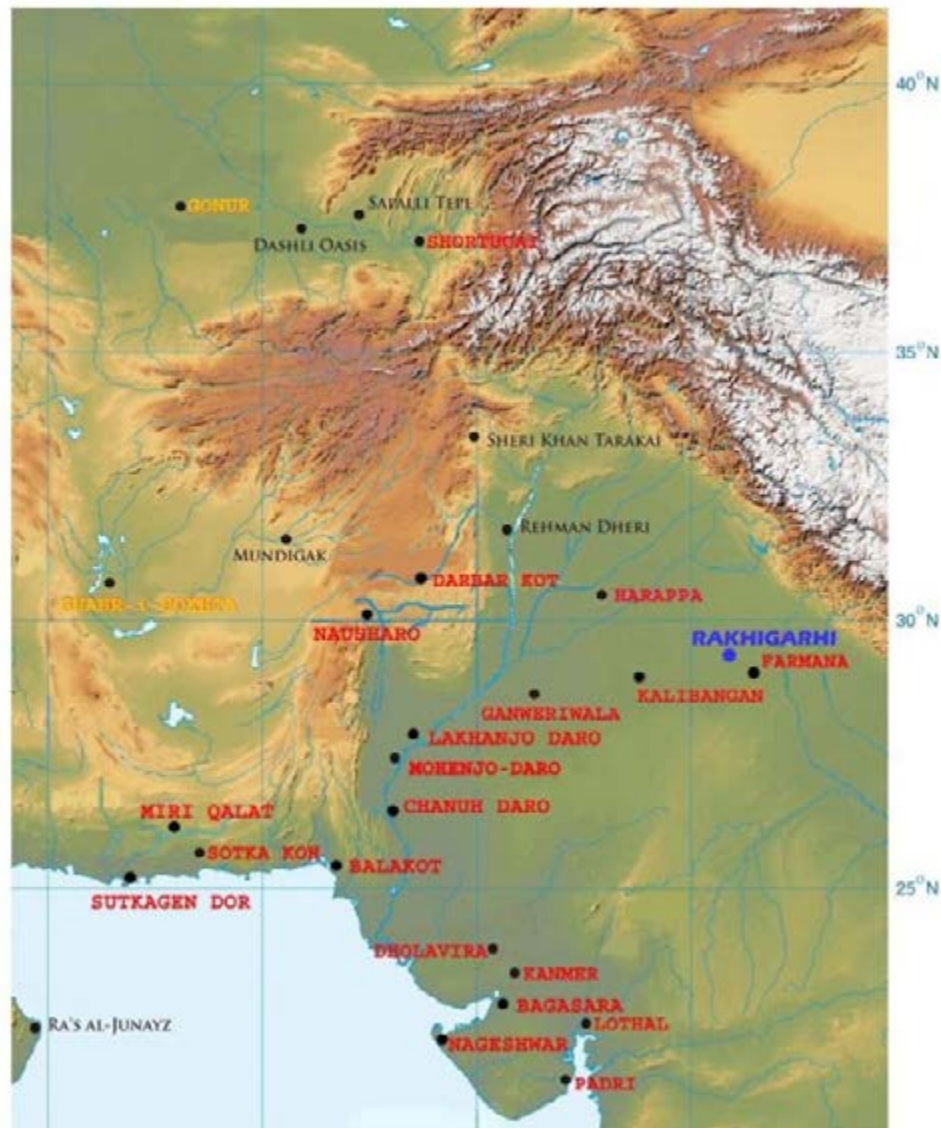


The writer of this article in scroll.in, Sruthisagar Yamunan, draws a connection between the “**graffiti marks**” on the Keezhadi pottery and the Indus script, presumably on the above note in the report. This must be the only, or most explicit, such claim in the report, or else we would have had more explicit quotes. We also have a quote about the Tamil-Brahmi alphabet: **“The report said: ‘Tamil-Brahmi letters as part of inscriptions are found engraved on the shoulder portions of the earthen vessels. In general, these letters were inscribed when the pot is in leather condition or were inscribed/engraved after the pot became dry. The letters engraved in leather condition could be made only by the potters at the time making pots. In the case of Keezhadi examples, they were all post-firing in nature and were engraved by the owners after purchasing the pots. The representation of various styles of writing also suggests this view. It clearly suggests that the literacy level of the contemporary society that survived in 6th century BCE.’”**

Note that while it is perfectly true that the Brahmi script must ultimately be derived from the Indus script, that is not what the western academicians are saying: they claim that the Brahmi script had a totally different origin (and try to search for that origin in scripts of West Asia). This report at least shows or concedes that “These graffiti marks are the one evolved or transformed from Indus script and served as precursor for the emergence of Brahmi script”.

But this article (and possibly this report also, if the writer of this article is interpreting it as intended by the archaeologists concerned) raises a very basic question: Are the writings found on the potsherds in the Tamil-Brahmi script which can be read, or are they in the form of “graffiti marks” which, “Like Indus script, [...] also could not be deciphered till date.”? They cannot be both.

If they are “graffiti marks”, then they cannot be read. There are potsherds with graffiti marks all over India. They are all precursor to the different forms of the **Brahmi script** used in different parts of India to record the local language: the **Ashokan-Brahmi** script records





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

an **Indo-Aryan** language. And the Tamil-**Brahmi** script records a **Dravidian** language.

**THESE GRAFFITI MARKS  
ARE THE ONE EVOLVED  
OR TRANSFORMED FROM  
INDUS SCRIPT AND SERVED  
AS PRECURSOR FOR THE  
EMERGENCE OF BRAHMI SCRIPT**

The undeciphered graffiti marks on potsherds in different parts of the country, representing the precursor forms of the different fully developed **Brahmi** scripts, will, unless the evidence after they are deciphered shows otherwise, likewise record both **Indo-Aryan** and **Dravidian** languages.

So, even though they cannot be read, it will be logical to assume that the graffiti marks on potsherds in Tamilnadu record a **Dravidian** language.

But how does all this show that the Harappan people spoke a **Dravidian** language, until the graffiti marks are deciphered and read (obviously showing a **Dravidian** language in Tamilnadu), and then on the basis of this decipherment, the **Harappan** script is also deciphered and proves to be a **Dravidian** language?

Just rhetoric and media frenzy cannot prove or disprove historical points. It will be better if chauvinistic tendencies and venom are kept out of the debate. To repeat what I have said umpteen times: **unless and until the Harappan script is deciphered and proves the Harappan language to be non-Indo-European, the only valid evidence to decide the language of the Harappan civilization is the data for the**

**chronology and geography of the Rigveda, which presents an irrefutable case showing that the entire Harappan area, as well as areas to the far east of it were purely Indo-European language speaking areas from well before 3000 BCE.**

[Incidentally, note the scientific precision of the scholars at scroll.in: the article ends with a note in italics: “An earlier version of this article wrongly mentioned the date of the artefacts as 583 BCE.” So the editors at scroll.in can go to this high degree of precision where even a difference of three years shows up in their carbon analysis! Carbon-dating experts from all over the world must be stunned at this super-advancement in technique and analysis]

It is up to us to decide whether we are going to fall into the different verbal traps being set up by the AIT-jihadists (nothing to do with Islam or Muslims, Mr. Sanghvi) or whether we are going to force them to discuss only, and only, this chronological and geographical evidence.

**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>



# SEEK INSPIRATION

## Words of Wisdom

### Siddheshwari Devi (Didi ji)

**W**hen you need inspiration, you don't have to look far. Look at your own family members, teachers, mentors, coworkers and friends to be inspired. Strangers also, when you hear about them or read about them, are a source of inspirational learning.

*Following are the kinds of people that inspire me and motivate me to be a better person:*

1. They are always optimistic. Their optimism shines through and sheds a warm light on others around them. These people never have a bad day, because they see the flicker of sunlight through the dark clouds.
2. They are extremely dependable. They keep their word, making good on their commitments. You can bank on such individuals.
3. They always have good things to say about others. They are very selective; in that they overlook the weaknesses and highlight the strengths of a person.
4. They are intelligent. When faced with a problem, they do not panic. Instead, they analyze the situation and understand the big picture before deciding on the course of action.
5. They are genuinely compassionate people

who care about others. They will be with you through thick and thin. They are the ones to offer you a shoulder to cry on and if need be, the shirt off their back.

6. They are the ones who accept their mistakes and truly work on improving themselves.

7. They are kindhearted and speak sweet words, distributing happiness wherever they go.

8. They live a holy life even though they are not monks. Theirs is a disciplined life, in which they balance their worldly duties with devotion to God.

### Tragedies teach us

The horrific events that unfolded on September 11, 2001 sent shock waves throughout the U.S. Approximately 20 years later, we can still vividly remember where we were on that morning and recall the whole gamut of emotions we felt in the aftermath. Our world was never going to be the same again. A dark cloud hovered for a long time over our collective consciousness and individual minds.

At the same time, there is always a silver

lining behind every dark cloud. Every tragedy forces us to accept truths that are otherwise too uncomfortable for us to reflect on. Every tragedy leaves us with lessons that we have no choice but to accept, simply because they stare us glaringly in the face. We saw on that sad day that life is unpredictable, and death is inevitable. When those who perished on that day left home in the morning they did not think that this was going to be their final day on earth. None of us is privy to that information.

Tragedies also force us to accept that life doesn't always remain the same. Life is not a stagnant pond. Life is an ever-flowing river. Things change; people change; situations change. The only constant in life is 'change'.

When faced with excruciatingly difficult situations in life, we learn that we humans are resilient creatures. When we are in the depths of despair, we have no way to go except up. We cry; we grieve; we become despondent, but then we rise up. We rebuild ourselves and continue to live, hopefully wiser, due to the lessons tragedy has taught us.

## Recognize the Value

You have a priceless diamond in your possession, but you put it in the junk drawer and forget all about it. One fine day, as you are decluttering, you toss out that priceless diamond. You will protest, "No, no, no. I wouldn't do that." Why not? "Because it's a priceless diamond." But what if you didn't know that it's a priceless diamond? What if you are convinced that it's a poor imitation? Now, there is nothing that will stop you from discarding it. If you don't know its value, you will not have any love or respect for it.

Substitute the priceless diamond with Time,

Family, Mental health, Physical health, Education, Friendship, and Life. If we don't value these, we will most certainly abuse them and ultimately lose them.

When we no longer have what we once took for granted, we start to miss it. In these difficult times, a much greater value is being put on something that was always taken for granted: human connection. Something as simple as an affectionate embrace from a loved one has become more precious. Teachers and instructors have become more valuable. There is no doubt left that they cannot be replaced by computers. Consumers are missing brick and mortar stores. Online shopping is convenient, but shoppers are craving the experience of shopping in the mall.

The most valuable gift we have been given is the body. Using the body as a vehicle, countless humans have reached the level of unimaginable greatness. At the same time, using this same body many have fallen to a deep pit of depravity. How we use this greatest gift is entirely up to us.

## Best Things to Give

Giving to others brings immense satisfaction to the mind. There is a great need for givers in the world; there always has been and will always be. We are children of the most magnanimous and generous God who never tires of giving. Let's try to follow in His footsteps. I will begin by giving some suggestions:

1. Give your attention. Listen carefully to what people are saying, especially children and the elderly. We often tend to dismiss them.
2. Give your time. Best gift is the gift of time. We all claim not to have enough time; so giving it means you are giving a very precious gift.
3. Give benefit of the doubt. We do disservice

to others by jumping to conclusions. We give due respect to others by giving them benefit of the doubt.

4. Give a smile. You can brighten a dull day with your smile. You can lift someone's spirits with your sweet smile. Smile, please.

5. Give a surprise. Send flowers for no reason. Give a surprise visit. Surprise someone going through hardship with a hearty meal or by cleaning up their home and doing their laundry.

6. Give your help. If you are a handyman, help those who need something done around the house but are physically unable to do it. If you are young and healthy, extend a helping hand to the elderly and the physically ill.

7. Give financial help. In the present climate your friends and family members may not have enough to even pay the rent or the mortgage; so don't wait for them to ask. Extend financial help without being asked.

world. He does not criticize anyone. Knowing his beloved Lord to dwell in every creature's heart, the devotee has deep respect for all beings. Because of his goodness, he sees everyone as being good.

A devotee keeps his actions and thoughts pure. Because the Supremely pure God rules his heart and mind, a true is pure in every aspect.

He looks at everyone equally. He mingles with the kings as well as paupers, treating both the same.

He treats women as a mother figure. He regards women to be an embodiment of the mother and has only pure feelings towards them.

His tongue never utters a lie and he never eyes the wealth of another. Every word he utters is the Truth. He regards the love for God in his heart as his true wealth.

## Signs of a Devotee

A beautiful devotional song by Saint Narsi Mehta talks about the signs of a true devotee. Mahatma Gandhi was very fond of this composition and he popularized it. The song is a helpful tool for aspiring devotees of God to work towards becoming a true devotee. Here is what the Saint says:

A true devotee is one who realizes the pain of others. Seeing his Lord within the heart of all beings, he identifies with the trials and tribulations of others, and feels them to be his own. His gentle heart bleeds seeing the pain of another.

He helps others without allowing pride to enter his heart. The devotee is the epitome of humility and he does not tolerate pride.

A devotee respects and praises the entire

He doesn't succumb to greed and avarice. His generosity is unlimited. He is not at all desirous of worldly property, but is greedy for his beloved Lord.

He has rejected anger and all worldly pleasures. Because he has transcended Maya, he is no longer tormented by anger or other vices.

He is attracted by the name of God, and all places of pilgrimage are embodied within him. He is always interested in chanting the holy name, and circumambulating such a true devotee is like circumambulating a holy place.

Visit [www.radhamadhavsociety.org](http://www.radhamadhavsociety.org)  
Email: [s\\_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org](mailto:s_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org)





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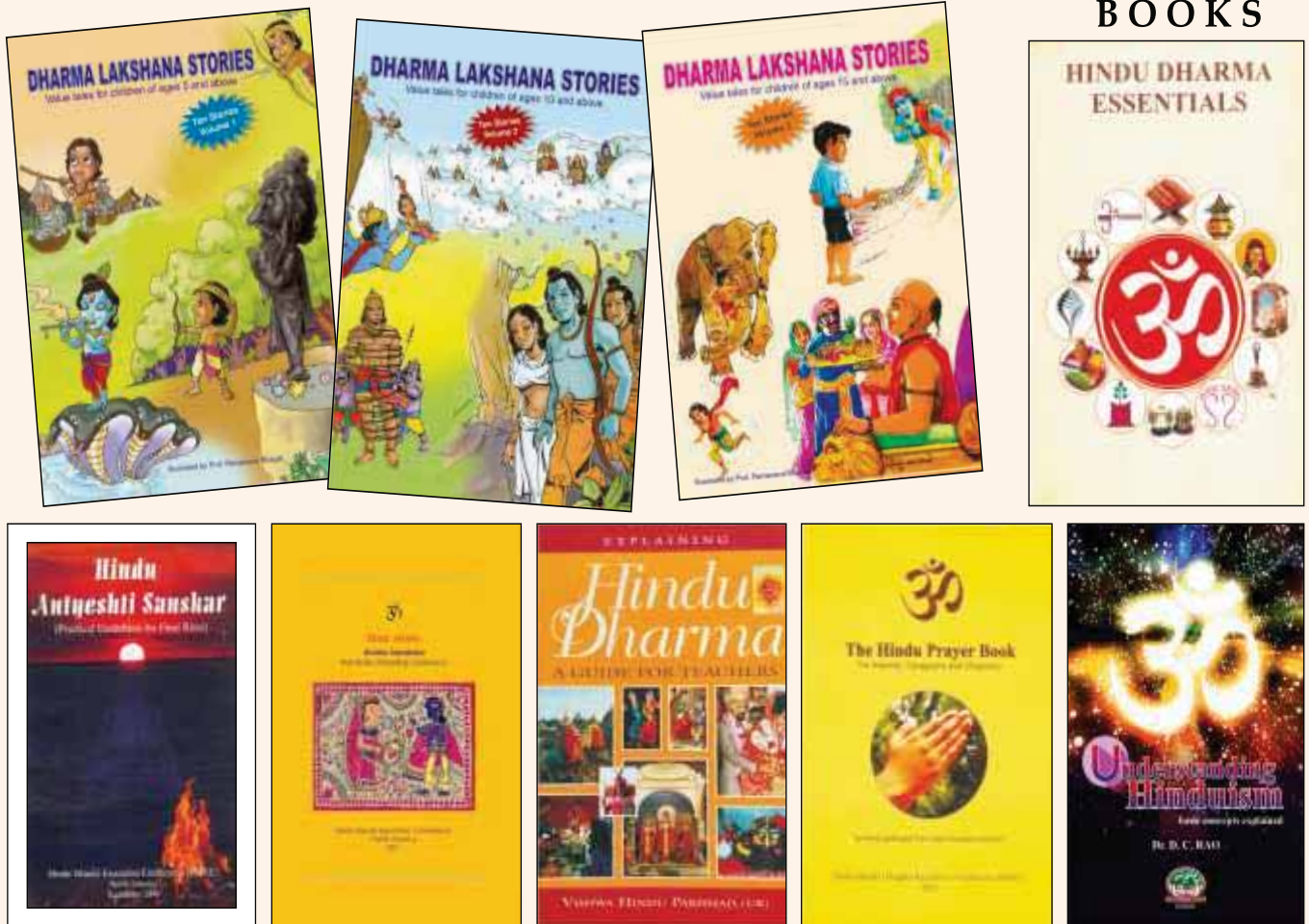
ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्मांमृतम् गमय ।।

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

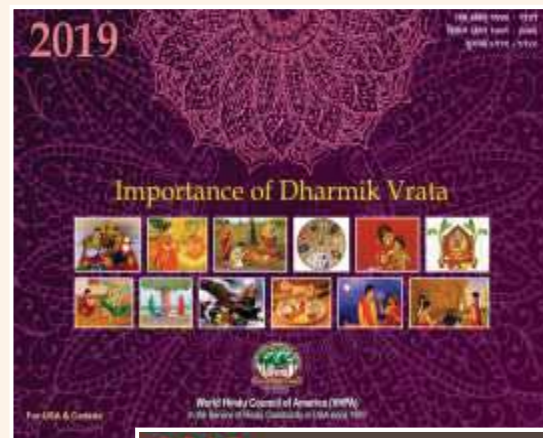
ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

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