

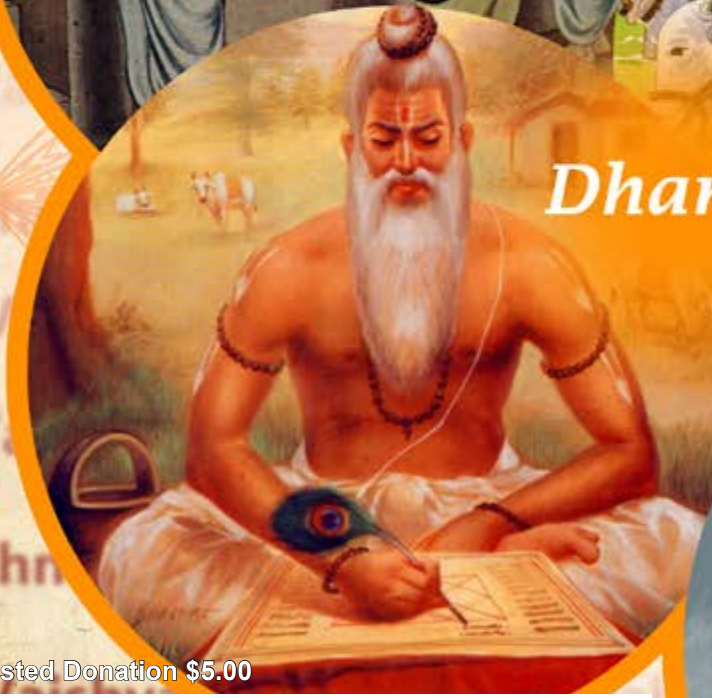
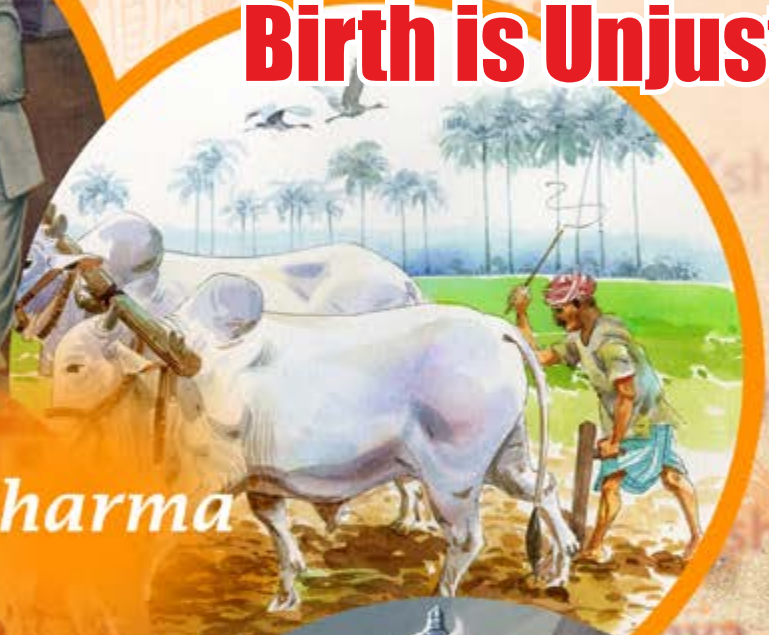
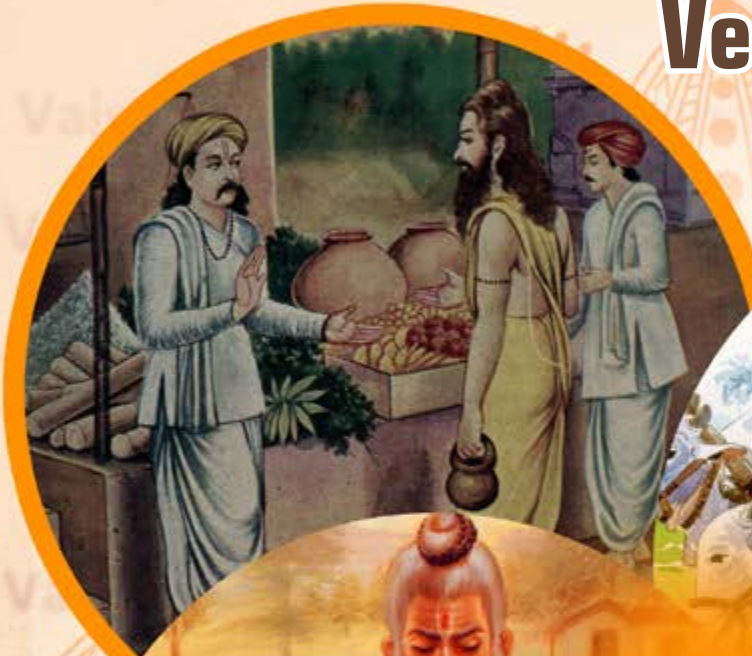


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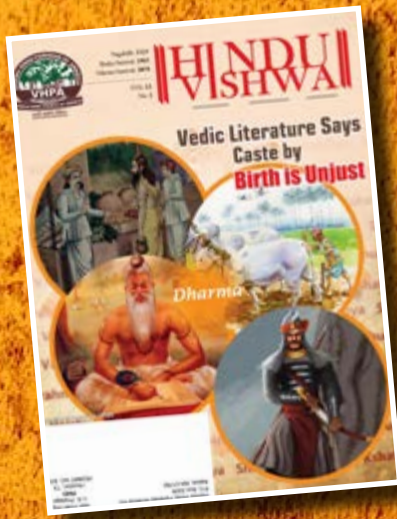
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पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः।
वेद्यं पवित्रमोङ्कार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च॥

–श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 9.17

*pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahah
vedyam pavitram omkāra rik sāma yajur eva cha*

Bhagvad Gita 9.17

Of this universe, I am the Father; I am also the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the purifier, the goal of knowledge, the sacred syllable Om. I am the Rig Veda, Sāma Veda, and the Yajur Veda

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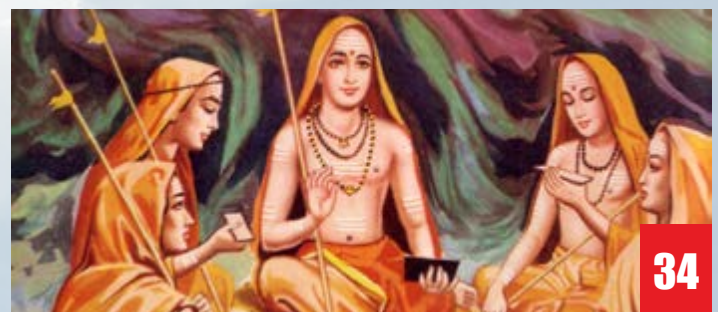
VEDIC LITERATURE SAYS CASTE BY BIRTH IS UNJUST I



KASHMIRI GENOCIDE: 1947



WHAT IS SANATANA DHARMA ACCORDING TO YOU?



TRADITION CONTINUES: HINDU HERITAGE DAY CELEBRATED VIRTUALLY





May Everyone Help

Just when we thought that the worst of the Wuhan-originated pandemic is behind us, it recurred with virulence in India and shook the

इगानेवंशेषयुक्ताशतुरो भावाजनपदोद्धवसकरान्
वदन्ति कुशलाः श्रतोऽन्यथाभूतास्तु हिताचाक्षते ।

च. वि 3, 6

The sages declare these four factors described above, to be destructive of populations, when not so blemished, they are said to be wholesome.

(Charaka, Vimana 3,6)

whole world. Harrowing scenes of shortage of critical supplies and the pandemonium amidst the pandemic, was accentuated by distressing blame game by people entrusted with leadership. Frankly, the dissection should have been reserved for a much later date. Moved by the unfolding tragedy, and motivated by the shared humanity and compassion, ordinary people from all over the world, and particularly the Hindu diaspora rose to the challenge to mitigate the disaster.

While the number of deaths is in hundreds of thousands, it is important to remember that behind each death there is a circle of family and friends and a lifetime of suffering.

Many of us retreat to our scriptures in crises like these for guidance and sustenance. We try to make sense of these seemingly senseless destructions of life and livelihood. While philosophical constructs espoused in them provide us with the strength to go on and deal with the calamity, there are other ancient Hindu texts that

deal with the very earthly matters related to pandemics and diseases. It would be far-fetched to predict or even speculate what the future holds. While there have been many advances in science and pandemic management, and we are thankful for them. Let us also remember the timeless injunctions passed down to us from our ancient sages. In the 3rd chapter of Janpadodh Vimana of Charaka Samhita, it mentions: The literal translation of a Janpada would be a district or a county but then when the talk today is of the whole world as a village, the concept of Janapada is expansive enough to cover our globe. In the times we live in where each one of us individually feels powerless in the face of this raging pandemic, these mantras provide us with the direction

ते तु खल्विमे भावा सामन्या जनपदेषु भवन्ति,
तदाया वायुः उदकं, देश, काल इति ।।

च. वि 3, 6

The sources of contagion in pandemics are air, water, locale, and season.

(Charaka, Vimana 3,6)

and wisdom, each one of us can practice keeping our air, water and surroundings, free of unwholesome contaminants. While we are at it, the same text traces the origin of pandemics in Chapter 3, 24-27 to a combination of greed, laziness, extravagant indulgences, and adharmic behavior. Let us all heed to these timeless pearls of wisdom that are our common inheritance, and do everything in our power to help the needy and provide solace to the grieving. This too shall pass!

Tradition Continues: Hindu Heritage Day Celebrated Virtually



With increasing vaccinations and lowered risks, life is starting to return to normal, although, with caution. But in February, when the organizers started planning for Hindu Heritage Day, the situation was still unstable. They started thinking about how this would affect Hindu Heritage Day in this climate. It soon became apparent that if it were to be held, it would have to be in a different forum. They would have to think outside the box. A plan was formulated, and the result of their collective thinking came to fruition. Hindu Heritage Day 2021 arrived on May 22, 2021 at 2 PM, in everyone's homes, on the small screen.

The program started with Shankh Naad and Deep Prajwalan, both in peoples' homes. All items were pre-recorded, and broadcast simultaneously on Zoom, and live on Facebook and YouTube. Children from local Bal Vihars recited the Ekta Mantra, and the National Anthems of USA and India. The Cultural Program began with children from VHPA Bal Vihar chanting shlokas, followed by an invocation dance to Devi Saraswati. The emcees Sumana Hatwar and Ashish Chhabra expertly led the audience through performances by various dance and music schools, which were specially pre-recorded for the program.

The day saw a lot of innovation. Dancers and singers performed while maintaining social distance. They danced and sang in peoples' back yards, in parking lots, on white boards, in parks, and in their homes. Special attention was paid to backdrops, adding to the uniqueness of the program. Performing in unconventional places also brought a lot of variety and beauty to the dances. Blooming bushes, and colorful flower beds added to the ambience and made the performances come to life. Through it all, one could see that a lot of effort was taken to maintain safety.

The Cultural Program was followed by a Storytelling Contest. This was the first time such a contest was organized in the New England area. Children from the New England area were invited to tell their favorite story, talk about someone who had inspired them, a favorite saying, parables, the list of topics was endless. The purpose was to keep the children rooted to their Hindu heritage, and have fun learning about Hindu tradition. There were 42 entries in all, with children's



ages ranging from 5 to 14 years. It was a fun family activity, with parents as directors and videographers, and the children as award-winning actors. Children as young as five years old dressed up as their favorite character and narrated their story. One five-year-old girl narrated the story of Shabari, who lovingly fed pre-tasted berries to Sri Ram, while a seven-year-old boy narrated the story of the Monkey and the Crocodile from the Panchatantra, with great gusto. There was a puppet show with paper puppets narrating the story of King Shibi, all handmade by a brother and sister duo. Topics ranged from stories from Ramayan and Mahabharat, to temple architecture and Ayurvedic skin care.

Two judges Meenal Pandya and Venkat Pula viewed all the videos painstakingly and picked out the prize-winning videos. But the videos were so engaging that everyone agreed that all the children were winners. The two storytelling emcees, Tanushree Nekenti and Aneeswar

Bairavsundaram, quite young themselves, introduced each of the ten finalists' videos, adding to the enjoyment of the story being told.

Due to the nature of the program, everyone agreed that they missed the lip-smacking food and special shopping, and were sad that they would have to wait a whole year to experience the Mela in all its colors and varieties.

The audience thoroughly enjoyed the show. Comments from the audience showed the appreciation for the participants. One person said, "I feel so overwhelmed by these young kids talking such deep things after being born and brought up in America. It is a great achievement."

"It was very well run; thanks so much for putting it together. The MCs did great, and the videos were incredibly fun to watch!" said another. A parent of a



Storytelling contestant said, “Another aspect which I can relate to is how this helps the kids with the presentation skills and public speaking.”

The program ended with addresses by the two Presidents of the VHPA Merrimack Valley and Massachusetts chapters, and a vote of thanks. Everyone agreed that they were looking forward to attending the next Hindu Heritage Day in person next year.

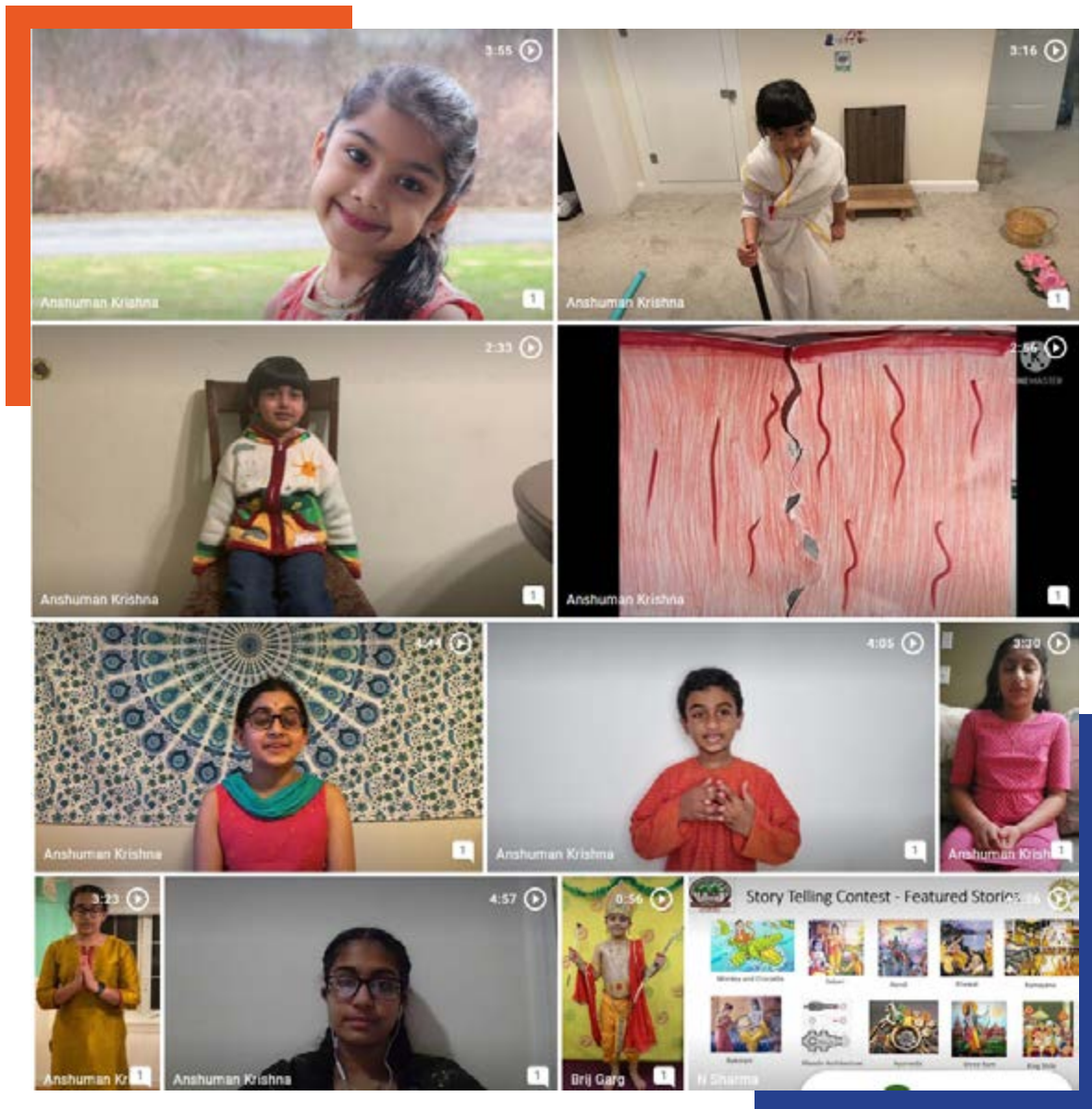
To view the program in its entirety, please visit:

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Faith and Self-Surrender for God-Realization I

Umesh Gulati, Ph.D.



Editor's note:

This is the first part of a
two part article.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Guru of Swami Vivekananda, used to say that two things are necessary for the realization of God: Faith and Self-Surrender. So, what do we mean by faith? It is confidence in self, a devotion to higher self, and a genuine effort to serve that; all this is faith. Fickle mindedness is the opposite of faith. Doubts, that I define as the vagueness of purpose, and slovenly performance are the traits of a person lacking in faith. A man of faith, however, is consistent, up and doing, earnest, and is dedicated to the ideal. Obstructions only increase his faith. So, faith or *Shraddha*, is different from a mere static belief. *Shraddha* with reverence requires a relentless effort to God's vision and realization, or else it won't be called *Shraddha*; only then will it be belief.

Yearning is also used in connection with the realization of God. It means a deep or intense longing to see or realize one's object of devotion. A four-year-old child whose mother just goes out of sight feels such a deep longing to see her again, that he would not stop crying until he sees her. Or just imagine how much pain a newly married bride feels for her husband who had to go away to another town for a few days on an important business matter; the same would be the condition of the husband who leaves her back home.

Each of the above states of intense feeling is an expression of yearning. Can we direct that intense yearning to God's realization? **Sri Ramakrishna stressed a similar kind of intense and focused yearning for the realization of God.** Faith and yearning are not only necessary for the realization of God; they are also necessary for any scientific endeavor. How many years of dedicated research, experimentation, and trials did it take, for instance, for scientists to send a human being to the moon, and ultimately succeed in their efforts? Besides, without having faith in themselves, scientists would not be able to proceed with the space mission in the first place. Similarly, equally great effort, physical as well as financial, would be required to be made in finding the cure for diseases like Alzheimer, cancer, diabetes, and so forth. The researchers could go on only if they had faith.

So, faith is an important factor both in a scientific inquiry and religious truth, especially in Hinduism

where the objective of a devotee is to “see” God or have His *darshan* and realize Him. This *seeing* is not like we see each other; rather, it is like seeing a beautiful sunset, which can be felt and is very personal, and cannot be described in words.

Sri Ramakrishna said: One attains God when one feels a yearning for Him. (*The Gospel*, 337)

He illustrated it with another example. A man had a daughter who became a widow at a very young age and had never known her husband. She knew some girls of her age who were also married. She asked her father. ‘Where is my husband?’ The father replied: ‘Govinda (another name for Lord Krishna) is your husband. He will come to you if you call Him.’ At these words, she went to her room, closed the door, and cried to Govinda: ‘O Govinda, come to me! Show Yourself to me! Why don’t you come?’ God could not resist the girl’s piteous cry and appeared before her. She was indeed filled with unspeakable joy!

For most of us who are rational thinkers, it is hard to accept the veracity of the above story. True, one may not accept this story literally. What one needs to *understand is the point that the story is making*. Once Narendra, the future Swami Vivekananda, told Sri Ramakrishna the same thing about the Vrindavan episode of the divine play of Sri Krishna with the gopis. He said that these were just the imagination of the writer of the *Bhagavata* scripture. Sri Ramakrishna told him, ‘I am not asking you to accept the stories of the divine *leela* (play), but think about the deep love and intense yearning of the *gopis*, including that of the foremost of the *gopis*, Sri Radha, those stories represented.’ It is that kind of love we all need to cultivate for the realization of God.

The point is, said Sri Ramakrishna: One must have a childlike faith – and the intense yearning that a child feels to see its mother. Sri Ramakrishna gave one more example of his nephew, Shibu, who was then four or

five years old. One day, Shibu was chasing grasshoppers by himself, while leaves rustled in the nearby trees. ‘Hush! Hush!’, he said to the leaves. ‘I want to catch the grasshoppers. He was a child and saw everything was throbbing with consciousness. One cannot realize God without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child.’ (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 568.)

Many of us want to lead a spiritual life but fail to achieve this desire. The reason is obvious. As a saying goes, *a person is what his or her thoughts are*. If we think of worldly things, we cannot be spiritual; we will remain worldly. On the other hand, if we read and think about spirituality and spiritual matters, we will feel joy and peace.

Sri Ramakrishna often used to get irritated when one of his devotees from Brahma Samaj, one of the

reforming sects in Hinduism, said *that he was a sinner*. His response to that assertion was that if you keep repeating, “I am a sinner”, then you will certainly be drowned in the worldliness. “One should have such a burning faith



in God,” he once said, that one can say, ‘what? I have repeated the name of God, and sin cannot cling to me? How can I be a sinner? How can I be in bondage?’ Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things? Say but once, ‘O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won’t repeat them.’ And have faith in His name.” (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 138)

Sri Ramakrishna told his devotees to *surrender* to God to receive His grace. But self-surrender is not an easy discipline to practice? For those who practice this discipline earnestly, God never disappoints. He would often illustrate this with a story of a weaver who had surrendered every act of his to the ‘will of Rama’. Sri Ramakrishna said that one who has realized God is firmly convinced that he is the machine and God is its Operator; that God alone is the Doer and all others are

His instruments. One should be aware that everything happens by the will of Rama.’

To conclude this essay, I would like to share with you the case of two Swamis in recent times who didn’t carry any money in their travels. One is Late Swami Ranganathananda; he was the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math. As we all know that the Swami was a world traveler and spread the message of Vedanta. *He also often had the practice of not carrying any money during his travels*, because of that he had to face humiliation sometime. But he did not change his practice of not carrying any money. (*The Universal Message of the Bhagavad-Gita*, volume 3, 232.)

Besides this, there is one more instance regarding my own Guru, Late Swami Bhashyananda, the head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Center of Chicago. Our encounter with the Swami occurred in 1974 when *I was not yet a devotee*. On behalf of my University, I invited him to speak on Hinduism. The day he arrived, I housed him at the Holiday Inn. In the morning, I called him that I would be coming soon to pick him up, and in the meantime, he should check out. Soon after that, I received a call from one of his devotees from Chicago who happened to have come to our town for a job interview. He said that the Swami could not check out unless he paid the hotel bill and told me that the *Swami had no money to pay the bill*. So, I told the caller that he should go ahead and pay the bill and I would reimburse him. I also told him that he should come to our house for breakfast with the Swami. Of course, I reimbursed him for Swami Ji’s hotel bill.

Then as I was driving the Swami in the evening to the airport, I asked him about not carrying money on his travels. He told me that it was not his practice to carry any money. Then I asked him if the university paid him the right amount for the honorarium. He said that he didn’t know what was right and he didn’t see the amount on the check. On my request to see the check, the Swami handed over the envelope to me. When I opened the envelope and saw the amount of \$50 on the check, I was shocked. For, at the international committee’s meeting a month before the event, we had decided to pay \$100 to the speakers. (\$100 in 1974 was considered quite reasonable.) I asked him to leave the check with me and I would send him the amended



check in a few days. I talked with the committee’s chair the next day and got the check corrected, and immediately sent the corrected check to Chicago.

We don’t know how many other swamis follow the practice of not carrying any money, but from the two examples we have given above, it is quite clear that when one surrenders to God in earnest, God’s grace is bound to follow.

To be continued with anecdotes from Swami Vivekananda’s life, the most famous disciple of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, in a future issue of Hindu Vishwa.

* This article was inspired by a discourse on Self-Surrender: Easy or Difficult by Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Carolina. The Pravrajika is an ordained nun of the Vedanta Society of Southern California and is currently posted at Vivekananda Retreat at Ridgely, New York.

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A Dialogue Between George Floyd and Nikhil Talukdar

Sitangshu Guha

Two friends, George Floyd, a black man from Minneapolis, USA, and Nikhil Talukdar, a poor Hindu farmer from Gopalganj, Bangladesh meet in another world. George Floyd was killed by a white policeman, Nikhil Talukdar was killed by a Muslim policeman.

George: What is your name?

Nikhil: Nikhil, what is yours?

George: George.

Nikhil: It is nice to know you.

George: Thank you. I have heard your name and I know that you were also killed by the police.

Nikhil: Yes, it was about a week after your death. But, hey, I saw a lot of very important people attend your funeral. It was televised around the world.

George: Yes, that was wonderful. How was your funeral?

Nikhil: Well, I was cremated before the world came to know about my death.

George: What happened to you, Nikhil?

Nikhil: You were chased for apparently using a fake twenty-dollar bill, and I was for playing cards. The policeman eventually caught up with me and killed me by breaking my spine.

George: My past is not clean, I have been to jail, but you are an innocent farmer and as far as I understand, playing cards is not illegal, even in your country, then why has this happened to you? Is this because you are a Hindu?

Nikhil: What was that policeman thinking as he strangled you with his knee? This is a black man, it would not be a big deal if he dies, am I right? Similarly, in Bangladesh, killing a Hindu or taking away his property does not bear much consequence. Law usually does not punish the perpetrators.

George: I was killed by white police; we call it racism. Is there racism in your country?

Nikhil: It is a different kind of racism. Blacks face discrimination in America because of their race, their skin color, in Bangladesh Hindus face discrimination because of the religion they practice or just because their names identify them as belonging to the Bengali Hindu community. We do not call it racism; we call it religious communal repression.

George: Oh, I understand! It looks like racism and communal repression are similar.

Nikhil: Yes, they are alike in some respects, but are different in many aspects.

George: How come?

Nikhil: You were born black, but your death launched a movement. I was born poor, and I died poor, but in addition, I died in vain. I belonged to the Hindu community, and it is laughable to think that my death could launch a movement against the repression of Hindus in Bangladesh.

George: What are you saying?

Nikhil: Despite the coronavirus, millions of people marched on the street to protest your death, major networks carried the news, and politicians demanded dismantling systemic racism not only within the police but in every American institution. Many white policemen took the knee to ask for forgiveness. For a poor Hindu farmer like me, the death news was simply a footnote in the newspapers, people did not take to the streets because they were too busy denouncing racism in America. It is true!

They watch American TV and get riled up by what is happening in America, but they have no understanding of the injustice that is happening next door to them. No, I misspoke, they willfully ignore what is happening next door.

George: Are you sure?

Nikhil: Listen, after I was killed, initially my family

was not even allowed to file a case! Later, only after some protestation, a case was filed.

George: See, the law has taken its course.

Nikhil: Not necessarily, the process is not transparent. In the meantime, my family may face the wrath of the majority!

George: Are you saying there is no law and order in your country?

Nikhil: There is, but Hindus have no recourse to that.

George: So, you will be in pain even after your death?

Nikhil: You got it! George, you died, your family will be compensated. Your daughter's college education is already free. There will be scholarships in your name, but more than that your death has launched an awakening that will change America for the better.

George: I do not understand! I was killed by a white policeman, now many whites are crying for me. One police officer killed me, but the whole police department is kneeling in support of the protesters.

Nikhil: That is why I am telling you that you are lucky. I was killed by a Muslim policeman, and rather than following the law, the local leaders decided not to file any case and persuaded my wife to accept the fait accompli in exchange for two lakh taka, which is about \$2300, and jobs for my wife and brother.

George: Did your wife accept the offer?

Nikhil: You will not understand George! It is impossible to stay in the village if you disobey the ruling of the local leaders. How could a poor farmer go against them? It is almost impossible!

George: But you said that a case has been filed?

Nikhil: Yes, a case was eventually filed. That is because some expatriate Bangladeshi Hindus protested,

GEORGE FLOYD, A BLACK MAN FROM MINNEAPOLIS, USA, AND NIKHIL TALUKDAR, A POOR HINDU FARMER FROM GOPALGANJ, BANGLADESH MEET IN ANOTHER WORLD. GEORGE FLOYD WAS KILLED BY A WHITE POLICEMAN, NIKHIL TALUKDAR WAS KILLED BY A MUSLIM POLICEMAN

and the Bangladesh Government could not ignore the strong sentiment that was associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. Unfortunately, if we go by history, such cases are never prosecuted, and my killer will never face justice.

George: I am sorry, my friend!

Nikhil: See, George, your death has brightened the future of your daughter; it has changed the country; you have become a hero. My death has not only terminated my life, it would put my wife and two little children out in the street. I was a poor farmer, to begin with, and in death, I have become absolutely nobody. Your and my journeys were the same, my friend, but the outcomes are very different.

George: I still cannot understand, a crime has been committed, why justice will not be served?

Nikhil: If the policeman were tried, it would tarnish the image of my country as an exemplary Islamic country of communal harmony, where different religious and ethnic groups thrive. You may not know but Hindus are being driven out of their homes for decades in this country.

George: My God! The movement Black Lives Matter got energized after my death. Will there be anything like that for you?

Nikhil: Some expatriate Hindus of my country, had started a movement called Hindu Lives Matter, but nothing will come out of this!

George: Why not?

Nikhil: In your country, the majority-white population has come forward to amend the wrong. In my country, the majority of Muslims are either not aware that such injustices are being perpetrated or they intentionally ignore these because they dream of a 100% Islamic country. What unites these two groups is that both deny that the minority religious and ethnic groups are being subjected to discrimination and unfairness.

George: That is unfortunate!

Nikhil: Finally, you understand! I thank you, my friend, for understanding.

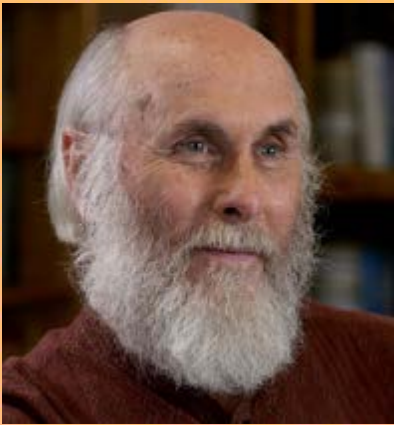
George: Thank you, I learned a lot, we will meet again. Our struggles continue.

Note: The tragic story of Nikhil Talukdar first came out in a Dhaka daily, The Prothom Alo on 04 June 2020, and in The Daily Samakal the next day. Nikhil, a farmer, was brutally killed by Police officer Mohammed Shamim Uddin. The incident happened on 02 June 2020 at Kotalipara, Gopalganj, the electoral constituency of the sitting Prime Minister Sheik Hasina. Nikhil, a Hindu, was playing cards along with three others when the police officer caught him. Playing cards is not illegal in Bangladesh. The officer along with two civilians beat Nikhil mercilessly broke his backbone into 3 pieces. Later, an X-ray confirmed that. Nikhil was taken to the local hospital and then to Dhaka, but he died on 04 June 2020. Initially, no case was filed and the local government party leaders along with officials tried to settle the issue out of court. But pressure mounted from outside Bangladesh, and police accepted a case filed by the younger brother of the victim, the officer was arrested.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sitangshu Guha, a columnist, a former college professor, an internationally known Human Rights defender, is playing a pivotal role against persecution of Hindus and other religious minorities in Bangladesh and campaign worldwide to save Bangladesh from the grasp of militant Islamists. Guha, a Bangladeshi, immigrated to USA in 1990. While serving at all levels in different organizations, he reached global Human Rights institutions by strongly advocating injustices committed against the Hindus and did his best to make Bangladesh a pluralistic democracy as well. Mr. Guha compiled and published several books. He lectured at the UN on 13th May 2003 and met Bharatiya Rastrapati in 2014 along with dignitaries from USA, Europe, and South Asia

Vairagya, Non- attachment and Ananda in Yoga



*David Frawley
(Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)*

Vairagya is one of the most important terms in the Yoga Sutras, which starting from the first Sutras of the text is emphasized as defining Yoga practice. Vairagya is commonly translated as detachment or non-attachment. While these indicate aspects of Vairagya, they are approximations that can mislead us. Vairagya is an untranslatable term like Yoga, Dharma or Karma, with no real equivalent in the English language. We need to understand it directly to move into deeper Yoga practice, for which it is definitive.

Vairagya is the state of vi-raga, or absence of raga, which refers to attractions and cravings for anything external in the realm of body and mind. These are defined according to the three gunas of sattva, rajas and tamas, as the three basic factors behind the external world and its enjoyments, including mental, sensory and physical enjoyments, not only in the physical realm but in all possible lokas or manifest worlds.

Vairagya occurs when we lose attraction or attachment to the external world through our connection to the Purusha/Atman, the inner Self. As the Purusha is of the nature of Ananda or bliss, entering into it, one no longer has any other desires, which are perceived as only its shadows. When one has become the Self of all beings, there is no desire for any personal pleasure, enjoyment, property, achievement or adulation because one reached the immutable essence of all happiness within.

Vairagya is not a state of mental detachment, with the mind holding to its own opinions; it is detachment from the mind, no longer accepting any mental state as defining ultimate truth or reality. It is not a state of mere indifference or neutrality but an inner fullness, peace and happiness that has no interest in seeking happiness externally.



**VAIRAGYA AND VIVEKA:
NON-ATTACHMENT AND DISCERNMENT**

The question is how do we reach Vairagya? The answer is through Viveka, another key Yoga and Vedanta term. Viveka is usually rendered as discrimination or discernment, but must be understood relative to these two groups of opposing principles:

*****Discrimination between the Eternal and the Transient (Nitya and anitya). Whenever we realize that something is ephemeral, we lose attraction to it, like quickly forgetting any enjoyment gained in a dream. Only what we realize something as enduring or eternal will we hold on to it.

*****Discrimination between Being and Non-Being (Sat and asat). Being is the only reality that is eternal and real. A non-being has no reality. Yet non-being includes all transient names, forms and becomings, which are ultimately unreal as they

pass away like clouds in the sky. When we perceive the reality of being, we lose an attracting to anything in the realm of becoming, which constitutes the entire external world. Fulfillment can only be in who we are, not in what we want to become.

*****Discrimination between Self and not-Self (Atman and anatman). The Self as pure consciousness is our true nature, our ultimate and enduring reality. The not-Self, which includes all the outer factors of body and mind, is not only transient, it doesn't relate to who we really are. It is ultimately irrelevant. It is like a movie we are watching, not something involving us directly.

*****Discrimination between Truth and Illusion (Satya and Mithya). Truth is ultimately what is eternal, infinite, immutable, unlimited, unqualified and uncompromised, exactly what it is. Illusion an outer appearance of things that

ABHYASA AS THE PRACTICE OF YOGA IN THE YOGA SUTRAS IS NOT DEFINED RELATIVE TO ASANA, PRANAYAMA, MANTRA, MEDITATION OR ANY PARTICULAR TECHNIQUE, THOUGH THESE MAY BE PART OF IT.

is superficial, transient and ultimately inconsequential, with the reality hidden behind it. What we come to perceive as illusory, like a mirage in the desert, we will automatically cease to pursue.

*****Discrimination between Eternal Happiness and eventual sorrow (Ananda and an-ananda). Eternal happiness or Ananda is possible only in our eternal nature as the Self of all. Whatever outer happiness or enjoyment we achieve is circumstantial and eventually ends in sorrow, whether it is some actual disappointment or our own eventual death, in which we must let go of all that we have. True Ananda is immortal and unbounded, while mortal enjoyments are ultimately the cause of suffering.

VAIRAGYA AND YOGA PRACTICE

Abhyasa as the practice of Yoga in the Yoga Sutras is not defined relative to asana, pranayama, mantra, meditation or any particular technique, though these may be part of it. It refers to the abidance in a state of Vairagya, which arises through the cultivation of Viveka. It is the key insight born of meditation and the basis of Samadhi. Yoga is Samadhi which is gained by Vairagya, which is misidentification with body and mind, and end of all cravings for outer enjoyments. Vairagya arises from this truth perception born of Samadhi, yet it also increases our abidance in Samadhi.

Vairagya, we must understand, is not about trying to be detached when we are really attached to something. That is merely dishonesty in the mind. Vairagya occurs when we realize that our attachments are illusions that we cannot hold on to anything. Even the body is not ours, much less anything external, including our home, property and possessions. Even the mind is not ours but is an outer and collective factor. Our physical body and social mind do not go beyond death. Outer enjoyment and happiness is but a reflection of the Ananda within, the inner Consciousness that is our true Self.

Being attached to outer transient objects, qualities and energies is a misperception, an error of judgment. We must correct that error, not simply try to be detached while sustaining a wrong view of the world. The main error judgment (buddhi-dosha) that leads to sorrow, arises from the ego (ahamkara) as identification with body, mind and our place in the external world as who we really are. Vairagya involves realizing through Viveka that such an identification is untrue and the source of needless sorrow.

Our true identity is everything and nothing, the entire universe and the transcendent beyond. We are the seer, not the seen, the state of pure knowing, not any object or quality known or conceivable. Such Vairagya takes us to Samadhi and Ananda that is the true goal of Yoga. Learn not simply to be unattached but to abide in the essence of bliss, the Ananda at the heart of all. That is the Samadhi of Yoga and the ultimate state of Vairagya.

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.

<https://www.vedanet.com/vairagya-non-attachment-and-ananda-in-yoga/>

RAMAYANA: WHEN AND HOW THE GREAT EPIC WAS COMPOSED?

Prof. Shyam S Sharma

Two of the greatest epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, are the greatest gifts of India to the world. Both were composed originally in Sanskrit language and have now been translated into almost all major languages of the world.

Below translations of Shloka 1-43 of Chapter two from Ramayana reveals how this great epic came into being.

Once upon a time, at the request of Maharishi Valmiki, Devarishi Narad narrated the story of Lord Shri Ram to him. Maharishi Valmiki was a master of language and a saint. Some time had passed after this, Maharishi Valmiki and his disciples were walking near the beautiful Tamsa river, a tributary of the Ganga. There was a small beautiful open space between forest and river. While enjoying the beauty of nature, Maharishi Valmiki turned towards his disciple Rishi Bhardwaj and remarked, "This place is so lovely with clear water and sandy beach. Dear vatsa [son]! Put down the kalash (water jug) and give me my bathing garment. I would like to take a bath at this beautiful place." The obedient disciple gave him the clothes. While bathing, Maharishi Valmiki saw a pair of Kronch birds making love and making melodious sound on a large tree branch. Suddenly, a cruel hunter came and killed the beautiful

male Kronch. The hapless bird fell to the ground. His mate, the female Kronch, was crying and flying in circles. A few moments ago, she was so happy with her red-headed companion. Now, she was separated by the cruel hunter. Maharishi Valmiki became very sorrowful and was emotionally charged at the wanton act of the hunter. At that instant, these words came out of his mouth.

*mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvamagamaḥ śāśvatīḥ samāḥ
yat krauñcamithunādekam avadhīḥ kāmamohitam*

Oh, hunter! You have killed one of the mating Kronch pair. You won't live long. Soon thereafter, the grieving Maharishi Valmiki realized that he should not have cursed the hunter at the death of the bird. This is against my nature, he said to himself.

This beautiful shloka is in *Anustup Chhand* (a meter), which has 32 syllables in *Gandhara svar* (musical tone) and can be sung perfectly with musical instruments. Rishi Bhardwaj who was near him also liked it so much that he happily crammed it. Both the guru and his disciple were overwhelmed by the words were uttered. Later Lord Brahma visited Maharishi Valmiki. Maharishi Valmiki welcomed and enquired about his visit. Lord Brahma told Maharishi Valmiki

that your sentence was a mantra. You spoke it because of my desire. O Rishi! Now, in this **Anustup Chhand**, you should write the story of dharmatma and intelligent Shri Ram. You should also write and sing Lord Shri Ram's life story chronologically the same way as you heard from Narad. You will remember everything in detail. The Ram Katha [story] you compose will become immortal. Maharishi Valmiki wrote the great epic Ramayana in 24,000 shlokas obeying the desire of Lord Brahma.

There is a controversial story about Maharishi Valmiki's life in Ram Charita Manas. Maharishi Valmiki is portrayed as a robber who was a killer, illiterate, ignorant, and a cruel man who lived in the forest. He robs and kills travelers passing through a forest to support his family.

Devarishi Narad visited him once but could not get anything useful from him. Devarishi Narad roamed with his saffron attire, knotted hair fastened with rudraksha mala, prominent smile with Tanpura reciting Narayan Narayan. Narad's recitation further annoyed Valmiki, so he decided to kill Narad. Witty Narad told him that robbing and killing people is a great sin. He asks him to confirm if his family approved of his ways. Valmiki asked his family, and they refused to have anything to do with his sins. So, Valmiki accepted Narad's advice and started reciting Ram, Ram shloka.

One day he was sitting under a tree and chanting Ram's mantra. On the branch, a pair of kronch birds were amorously enjoying. A hunter kills the male partner, and the injured dying bird fell in the lap of Valmiki. Suddenly, the famous shloka came out of Valmiki's mouth.

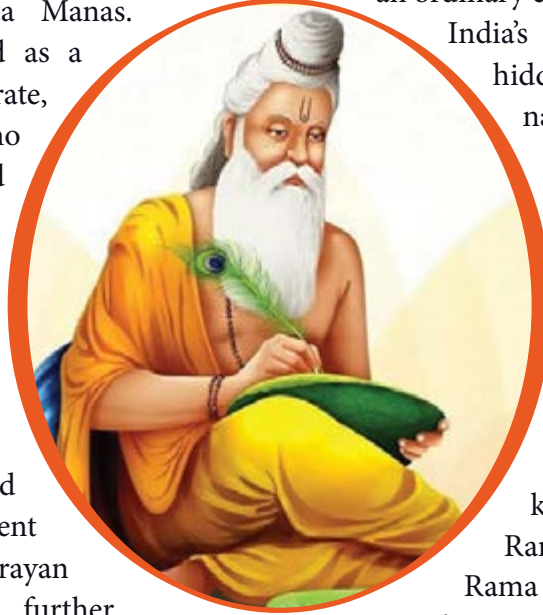
This story is an insult to Maharishi Valmiki. According to the Ramayana, he was already a saint

and well-known Rishi with disciples like Bhardwaj. This flimsy story has no merit. This version is quite prevalent, particularly in north India. The Ramayana was written in Sanskrit language, a language of scholars, and not of ordinary people. In the sixteenth century, Ram Charitra Manas was written in poetry form by Tulsidas in the popular Hindi language of north India. The Ram Charita Manas is still sold as Ramayana. In north India, in every Hindu home, one can find a copy of Ram Charita Manas. Unfortunately, it is not the same with Maharishi Valmiki's Ramayan and it is not an ordinary epic. It is a powerhouse of knowledge.

India's geography, history, and culture are hidden in it. Intensively, one can find the names of trees, flowers, fruits, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, waterfalls, medicinal plants, herbs, etc.

It is the greatness of Ramayana that the epic is composed in **Anustup Chhand** (meter), which has 32 syllables. The Ramayana has been translated into many major languages. Ramayana is known as Yamyana in Myanmar, Ramketri in Cambodia, Hikaya Seri Rama in Malaysia, Kakowin Ramayana in Indonesia, Lawana in Philippines, Phra Rama in Laos, Hebusu Shu in Japan and Ramkian in Thailand. It is also the national book of Thailand.

Lord Ram in Tulsidas's Ram Charita Mansa is a God, but in Maharishi Valmiki's Ramayana, Lord Ram is a hero of great epic who accepts failures and success on equal footing. This is Ramayana! A great epic.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A VHPA Legend Leaves the Stage

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) regretfully announces passing away of **Mananiya Anjleebahen Pandya**, its Director of International liaison on the 19th of May at Gandhinagar, Gujarat at age 71. She battled cancer for last three years.

Anjleebahen served Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) in various capacities including its General Secretary and a fulltime unpaid volunteer for many years. Her contribution to VHPA right from its inception is immeasurable.

Anjleebahen's life is an inspiration to anyone facing hardship in life. She was widowed at age 24 with a two-year-old baby being in the USA for less than three years she faced many challenges. From a docile young lady, she became a powerhouse of energy, Seva and Samparan. She dedicated her life to the Hindu society not only in USA but across the world. Anjleebahen began as a volunteer graphics and layout artist and a typesetter for VHPA's magazine Hindu Vishwa. Soon she developed confidence and her horizon expanded to include understanding of the issues of the Hindu society in USA and management of a growing organization.

She was the moving force behind VHPA's major conferences in 1984 and 1993, Dharma



Samsads, Dharma Prasaar Yatra, hosting of more than 100 Hindu saints and dignitaries for the United Nation's Millennium Peace Summit, several Hindu Mandir Executives' Conferences (HMEC), etc.

She excelled in working with children and youth in youth camps. To the campers she was a mother. To the volunteers she was a loving sister.

She took active part in fighting Mrs. Gandhi's emergency and in Shree Ram Janmabhoomi movement. She traveled extensively to many

Editor's note: *The next issue of Hindu Vishwa will be dedicated to Ma. Anjleebahen. Please share your fond memories and pictures with us*
officeadmin@vhp-america.org

countries where she was invited to help with the planning of major events. She was one of the key persons in managing South Africa's first World Hindu Conference in 1995 that drew 30,000 Hindus and was graced by the presence of Nelson Mandela and scores of saints and swamijis.

Anjleebahen had the innate ability to work enthusiastically with all - from a new volunteer to the high and mighty. By force of her dedication and sacrifices, she had earned trust of her coworkers, religious heads, swamijis and national leaders. She was as at ease meeting the king of Thailand as she was entering residence of then Prime Minister Vajpayeeji. She handled with finesse challenging task of convincing various religious heads to sit together on VHPA's platform for the good of the Hindu Samaj.

"Anjleebahen was the epitome of a selfless volunteer totally committed to the Hindu cause. Throughout her life she inspired people and organizations with her boldness, dedication, determination, creativity, kindness and compassion."

Said Dr. Abhaya Asthana, immediate past president of VHPA.

Shri Sanjay Mehta, immediate past General Secretary of VHPA summarized Anjleebahen's persona thus: *"Anjleebahen was a strong sutra between Hindus of America and Bharat. In this role she used to visit Bharat frequently. Upon her return from Bharat, I used to ask her, 'Bharat Mata kaisi hai (How is Bharat Mata)?' Her prompt answer with a smile was always, 'Mere jaisi mast hai (joyful like me!)' Anjleebahen was Shubhra Jyotsna (radiant white) in her appearance and role. She has tied many of us in the eternal Raksha Bandhan sutra."*

Dr. Ved Prakash Nanda, former head of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and an authority on International Law and a Padmabhushan said: *"Anjleebahen truly embodied Service Above Self. I*

had the privilege to work with her on several projects and had the opportunity to witness her untiring and selfless efforts for all Hindu causes. She had an infectious smile and cheerfully brought people together to serve society. In large and small events alike, she was the heart and soul."

Shri Ramesh Shah, Chairperson of Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation, USA said, *"In the history of VHP she will be remembered as lone star from USA."*

Shri Shridhar Damle, who has spent better part of his life doing research on the true history of Bharat wrote: *"When Anjleebahen lost her husband at a very young age with a small baby to take care of, she had two options: traditional one was to take care of the baby with a relative or the modern option of remarriage. Rather than the 'Kati Patang' syndrome, bold Anjleebahen chose a different option- to serve the Hindu society, while taking care of boy under loving support and guidance of Dr. Mahesh and Dr. Ragin Mehta."*

Shri Girish Gandhi, a member of VHPA's Advisory Board reflected thus: *"She was the 'Shakti' in true sense behind all the work done under the umbrella of VHP of America."*

Smt. Manju Tiwari, a member of the VHPA's Executive Board connected Anjleebahen's last rites with the essence of her life: *"Even her last rites were performed by those who were not her blood relations. That was Anjleebahen who always made even unknown people her own."*

To consider all as your own is the mark of a saint."

Dr. Mahesh Mehta, founder of VHPA who took Anjleebahen under his wings after her bereavement and encouraged her to develop her full potential, rights from Bharat: *"The early loss of life of Anjleebahen has left a big vacuum in various types of Hindu Services. She served many Organizations across the world. She*

ANJLEEBAHEN HAD THE INNATE ABILITY TO WORK ENTHUSIASTICALLY WITH ALL- FROM A NEW VOLUNTEER TO THE HIGH AND MIGHTY. BY SHEER FORCE OF HER DEDICATION AND SACRIFICES, SHE HAD EARNED TRUST OF HER COWORKERS, RELIGIOUS HEADS, SWAMIJIS AND NATIONAL LEADERS.

was a leader with organizational skills and knew how to keep strong relationships She was a daughter to senior leaders and Didi to younger ones. It is difficult to fill the leadership void of her gravity.”

Dr. Shankarrao Tatwawadi Ji, a senior RSS functionary writes, *“Anjleebahen was the link to all leaders, saints and organization for VHPA’s founder Dr. Mahesh Mehta. One thing worth admiring is that in spite of the terrible illness, Anjleebahen was always cheerful.”*

Shree Champat Ray Ji, V.P., VHP said that *“Anjleebahen was never disheartened; she always remained cheerful.”*

Gaurang Vaishnav, Executive Vice President of Global Indians for Bharat Vikas (GIBV) and a former General Secretary who worked closely with Anjleebahen for more than 40 years said: *“Anjleebahen’s life is an example of the victory of inner strength and power of ‘tapsya’ over seemingly unsurmountable difficulties. She faced the adversities head-on and succeeded in becoming a leader who didn’t know what ‘impossible’ meant.”*

Ajay Shah, President of VHPA said, *“Anjleebahen epitomized selfless service. No task was too big or too small for her. She treated everyone around her as a member of family; she inspired and led by her dedication. Her organizational skills were exceptional.*

Leadership came naturally to her. Fifty years ago, it was uncommon to see women leaders in public life. Ajleebahen, paved a way for generations of Hindu women leaders who follow in her footsteps. VHPA will announce details of a womens’ leadership and educational initiative in her memory.”

Anjleebahen moved back to Bharat about 10 years ago. While there, she became very active with Global Indians for Bharat Vikas (GIBV) a USA base NGO working for rural empowerment and educating citizens of their responsibilities and rights. She served as its President in Bharat.

Besides being an active volunteer, Anjleebahen was an artist. She was a good painter, decorator and a versatile singer. She also authored a book in Gujarati detailing Hindu Samskaars and customs as observed in certain communities in Gujarat.

She leaves behind a son, daughter in law, two grandchildren and thousands of admirers across the globe.

May Ishwar help Anjleebahen’s Aatma in its upward journey. OM Shanti.

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Funds Meant for Hindu Temples in Karnataka will No Longer be Spent on Other Religious Institutions

By Harsha Bhat

Karnataka government has ordered that the funds of the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions And Charitable Endowments (HRCE) Department also known as Muzrai department be no longer used to fund any non-Hindu religious institutions.

In response to the recent outrage by various Hindu groups and leaders against the distribution of 'tastik' money from the HRCE to priests and staff of other religious institutions, Minister for Muzrai Kota Srinivas Poojary directed that all such acts of financial support from the department be halted with immediate effect.

In a media address, as per a release, Poojary said that "until our government came to power, 'tastik' amount meant for temples was also being provided to other religious institutions. Upon receiving this information we have directed that all utilization of funds for non-Hindu purposes be stopped immediately."

He said instructions will be issued for other religious institutions that need funds to avail the same under their respective departments.

In a statement, the HRCE Commissioner informed that a total of Rs 133 crore is spent annually on 'tastik' distribution which covers around 27,000 Hindu temples in the state. But among the recipients of the 'tastik' are 764 other non-Hindu religious institutions, and an order shall be issued to stop the same with immediate notice as instructed by the Minister.

Hindu organizations had recently opposed the distribution of Covid compensation to imams of mosques

from the funds of the HRCE department. Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa had recently announced a relief package of Rs 500 crore which involved a one-time compensation to 'archakas' and staff of C-grade temples as well as Imams and muezzins of mosques.

While the compensation to priests was welcomed, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad earlier today opposed the government's move to sanction a compensation from the funds of the HRCE to mosques. VHP leaders who met Poojary earlier today had condemned this decision of the government.

In its appeal to Poojary, VHP said it "opposes the decision of the government to provide Covid pandemic relief to the imams of 41 mosques and madrasas of the district from the funds of Hindu Religious Endowment."

Seeking that the government withdraw its orders immediately it emphasized the funds from 'daivasthanas and temples' should only be used for the Hindu community. "It should not be used for mosques and madrasas. We condemn this decision of the state BJP government," said the appeal further. Poojary who received the appeal had assured to withdraw the decision.

The Muzrai department had earlier distributed food kits worth Rs 1,500 each to all archakas of C-grade temples in May this year. In response to a petition from priests for these temples, Poojary had ordered the same which was said to benefit around 50,000 priests and staff of temples that have been functioning without devotees since the lockdown.

Vedic Literature Says Caste by Birth is Unjust I



*Stephen Knapp
(Sri Nandanandana Dasa)*

When it comes to the sensitive topic of *Varnashrama*, or what many people call the caste system of India, we have seen so many talks over this issue, both pro and con, back and forth, this way and that. We all know that the Vedic system of *Varnashrama* has been mentioned in the Vedic literature in many places, such as in the Purusha Sukta verses of the *Rig-veda* (Book Ten, Hymn 90). But there is no indication in these verses that say that birth is the essential quality for one's *varna*. Yet, it seems that many people still don't understand how the *varna* system was meant to be implemented, as can be seen in the modern form of the caste system of today. The problem is not because of *Varnashrama*, but because of this misunderstanding of what it really is that has caused so many of India's social problems. This article contains many quotes from Vedic *shastra* to clarify what the *Varnashrama* or caste system is actually supposed to be.

This article is for those more familiar with the topic, but for those who are not we can explain briefly that there are four basic social divisions, namely the Brahmanas (those who are priests, or interested in the study, teaching and practice of spiritual knowledge and intellectual pursuits), Kshatriyas (those who are soldiers, in the military, or police, politicians, managers, etc.), Vaishyas (merchants, businessmen, bankers, farmers, tradesmen, etc.), and Shudras (those who have little interest in the study of the Vedic literature or spiritual pursuits, and would rather engage in simple labor or employment, or technicians and other craftsmen in the service of others, etc.). Outcastes are those who are outside these four. There are also the four ashramas of life, which include Brahmacharis (student life, generally celibates), Grihastas (householders), Vanaprasthas (those who are retired from family life), and Sannyasa (the renounced monks, some of whom travel the world to teach). This is the Vedic system of *Varnashrama*.

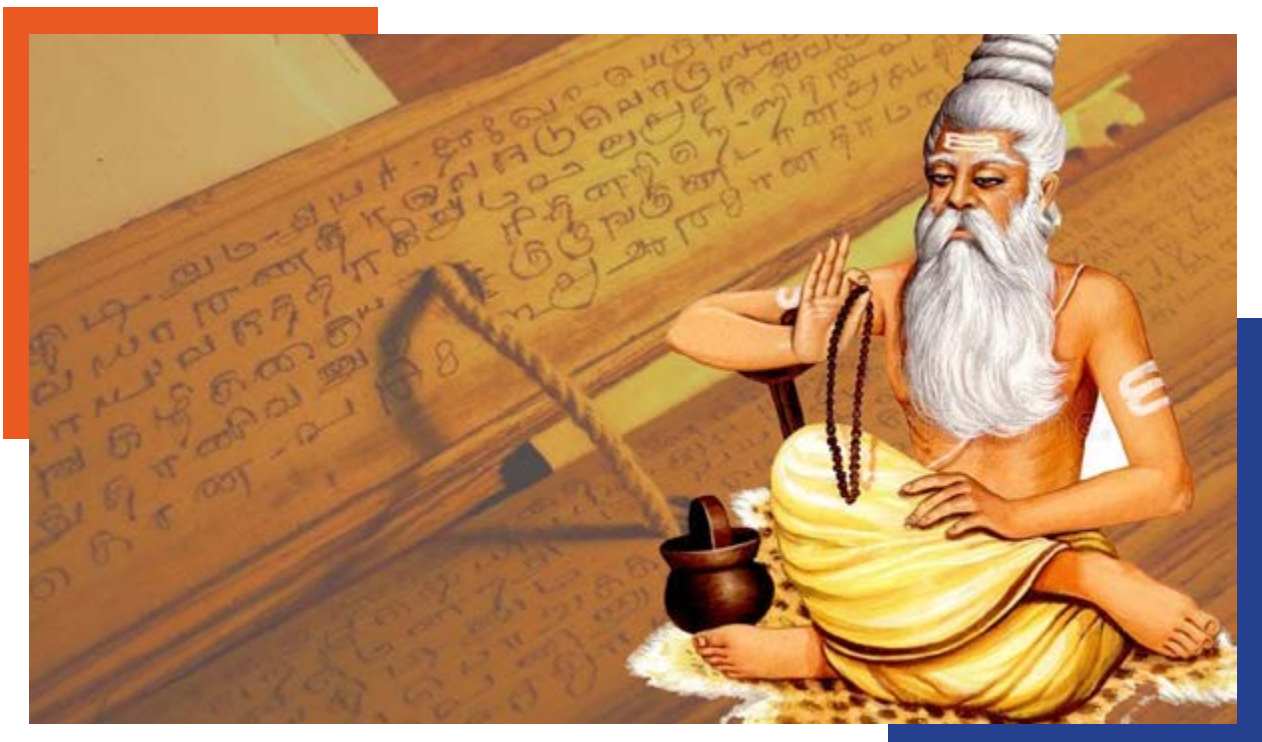
The modern caste system is seen to usually dictate one's *varna* or caste merely by one's birth family, as if one automatically inherits the caste of one's father, which is why there is a growing dislike for it. This is not the traditional Vedic system of *Varnashrama*. This is the difference and the problem. The traditional Vedic system calculated one's occupational class by recognizing one's natural talents, interests, tendencies, and abilities. It was similar to the modern system of having high school counselors adjust a student's academic courses by discussing with the students their interests in conjunction with the results of their IQ tests. Thus, such counselors see what occupational direction is best suited for the students so they can achieve a fitting career that is of interest to them and

helps them be a contributor to society at the same time. And the four basic divisions of society, as outlined in the Vedic system, are natural classifications and found everywhere, in every society, call it what you want. Plus, the traditional Vedic *Varnashrama* system was never so inflexible that one could not change from one occupation or class to another. The rigidity of the present-day caste system, based on *jati* or one's birth family, is actually leading us away from the flexibility, and the common sense, of the Vedic *varna* system.

For this reason, you could say that the modern caste system that we find today is opposed to the Vedic system of *varna*. The Vedic process was a matter of bringing experience and wisdom of the ages to assist and direct a person's life in what would be the most productive and satisfying occupation that would fit the mentality, interests, talents, and level of consciousness of an individual. It was never meant to dominate, stifle, hold down, or demean anyone. Therefore, the modern caste system as we find it today should be thrown out, and the natural system of the Vedic *Varnashrama* should be properly understood as it was meant to be.

Another problem with the present day caste system is that an increasing number of adults in India, what to speak of Western countries, who come from different *varnas*, different family lineages, various ethnic backgrounds, are getting married and becoming parents. How is it possible then to determine the caste or *varna* of the child they produce based merely or only on its birth or parentage? So when this increases to additional mixed *varnas* and *jatis*, caste by birth no longer holds true, if it ever could. It increasingly depends on *guna* and karma, which molds the tendencies, talents, abilities, intelligence level, attractions, and characteristics of the individual. And this cannot be determined until the child engages in actions and interactions among others. Only then is there some indication for what is a person's *varna* or most likely career classification.

So, to show what I'm talking about, here in the *shastric* quotes that follow I try to provide a clear description of how the *varna* system was never meant to be based merely on one's family birth, but by one's talents, natural interests, proclivities, expertise, and



activities. These quotes are from the Bhrama Parva section of the *Bhavishya Purana* (abbreviated as *BP*), and no matter how much or how little credit you give to this *Purana*, you still cannot deny the logic with which this information is presented. The verses cited herein from the Bhrama Parva section of the *Bhavishya Purana* is known to be relatively free of corruptions and its antiquity is vouchsafed as well. The same verses are also repeated verbatim in the *Skanda Purana* (north Indian versions) and a few verses of similar purport are also found in the beginning of the *Shukranatisara*. Some scholars say that the last is a 19th century forgery, but no less than Swami Dayanand Sarasvati acknowledged it as an ancient text, and most scholars date it between 300-1200 AD. So at a minimum, these verses do represent an alternative opinion and an elaboration on the Vedic *varna-jaati* system.

There are many other points about the caste system that could be discussed, such as untouchability, etc., but please note, this article is not taking those up, but merely following the outline as brought up in the following *shastric* quotes focusing on the *Bhavishya Purana*. In this portion of the *Bhavishya Purana* that follows, the answers to the questions are spoken by Sumantu, the disciple of Srila Vyasadeva, to King Shatanika. This was at the suggestion of Srila Vyasadeva [VedaVyasa] who was sitting nearby in the assembly of sages, all of whom were listening to the discussion. (*Bhavishya Purana*, Bhrama Parva, Chapter 1.28-35)

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE ONE'S VARNA?

First of all, how do we recognize one's *varna* is an ancient question, even asked by the sages of the distant past to Lord Brahma. What is it that really makes the difference between one person and the next? "The sages asked: O Lord Brahma, in the beginning of creation, how was one recognized as a Brahmana? Was it because of his birth in a particular family, his knowledge of the *Vedas*, the characteristics of his body, his accomplishment of self-realization, his quality of behavior, or the prescribed duties he carried out? Is it the mind, speech, activities, body, or the qualities that determine one's social status? Surely one's birth in a certain caste [or family] is not sufficient for one to be recognized as a Brahmana. One's

qualities and work must also play an important part in determining a person's position in society. The Vedic literature supports this view." (*BP*, 38.8-11)

"Different social orders, such as the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas (and others) are directly seen, but simply being born in a particular family does not automatically grant one his social status. An intelligent person can easily recognize a horse in the midst of many cows. Similarly, among many who are born in a particular social status, those who are actually qualified in terms of character and activities can be easily recognized. (*BP*, 38.19-20)

"Some people say that all of humanity is the topmost caste, and there is nothing more to be said than this. They fail to understand that the various purificatory processes, such as the sacred thread ceremony [initiation into the twice-born status], make a person distinct from those who do not undergo such rituals." (*BP*, 38.21)

Such customs certainly help one progress and is recommended, but the fact remains that in spite of such purificatory rites, we are all still very much the same, as described next.

WE ARE ALL QUITE ALIKE

"How can all the living entities who take birth, grow old, become diseased, and then die, who suffer the threefold miseries of material existence, who take birth in innumerable species, such as human beings, birds, dogs, pigs, dog-eaters, insects, and tortoises, who are all placed into very awkward conditions of life, fraught with danger, illness, lamentation, and distress, and who are constantly being drowned by the burden of their grave sinful reactions, be accepted as qualified Brahmanas?" (*BP*, 38.23-25)

Therefore, there must be some additional means that can help identify one's mental makeup and high or low level of intellect and consciousness.

IT IS ONLY OUR ACTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS THAT DIFFERENTIATE US

"Just as one can differentiate between a soldier, an elephant, a horse, a cow, a goat, a camel, and an ass

by seeing their colors and forms [as distinguished because of their birth], all living entities have different characteristics and duties that distinguish them from one another.” (BP, 38.30)

“[However] the question, ‘Who is a Brahmana?’ cannot be answered so easily. Actually, there is no question of a person being qualified as a Brahmana simply because he was born in a family of Brahmanas. When a person is designated as belonging to one of the four divisions of the social order [whether it be Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras or Brahmanas]—that [designation] is not eternal. There is no physical characteristic that enables one to determine who is a Brahmana. A fair or dark complexion, which, after all, is temporary, is no real indication of a person’s *varna*.” (BP, 38.31)

In Goswami Tulsidas’s *Shri Ramcharitmanas* there are many instances when this issue is also addressed. In the ‘Sabri episode’, Lord Rama speaks to Sabri about the importance of action (Chapter III, Aranya Kand, Verse 34, Line 4,5,6). It is clearly stated that “Bhakti (devotion and unification with the supreme), does not consider caste, religion, etc., rather it is determined by the character and qualities of an individual.”

A CASTE SYSTEM BASED ON BIRTH IS UNJUST

“Therefore, the conception of a caste system based solely on birth is artificial and temporary. It may seem to be reality, but that is only due to the influence of the practice of a particular period. A businessman and doctor are both human beings, but their profession is different. Their work is according to their nature and qualities, and not because of the family they were born into.” (BP, 38.32)

“Can a person, thus, claim to be a Brahmana if he does not act according to the codes of good conduct? Can a man claim to be a Kshatriya if he does not protect the citizens? Can a person claim to be a Vaishya if he gives up performing his prescribed duties [in business, trade or farming]? Can a person claim to be a Shudra if he abandons service to the higher three classes?

“There is no physical difference between human

beings as there is between cows and horses. Actually, all living beings should be treated with respect, knowing that they are one in quality as spirit souls, although they may temporarily have different varieties of forms and activities.” (BP, 38.33-34)

“Therefore, the caste system in human society that is based solely upon birth should be understood as superficial, because it is not prescribed in the scriptures. Unfortunately, those in ignorance cannot understand that it is a man-made concoction that can be easily refuted by a person in knowledge.” (BP, 38.35)

“If a person considers himself to be a Brahmana by birth but engages in [such things as] taking care of cows, buffalos, goats, horses, camels, or sheep, or acts as a messenger, tax collector, businessman, painter [artist], or dancer, he should be considered as not a real Brahmana, even though he may be very expert or powerful.” (BP, 38.36-37)

“Brahmanas who have deviated from the path of righteousness as propagated by the scriptures are to be considered fallen [from their social status], even though they may belong to a very aristocratic family, and have performed all the required purificatory rituals, and carefully studied the *Vedas*. No amount of accomplishments gives one the right to justify sinful behavior.” (BP, 38.42-43)

“Thus, it can be understood how a Brahmana can become a Shudra, a Shudra can become a Brahmana, a Kshatriya can become a Brahmana or a Vaishya, and so on.” (BP, 38.47)

Herein we can understand that a Brahmana is not Brahmana if he is not endowed with purity and good character, or if he leads a life of frivolity and immorality. However, a Shudra is a Brahmana if he leads a virtuous and pious life. *Varna* or caste is a question of character. *Varna* is not the color of the skin, but the color of one’s character and quality. Conduct and character is what matters and not lineage alone. If one is Brahmana by birth and, at the same time, if he possesses the virtues of a Brahmana, that it is extremely good, because it is only certain virtuous qualifications that determine if one is a Brahmana, just as certain qualities distinguish one as a Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra. But if a Brahmana

does not have the necessary traits, then he cannot call himself a Brahmana.

“Brahma said: If study of the *Vedas* is an important criteria for being recognized as a Brahmana, then many Kshatriyas and Vaisyas also deserve to be called Brahmanas, just as Ravana became known as a demon [by qualities and actions]. Similarly, there are many dog-eaters, laborers, hunters, fishermen, sailors, and other people [outside the higher classes] who study the *Vedas*. Therefore, mere study of the *Vedas* cannot be the criteria for determining a person’s social position.” (BP, 39.1-2, 6)

The point is that “One who is twice-born and has thoroughly studied the *Vedas*, along with its six branches, cannot claim to be a purified soul if he does not observe the codes of good conduct. It is the occupational duty of one who is twice-born to study the *Vedas*, and this is one of the symptoms of a genuine Brahmana. If a person does not perform his prescribed duties after studying the four *Vedas*, he is like a eunuch who cannot take advantage of having a wife.” (BP, 39.8-9)

Here again we see that the proper classification of an individual is not the status of one’s birth family, but the qualities that he shows in life. Otherwise, even someone who considers himself to be a sophisticated Brahmana may indeed be something far less. As it is further explained: “Just like a Brahmana, a Shudra can have a shikha, chant Om, worship the deities every morning and evening, wear a sacred [Brahmana’s] thread, carry a staff, and wear a deerskin [like a forest sage]. Even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are incapable of preventing people from becoming Shudras, and so what to speak of human beings. Therefore, wearing a sacred thread, keeping a shikha, and dressing a particular way are not really indications of a person’s position within the



Varnashrama society. Who can stop a person’s Shudra mentality, even though he may be well-versed in the Vedic mantras and tantras, and is a very good speaker on these subjects?” (BP, 39.10-13)

“[Generally it can be recognized that] All classes of men are seen to be capable of performing austerities, speaking the truth, worshiping the demigods, and chanting mantras. All classes of men generally avoid and [in some cases] even deceive those who speak harshly. Considering this, it is not possible to actually differentiate between a Brahmana and a Shudra. The power to curse and the exhibition of compassion can also be found in Shudras. One cannot ascertain from a person’s external appearance whether he is a thief, a cheater, or a prince. Just as a Shudra is incapable of relieving himself of his miseries and protecting his family, it is the same for a Brahmana.” (BP, 39.14-17)

THE DAMAGE OF UNQUALIFIED BRAHMANAS

“It is better if there are no Brahmanas at all than to have sinful and unqualified Brahmanas in the kingdom [who thus mislead society by what they say and do], especially in Kali-yuga, because in previous ages such Brahmanas would have been censored.” (BP, 39.18)

Furthermore, it is especially difficult in these days to find anyone who is eligible to be considered a member of the higher classes or *varnas* of society, for it seems that everyone is materially motivated.

“According to some opinion, the power to curse others, a compassionate nature, and an inclination toward spiritual life are the characteristics of a Brahmana. In spite of that, it is seen that practically

everyone is attached to worldly activities, having fallen into the darkness of ignorance, and because of that they are helplessly rushing towards hell, just like flies rush towards a fire.” (BP, 39.19-20)

SO WHO IS A REAL BRAHMANA?

We have now seen by the logic presented in the *Bhavishya Purana* how the *jati* or birth of an individual does not justify anyone’s social classification. But also how many of those who take pride in considering themselves of a higher caste or *varna* are actually not qualified in such a way at all. And yet, even a low-class person, meaning having taken birth from a lower social class, can indeed rise up to be a Brahmana. It all depends on one’s level of consciousness, which generally depends on one’s training and then mental disposition towards a spiritual life, and his natural inclination to follow a code of good conduct.

“Only those who have been PROPERLY trained and who have studied the *Vedas* [are seen to generally] adhere to a life of piety, whereas those without training [in at least general moral standards], who have not studied the *Vedas* [nor their spiritual conclusion] engage in sinful activities. Because study of the *Vedas* is the primary duty of a Brahmana [or one who is seriously on the path to spiritual progress, thus showing Brahminical qualities], one who does not study the *Vedas* cannot be considered a genuine Brahmana.” (BP, 39.25-26)

This is interesting because how many times have we met people who feel they have duly studied the Vedic conclusions but have yet to know how to apply them, nor have they continued to follow them, giving any number of excuses for their present activities. The above verses make it clear that one has to continue to follow the standards, and if he cannot, then he is no longer to be accepted as a person of a higher social class. And this can go for anyone and anywhere. If they have little respect for others, engage in materialistic pursuits without higher moral standards, then that person is someone with a low consciousness, or low *varna*.

A BRAHMANA CAN EASILY FALL DOWN, WHILE A SHUDRA CAN EASILY RISE UP

“A Brahmana can easily be diverted from his brahminical qualities and codes of good conduct if he

becomes bewildered by desires for material enjoyment and blinded by pride, just like an ordinary materialistic person. Of course, anyone becomes degraded and goes to hell if he has a sinful nature, even after undergoing the *samskaras*. On the other hand, those who observe proper etiquette, even though they might not have undergone the *samskaras*, should be considered as Brahmanas.

“It is a fact that even someone who chants various mantras and has undergone all the purificatory rituals may fall down into illusion and thereby become bereft of brahminical qualifications due to his sinful mentality. People who engage in abominable activities, and who are blinded by pride in their ability, fall down from their position and lose all brahminical qualities.” (BP, 40.15-18)

Here again I am reminded of what I have always said, that the present caste system based on one’s *jati* or birth is unjust. It is meant to depend on the person’s natural talents, abilities, tendencies, and mentality, which varies from person to person regardless of family, social class, culture, regional jurisdiction, etc. Each person has to be considered individually regardless of family background.

“The caste system based simply on birth does not actually divide people according to their development of consciousness. It is one’s envy and hatred that allows us to place a person in a higher or lower category. If it is not helpful to divide people according to their bodily characteristics, [then why do so]? In the past, many great sages, such as Srila Vyasadeva, observed proper etiquette and became great souls, although they did not undergo the *samskaras*, such as the *garbhadhana*.” (BP, 40.19-20)

For example, “Vyasadeva was the son of a fisherman’s daughter, his father Parashara was born from a woman who was a dog-eater. Shukadeva was born from a female parrot, Vashishtha was the son of a prostitute” and other sages like Kanada, Shringi, Mandapala, and Mandavya all had questionable births, and yet all were highly qualified Brahmanas, and recognized as such.

“Indeed, it is imperative that one strictly follow the instructions of these highly qualified sages, who all possess a spotless character, if one hopes to achieve success in life.

“O King, undergoing the various *samskaras* certainly plays an important part in raising one to the platform of a qualified Brahmana, but there are many other important considerations. For example, the great sage Shringi achieved the status of a Brahmana on the strength of his austerities. It must be concluded that undergoing *samskaras* is a principal criteria for becoming a Brahmana. Still, on the strength of their penance and austerity, Vyasadeva, Parashara, Kanada, Vashishtha, and Mandapala became qualified Brahmanas, despite their taking birth from the womb of a fisherwomen, female dog-eater, or prostitute, etc.

“[Therefore] undergoing the various *samskaras* is not sufficient to qualify one as a Brahmana. Those who are expert in performing the Vedic and tantrik *samskaras* require the attainment of transcendental knowledge and the performance of penance to support their claim of being qualified Brahmanas. Without such qualifications, one will certainly indulge in sinful activities and thus fall from his high position as a Brahmana. One who is a Brahmana in name only is not really a Brahmana.” (BP, 40.22-32)

Here in these quotations we can see that many great Rishis were born in lower *varnas*, such as Vashishta was the son of a prostitute; Vyasa was born of a fisher woman; Parashara’s mother was a chandala; Nammalwar was a Shudra. Similarly, Valmiki, Viswamitra, Agastya were Brahmanas in spite of their non-Brahmana origin. In more recent times, for example, Swami Vivekananda, one of the most revered Hindus worldwide, was a non-Brahmana. Or was he? In spite of a non-Brahmana birth he displayed so many high qualities. All this proves that birth is not a major player in attaining the status of Brahmana. It is the intellectual and spiritual level of consciousness that differentiates people.

In the same way, spiritual realization is not dependent on birth or book-learning, as has been repeatedly demonstrated in the lives of saints, from the very earliest

times to our own day. So, then who is a real rishi? It is the person who has attained through proper means the direct realization of *Dharma*. That is the one who can be a *rishi* even if he is a non-Brahmana or *mleccha* by birth.

The basis of *varna* is *guna* or the mode of nature in which a person is situated, and not birth.

Therefore, one is a Brahmana not because of one’s birth or caste or heredity or color or profession or acquisition of worldly knowledge, or mere observation of social and moral codes, but because of his spiritual knowledge and insight, and his abidance in the Supreme Reality, his state of self-realization. This is the conclusion of all *Vedas*, *Shrutis*, *Puranas*, *Itihasas*, and of all great men of India.

Therefore, casteism, meaning judging a person by one’s birth family, is a misguided social custom and not part of any spiritual tradition, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. From Buddhism downwards, every sect has preached against caste.

WHEN A BRAHMANA BECOMES LOWER THAN A SHUDRA

“According to Svayambhuva Manu, the principal characteristic of a Brahmana is that he possesses spiritual knowledge, is enriched with the power of penance, and maintains a state of purity. According to this understanding, anyone, whether he belongs to an upper, middle, or lower caste, if he never indulges in sinful activities, he must be considered a Brahmana. It is said that an honest and well-behaved Shudra is better than an arrogant Brahmana, and a Brahmana who disregards the prescribed codes of good conduct is inferior to a Shudra. A Shudra that does not keep wine in his shop or in his house is called an honest Shudra.” (BP, 42.29-32)

This article and more information at www.stephen-knapp.com

FOR EXAMPLE,
“VYASADEVA WAS THE
SON OF A FISHERMAN’S
DAUGHTER, HIS FATHER
PARASHARA WAS BORN FROM A
WOMAN
WHO WAS A DOG-EATER.
SHUKADEVA WAS BORN FROM A
FEMALE PARROT, VASHISHTHA
WAS THE SON OF A
PROSTITUTE”

Silent Guru

Aneesh Bairavasundaram

Sadness, despair, anxiety and overthinking. My life had been run over by the demons who have inhabited my head. I was lost for years, not understanding I had been wandering on a path that never existed

My name is Aneesh Bairavasundaram, and I am now unrestricted.

Born and raised in the United States, identity - as many second-generation children may relate with - was not something that I was mindful of for many years. My family's background originates from a long lineage of Hindu priests from the acclaimed Madurai Meenakshi Temple and Chennai Kalikambal Temple; faith was often considered a given - yet for me blind faith was not.

Faith is something which only came through observation for me. As a scientist at heart, I proclaimed that religion or faith was a primitive form of understanding the physical world and was invalid.

Although I made the claim, I was also not able to support religion or Gods' irrationality aside from counterarguments. Many paths in spirituality existed and as a purely scientific experiment I decided to go on a path; to learn the scriptures and learn yoga to prove its invalidity which meant committing to the process.

As time progressed my doubts were growing, I had constant debates with Gurus and religious leaders. As I was reflecting on the journey thus far, I realized that it truthfully was all imaginative. I decided to stop continuing the "spiritual" path. As the path began to end, I stopped trying to understand and began just observing life.

Observation led to understanding: Energy = Presence. Something that is omnipresent cannot be understood without being acknowledged in the most objective manner.

Shakthi has been something I have been surrounded by since I was young. I grew up with tales of Kali and the Goddesses' might but beyond valor is their kindness and compassion. Energy's consciousness is often not described, but energy's conscious nature is in its presence. When we see a highly energetic person, we regard them as having a large presence regardless of their conscious thought. Similarly, I understood that I was simply not observing the presence which was omnipresent, and I was lacking awareness. Creation is Energy. Preservation is Energy. Dissolution is Energy.

Creation in Shaiva Agama is described as Shiva the Consciousness and Shakthi the Energy. Both are intertwined, yet both are unique in distinction; at Consciousness' will, Energy plays. Everything in the world both animate and in-animate vibrate at different levels of energy. Energy is the heat of the fire; consciousness is the light. Fire's purpose is a combination both to provide light and heat.

This understanding helped me for the first time look outside of the Ego which I and the community had been building together for years.

YAD BHAVAM TAD BHAVATI

Blind faith is something that I detested. Coming from the American perspective I always tried to find an "answer" and until then I disregarded the practice - often at my own detriment. As I began to receive more

answers and understandings, I realized the place of blind faith. Blind faith leads to unwavering selflessness and true commitment.

What is blind faith? Essentially a form of performing action without understanding the inner workings of how and in some cases why. True sacrifice comes from the early stages of performing action without necessarily understanding where it may lead. A dream to manifest often uses this concept to begin to create.

For example, if someone had an idea to start a clothing business, regardless of how much they may read on the topic, they are following the path or belief that their peers or mentors may have taken. The Upanishad says “Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati” which loosely translated means “that which is believed, manifests”. This concept ties in the importance of ShivaShakti balance.

Although I could call myself Aneesh, I did not understand my purpose which let way for all these demons to run. I have been fortunate with my father, and many Gurus who through conviction shared their Energy and the ultimate compassion of the Goddess’s grace, it all connected. I was not understanding what was right before me; to look inward, I had to observe outward. I understood for the first time the ownership of action is ego.

For the first time in my life, my life meant something to me. I began the bhavam of enjoying and building my life – and Tad Bhavati, there it manifested.

Happiness, Peace, Love, Care, Faith, and Gratitude. My life is now under the Lord’s hands. The demons who once lived in my head, now tremble in the presence of

Shakthi, passion. I am on a path and with balance of Energy and Consciousness I have understood that I am to bring others onto my path.

The title SilentGuru came to me, which is also a title given to the Guru of Gurus not for a title to call myself but rather to help others find the path and to walk together towards a Global Spiritual Consciousness. To provide the Energy for many who feel their life is constricted. For those out of balance, to guide them towards balance which in turn will help realize their purpose.

As my mental health and strength grew, I decided to provide both allopathic and spiritual mediums to children of immigrants through Bala Vihar and propagate the importance of both Mental Health workshops and therapy as well as the spiritual relief and cleansing which will help one have the strength to get through recovery.

SilentGuru Trades grew out of the necessity which I lacked during my growth both as an individual but also as a member of the community. Faith is a duty, not a choice; the mind, body and soul all are part of life is what helped me understand my own purpose.

All praise to the great Shiva/Shakthi.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aneesh Bairavasundaram is an ex Bal Vihar graduate in Boston area, and now runs a flourishing Bal Vihar himself at the Siva Temple. He recently introduced an advanced program for young adults.

Kashmiri Genocide: 1947

Bal K. Gupta

I am writing this article to support the article “**The Lessons of 19th January 1990 and Kashmiri Genocide**” by Rajat Mitra in the Jan-Mar 2021 issue of Hindu Vishwa. Mr. Mitra has witnessed the recent Kashmiri Genocide of 1990 and wrote a very scholarly article. But I am a survivor of the long-forgotten **Kashmiri Genocide of 1947** and was held prisoner in Alibeg, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) from 1947-48. In 1947, around 150,000 Hindus and Sikhs lived in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Bhimber, Kotli, Poonchh, Bagh, etc.) along with 1 Million Muslims. During the Pathan and Pakistani army invasion in October-November 1947, most Hindus and Sikhs were killed, and their women kidnapped, including my uncles and aunts. Pakistan Occupied Kashmir was ethnically cleansed of Hindus and Sikhs. 25,000 of those Hindus and Sikhs were from Mirpur. Following are the excerpts from my book “**Forgotten Atrocities: Memoirs of a Survivor of the 1947 Partition of India**”.

“The blood dripping from head, skin started to peel off from the wrists for hands tied in ropes, the bent of the lifeless neck signaled unconsciousness, feet with cuts and torn skin, having no ounce of energy to balance so were hanging in a way as if they would never walk again, face scarred with injuries, lips dried and requesting for water, with the visible red marks left by the Pathans and Pakistan army. These were the scenes I saw on the way to Alibeg Prison. The windows were broken that let the chilling Himalayan winds cut through the wounds. It was such a pitiful condition but there were hundreds of youngsters and men bearing the same or even worse torture in the prison of Alibeg. Where death seemed

merciful, but the man had forgotten everything about it.”

I thought of every night to be my last. I would pray for death to put an end to my miseries, but the lines of my hands had a long life written in them for me to witness something more. The tears in my eyes had dried after crying so long for so many.

But every time I closed my eyes, the only thing I would see was Mirpur, my beautiful home, and my blissful life. The cool mountain breeze and beautiful snow-capped peaks presenting the most mesmerizing sunsets and sunrises in the world. The calm stillness in the surroundings was there in the people too. And under the reign of our Maharaja Hari Singh, the people were living happily. My maternal grandfather was a Tax Collector of the Maharaja and owned a double-story house with a big compound at the back. We had a big family of 15 people including my maternal and paternal family including grandparents, siblings, cousins, uncles, and aunts. Mirpur had a high school, college, and a middle school for girls. I completed my education until grade 5. I stayed in my paternal house till 4th grade and continued the 5th grade from my maternal grandparents’ house as the school was near their home. The chimes of bells with the Aarti of the Hindu Arya Samaj Temple, occasional countryside trips, the hustle and bustle of fairs of Eid, the Ram-Leela during Dussehra, the tableaux and processions during Krishna Janmashtami, and the celebrations of Guru Parab coexisted.

But all this was like a beautiful dream when the eyes opened to the reality of those prison bars, the smelly ragged blanket, the stinking smell of blood and flesh

everywhere, walls filled with screams and cries of the 'prisoners' who were imprisoned in the name of Allah. Around 15 to 20 young Hindu/Sikh men were being killed every single day in front of us. Some were waiting for their turn and some were still praying for help from the heavens.

I still get nightmares thinking about that part of my life, where witnessing death was an everyday scenario, and to my helplessness, I couldn't change it then; not for myself, nor for anyone else. Who could have ever thought of a Hindu-majority city being invaded in such a brutal way as if the angel of death had visited?

Pathan mercenaries backed by the Pak Armed Forces attacked J & K state in October 1947 that vitiated the cordial relations among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The city remained surrounded and was turned into a fortress by the Pathans until November 25, 1947. Nothing could go in or out. Firing could be heard round the clock. As starvation set in, the destitute Hindu Refugees from Gujrat and Jhelum sought shelter in Arya Samaj buildings and lived off the depleting food, offered

in charity. My family was also starving and feared for their safety. On November 25, 1947, the Pakistani forces along with the Pathans took a victory in the city. There were around 25,000 Hindus and Sikhs in the city then but soon thereafter approximately 2500 were killed in the Pak artillery fire. Another 2500 escaped with the J & K Army which was retreating after defeat. Due to shelling and cross-firing, a major part of the city was burning in flames that caused a major migration in the middle of the night. Houses were burning, streets were engulfed in smoke, there was blood everywhere; it was all very horrific. The house of my paternal grandparents was burnt to the ground. My grandparents and a paternal Uncle were cremated alive. The disabled took shelter in an old judicial building and my mother who could not walk was left along with thousands of people in the Court House. I was a 10-year-old boy who was forced to leave his mother in that unsettling and terrifying environment. She hugged and kissed me, and then we left her. With a heavy heart and teary eyes, I bade her goodbye, wishing in my heart to see her soon and praying to God, to keep her safe.



Our caravan was very large, the refugee count was in thousands. Many homeless, hopeless people who had left their homes and loved ones were making their way to Jammu. But unfortunately, the massacre had just begun. Pathans and the Pakistani army attacked us on our way and many people lost their lives in the firing in the dark. By the dawn, twenty thousand people were captured. All Hindu and Sikh prisoners were made to march towards Alibeg prison. Out of 20,000 prisoners, half of them were killed on the way, and over 5,000 young girls and women were abducted, including my two maternal aunts. Only around 5,000 people could make it to the Alibeg prison alive to be tortured like animals. I saw Hindu and Sikh men being hunted with swords or were shot to death; some were my uncles. Anticipating what was ahead, many women consumed poison and committed mass suicide as they could not bear the idea of their body being disgraced. It took us 3 long days to reach the prison but the worse was yet to come.

Alibeg prison, an abandoned Gurudwara, was a dilapidated old building with a large tomb-like structure in the center and some small ones along on its sides. It was winter and the deadly chill in the winds made the place howl. A Sikh holy shrine was converted into a slaughterhouse. We were kept in rooms that were used as prison cells and were given 0.5 oz of wheat flour/person/day. By the end of December, about two thousand people had lost their lives at the hands of the prison guards. More than a thousand including children and the elderly were sick, many deaths occurred due to sickness, malnutrition, and food poisoning. Men were randomly killed, and women kept on going missing. No Sikhs were left alive. I had to watch two of my four cousins die due to starvation after their mothers were kidnapped. There was no end to these atrocities, but the end of our lives seemed just around the corner.

In January 1948, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) arrived at Alibeg prison and the killings stopped. Then they started the rescue mission to get the people out of there. By April 1948, the said 'prisoners' from this concentration camp were taken to the refugee camp set up in Kurukshetra via train through the Wagah border. Only 1600 refugees including children, widows, and old survived. My brother and I were two of those survivors. My father, though, had died when I was 3 and I used to miss him a lot. But after seeing all this, I am glad he was not there. Imagining him dying in front of me would have been much more painful.

In 2006, one of my maternal uncles who was 80 years of age at the time visited Mirpur again. And what he told is heartbreaking. He said that the whole area has now been submerged to make the 7th largest dam in the world; Mangla Dam. And a new Mirpur with new infrastructure and new people, has been established which is now the largest city of *Azaad Kashmir* (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)"

I have seen countless deaths, been through atrocities, and have seen people getting killed. Yet, I stand to say that the youth of both countries must forget the sufferings of their forefathers. Their forefathers who lived at that time would not now be able to recognize the place they called 'home'. Nor would they ever want the place they loved to perish like this.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Bal Krishan Gupta, Atlanta, Georgia, USA,
authored a book- Forgotten Atrocities: Memoirs of a
Survivor of the 1947 Partition of India*

What is Sanatana Dharma According to You?

Maria Wirth



A friend asked me this question recently. Sanatana Dharma is so vast; it has so many aspects. How to put it briefly? Let me try:

Sanatana means eternal and Dharm is difficult to translate. It means: to do what is right in a given situation, to do one's duty.

How to know what is right? Our conscience tells us in most cases what is right. The human being is equipped with a moral barometer which gives the right direction. Only in some cases, there may be a genuine doubt. In those cases, texts like the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana or Dharma Shastras can prove helpful, or the advice of a trusted guru.

But, is the main thing in life to be an honest, upright, compassionate human being?

It is probably the most important part, because only on this basis, the other important aspect of Sanatana Dharm can be understood. Being honest and following one's conscience makes one susceptible to finer layers of awareness, and such refinement is needed to understand the truth.

And the truth about us and the universe is the other very important aspect of Sanatana Dharma. The Vedas, Upanishads and innumerable other ancient texts contain wisdom which a human being cannot easily discover. This wisdom was "seen" by the Rishis and has never been proven wrong.

The main point of this wisdom is: you are not what you think you are, but you are one with everything. In other words: You are not a small person in a big world but your Essence is the one blissful Awareness which is the basis of the universe and beyond – SatChitAnanda. Or again in other words: your person is like a wave on the infinite ocean. In essence the wave is nothing but the ocean.

From this claim (that we are not a small person in a big world) follows naturally that the goal of life is to realize this Oneness, to "know" it as clearly as true as one now knows that one is a human being and not a dog.

Plenty of tips are given how to discover this Oneness. Probably the best guide is the Bhagavad Gita, which explains in detail Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga. Jnana means to approach unity (Yog) by reflecting deeply on the truth, Bhakti by devotion and surrender to that great Intelligence and its divine forms, and Karma by dedicating one's actions and leaving their result to that great Intelligence.

There are many more helpful means, like poojas, mantras, meditation, pranayama, yog asanas, temple visits, vegetarianism, etc.

It follows that Sanatana Dharma fosters good humans who are aware that SatChitAnanda is within them and in all others, including in animals and nature. It gives them inner strength, and it makes them kind to other living beings and respectful to nature. It's the ideal basis for society.

Now in comparison, Christianity and Islam, both of which claim to be the only true religion, do not foster universal goodness in humans, and also do not have the wisdom about the Oneness of all.

Both religions demand that the doctrine of their religion must overrule one's innate knowledge of good and bad. The most important claim of their doctrine is that the Highest loves only the followers of their respective religion. Therefore, Muslims and Christians are taught from childhood that non-Muslims, respectively non-Christians, are inferior and will be rejected by the one Almighty. Their goal of life is to make the world free of those unbelievers either by pushing conversion or even by killing to please their God/ Allah.

And to hide that they have no proof whatsoever for their strange beliefs, they keep attacking Hindus

as superstitious, caste-ridden, etc. to put them on the defensive and prevent them from exposing them.

Fortunately, Hindus are waking up and see through their game. And even several converted Indian Christians and Muslims wake up and realize that the almighty Creator cannot possibly be such a terrible tyrant, who enjoys making billions of people suffer for all eternity in hellfire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Wirth is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the Ardhha Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India's spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.

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Source:

<https://mariawirthblog.wordpress.com/2021/03/26/what-is-sanatana-dharma-according-to-you/>

God's Pharmacy



Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)

The infinitely merciful God has given us the human body using which we can elevate ourselves spiritually. He gives us fruits, vegetables, rice, grains and so much more to sustain the body. But do you know that God provides us with a most amazing pharmacy also? Yes, He does. This pharmacy is called Nature.

There were many practices we followed in daily life as I was growing up in India. Back then, the benefits of these practices were not known to me. Now the entire world has started understanding the merits of natural remedies.

There were many Neem trees growing around our house. These trees repel mosquitos and other insects. The leaves of the tree are bitter and chewing them lowers and controls blood sugar levels. Neem leaves purify blood also. People would chew on 'datun,' which were essentially twigs of the Neem tree. These were used as a toothbrush, and they helped prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

When I had an earache, my mother would put mustard oil with garlic in my ears to alleviate the pain. For bloating and stomach aches we would reach for 'ajwain' (carom seeds), mix a little salt and wash it down with warm water.

Coconut oil has a huge fan gathering in the world today. We would put coconut oil in the hair to make it healthy and shiny. In the winter months the oil would solidify. To thaw it out we would put it out in the sun and apply it to the hair while basking in the sunlight.

Fennel seeds are a natural breath freshener and a digestive. Boiling these fragrant seeds in water and consuming this herbal tea cools the stomach. Ginger was a must in every household for its excellent qualities, as was turmeric powder. These two are still mainstays in the Indian kitchen.

God has created foods that have either a heating or a cooling quality. We knew about the heating quality of mangoes; so we would put them in a bucket of water for some hours before enjoying them.

All the above practices are ancient practices from God's Pharmacy called Nature.

ARE YOU A 'CHURCH LADY'?

Some time ago, there was a recurring skit on a very popular TV show in which a comedian played the role of the 'Church Lady.' The 'holier than thou'

attitude of the ‘church lady’ who criticized and judged others as being immoral was always presented against the background of hilarious comedy. It was all very entertaining. At the same time, there was an undeniable truth behind the laughs. The sad truth that many who consider themselves as God-loving and God-fearing often fail to observe the laws of God.

One of the divine laws is that we must not be judgmental toward others. Another is to see the good in everyone. How can anyone profess to be holy yet judge others harshly? A holy person does not see the faults of others, only the virtues. He does not engage in backbiting and cruel behavior. He does not tolerate gossip, let alone spread it. He may not ever talk about compassion, empathy, service, tolerance, and generosity, but he practices them every day.



We must ask ourselves some questions:

- Am I good only in the place of worship, or do I sincerely practice my faith?
- Do I see my own faults, or am I too busy judging others?
- Am I cautious only about ‘looking’ good before others, or am I working toward ‘becoming’ good?
- Do I join in the criticism and backbiting, or do I make an excuse and leave the place where this is happening?

We think we are very good and holy and spiritual. It is very difficult to see all the wrongs we need to rectify, but it certainly isn’t impossible. What we need to do is to reflect on the true meaning of holiness instead of professing it like the ‘Church Lady’.

TURN CHORE INTO PLEASURE

A new bride called her mother in tears and told her that she didn’t want to stay with her husband as he was

very mean to her. Her concerned mother asked, “What did he do?” The bride said, “Mother, he uses so many 4-letter words.” The mother was shocked and said, “That doesn’t sound like him.” Her daughter replied, “He keeps using words like ‘Cook, Bake, Wash, Iron.’”

You can surely identify with this young lady. Chores do not evoke pleasure; only pain. When you think of a chore, you are likely to think of something you ‘have’ to do; not something you ‘want’ to do. Fact is that you are stuck with chores; there is no way to get rid of them. While you can’t change the fact that you will have to cook, clean, sweep, and mop, do the dishes and tackle the laundry, you can change your attitude about your daily work.

The Bhagavad Geeta says, “Whatever you do, offer it to God.” When understood, these simple words can transform the way you look at everything in life. In fact, these words can transform your entire life. Whenever you are engaged in doing a chore, visualize your sweet Lord beside you or in front of you. Think that you are cleaning the house for Him. As you prepare a meal, think that you are cooking for Him. The clothes you are washing belong to Him. Imagine the smile on His face as He shows satisfaction with the way you serve Him.

Following this practice will benefit you in two ways. First benefit is that your chores will no longer be dreary. Second benefit is that while you may be externally washing, cleaning, cooking, sweeping and mopping, internally you will be practicing devotion all day long.

GRACE OF A GURU

Scriptures state repeatedly that guidance of a divine teacher is necessary for one who wishes to live a purposeful life and who wishes to know God. Such a teacher is known as the Guru. A Guru possesses theoretical knowledge of all the scriptures and a practical experience of God.

Although a Guru descends to earth for the

sake of everyone, not everyone is attracted towards a Guru. Some are immediately attracted, while others take their time. Some may need coaxing and prodding, while many even criticize these divine teachers. History bears evidence to this fact. We have nailed such saints to the cross, poisoned them, maligned them and incarcerated them.

However, a Guru is a well-wisher for the entire world because he is completely selfless. After attaining God, there is nothing remaining for him to attain. This makes him absolutely selfless. All his efforts and actions are solely for the sake of humanity.

It is for this reason that each and every soul who genuinely associates with the Guru benefits from his divine association. Just as iron is turned into gold if it comes in touch with gold, so even the most wicked person is reformed if he follows the instructions of the Guru with complete faith. There is a difference,

however, between the touchstone and the Guru. While the touchstone converts iron into gold, a Guru in the form of a touchstone converts iron in the form of a disciple into touchstone in the form of a saint.

One of the greatest Gurus lived recently on earth for 91 years. He is Jagadguru Shri Kripalu Ji Maharaj, and he was hailed as Jagadguru (Guru of the world) at a very young age of 34 on January 14, 1957. This day is known as 'Jagadguru Divas (day).'

I wish to let the readers know that Jagadguru Shri Kripalu Ji Maharaj has been my greatest inspiration in life and his divine light will continue to shine on the path of every sincere seeker.

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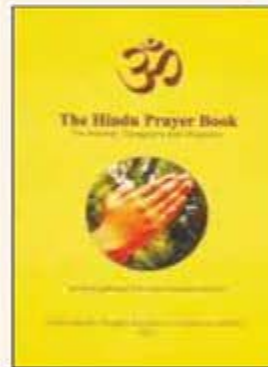
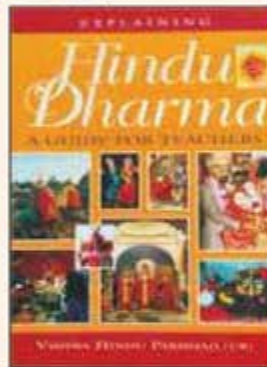
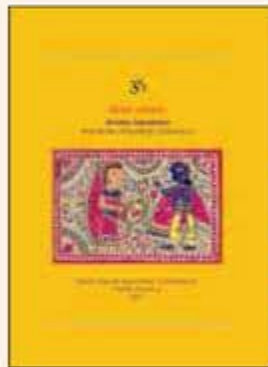
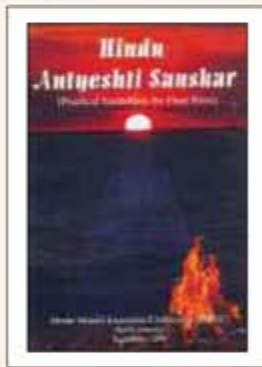
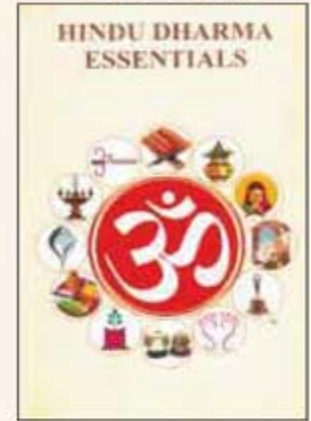
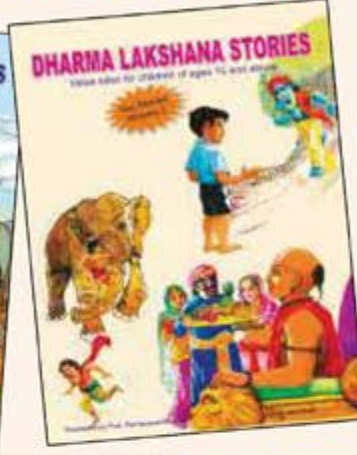
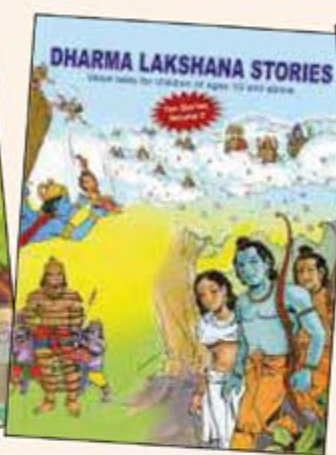
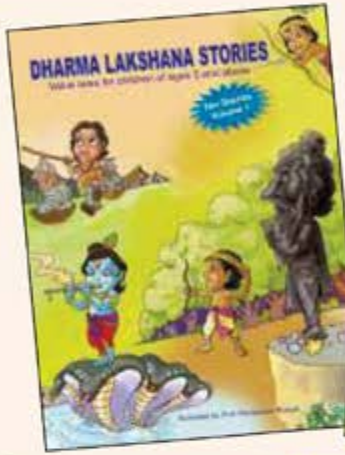
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Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

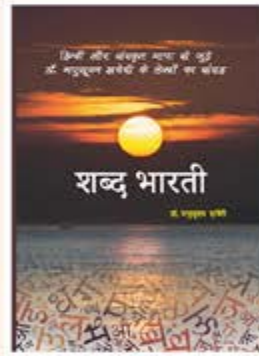
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