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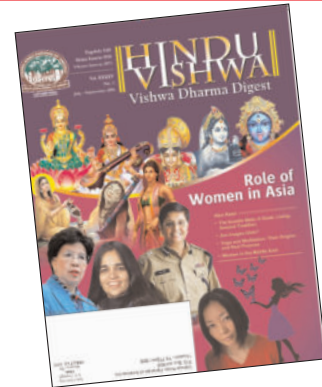
सन्नियम्येन्द्रियग्रामं सर्वत्र समबुद्धयः ।
ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥

श्रीमद् भगवद् गीता १२-४

*sanniyamyendriya gramam sarvatra sama buddhayah
te prapnuvanti mam eva sarva bhuta hite ratah*

Shri Mad Bhagavad Gita 12-4

But those who worship the indescribable, all pervading, inconceivable, immutable, constant, eternal, impersonal absolute devoid of perceptible form and attributes; completely controlling all the senses with spiritual intelligence equally disposed to everything and dedicated welfare of all living entities; they certainly also achieve me



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

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The Twenty First Century: Of India and Hinduism

None of the religions of Indian origin (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism) subscribe to religious conversion. Traditionally, religion is regarded as subject purely to personal choice in India. However, the followers of these religions, and particularly of Hinduism, have suffered forced and coerced conversion into Islam and Christianity throughout history during and after invasion of the country by foreigners, starting in the 8th Century A.D. The concept of nonviolence imbibed and deeply entrenched in the Indian masses under Hinduism, and particularly under Buddhism and Jainism, left little inclination for them to fight to defend the country. Apparently, they would submit to foreign attack, no matter how atrocious, rather than resort to armed resistance, much less go into full-fledged nationwide war or counter-attack. This national mindset made it easy for invaders to wield inhuman oppressive treatment of the indigenous masses including indiscriminate massacres, looting, rape, abduction of young women, demolition of temples and building of mosques over them, and rule by terror. These measures were more prevalent during Islamic regimes, while the British imperial rule busied itself more with transporting India's resources to England. Apart from these unjust havocs, conversion into Islam was more bloody due to shadow of the sword, and into Christianity through disguised favor of social services, temptation of material gifts, and 'promise' for the soul of an open door to heaven. Millions of Muslims and Christians in present-day India can be traced to be of Hindu ancestry.

As almost all the elements of belief-systems of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) were set forth in their scriptures prior to scientific discoveries of common interests, many of the related scriptural injunctions tend to be illogical and unscientific - reflecting the-then human ignorance, superstitions, and narrow world-view. In contrast, Hinduism has benefitted from an open-minded and continuing enquiry about the Truth, and enjoys an evolutionary pattern endowed with a great deal of scientific principles enshrined therein, directly or indirectly. Many of the ancient 'religious'

Editorial



elements of Hinduism in fact conform with modern astronomy, cosmology, health-science, philosophy, and logic, for instance.

In view of these circumstances, it seems prudent for Hindus in the Diaspora, to open the door for non-Hindus to get a glimpse of Dharmic

traditions so as to make it spiritually rewarding for them, if they so wish. Perennial human values including nonviolence, universal brotherhood, making religion a matter of personal choice for higher levels of spirituality and inner peace, respect for all religions, respect for Nature, practice of Yoga, etc., would be a gift to humanity in general irrespective of formal religious labels. Strict adherence to labels is beset with religious strife, terrorism, imbalance with Nature, environmental abuse and results in global imbalance.

Many Western intellectuals, scientists, philosophers, social scientists, health-professionals, among others, have come to recognize the apparent limitations of Abrahamic religion and its glaring conflicts with modern scientific in an environmentally endangered era. Many have openly praised and endorsed Vedic and Upanishadic scriptural and spiritually enlightening writings. Spiritually starved individuals in large numbers even travel to India seeking inner tranquility. They find Hinduism highly satisfying - be it in the realm of true spiritual growth, concept of God, family interrelations, psychological balance, health- and diet-related habits, and even such common place things as wedding-rituals and vows.

It is often said that the 21st Century belongs to India. Usually it is implicitly assumed that this applies in connection with political influence, economic excellence, military strength, technical progress, and environmental-friendly life-style. It may be a high-time to add one more element in this list: spiritual pursuit. Let the conch be sounded for such a peaceful revolution all over the world. Indian students, professionals, organizations, temple-communities, and the retired individuals residing in the Western countries, individually and collectively, can contribute a great deal in this direction. Let this be one of the planned enterprises of VHPA. This would surely be good for humanity as a whole. ■



Sri Maha Ganapati



By Dr. M.G Prasad

Introduction:

The Lord Maha Ganapati refers to a form of Supreme Being, who is worshipped before the beginning of any auspicious work. In addition, the well-known mantra from The Rig Veda (2-23-1) says,

*"Ganaanaam Tvaa Ganapatigam Havaamahe,
Kavim Kaveenaam Upamashravastamam
Jyeshtharaajam Bramhanaam Bramhanaspata
Aa Nah Shrunvan Ootibihhi Seeda Saadanam,
Sri MahaGanapataye Namaha"*

Which means, "You are the Lord of all faculties. You are the poet (seer) of the poets (seers). You are the King of kings. You are the Lord of all mantras and glories. We invite you to listen and to grant our prayers for our protection and blessings on us. Our salutations to Lord

Maha Ganapati"

In the well known five deity worship procedure namely *Panchaayatana Pooja*, the five deities are Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Suryanarayana and Ganapati. The devotees who worship Lord Ganapati as the main deity are said to belong to *Gaanaapatya Matha*. Lord Ganapati is also commonly referred by several other names such as Ganesha, Vinaayaka, Vighnesha, Gajaanana, Ekadanta, Vakratunda, etc.

Maha Ganapati is also referred as the ruler of the various faculties especially the mind. The role and importance of pure and clear mind required in focusing and successful completion of any work either materialistic or spiritual is very well known. It is also known that the numeral 21 has significance to worship Lord Ganapati. The reason being 21 refers to the mind, which is above and controls the 20 faculties that we

possess and interact in our daily life. They represent 5 senses of cognition namely hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling. The 5 senses of action are speaking, holding, walking, excretion and procreation. The 5 subtle elements are sound, touch, form, flavor and odor. The 5 sense particulars are ether, air, fire, water and earth.

This brief article presents the significance of the divine form of Lord Ganapati, the story related to *Ganesha Chaturthi* and its spiritual interpretation, the description of the Lord Maha Ganapati (in *Ganesha Atharva Upanishat*) as Supreme Being and also Lord Maha Ganapati as the embodiment of *Shabda Brahman*.

Significance of the form of Sri Maha Ganapati

The form of Maha Ganapati is not an imagination but is a *yogic* vision (of the Supreme Being) by the sages. Symbolically Ganesha's form indicates several concepts for us to focus. He is located as energy form in the *Mooladhara Chakra*. The elephant face indicates the omniscient wisdom. The large ears refer to the all-pervading listening ability. The goad in right hand denotes the control of mind. The noose in left hand denotes His control over changing world. The sweet dish in His hand signifies the fruits of the sincere hard work. In spiritual pursuit, the sweet refers to spiritual bliss. The other hand signifies the protection. The four-hands together denote the four-goals of human life namely *dharma, artha, kama and moksha*. The curved trunk when bent to His right denotes the *OM* (this form is worshipped by renunciates) and when bent to His left signifies the blessings of spiritual and materialistic wealth (this form is worshipped by students and householders). His large belly denotes that the faculties of the universe are embedded in Him. The snake as belt signifies the *Kundalini* power of *yoga*. The rat signifies the disturbing and leaky nature of mind. When Lord Ganesha is seated on the mind, it means that His grace firmly enables us to carry out the work successfully with the disciplined, pure and clear mind. Hence Lord Ganesha is worshipped before any work is begun so that no obstacles arise and deter the successful completion of the work undertaken.

Ganesha Chaturthi Festival

Ganesha Chaturthi is a very important Hindu festival celebrated by Hindus around the world. A Hindu festival is a celebration that integrates spiritual, philosophical, religious and cultural aspects of human life. The spiritual aspect is based on the basic human instincts of joy and

happiness. The philosophical aspect is based on the principle that the good always wins in the constant struggle between the good and the evil. The victory of good is to be celebrated. The religious aspect deals with the particular rituals of that festival. The spiritual insights of the stories of the specific manifestation of the God (Supreme Being) make the festival relevant to us. The cultural aspect deals with the customs, activities, food, dress, social interaction with family and friends etc. In the view of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer, "The planetary positions are favorable to spiritual development on these festivals and one should make use of these special timings". Thus we see that festivals are not only a celebration and a means for spiritual development but also an effective means to convey the values of life to future generations.

Ganesha Chaturthi occurs during August-September of the year (fourth day of *Shukla Paksha of Bhadrpada* month).

The story commonly associated with the Ganesha Chaturthi

The Goddess Parvati created a son out of her sweat. Then She made him to guard her chamber and told him not to allow anyone to enter. The obedient boy strictly followed the rule. Lord Shiva came to enter Goddess Parvati's chamber. However the boy did not allow Lord Shiva and was very firm in stopping Lord Shiva to enter. The boy did not allow Lord Shiva to pass. In spite of Lord Shiva's intent, the boy did not yield. Lord Shiva became angry and chopped off the boy's head. As soon as Goddess Parvati came to know of this, she was very upset and asked Lord Shiva to bring back Their son. Lord Shiva sent His subordinates to find a suitable head for the boy. They brought the head of a sleeping elephant facing north, and the head was put on the boy. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati blessed Their son. Also Lord Shiva declared that Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped at the beginning of any auspicious activity in life as Lord Ganesha is the Lord of all faculties and also He is Lord *Vighnesha* (God who removes all obstacles in the path).

The spiritual interpretation of the story based on the vision of *yoga* is as follows:

Goddess Parvati represents Mother Nature. The first basic layer of Nature is element Earth. The interpretation of Goddess Parvati creating Her son using Her sweat refers to Her creating with the first layer of Her body. The element of Earth refers to *Mooladhara Chakra* in which Lord Ganesha's spiritual energy form is held (as referred in *Ganesha Atharva Upanishat*). Thus we see correspondence between Lord Ganesha, *Mooladhara*



Chakra and the element Earth. After the boy was created, Mother Parvati asked him not to allow anyone into Her chamber. However, this rule does not apply to Her husband Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are not only husband and wife but also are the father and mother of the universe and they are inseparable. When the boy becomes indifferent to this fact and does not allow Lord Shiva, Lord Shiva gives him a punishment by chopping of his head. However after learning from Parvati, Lord Shiva blesses His son with an elephant's head to signify the omniscient wisdom. Then both Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati bless Ganesha as the Lord of all faculties and of mind. Thus, Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped before starting any work as His blessings will remove obstacles to our mind.

In addition, on the night of *Ganesha Chaturthi*, it is forbidden to see the moon. This is because as the story goes, the moon laughed at Ganesha when He fell off His rat. The interpretation of this is that Lord Ganesha is responsible for disciplining the mind. The moon signifies a wavering mind. On *Ganesha Chaturthi* one should meditate and focus the mind on the Lord Maha Ganapati. Looking at the moon on the night of Ganesha Chaturthi, will signify wavering and a lack of focus.

Also in the celebration of *Ganesha Chaturthi*, the deity of Lord Ganesha is made of earth (mud) and is worshipped. Then in the evening, it is submerged in a

lake or river. The spiritual insight is that the mud (earth) signifies the *Mooladhara chakra* and the when it is mixed with water, the energy is raised to a higher *Manipoor Chakra*. The physical form of the Lord is merged into the formless. Thus, we see that the physical form of the Lord Ganesha, the story and the celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi festival essentially deal with our mind and the ways of making our mind to take spiritual inner journey to reach the destination of God-realization. We know the utmost importance of our mind in life and living. Thus praying and worshipping Lord Ganesha with spiritual insight can only help us in reaching the goal.

Sri Maha Ganapati as Supreme Being

The *Ganesha Atharva Upanishat*, also known as *Ganaapatyopanishat* clearly describes the Lord Maha Ganapati as the Supreme Being. A summary of this *upanishat* is as follows

"Oh Lord Ganapati, salutations to you. You are the all existence and also the eternal indweller of all existence. You are verily the cause, the nourisher and the dissolver (or destroyer). I am saying both the implicit and explicit truth. Protect me and my teacher. Protect all who listen. Protect those who study Vedas. Protect those who retain and give knowledge. Protect the disciples. Protect me from the front, the back, the right and the left sides. Protect me from all the sides from all troubles. You



are the speech and literature (in the form of letters). You are the Brahman and You are of the form, the immortal bliss. You are second to none as truth and bliss. You are the Brahman. You are both the knowledge and the science behind knowledge. The whole world has originated from You. It is sustained by You and It merges within You. The whole world is appearing within You. You are in the form of earth, water, fire, wind and the space. You are the four-fold speech namely Para, Pashyanti, Madhyama and Vaikhari. You are beyond the three gunas namely satva, rajas and tamas. You are beyond the three stages of time namely past, present and future. You are beyond the three types of bodies namely gross, subtle and causal. You are eternally enshrined in the Mooladhara chakra (referred to coccygeal plexus). You manifest in all the three forms of powers namely knowledge, desire and action. Yogis always meditate upon You. You are verily Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Sun, Moon and Brahman. You are the three worlds namely Bhoo (earth), Bhuvaha (space), Suvaha (heavens) and also the all-pervading Para Brahma referred as OM. The initial letter G (in Sanskrit) is recited first. Then the initial letter (first vowel in Sanskrit) A is to be recited. Thereafter the Anusvara is recited. Thus the 'Gan' enshrined with the half-mora (ardha Chandra) having restricted by the syllable Om (resulting in Gam) is the form of Your root hymn. Thus the Ganesha Vidya consists of the first form as Ga, the middle form as A and Anusvara as the terminal form and point (Bindu) is its answer form. The transcendental sound (Naada) is application (sandhana) and Samhita is referred as its joints (Sandhi). This is known as Ganesha Vidya. With the Rishi as Ganaka, the Metre as NichirdGayatri' and the Devata as Lord Ganapati, the mantra is 'Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha'. Then the mantra (known as Ganesha Gayatri) says that, we know Lord Ganesha as 'Ekadanta', we meditate on 'Vakratunda', and May 'Danti' (tooth-bearer) i.e. Lord Ganesha motivate us towards the benevolent and spiritual path."

Thus after the prayer above, the *upanishat* continues to describe Lord Ganesha and also His sincere devotee as a yogi. The description of the Lord Ganesha and His devotee-yogi is summarized below.

"The devotee who meditates and worships daily the 'Ekadanta', four -armed, holding in His four-hands, the posture of 'Abhaya' (fearlessness), holding a (broken) tusk, holding a 'Paasha' (string), holding an 'Ankusha' (goad), bearing a flag mouse-marked, red-colored, a hug stomach, huge ears like a (corn fanning) bamboo fan, covered by red-color garments, body duly smeared



by red sandal, (worshipped) by red-flowers, always graceful to the devotees, cause of creation of the universe, eternally established, born prior to the creation of this universe and beyond the nature, (that devotee) is the best and excellent among all yogis."

Then the *Upanishat* offers salutations to Lord Ganesha by describing him with several attributes namely *Vraatapati* (Commander of commune of all gods), *Ganapati* (Lord of all faculties), *Pramathapati* (Leader of the attendants of Lord Shiva), *Lambodara* (with large belly), *Ekadanta* (with one-tusk), *Vighnavinaashi* (destroyer of all obstacles), *Shivasuta* (the son of Lord Shiva) and *Varadamoorti* (Lord who bestows boons to devotees).

This is an *upanishat* of *Atharva Veda*. The devotee who internalizes this *upanishat* becomes entitled to the position of *Brahma*. Any hurdles irrespective of their nature will not resist the progress of that devotee. The devotee avails joy and peace everywhere. That devotee is liberated from the five kinds of major evils such as stealing gold, drinking liquor, transgressing behavior with guru's wife, slaying of *brahmana* (noble people), having company of people committing these evils and other minor evils. The recital of this *upanishat* made in the evening destroys the sins committed during the day. The recital made during the morning destroys the sins committed during the night. When its recital is done



during both morning and evening times, will make the devotee free from sins. Thus the devotee obtains all the four-fold goals namely *Dharma* (spiritual wisdom), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (fulfillment of right desires) and *Moksha* (Liberation from all fetters of life). In other words, such a devotee realizes Supreme Being.

This *upanishat* should not be taught to unworthy and also not with any attachment to desires. If it is done with attachment to desires, then the one who teaches will become sinister.

Lord Ganapati as the embodiment of Shabda Brahman

Lord Ganapati in addition being referred as Lord of the mind is also referred as the Lord of transcendental sound termed as *Shabda*. A seer-scholar named Sri Vasishtha Ganapati Muni nicely describes the relationship between Lord Ganapati and Shabda Brahman. Lord Ganapati as energy is located in the *Moolaadhaara chakra*, which is source of energy for production of any vocal sound. Also that energy is identified in the form of *Kundalini Shakti*, which is again important for *shabda*. In the *Ganesh Atharva Upanishat*, it says that "*Tvam Vangmayaha*" which means "Lord You are the form of speech. We know that speech is a very important part of life. The *upanishat* also says "*Tvam chatvaari Vakpadaani*", which means that Lord is the four-fold speech. The four-fold speech as said earlier refers to *Paraa*, *Pashyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari*. *Paraa* refers to all pervading energy, *Pashyanti* refers to the first movement of energy experienced by the yogis, *Madhyama* refers to the crystallization of energy moving through medium (heart) to form concrete vocal expressions and *Vaikhari* refers to the specific vocal expressions (through mouth) which manifest in several forms such speech, music, mantras, etc. Also before chanting any *Veda mantras* in any pooja, first the invocation mantra on Ganapati is chanted. In that mantra, he is referred as "*Brahmanaspati*, which means that He is the Lord of the Vedas or the collection of Veda mantras.

Also Lord Ganapati is prayed for the removal of any obstacles in proper pronunciation and flow of memory of mantras. Lord Ganapati's form especially when His trunk is towards His right, then it forms OM, which is Shabda Brahman. The Lord Ganapati has large ears, which refer to the universal listening ability of the Lord. He has large belly, which refer to as the large resource for sound (*shabda*).

Thus we see that Lord Ganapati is also *Shabda Brahman*.

Concluding Remarks

Thus we see that Lord Maha Ganapati is revered as Supreme Being. His blessings are essential before undertaking any work either worldly or spiritual. He being the Lord of mind, Lord of all faculties and Lord of sound field as Shabda Brahman, His blessings will enable us to carryout the work successfully with joy. Let us seek the blessings of the Loving Lord Maha Ganapati. ■

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Balvihar Startalk Hindi Camp Explores **India** through Railways

By Smita Daftardar and Vunden Patel

The Balvihar Hindi School (VHPA) Atlanta conducted the popular Star Talk Summer Hindi camp from June 6th to 18th at the Piney Grove Middle School in Forsyth County. Star Talk summer camp is a federally funded foreign language program offered across the USA, and teaches a variety of foreign languages. Balvihar, an educational program of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), has been hosting this annual camp for last six years. The camp successfully combines a well-defined educational objective with a fun summer camp setting; students learn to speak, read, and write Hindi through a variety of games and activities, using India's rich cultural and geographic diversity as a backdrop. This year 78 students attended the 12 day camp, which included a field trip to the Swaminarayan Mandir in Lilburn and the

Southeastern Railway Museum in Duluth, Ga. The camp was inaugurated with a traditional lamp lighting ceremony by Kusum Khuranaji, chapter president of VHPA, Atlanta Chapter and a welcome address by Camp Director Manju Tiwariji.

Studies have shown that learning a new language can open up a new way of viewing the world, insight into another culture, and understanding of another way of life. The program interlaces culture along with language learning. This year's theme was "Incredible India." Focusing on three States of India, which were Kerala, Rajasthan, and Assam, students were able to broaden their cultural knowledge. Over the two weeks, campers explored the rich landscape, the ancient traditions and modern technological advances of India, as they embarked on a virtual train journeys on some of the unique train routes of the Indian Railways. The first destination was Kerala, "God's Own Country". On the way to Kerala, students learnt about the Konkan





Railway, which is considered an engineering marvel of modern India, with its multitude of tunnels and bridges, built on the extremely rugged coastal terrain. Once in Kerala, they were introduced to the festivals, traditions and handicrafts of Kerala, such as the Onam festival, the world famous boat race and the variety of products made from the coconut tree. Students especially enjoyed watching "Kallaripattu", the martial arts based dance form of Kerala. From the lush green landscape of Kerala, students were transported to the desert state of Rajasthan, travelling on the Royal Palace on Wheels train, getting a taste of Indian royalty. The diversity of India could not be more evident as campers viewed the kaleidoscopic images of folk dances and arts of Rajasthan, in stark contrast with Kerala! Also, in a thought provoking activity, campers experienced the water scarcity in Rajasthan and its impact on lifestyle of locals. Walking across the classroom balancing a load on their heads, to fetch water one cup at a time, made them appreciate their own comfortable life style and highlighted the need to conserve water as well as use it judiciously.

As the camp progressed, kids explored India further, moving eastward to Assam. They learnt about the Darjeeling Himalayan Mountain Railway, a UNESCO world heritage site, the famous Tea Festival of Assam and the beautiful bamboo handicrafts made by the locals. Students learned the process of

manufacturing tea and participated in their own tea-tasting event, trying out four different types of tea samples and giving their feedback on the flavors. They learnt about the local traditions of Bihu, the traditional attire such as the bamboo hat "Jaapi" and the famous "Mekhala" saree.

The purpose of this educational yet fun venture is to teach Hindi in context of the Indian subcontinent where the language flourished; to experience the language in its natural form, rather than a textbook version. To achieve this "natural" setting, kids took part in a wide range of activities. During classroom sessions they explored eco-friendly traditions of India; in the food club, they prepared Indian snacks such as mango *lassi*, *chaat*, *kulfi* and *neembu ka sharbat*; in the craft club campers made cloth puppets, wall-hangings, and tie-dye handkerchiefs using vegetable colors. In the engineering club they built bridges with Popsicle sticks and an eco-friendly model train that used solar panels and rain water harvesting.

As they worked on various projects, students gradually picked up the language since all instructions were given in Hindi. To get students completely immersed in the culture, the meals provided at the camp were from different regions of India, from *idli-sambhar* to *daal-baati*, which all of the kids enjoyed much to the surprise of parents! To add to the fun, campers got to watch age-appropriate Hindi movies during lunch.

Each afternoon, after the day's lesson had concluded, students participated in conventional Indian sports like *Kabaddi* and *Kho-Kho*. Following the hour-long sports time, campers cooled down with relaxing yoga taught by a skilled instructor. Another plus for the camp was the team of teaching assistants and student volunteers, comprising of college students and rising high school seniors well-versed in Hindi. They were great role models who made all the activities a lot more fun for the kids, from the classroom all the way to *kabbadi* during the sports hour.

Campers were able to take a break from the school setting on field trip day. In relation to this year's theme, students visited the Southeastern Railway Museum. During the tour, the kids were taken through various railway cars and delved into their history. The archaic cars led students to realize how far technology has come. "I never really thought about what technology was like before, it's crazy to think that this was considered advanced at one time," stated Vishnu, a first-year student. Campers were fascinated to be able to see and touch the inside of the very railcars that belonged to former presidents. Campers concluded the day by enjoying a nice windy ride on the railroad after an exciting but nonetheless exhausting day of learning.

On the final day of camp, the students gathered all that they had learned in order to prepare a cultural show. Students performed crowd-engaging plays, beautiful and moving dances, and informative speeches before their parents and peers. Given only a short amount of time to prepare for the program, this was truly a test of ability and our campers pass with flying colors. On this day, students were undoubtedly

unhappy to leave their newfound friends, but eager for the year to come.

The success of the camp lay in the team work of the teachers, teaching assistants, and volunteers from VHPA, Atlanta chapter. Mrs. Manju Tiwari, former faculty at Emory University was at the helm as the program director, Vivek Patel, a recent graduate of University of Georgia was the camp administrator and Mrs. Seema Laddha, a volunteer with Balvihar was the food administrator.

VHPA, Atlanta chapter would like to thank the administrative team of Piney Grove Middle School for helping the smooth execution of the camp. Also, special thanks to the Swaminarayan Temple and Southeastern Railway Museum for conducting informative guided tours for the campers. VHPA would also like to extend thanks to the community for their continued support of Balvihar Star Talk summer camp.

The Atlanta Balvihar StarTalk Summer camp has now become a highly popular program, serving the community for last several years. Star Talk teachers are trained by world-class foreign language professionals. Since most of them also volunteer as teachers in VHPA Balvihar Hindi School, this training benefits the students of Balvihar throughout their curriculum, year-round. Apart from the educational gains for students, a very significant advantage of such a program is the community building among the second generation Indian American kids. Over the years, new as well as returning students, volunteers and teacher assistants have bonded together, making an extended family that can reminisce on their fun times together and look forward to meeting again. ■



Fighting 'Hindu phobia' in the American Classrooms

By Dhiru Shah

Following the Hindu Dharmic traditions, Hindu temples have for thousands of years been used not only as a sacred meeting place for the community to practice spirituality, but also as centers of social, political, economic and intellectual activities. Most Hindu temples in North America today are doing an admirable job in offering a wide range of activities to their devotees besides spiritual services.

While primarily temples are meant for worship and perform Dharmic rituals, the Hindu temple management needs to realize that Hindu children growing up in America today are struggling to find their own identity in a multicultural but predominantly Judeo-Christian society. Further, in the American classrooms, they face the anti-Hindu biases in their textbooks leading to bullying and harassment.

Following the neo-colonial orientation, the Western academics define India and Hinduism in terms of caste, cow, Sati, dowry murders, devil worship and immorality. Whereas Judaism, Christianity and Islam are treated favorably and in positive terms in classroom books, Hinduism does not get a fair and equitable treatment and is presented inaccurately and in a biased manner. A couple of quotes below from the Sixth grade books in California will show how Hinduism is negatively projected in the American classrooms:

"One custom shows how the lives of Indian men were considered to be more important than the lives of Indian

women. In India, people were cremated, or burned, when they died. When a man from a prominent family died, his wife was expected to leap into the flames. This practice was called suttee. If the wife resisted and did not kill herself, it was a great shame. Everyone would avoid the woman from then on." (Glencoe, Discovering Our Past Ancient Civilizations, Chapter 4, Early India, p. 245)

A dedicated Hindu believes that the people in a higher caste are superior and that they are supposed to be on top." (Glencoe, Discovering Our Past Ancient Civilizations, Chapter 4, Early India, p. 248)

A vast number of books and articles depicting Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the most vulgar and offensive manner get churned out by high profile non-Hindu academics from the prestigious Ivy League American universities. In 2004 a committee of 'Concerned Hindus' from Atlanta submitted a critique to Emory University on the sexually abusive book, 'Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginning' authored by Prof. Paul Courtright. A few quotes from this reference book for the university students to learn Hinduism will show how perverse and insensitive it is:

"Its (Ganesa's) trunk is the displaced phallus, a caricature of 'Siva's' linga. poses no threat because it is too large, flaccid and in the wrong place to be useful for sexual purposes." (P.121)

"Although there seems to be no myths or folktales in which Ganesa explicitly performs oral sex; his insatiable appetite for sweets my be interpreted in an



otherwise ascetic disposition, a hunger having clear erotic overtones." (P.111)

Another blatantly abusive and biased anti-Hinduism scholarship comes from Prof. Wendy Doniger of Chicago University in her 780-page book, "The Hindus: An Alternative History" (Penguin 2009). She has sexualized and eroticized passages from the Hindu epics and scriptures. She finds in the sacred *Rig Veda* incest and adultery with a pregnant woman in a verse praying to God for protection and safe delivery. In 'Philadelphia Inquirer' Prof. Doniger once commented: ...*"throughout the Mahabharata...Krishna goads human beings into all sorts of murderous and self-destructive behaviors such as war... The Gita is a dishonest book; it justifies war."*

Such negative attitudes and stereotypes about Hinduism can have a devastating impact on the psyche of young Hindu students. It makes Hindu students in class feel embarrassed and ashamed of their ancestry. As a result, not only Hindu students face hate crimes and bullying in their schools, but also it gives them a sense of insecurity and inferiority complex and in some cases mental depression. Some of them start hating their own faith believing 'Hinduism is a 'filthy' religion, or that Hindus worship the devil' and get converted to Christianity in order to get acceptance in the mainstream America.

According to the results of a bullying survey of 230 middle school and High school students (grades 6 to 12) conducted by Hindu American Foundation between August 5 and Sept.30, 2015: "(1) one in three Hindu students have reported being bullied in public school classrooms due to their religious beliefs and approximately half indicated that they felt socially isolated. (2) Many of those surveyed highlighted a sense of alienation for being a different religion; particularly one not understood well in most US classrooms or textbooks. As a result, some respondents said they hid their religious identity in order to prevent or stop bullying. In addition, one out of every four students surveyed said she/he was put on spot or singled out by a teacher when the section on Hinduism was discussed".

While a few Hindu/Indian organizations supported by a handful of Hindu temples have been engaging state education boards like California, Texas and Virginia to rectify inaccuracies and negative portrayal of Hindu Dharma in classroom textbooks, their efforts alone will not be sufficient to defeat the well-orchestrated anti-Hinduism campaign led by the Western academics and supported by several anti-India and anti-Hindu entities. The need of the hour is to awaken the Hindu society to join in this battle. It is here that temples can play a very

positive and active role by harnessing the collective strength of their devotees

In order to create this collective mass awareness to protect Hindu children from the Hindu Phobic classroom curriculum, the temple management needs to include the following additional activities in its routine programs:

1. Organize regular monthly talk by Hindu scholars and academics familiar with anti-Hinduism curriculum in school textbooks and advise parents how to engage school management to correct any biases about Hinduism.
2. Encourage young parents to carefully study their children's social science and history textbooks that may contain distortions and denigration of Hindu traditions and culture.
3. Conduct regular classes for young devotees and students to teach them the basics of Abrahmic religions (Judaism, Christianity & Islam) as well Indic Dharmic religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Such comparative religions study will help children to fight back against bullying in classrooms and outside.
4. Encourage devotees to support actively Hindu organizations, scholars and activists who are engaged with various state educational authorities to correct the schoolbooks curriculum.

Such activities mentioned above are not considered as 'political' in nature and therefore they will not affect their non-profit status with IRS. All other religions conduct these activities openly and do not face any IRS penalties.

The time has come for temples to follow the famous verse: *Dharmo rakshati rakshitah*" means "Dharma protects those who protect Dharma" (Mahabharata). In the long run, refusal by temples to participate in the defense of Hindu Dharmic traditions, culture and history will eventually hurt the temple movement in America. It will not be too long before the next generations of Hindus start abandoning their faith and leaving temples as showpieces like historical museums. ■

About the Author

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Remembering Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Ji

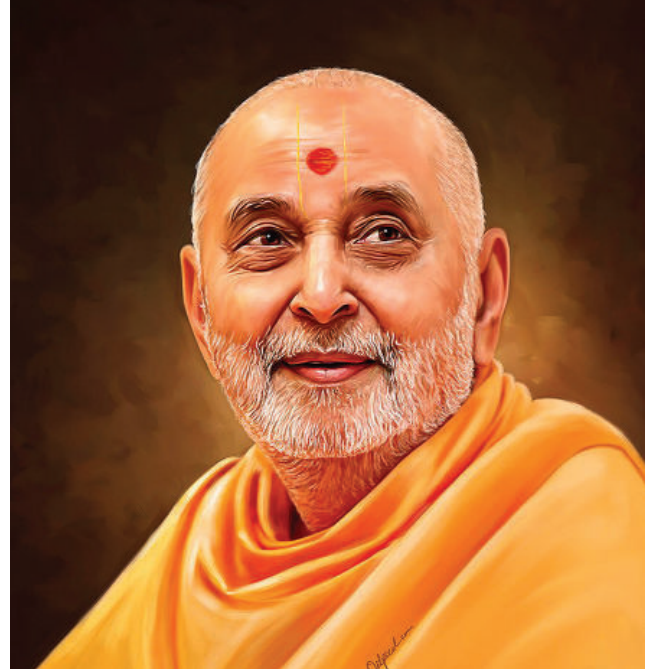
By Abhaya Asthana

President, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America

We are so deeply saddened to learn about His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharajji's earthly departure on Aug 13, 2016 at 6 pm. The spiritual head of B.A.P.S., celebrated for his worldwide socio-spiritual services, passed away peacefully at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, Gujarat, at the age of 95 years.

A stalwart and one of the greatest sons of Ma Bharti, he will dwell in our hearts and minds forever. His wisdom and his quiet leadership, his vision and creativity, his humility, his devotion and his endless compassion inspired millions of devotees like me around the world. His saintliness and nobility was only matched by the simplicity with which he lived and related to the common man, and the number of lives he touched and transformed.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the fifth spiritual successor in the tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. For over seven decades he traveled tirelessly, visiting over 17,000 towns and villages in India and abroad. Born on 7 December 1921 to a humble farmer's family in the small village of Chansad, near Vadodara in Gujarat, he renounced home in 1939 to become a sadhu and received initiation from his guru, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. On completing his Sanskrit studies, he was appointed as the kothari of the BAPS



Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur at the age of 25 years. In 1950, Shastriji Maharaj selected him as the President (Pramukh) of BAPS and ever since he was fondly known as 'Pramukh Swami.' In 1971, after the departure of Guru Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj succeeded him as the fifth spiritual guru of BAPS. Then started his unremitting selfless services to society which earned him the reverence of countless worldwide.

His untiring efforts in uplifting the *vanavasis*, liberating thousands from vices and addictions, providing relief and rehabilitation to innumerable people in times of calamity and catastrophe, and inspiring character and faith in hundreds of thousands of children and youths were some of his many outstanding services to society. Alongside he created 1,100 mandirs and giant cultural complexes to portray the cultural and spiritual heritage of India.

These magnificent Akshardhams he gifted to the world as spiritual and learning centers of profound beauty will remain as his eternal signature. His service to Hindu society and mankind at large will always be remembered, and will continue to inspire us forever to follow his example.

Hari Om!

Role of Women in Society: II

Women in Asia

By Divya Ragunathan

Asia, a large continent with many regions, has a long and unique history tracing back thousands of years and is home to the three oldest civilizations, represented by India, China and Japan. History in the early days was an oral tradition passed from one generation to the other. What we know from that time is what has been transcribed later by historians and women therefore have been relegated to a small part of written Asian history. However, this was not always the case.

The Goddesses (feminine aspect of the supreme reality) in Hindu Dharma embody various characteristics. Parvati and Kali represent strength and courage, Lakshmi bestowing wealth and prosperity and

Saraswati embodying grace and wisdom. The Ramayana described Sita as the ideal woman who showed courage, loyalty, purity and endurance every step of the way. By contrast, Draupadi in the Mahabharata had to face the unusually tough challenge of having five husbands, survive trying to be disrobed in public and ended up losing all her children in the Kurukshetra war. Through all this, she is described as a woman of wisdom and dignity.

Archeologists excavating the cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa that were part of the Indus Valley civilization that flourished around 2600 BCE, have found a number of figurines of goddesses that they believe represent fertility.

With such a diverse variety is it any wonder that in Vedic times, women in India had nearly the same



opportunities as men to study and become scholars, doctors and teachers? There are twenty women who are documented contributors to the Rig Veda and they were allowed to practice religion just like the men. They were treated as equal in the day to day living. Generally speaking, women seemed to shape their own life within a flexible social structure. They married in their late teens and took charge of their husband's households and contributed to the economic and social well-being of the family. Gargi, a woman from the vedic times, was very well educated and she is depicted as arguing publicly in the court of the king where she boldly states her claims, and refused to back down against men.

So what happened? History elsewhere in the world has shown that there was a period around 1200 BCE when the world went through a Dark Age. During this time, there was a lot of turmoil and displacement of human settlements and a loss of knowledge that set civilization back by centuries. This seems to have affected Asia as well.

By 500 BCE, women in India no longer were being educated and were relegated to the background. This was not just pertinent to India, but curiously seems to be

the case in China and Japan as well. History shows that prevailing thought of that time featured only men like Confucius who portrayed women as intellectually inferior to men and prone to emotional weaknesses like petty jealousies and manipulative creatures. The women in all three civilizations were relegated to child rearing, cloth weaving and generally managing the household. Women were no longer educated and higher learning and writing were restricted to men.

With the advent and spread of Buddhism as the world moved to the first millennium of the Julian calendar, the rights of women continued to erode. Neither Indian, Chinese or Japanese women were allowed to hold any property. Child marriages in India became more prevalent as the chastity of the bride became the paramount requirement. This meant that girls no longer had an opportunity to study and were essentially illiterate and fully dependent on their male relatives for their every need. Women in China and Japan also followed the same pattern with property being passed from father to son and women having no rights to inheritance. Also, these cultures now allowed and sometimes even encourage men to take other wives or



concubines which led to more misery and turmoil for women and their children.

Women who lost their husbands whether at a young age or even later in life became fully dependent on their sons. The situation for childless women was even worse. Women in these cultures were not allowed to remarry and divorce was not an option for any woman during these times. Small wonder that the family who had daughters looked upon it as a burden and not an occasion of joy. Parents had to start worrying as soon as the daughter was born about getting her married. Then they had to hope that the marriage was a happy and long lasting one as otherwise either they had to support her for the rest of her life or watch her mistreatment at the hands of her in-laws. Keeping the daughters unmarried had such a huge social stigma that no one wanted to risk ostracism. Small wonder then that women were only focused on birth, marriage and death.

Just when you thought things could not get worse for women, they did!! By the 12th century, in China foot binding became the norm. Mothers bound the feet of young girls to stop them from having large feet. Girls had their bones broken and became virtually immobile. Their feet became so deformed that they could never walk normally again. The ideal embodiment of beauty was small feet (3.9 inches long) with an exaggerated arch!! The practice was only outlawed in the 20th century. Sati was prevalent in India with women and girls killing themselves upon the death of their husbands. In Japan the Samurai culture gave way to other beliefs where a woman was inherently evil and had no place in heaven.

As the world progressed, a strange dichotomy can be observed in the rules governing the role of women in all three cultures. The women who belonged to the upper classes were bound by very tight rules as compared to women in the lower classes. This reflected the economic reality of the times. For example, only women with servants could really have their feet bound. How would a woman in rural China work in the fields if she could not move? The same was true in Japan where widows and other women were allowed to earn a living making garments or running inns for travelers. In India, most of the stories of the time feature courtesans as heroines as they were the ones who had the opportunity to be educated and hone their skills in the fine arts like music and dancing. These opportunities were not available to the aristocratic women. Women belonging to royalty however could really bend the rules to enjoy a much better life than other women.

By the 17th century when explorers documented their

travels through Asia things had pretty much reached rock bottom for women. In Japan for example, women were only taught to write a simplistic script and could therefore not understand the political and economic affairs of their fathers and husbands which were conducted in the official language, Kanji. In India, invasions from the North led to greater prevalence of restrictive practices. Women literally went behind closed doors and were covering up when out in public for their protection. However, the indomitable spirit of women still shines through with spectacular examples like Andal, Meerabai, and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi from India, and Wu Mei and Empress Cixi from China.

The dawn of the 21st century brought a lot of changes in the lives of women all over the world including in Asia. The two World Wars, the end of Colonialism, and rapid advances in science and technology all have had a positive impact. With Japanese men fully engaged in World War II, women emerged from their homes to become part of the work force. They started getting better educated and married later in life. Women also got the right to vote in 1945 this giving them a voice in society. 67% of the women turned out to vote in the first election and many women were elected to serve in the House of Representatives. These numbers haven't been surpassed even today. Today, only a third of Japanese women go to college with majority of them enrolled in humanities and social studies. Women who enter the workforce in large numbers in their early twenties tend to drop out of the work force after having children. Very few women in Japan enroll in science and engineering programs.

At around the same time China underwent a Communist revolution. This brought very welcome reforms that bettered the status of Chinese women in society. Men and women were of equal status and the Marriage Law was no longer valid. Women were now able to choose their own spouse and later were given the right to divorce. A saying attributed to Mao reads 'Women hold up half the sky!' which is so different from the Confucian saying 'Women and crooks are unteachable.' With the one child policy, families now had the same resources to educate a daughter as they would a son. Today women in China account for nearly 45% of the university enrollment and 44 % of post graduate enrollment.

The All India Women conference was established in 1927 to promote equality and betterment for women. Women were part of the freedom struggle and stepped up to sustain the protests against the British as men were incarcerated in great numbers. When India got its



independence in 1947, the new Constitution granted equal rights to men and women. The five year plans included goals to promote healthcare, education and employment opportunities for women. Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India in 1966. Compare that to Margaret Thatcher becoming the first woman Prime Minister of Britain in 1979 and the United States that still has only male Presidents. However, this did not translate to betterment of all women as India is made up a large and very diverse population. While women in cities fought for the right to divorce, inherit property and equal pay at the work place; rural women still lacked basic education and healthcare. Lack of resources and awareness in the rural areas still led to female infanticide and a skewed male to female ratio. Child marriages and high female mortality still plague the rural poor though the country as a whole has made great strides in medicine and technology. Violence against women continued to rise past independence and despite various programs instituted by the government and NGOs it still continues. However, Indian society has recognized that education is a key component to raising awareness of the issues among both men and women. 80% of urban women are literate as compared to 59% of rural women. However, women constitute 45% of college enrollment with women accounting for 29% of enrollment in Engineering and 40% in Computer Science / IT.

Today Asian women have made their mark in very diverse areas. Kiran Bedi India's first woman IPS

Officer, astronaut Kalpana Chawla, artist Kumi Yamashita, Margaret Chan director of WHO, panda and bio diversity expert, Lu Zhi, and a large number of Olympic athletes representing their countries in both the Summer and Winter Olympics. Despite the adversities, women continue to challenge the status quo and make great strides in their chosen fields. Unlike before, girls today have so many women they can look up to as role models who shine the light on the path forward. Asian women embody the spirit of the phrase, "Educate a man and you educate one person, educate a woman and you educate a nation". I expect to see many advances in society influenced by women. Though the past was filled with darkness, the future is illuminated with the light of many bold and determined women. ■

About the Author

Divya Ragnathan

is a sophomore in Northview High School. She is keenly interested in current affairs and hopes to pursue a career in business. She has a passion for playing violin and tennis and is part of her school's chamber orchestra and tennis team. She wrote this article over the summer to learn more about the role of women in Asia and hopes to share this knowledge with her peers.



Spiritual Meaning behind the Srimad Bhagavatam Stories - Part I

By Umesh Gulati, Ph.D.

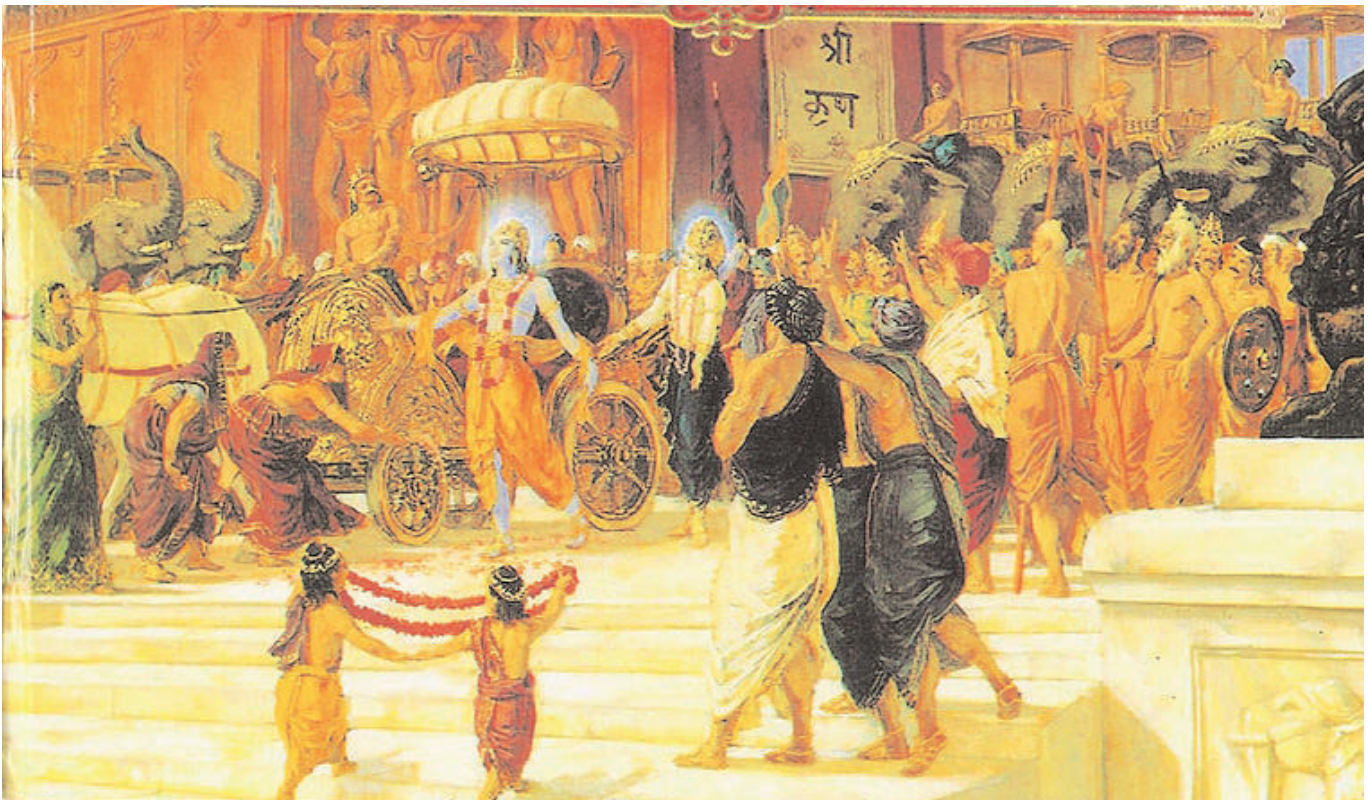
Shrimad Bhagvatam is one of the authoritative scriptures of the Hindus and is regarded as the fifth Veda. By means of stories from the lives of Avatars (incarnations), sages, devotees, and kings, it popularizes the truths contained in the Vedas. At this time nearly 400 million Hindus find in it their most cherished expressions of religious faith and their dearest exemplars.

In the Hindu tradition incarnations come again and again to punish the wicked and cruel and reestablish righteousness and justice. Sri Krishna's birth occurred precisely to end the reign of terror and unrighteousness by his very own maternal uncle, king Kamsa. An *Avatara* means the descent of God on earth in human form. The incarnation in human form is born to human parents and lives and dies like any other human being, but during the course of his or her life he or she performs actions that can be possible by God alone. Its peculiar excellence is that it reconciles the heart with the head, devotion with learning. "It is fried in the butter of

Knowledge," says Sri Ramakrishna, "and steeped in the honey of Love."

Sri Krishna's birth occurred in very unusual circumstances. His parents, Devaki and Vasudeva were the prisoners of his maternal uncle, Kamsa. This was because when Kamsa was driving his sister and her bridegroom to their home in Gokula, a voice from void declared that the eighth son of the couple would be the cause of his demise. Suddenly Kamsa sprang up from the driver's seat and was about to kill his sister but for the intervention of her husband who promised that all the sons born to Devaki would be handed over to him.

When the eighth son, future Sri Krishna, was to be born, Kamsa took an extra care of the couple and tied their hand and foot and threw them in solitary cell, guarded day and night by a number of armed guards. But can anyone bind the one who Himself is the remover of the bondages of others, and for that reason is called *Hari*? That indeed what happened as the infant Krishna was born. Just a few minutes before the birth, the Lord appeared in the form of a young man of 16 or so, and told His parents what they needed to do when He is born.





As directed, Vasudeva wrapped the infant Krishna in a cloth and was ready to leave for Gokula where his friend Nanda and his wife Yashodha lived. But how could he leave when the couple was all bound up and armed guards were watching. But as the Lord had ordained, the chains tied to his feet and hands suddenly opened and the guards fell asleep.

So carrying his baby Krishna came to the bank of the river Yamuna to cross it, but in the middle of that dark night found no boat to ferry them across the river. But as the Providence would have it, intermittent lightening showed Vasudeva that the river was quite shallow and hence he had no difficulty in crossing it. Reaching at Nanda's house, he found Yashoda had just delivered a baby girl, but everyone was fast asleep. So he exchanged his son with the baby girl and headed back to the jail. After he settled down with the baby in the arms of Devaki, the cries of the infant woke the guards up. They found the couple were tied with chains as they were supposed to be, and at once announced the birth of the baby to the king.

Kamsa rushed to the place, but when he found that the eighth child was a girl, his rage knew no bounds. He was sure that there was some trick the couple had played on him. He snatched the baby from the arms of Devaki and was about to kill the girl by stretching her legs when she just slipped past his hands into the air. From there she declared that Kamsa's nemeses had been born already and was playing in the arms of Yashoda in Gokula.

Kamsa was not a person to keep quiet and began to send demons in the guise of beautiful women to lure Krishna away from Yashoda and kill Him. One such demon was Putna. She persuaded Yashoda to give the baby to her. As she got the baby she at once went into a secluded corner to breast feed her, but Kamsa had poisoned her breast. As soon as she thrust her breast into Sri Krishna's mouth, He began to suck it so hard that it took her very life out of her. After a few minutes when the inmates of the house came outside to see what the two were doing, they found the baby Krishna sitting on Putna's body and playing and making merry. There were other similar incidents orchestrated by Kamsa, but the Lord that baby Krishna was, had no difficulty in fending them off.

Many devotees of Sri Krishna know that He was very fond of butter and was not satisfied with the butter He got from His mother Yashoda. So He stole butter from the houses of cowherd girls' houses. They would complain to Yashoda. He often denied it. But if Mother Yashoda tried to spank Him the cowherd girls didn't like

it either.

We have often thought about this incident, but have always dismissed this as an allegory and not a fact. Sage Shuka has described Him as *Atmaramah* and *Aptakamah*. The former term indicates a person who is satisfied in the self, or is self-satisfied, and doesn't seek anything from outside. The second term implies that a person has no desire because the person is perfect in every respect. That is Sri Krishna. Therefore, it makes no sense that He was stealing butter from neighbors' houses and satisfying His craving for it.

As everyone knows that cows, milk, and butter were the symbols of wealth of the people of Gokula in those ancient times, as money houses, farms and factories at the present time. We also know that everyone, men and women, were very fond of Sri Krishna, who was a mere child, six or seven-year old. If the cowherd girls and boys didn't know the divinity of Sri Krishna, at least He Himself knew who He was. But can one get God, if one is so much immersed in counting his money and wealth? To realize God, one must renounce wealth. Similarly, one needs to detach from people, including ones near and dear ones. This doesn't, however, mean that one has to run away from ones responsibilities, but one must remain detached. By so-called stealing butter, for which He was called butter thief or *Damodara*, from the cowherd girls, Sri Krishna was attracting them toward Him, who is the only Wealth worth possessing.

One day a woman came to the town to sell some fruits. Sri Krishna wanted to have some fruits. Therefore He brought handful of paddy from His home and gave it to the fruit seller as the price for her fruit. The woman was so enchanted with Sri Krishna's beauty and pleasant manners that she wholeheartedly gave fruits into His two hands, though a few grains of paddy were no remuneration for her fruits. When the woman looked into her basket to adjust her merchandise she was surprised to see that all those grains were converted into gold and diamond pieces!

Once Mother Yashoda wanted to check if her Baby had not chewed any dirt. When she asked Him to open His mouth, she saw the whole universe in the mouth of her little baby. She also wanted to bind Him to a post to restrain Him from teasing the cowherd girls. So she brought a rope to do so. But as she tried to tie Him, His body began to expand and the rope was not enough to tie Him. The more rope she brought to tie Him, the more the body expanded. When Sri Krishna saw His mother had become exhausted, He allowed Himself to be tied. As soon as the mother left, He pulled the rope and the post to which it was tied. As He went out and tried to pass

through two big trees, the post got stuck between the trees. So he pulled it with such a force that the trees fell with a crash that made a big noise. And out of the trees came two celestial beings, which began to worship Him and sing His divine glories.

Such incidents did give people some awareness of the divinity of this unusual child. But their natural affection for the child was so much that they often forgot about it. At the same time such incidents made them fearful of losing Him because He would do so many unusual things. After great thought, Nanda and Yashoda decided to leave Gokula and move to adjoining village, Vrindabana.

In the forests of Sri Vrindabana, Sri Krishna was tending the calves with His companions; a demon in the guise of a big snake devoured all of them. But immortal and deathless Sri Krishna tore to pieces his throat and killed him. He then recovered all the calves and His companions from the demon's belly.

Brahma the creator was seeing all that and to test the divinity of the child he stole all of His companions along with the calves and took them to a cave and put them to sleep. When Sri Krishna came to realize this, He concentrated His mind on the problem and realized that it was the stratagem of Brahma. Without showing the least concern of what had happened, He at once created from His own mind exactly the same looking shepherd boys as well as their calves. When He reached home with all of them, none of the shepherds and

shepherdesses knew anything about the stealing of their real children; instead they began to love their children even more than before.

The very sight of their children used to give them the highest bliss, which comes to one alone who realizes the glory of one's own real Self. This intense love of shepherd girls toward their children is the proof of Sri Krishna's being the Soul of all souls, the Self of all selves with whom all souls are eternally united. On the other hand, the connection with our earthly children is only through this life alone and hence temporary. Thus our love toward our children, although it seems to be natural, is really acquired and based upon the wrong notion of "I and Mine" instead of the right one of "Thou and Thine". Such love is just attachment. This natural outpouring of love for Sri Krishna can only be accounted for in His being the Soul of our souls or in other words, in His being God Himself.

This state of affairs went on for a year, and when Brahma realized the power Sri Krishna, he admitted his mistake. Until this event he had thought that he was the only creator. At any rate, he appeared before Sri Krishna, and bowing before Him, he asked his forgiveness. All the cowherd boys and their calves were restored and the ones that were the product Sri Krishna's mind got assimilated into the Lord of the Universe.

The world is full of good and bad people. So, on the one hand there were simple cowherds of Sri Vrindabana, earning their honest living, cooperating with one





another, and tending their families, while on the other hand, there were bad people, whom we call as demons, deriving happiness in terrorizing others. In every age we find such opposites. At the same time there is always the victory of good over evil, because God is always on the side of the good and righteous people. Such was the case during the boyhood days of Sri Krishna. There was a demon, named Dhenukasura in the palmyra grove, a little distance from Sri Vrindabana. The demon didn't allow anyone to eat the sweet fruits of those trees. Therefore, Sri Krishna killed the demon and made the palmyra grove safe place for everyone to go and enjoy.

There was a big snake, Kaliya, which had poisoned a certain part of Yamuna, which on that account was called the Kaliya lake. Once Sri Krishna went with His playmates to drink water. As soon as the cowherd boys drank the water of the river, they got sick and became senseless. Sri Krishna killed the snake and revived the boys with His divine power.

If you don't want to believe these stories literally, you may think about these demons as existing in our own minds. All of us are governed by both negative and positive energies. The negative energies make us greedy, selfish and proud, and separate us from our fellow beings. These make us demonic. The positive energies are divine energies that make us loving, unselfish, and helpful toward all beings; and these make us divine. There is always a war going on between these two forces, as it were, within us all the time. If we allow ourselves to be governed by the divine forces, we can easily overpower the demons in our minds and make the world more peaceful and happy.

When Sri Krishna grew up to be a big boy, He argued with His father about the efficacy of yearly worshipping Indra, the king of gods. He convinced His father and other residents of Vrindabana that it was no use worshipping a minor god, leaving the all-pervading eternal and one God of the whole universe. Here, it would be quite relevant to make the difference between a minor god and the God of the universe. God of the universe has six attributes: all knowledge, all power, supreme majesty, supreme strength, unlimited energy, and total self-sufficiency. That is why the God of the universe is called Purushottam, which means the ultimate person. That is also the reason the Hare Krishna people call Him the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is what Sri Krishna was; He possessed all the attributes mentioned here. Indra, obviously had some power with regard to rains, but the source of that power was in Sri Krishna, the God of the universe.

Sri Krishna also told His parents and the shepherds of

Sri Vrindabana that it was better to celebrate the festival in honor of the hill, Govardhana, which supplied their cattle with good grass, sheltered their town from storm, and in several other ways was the real friend of theirs. As a result all the population of the town went up the Govardhana hill and had great festival in its honor. That enraged Indra and he lost all control. Imagine, Indra behaving like an ordinary human being, who is some time happy, while other times unhappy and angry? One becomes angry because one's desire has been frustrated. So Indra was like a human being, only more powerful than many of us.

So Indra out of anger sent such a downpour and hailstones on Sri Vrindaban that it frightened all the cowherds for being drowned in the flood-like rains, and the structures leveled to the ground. But how could Indra succeed when Sri Krishna, the Lord, was on the side of people? He lifted the whole of Govardhana hill on one of his left-hand fingers and asked everyone, shepherds and shepherdesses, to come and take shelter under it. When Indra saw the superhuman power of the shepherd boy (Sri Krishna), he came to his senses and realized who He was, stopped the rain and asked His forgiveness.

We have already pointed out six attributes of God, all of which Sri Krishna possessed for which He is called Purushottam by His devotees. Now to distinguish Him from Indra who didn't have much self-control as he became angry like any ordinary human being, Sri Krishna had complete control on His five senses and the mind. For that reason sages call Him Hrishikesa. Some human beings have control over one or more of their senses, and because of that they attract, and have power over, other people.

But one, who has control over all one's senses, is the most powerful person. Such was Sri Krishna. Truly it has been said that God in chains is man, and man unchained is God. ■

About the Author

Umesh Gulati,

Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, based in Durham, NC, is a Vedantist, and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He has regularly published articles in Vedanta Kesari from Chennai and Prabuddhabharata from Kolkata, and also in Vedanta magazine from England. Lately he also published articles in Marg magazine. After receiving Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Virginia in 1967, he joined East Carolina University in Greenville, NC the same year and retired in 1999.

SHRADDHANJALI

Dr. Ashok Sinha, Editor, Hindu Vishwa

Dr. Ashok Kumar Sinha departed this world early Aug. 6 in Santa Clara, California. He was 73, but lived many

lifetimes in that time. Dr. Sinha was born in Kadma, a village near the city of Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, India. As a child, he walked four miles each way every day for his entire schooling in Hazaribagh. He went to St. Xavier's College in Ranchi, as well as Patna Science College at Patna University, scoring at the top of his class each year. After earning Masters in science, he opted to cross the Atlantic to enroll at the University of Maryland. With Ph.D. in physics, Dr. Sinha worked at NASA in Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt on a post-doctoral research fellowship. He later worked at Comsat and Intelsat, or International Telecommunications Satellite Organization, in Washington, D.C., and also represented the agency internationally. Through his work with Intelsat, he helped develop the transmission specifications for the first digital TV system in the world, then known as Echostar I, but now delivered to millions of homes through the household brand name, Dish Network.

His work was enough to earn him the nickname "Mr. Digital TV", from colleagues at Intelsat. He published

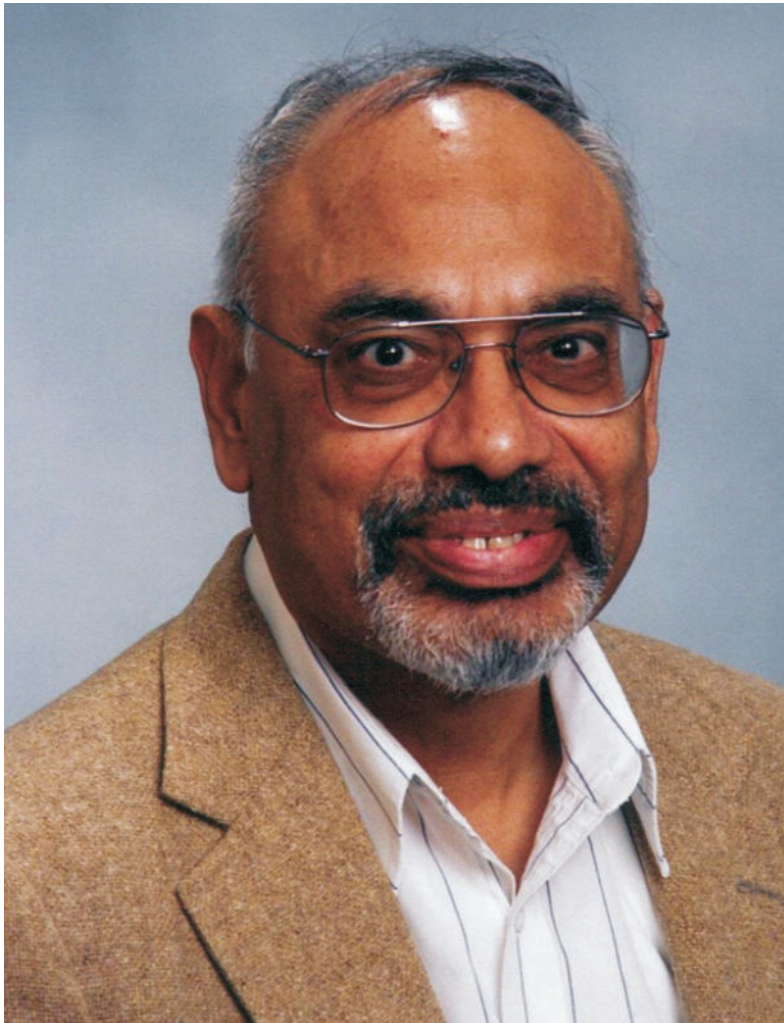
roughly 25 books, including a compilation of poetry called "Drops of Dew," English translation of Indian

classics, explanations of major Eastern religions, an in-depth look at elementary particle physics (his favorite subject within physics), a sociopolitical novel depicting the rise of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called "The Reincarnation of the Iron-Man" and a Hindi translation of the Bhagavad Geeta, his favorite book. He was working toward filing patents on his discoveries around algorithmic, satellite-based location systems for forest fires and was even exploring ways to use new technology to help cleanse India's holy Ganga River.

For 12 years, he served as editor of Hindu Vishwa,

regularly writing editorials for the publication of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. Dr. Sinha also gave heartily toward several causes to bolster education in India, including EkalVidyalaya and IDRF, even helping fund a new school in his native village of Kadma.

Dr. Sinha, a beloved father, physicist and philanthropist is survived by his wife, Manjula as well as son Vikas, daughter-in-law Mira, daughter Vandana, son-in-law Viral and grandchildren Jai, Maya, Ruhaan and Roshan.



MESSAGES

Ashokji's life is a true inspiration to others and the generations to come, and we, at VHPA will miss him forever. His departure leaves a huge void, which will be very difficult to fill in. He may have left us in body but his unwavering commitment to the work he undertook can be easily seen even today through his books and writings. This is further exemplified by the fact that he already wrote his last editorial piece for Hindu Vishwa, July-Sept issue.

At times, when he expressed a desire to step down as the editor I would panic. He was so full of ideas and energy that I expected him to be around forever. With a very heavy heart I offer my humble pranaam to a true karmayogi, a tireless, silent and passionate worker. His

association with VHPA was long and motivated by his earlier experiences at St. Xaviers, Ranchi as noted in one of his articles, "My decision to join the VHPA was consciously motivated by a desire to do my part to contribute in the process of educating the American-born Hindu children on Hindu culture and spirituality, as well as of trying to raise a voice against the trend of proselytizing poor Vanavasi children in India - be it through helping in the 'Ekal Vidyalay' movement, through a social change, or any other legitimate channel." May *Ishwara* grant *sadgati* to his *Atman* on its onward journey and strength and forbearance to his family.

Shyam Tiwari and Abhaya Asthana

It is with sadness that we have received the news about the passing away of your beloved father, Dr Ashok Sinha. The loss of a member of one's family leaves a void, more so that of a father. I pray that Bhagwan gives all of you the strength to bear the loss. As a Hindu activist in general, and the editor of Hindu Vishwa in particular, he has made a significant contribution the resurgent Hinduism that we all see over the last thirty years or so. This resurgence is following the path of evolution and not revolution, which is in the tradition that our ancient sants and sages have set out. Despite the serious attempts made by the opponents of Hinduism, we all have been able to resist the onslaught, and are today in the process of looking forward positively to the day when our opponents will have to admit that they have been wrong in the propaganda that they have been making. It is the task of all of us to build upon the work done by our father and take the work forward. As Arnold Toynbee had said in 1970: "Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of world's history, but it is already becoming clear that the chapter which had a western beginning, will have an Indian ending, if it is not to end in self-destruction of the human race."

Ashok Chowgule

Working President (External),
Vishwa Hindu Parishad, India

Shocked to learn about Dr. Sinha's death. Hindu Community in USA has lost a dedicated and silent leader. Please convey my condolences to Dr. Sinha's family. May *Ishvar* grant his soul Eternal Bliss. Aum Shanti

Dr. Mahesh Mehta

A great loss to VHPA and all Hindus. So sorry to learn about this sad news. Just this morning While talking with Veena Gandhi, she mentioned that he was very sick. She was going to visit him in CA on Monday. Obviously she did not know that his soul had left the body.

Umesh Shukla

I am so saddened by the passing away of Shri Ashok Sinha. I first met him during the preparation for 1993 Global Vision 2000 conference in DC. He used to live there. Veenababen had introduced him to me as they both had some common connection from college. He was a very gentle person and soft spoken. yet, he could write strong editorials for Hindu Vishwa when circumstances demanded. A few years back I had met him and his health was in decline. Our prayers are with the family. *OM Shanti, Shanti, Shantih.*

Gaurang Vaishnav

This is really a surprise and Ashok ji was always active. Yes his legacy will remain forever for us. We all pray for ultimate peace of the departed Soul. Our consolations to the Family, relatives and friends. *Om Shanti Shanti Shanti.*

Ramesh Shah

It was indeed with great sorrow to hear the sad news of Dr Ashok Sinha's passing away. I had personal contact with him and had communicated few times. He was always very sympathetic and helpful. He will be severely missed and remembered for long time. May his soul rest in peace. God bless all his family.

Dr Hiro Badlani



We, at Vishva Hindu Parishad Hq Office here in New Delhi, are sad to learn about the passing away of Dr. Ashok Sinha. He served his adopted country and *Karma Bhoomi* USA in the field of Satellite communications at NASA, COMSAT and INTELSAT. By virtue of being a man of ideas and prolific writer who wrote many books, he also outstandingly edited the "Hindu Vishwa" magazine since 2004 and the VHPA treasured his work much. As a true Pravasi son of *Maa Bhaاراتي*, he had not forgotten the experiences and impressions of his formative years as a student at St. Xaviers in Ranchi (Jharkhand - then a part of Bihar) (I also did Intermediate of Science from St. Xaviers Ranchi) when he saw the unacceptable consequences of the proselytizing and denationalizing activities by the missionaries in the Vanvasi and Girivasi areas (Tribal areas) and so even while living in USA, he always tried via Ekal Movement and other means to undo such activities in various areas of Bharat. He lived in USA, but, perhaps Ranchi and by extension Jharkhand and Bharat was his dream though intellectually he stood for *Swadesho Bhuvana Trayam*. He was an inspiring *Karyakarta* and his services to the Hindu cause will always be remembered. In his passing away, *Maa Bhaاراتي* has lost a distinguished son and the global Hindu society that forms 1/6th of the seven billion global population has lost a multi-faceted personality and eminent advocate of its Hindu Dharma. His *Nidhan* is a great loss to VHPA and VHP and all of us. Please accept our heartfelt condolences and convey them to all members of your family.

We can imagine how intensely Dr. Ashok Sinha's *Sahadharmini* would be feeling his absence and we know the philosophy of "Jaatasya hi dhruvomrityuh" ("that which is born must die" - Gita 2/27) won't give

solace at this time of extreme grief. However, one has to bow before the inscrutable designs of the Almighty! "Na Hi KalyaanaKrutaKaschit, Durgatim Tat Gachchhati"! ("There is never any loss to an altruist in the divine scheme who engages in auspicious and spiritual activities." - Gita: 6/40). While it hurts all Aatmeeyajans, Parijans and Suhrudjans left behind, we hope his family can take comfort in the fact that Dr. Ashok Sinha is with his *Ishtdev* (respective Personal Deity who guides the soul to its real home - Moksh/Liberation/Self-Realization/Enlightenment) now. He lives on not only in the memories of all those who knew, celebrated and cherished him, but with his *Ishtdev* as well. We pray to the sarvaSaktiman to give you and your family the strength and courage to bear this irreparable loss! My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

The best tribute to his memory would be to further his work for the cause of the Tribal brethren (*Girivasis and Vanavasis*) of Jharkhand and elsewhere in Bharat!

**"Om Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnaat
Purna mudachyate,
Purnasya Purnamaadaay
Purnamevaavashishyate."**

Om Shaantih, Shaantih, Shaantih!

["O Supreme Lord! That is whole; this is whole; from that whole this whole came; From that whole, this whole removed, what remains is whole. Om Peace, Peace, Peace!" (May the living beings be at Peace with themselves, May there be Peace and discipline (Dharma) in the World! May the Universe Shower Peace on All!)]

Swami Vigyananand,
Joint General Secretary,
Vishva Hindu Parishad, India

Ashok ji's soul rest in peace. God give the strength to his family to cope with loss. Extremely sorry to hear the news.

Parag More

Very sorry to hear Ashokji's news. He is big loss to VHPA and *Param Krupalu Bhagvan* grant and give *Shanti* to his soul.

Amar Upadhyay

Indeed very sad news. Although I did not know him, every *Krutishil* is very close to heart for all the Deshbhakt.

Sandip Shah

My sincere heartfelt condolences to Ashokji's family.

May his soul now rest in eternal peace. 'Hari Aum Tat-sat, Jai Guru Datt'

Prakash Waghmare

May his soul rest in peace. Hari Om!

- Girish Gandhi

Very Sorry to hear the news. He did an incredible job.

Ajay Shah

Sorry to hear the news of Ashokji. Great loss to VHPA.

Vasav Mehta

My Humble Shrandhanjali to Unperishable Pious *ATMA* of Shri Ashok Ji.

Ram Suchdev

Karma and Rebirth

By Dr. D.C. Roa

Karma means action. An action is undertaken by an individual with a specific intention. It is this individual, known as the 'doer,' who is responsible for the action and therefore has to reap the consequences of the action. A central idea in Hindu philosophy is the unshakeable link between action and consequence, as between cause and effect. Each action creates a consequence that the doer of the action must necessarily experience; and each experience of an individual has its cause in a prior action by that same individual.

Because of this tight connection between action and consequence, the word *karma* is also used to indicate the result or 'fruit' of an action. Depending on the intention behind the action, the fruit may be desirable, undesirable or mixed. Actions that are selfish, malicious and hurtful result in sorrow, tension, regret and guilt. These are known as *papa*. Actions that are driven by a sense of duty and concern for others bring joy and inner fulfillment. These are known as *punya*. Only good actions with good intentions lead to good *karma*: one cannot harvest mangoes by planting a cactus.

The time interval between the action and its consequence may be very short, even immediate, or very long, stretching over many lives. Thus, our experiences in this life may be the result of our actions performed in past lives; and the fruit of our present actions may be experienced by us in future lives. Since we do not remember our past lives, we frequently cannot understand why we suffer pain and sorrow; and we may fail to see in this life the rewards of our good actions that fructify as good experiences in future lives. It is fortunate that we forget our past lives. If we remembered them, we might be plagued by guilt or anxiety and the memory of past associations might poison relationships.

The karmic consequences of all our actions in all our previous lives are accumulated in seed form that produce fruit in future lives. This accumulation is known as *sancita karma*. As long as there

is *sancita karma* in our *karmic* account, we are bound to be reborn until we exhaust this accumulation. Since it has been accumulated over many lives, the burden of the past is too much for us to exhaust in this life alone. If the *sancita karma* is thought of as a warehouse full of our past *karmas*, one part of it, designated to be exhausted in this life, is like a truckload in our front yard. This is known as *prarabdha karma*, a subset of our *karma* that must be experienced in this life. It is our destiny for this life, determining the circumstances of our birth, our life span and the principal elements of our lives.

Who selects *prarabdha karma* as a subset of *sancita karma*? This is the prerogative of *Ishwara*, the all-knowing, all-powerful and compassionate God who set in place the law of *karma* and oversees its operation. *Ishwara* helps us exhaust our accumulated *sancita karma* in the most efficient way possible in successive births. The purpose of each birth is to exhaust *prarabdha karma* and, as far as possible, avoid adding to the stock of *sancita karma*. To grasp how this is done, one needs to understand the link between our actions and our latent desires.





Each action is driven by a desire, consciously or unconsciously. Even when we believe we are acting out of a conscious intention, we frequently act out of habit. The habits we cultivate by repeated actions over many lives are known as *vasanas*. Since our actions are driven by our *vasanas*, we can only exhaust our *karma* when we have overcome our *vasanas*. *Vasanas* dwell in our mind and are acted on by our body. In His compassion, *Ishwara* provides us with the body and environment that is best suited to exhaust our *vasanas*. For example, *vasanas* of violence may be best exhausted in the body of a tiger and *vasanas* of stubbornness in the body of a mule. When our mind is overwhelmed by *vasanas* that constitute an obstacle to our spiritual growth, *Ishwara* gives us a birth in a non-human form best suited to exhaust those *vasanas*. Since animals act from instinct, they are not "doers" and do not create any new *karma* by their actions. Thus each animal ends its life with a reduction in *sancita karma*. Humans have greater choice in how they act. When humans act to fulfil desires, they add to their *sancita karma*. Actions driven by selfish desires such as anger, add to bad *karma*; and actions motivated by a higher purpose and undertaken in a spirit of dedication to God add good *karma* to their stock of *sancita karma*. *Ishwara* gives us a human birth only when our minds are sufficiently evolved and capable of the self-control needed to make right choices. When humans fail to exercise self-control and act to fulfil base desires, they are propelling themselves toward an animal birth in the future. Based on the changing composition of *sancita karma*, each of us might have gone through many lives in a variety of different forms, human and non-human.

This cycle of births and deaths in one body after another is a journey undertaken by our minds. Our minds are filled with desires and habits accumulated over many past lives and we are deluded into thinking that the way to happiness is the fulfillment of our desires. It is only through long and bitter experience that we learn that the well of desires is bottomless and that seeking happiness by fulfilling desires is foolish. Spiritual practice consists of seeking fulfillment in helping others; working unselfishly for a higher purpose; training our minds to be detached and single-pointed; reflecting on who we are and how we relate to the world around us; and surrendering all our actions and their fruits to God. That is how we accumulate good *karma*. The goal of spiritual evolution is to realize that our own true nature is eternal, blissful and universal, unaffected by the joys and sorrows that are an inevitable part of all individual experience. This is Self-Realization. A Realized person

no longer sees himself or herself as a "doer" of actions; and the warehouse of *sancita karma* is as if burnt, bringing complete liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The law of *Karma* is not 'fatalism' or 'pre-determination.' First, our experiences today are merely the consequences of our own actions in the past, maybe past lives that we do not recall.

This is a theory of full accountability rather than 'pre-determinism.' Second, while what we experience is a consequence of our past actions, how we conduct ourselves in the midst of these experiences determines our own destiny in the future. This again is individual responsibility and exercise of free will rather than fatalism.

A proper understanding of how the law of *karma* operates in our lives helps us sustain peace of mind in the midst of turmoil and sorrow while strengthening our motivation to engage positively in meeting life's challenges. ■

Note: ★ for a fuller treatment of this subject, including important nuances and lessons drawn from engaging scriptural stories, see *From Death to Birth: Understanding Karma and Reincarnation* by Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, Himalayan Institute, 1997; ISBN 0-89389-147-9.

★ Above is part of a larger collection of essays written by Dr. D. C. Rao and published by the Hindu American Foundation. The full e-book is available at <http://hafsite.org/hinduism-101/recommended-reading-hinduism>.

About the Author

Dr. D. C. Rao
retired from the World Bank in 1995 to pursue an intensive adhyatmic education and practice. He is a Trustee at the Chinmaya Mission, Washington D.C. and actively associated with the Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy at Honesdale, Pa. He is a member of the Assembly and former President of the Inter Faith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, where he has contributed to work on Strengthening Teaching About Religion (STAR) for several years. He has degrees from the University of Mumbai, India, Cambridge University, U.K., and a Ph. D. in economics from the University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

Foreign in My Land

By *Gayatri Menon*

It's the 21st Century, and we are finally realizing that mixed couples from two different regions of India are the reason for not only the cutest, but also the most interesting babies. I am one hundred percent Indian, however, for those of you that don't know, there reside over 25 different Indian languages-and no, they aren't all just dialects of Hindi. My parents are originally from complete opposite sides of India, my mother from Gujrat who speaks Gujarati, and my father from Kerala, who speaks Malyalam. When I was little, I wasn't taught both languages, just Gujarati, so I grew up considering myself a Gujarati with a Malayali last name. I was embarrassed of not knowing my dad's culture or language, so why even address that part of me? I went to every Gujarati cultural event along with fluently speaking to all my relatives in the language, showing off that I am an American, but I still can go back and communicate in



India. But really, communicate to only half of my family.

I had visited Gujarat many times, and even though we go to the "New York" of India regularly, Mumbai (where every different language speaking Indian can be found), I went there ready to flaunt my inner *Gujju*. This time, however, was different. This time, I visited my dad's original state, Kerala, where my ancestors from his side lived and the culture of his family remains.

I was nervous; how was I going to communicate with literally anyone? My dad tried comforting me by saying the second language in the state is English, but I also knew that it was a village there. Literally a forest with locals

who live their lives so peacefully with not even a single telephone. I was going to tour one day and visit relatives the next. Touring was just beyond my excitement; Kerala is known as the paradise of India, but relatives? What was I going to do? Awkwardly sip tea and nod? Well, turns out, that was almost accurate.

So the first day, we got onto a houseboat. We were to spend the night there. It was absolutely peaceful with the completely green surroundings, and the villagers wrapped in their vibrant colored saris. The fisherman on a boat next to ours were so used to the scene, while I didn't even want to blink just so I could capture it all in. The air felt different; cleaner and more pure. I have yet to fully figure out how to describe the flawless moments on that boat into words.

We stopped on the shore of an island for ten minutes to pick out the things we were going to eat for dinner. Kerala is known to be one of the meat eating states in the predominantly vegetarian India, while Gujarat is almost vegan. I guess I realized my food preferences always swayed more to my Malayali side. We finished picking the food items and had a man open coconuts from a tree for us to drink the water from and made our way back onto the boat. We continued on, and saw a boat with locals going to work-almost like a ferry. It was four Rupees to get on and sometimes the only transportation to their work. My dad told me stories about how he had to canoe to get to his house, and how his dad took a canoe almost every day.

We reached our stopping point, and the boat parked in the perfect position. We walked around the village on shore and came back to the capturing smell of our dinner. We ate until we could no longer move, and took in the sunset's beauty until it was dark. The bed was more comfortable than you could imagine for a house boat, another one of the billion things right on our adventure.

We woke up the next morning, dazed with disbelief at the perfection of the reflection of the trees in the sunrise. We didn't want to leave-the past 16 hours was one big flawless moment.

Unfortunately, it was time to leave, but fortunately, we

had one more night to spend in this paradise. We got into the car, sharing our adventures with our driver, my late uncle's driver and friend. He was so familiar with the routes to our family's houses, I felt like he was a part of the family himself. He, Christian like a large population of Kerala's locals, took us to two churches. They, too, were gorgeous beyond belief. I felt as if I had been missing a part of me all my life that I had finally found, one also so beautiful I felt ashamed of to ignore all these past years.

The touring part of Kerala was over, and now was my biggest fear- visiting relatives that I already knew I couldn't communicate with. We started off in the first house, my sister and I sitting in silence, trying to figure out what was going on through body language. Then the next, then the third. The third house, technically was the same situation, but different for one reason: it was my grandfather's sister's house. I had never met my grandfather, only heard stories from multiple people about how great of a man he was. There was so much I wanted to ask his sister, but I couldn't. I was upset at the beginning, but by the end of it, I was okay. There was a look in her eyes, so genuine and happy she even got to see us. She

looked just like my grandfather (thank god for pictures). And I felt almost this weird connection with him.

The visits were a bit much to take in, but the emotion I saw in each one's eyes, a desire for them to want to talk to us even though we couldn't, was so much more meaningful than I had ever thought. I felt at home by the time we reached the airport to depart. Some words and phrases even became more familiar to me. I had come in foreign, but left my land a local.

I still have work to do on balancing my two differing cultures inherited from my parents, but this trip gave me the chance to realize how much I've missed out on, and how much more I need to make up for those lost years and find the Malayali in me. ■

About the Author

Gayatri Menon,
is majoring in Speech Communications and double minoring in Marketing and Psychology. She aspires to become a speech therapist. Her other interests lay in travelling and learning about different cultures, dancing, and writing.



U.S. Postal Service Honors Festival of Diwali with a Forever Stamp

Washington: The U.S. Postal Service will commemorate the joyous Hindu festival of Diwali with a Forever stamp. The Wednesday, Oct 5, first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony will take place at the Indian Embassy in New York City. The stamp design is a photograph featuring a traditional diya oil lamp beautifully lit, sitting on a sparkling gold background. Diya lamps are usually made from clay with cotton wicks dipped in a clarified butter known as "ghee" or in vegetable oils.

Also known as Deepavali, Diwali celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Spanning five days each autumn, it is considered by some to be the start of the New Year. On the Hindu calendar, Diwali falls on the eve of, or on, the new moon that occurs between mid-October and mid-November. In 2016, the main day of the festival will be celebrated Oct. 29 for South Indians and Oct 30 for North Indians. Diwali is a shortened version of the Sanskrit word *Deepavali*, which roughly translates as "a necklace of lights." During Diwali, the flickering oil-wick diyas sprinkle the homes of observers around the world.

Before the festival, many Hindus traditionally go shopping, clean their homes, open their doors and windows, create intricate *rangoli* - a vibrant floor pattern traditionally made from materials such as rice powder, colored sand and flower petals - and light diyas with hopes that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, will visit. In some regions of India, people play games, just as Hindu lore says that the god Shiva did. On the festive main day of the holiday, families pray for Lakshmi, dress up in their best clothes, enjoy lavish feasts and sweets, exchange gifts and light fireworks. Diwali also marks the New Year for people in Gujarat and a few other states of India.

The Diwali stamp is being issued as a Forever stamp. This Forever stamp will also be equal in value to the current First Class Mail 1-ounce price. The Postal Service receives approximately 40,000 suggestions for stamp ideas annually from the public. Stamp subjects are reviewed by the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee. Of that, approximately 25 topic suggestions for commemorative stamps are selected by the Committee for the Postmaster General's approval.

Desi Bible to have verses from Vedas, Upanishads

Tiruvananthpuram: Pictures of a turbaned Joseph and sari-clad Mary with baby Jesus in an "Indianized" version of the Bible is set to create waves across the country. In a unique experiment, the Catholic Church is coming out with a version of the Bible with verses from ancient Indian texts like the Upanishads and Vedas to explain the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

This is an unprecedented attempt to encourage a contextual reading and understanding of the Bible, says the church spokesman, Paul Thelakat.

"The Biblical text remains the same but verses from Vedas and Upanishads have been used to interpret Christian teachings," says Thelakat. As far as Catholics are concerned, they have to live and interpret their Christian faith and scriptures within the given culture, he adds.

Thiruvananthapuram Archbishop Sosa Pakiam, in his preface to the Bible, says a unique feature of the new Bible is that it has many references to the spiritual message and Biblical values found in the scriptures of other great Indian religions.

There are 24 line drawings, including those of mosque, temple and church with slippers outside, by the late Christopher Coelho. The New Community Bible is the product of a project commenced in 1990 by a team of 30 Biblical scholars.

Approved by the Catholic Bishops' Council of India, the book will be published by a Mumbai-based Christian publishing house, says Thelkat.

"There are at least 70 references to Bhagawad Gita, Mira Bai, Gandhiji, Gitanjali and Vedas," says Thelakat. For instance, to illustrate Mary Magdalene's sentiments for the resurrected Jesus, the book invokes Mira Bai's immortal couplets in praise of Krishna.

"Treasure in heaven" as mentioned in Matthew 6:19.21, has been explained using the Bhagavad Gita's call to disinterested action: "Work alone is your proper

business never the fruits it may produce" (2:47). Does this mean the Church now accepts the teachings from Hindu scriptures?

"No. This does not mean that we accept all teachings of Indian tradition as those of the Church. We are merely adapting them to Christian teachings wherever we feel there are points of harmony," emphasizes Thelakat. There remain points of disagreement like the view of rebirth, he adds.

While the Church is upbeat about the experiment, it has invited cautious reactions from Hindu groups in the state. "The move is welcome, but it remains to be seen if it's just another attempt to use Indian symbols to spread Christianity. In

areas like north India where the roots of culture run deep, missionaries have often found it difficult to reach out to the masses with their philosophy," says Jaya Prasad, a professor at the Sri Narayana college, Kollam and office bearer of Bharatiya Vichara Kendram, an RSS think tank.

"A selective approach is not proper. Accepting Mirabai should mean accepting Krishna and quoting from the Upanishad's should mean backing philosophies like Advaita (non-duality). Is the Church ready," he asks. ■

*Jesus In Vedas?
Really?*



Reforming Hindu Practices

By Dr. Jayant Mehta

As a practicing Hindu and a former Hindu priest, I have felt that Hindu religious practices are quite different from the teachings of the major Hindu spiritual texts. Shruti literatures include Veda, Upanishad and perhaps Bhagwat Gita, but most Hindus never study the basic spiritual texts that form the foundation of Hindu faith tradition. Most Hindus practice what is based on a family tradition or one of the many denominations of Hindu Dharma. Temple worship and rituals performed for the Images are based on *Smriti* literature. To complicate the matter further, some of the Gurus make their own rules for their followers. The *Brahmin* who performs the rituals is not the Guru and most of the Hindus neither read the spiritual texts nor get a formal education on basic teaching of the *Santana Dharma*. Meaning of the stories from the epics and *Purana* are rarely explained to the modern youth.

This issue is important because the world is getting smaller and Hindus both in India and abroad are getting more into the rituals rather than progressing to the path of spirituality or better practice of *Dharma*. Many Hindu priests and some of the Gurus do not take time to learn about the other major religions of the world, which limits their ability to relate to the youth. Western books have described Hindu Dharma as a very confusing and contradicting religion and labelled it as "Hinduism". Our new generation is staying away from our ancient faith because they want simple answers and they lack good role models. Millions of Hindus in India are still very poor and face cruelty in the name of caste system. Violence on women and chronic mistreatment of widows continue to be a sad state of affair in Hindu society. Corruption, dishonesty and superficial religiosity are prevalent in India, indicating limited positive effects of Dharma on the daily lives of Hindus. Christianity and Islam are rapidly growing religions. Their society also has problems. Some of their leaders are very eager to convert others to their own fold and declare that their theology and their holy books have the final authority. Honesty, non-violence and kindness towards the poor are not improving in the area where these religions have dominating position. It seems that religions in general have very limited positive influence on morality at large.

All this means that a reform movement is needed. Reform of the Hindu mind and the society at large is an ongoing process but it is always slow. Some of the

reforms are long overdue. Such reforms are part of every dynamic religion or a faith group. When the religion fails to keep up with science and technology, ultimately the religion decays. Take an example of recent Zika virus epidemic and Catholic practice of not using birth control measures. A progressive leader will change the church's position and lead their people to a right direction. Throughout the history, Hindu leaders have also changed their positions and guided the masses towards a correct path. In 1897, when M.K Gandhi went to England, his Baniya community declared him an "out-caste" for crossing the ocean. In 1915, thousands came to greet him at the Bombay seaport, when he returned to his homeland from the South Africa as the Mahatma. Now a days, thousands of Hindus cross the ocean every day without the fear of being placed on "out of caste" status. Ability to correct themselves have kept the Hindu faith alive and well in spite of adverse circumstances and foreign invasions we had to deal with in the past and we are facing at the present. This is about the need of such reforms and its value in keeping Santana Dharma more relevant to the modern world.

Reforms are divided the in two sections:

1 Philosophical changes:

A- We consider Veda "Apurisheya", that means no human being has composed it. It is the knowledge of God, by God. The truth is, our ancient sages were inspired by God to compose these verses and they have been collected over many years. It is also possible that many of the verses are missing. Not all the spiritual texts are composed by one person, certainly not Veda Vyasa alone.

B- We must denounce any discrimination based on caste system. Manu Smriti is an important book but we cannot follow everything written in Manu Smriti in literal sense. We should not stretch or twist the interpretation of the old text to please the modern critics either. We should plainly say: "This idea is not relevant today"

C- Using the theory of incarnations there are many self-proclaimed "Avatar" that walk around in India. Innocent people worship them as God. This is ridiculous! Hindu leaders do not want to upset some of the Sampradays because of the political or social reasons. How many gods do we need? Are we going to allow Hindus get divided in many denominations and worship every piece of stone? Hero worship has no end.

D- Temples are important for Hindu faith but our faith is not temple based faith. We believe in "Aachar parmo dharma" High philosophy must trickle down to spiritual

growth and service to the millions of Hindus who are hungry and poor. "They are suffering because of their bad karma" is not a right answer. "Lord Narayan will take incarnation and fix our problem" is not a correct attitude either.

E- We frequently say that Moorti Pooja is the first step towards Bhakti. When are we going to promote 2nd or 3rd step?

F- Adi Shankracharya had established four seats (math) in all four directions of India. He tried to bring some organized structure to an unorganized religious tradition. Over the years, this structure has lost its influence. It is time to reestablish a committee or a scholarly group that will speak for the Hindu Dharma with some authority and minimize chaos.

G- Ramayana and Mahabharata are great history texts. Instead of enjoying the poetry we have turned them into just religious books. Miracles and stories described in the ancient books are meant to teach the common man in a form of storytelling. Some folks take it literally.

H- We keep on praising our ancient past but ignore the present.

I- Truth always wins but it is the absolute truth that wins not a relative truth. Non-violence is important but there are times when "just war" has to be accepted.

J- Poverty is not simplicity. Enjoying life is not a religious sin.

This is not a complete list, but you get the idea. We must change our philosophical ideas based on old texts or reinterpret them in modern perspective. This should be done by a group of learned scholars and not by the self-proclaimed Guru or a leader of one or two denominations.

2- Social and cultural changes:

A- Atma-Gyan (self-realization) is praised so much that people forget that after this self-realization, one still has to perform the daily chores. Everyone has to eat and sleep and do his/her duties.

B- Most Hindu priests do not bother to study other world religions. This must change. A modern teacher of Hindu faith must have some basic knowledge of Christianity and Islam, two most popular religions of the world. These two western religions are monotheistic and some of their leaders are so overzealous that they believe that they must "save" Hindus by converting them. Hindu leaders need to understand their theology and their methods of spreading the power of their organization. Their service commitment is also something we can learn from.

C- Hindu masses must understand that going to a temple or performing a ritual does not complete their faith based practice. Dharma should be practiced in day to day

life and honesty, sincerity and kindness should be part of daily living.

D- God doesn't need gold and silver. Loading these temples with lots of money and precious metals is foolishness. It promotes greed and creates a large sum of dead investment that hurts our economy.

E- Some denominations use public service as "public show" to collect more money. Community should ask pointed questions like: "what percentage of the total collections was spent on charity?"

F- Be aware of self-proclaimed "Avatars". They are there to gain power, money and abuse the public faith.

G- There is no scientific evidence that fire ritual performed in a traditional sense brings rain. No need to pour lot of Ghee in the fire. Lord Shiva and the Shiv Linga does not need lots of milk. It is better to offer this milk to the Lord and then distribute it to the needy children.

H- False belief or excessive emotionalism is not Bhakti. God will be equally pleased weather you visit him on Purnima or on the Amavasya. God is the creator of all the days, how can he create a bad day?

I- Respecting a great saint is one thing but put him or her at the same status as God is diluting the devotion to God. One must be selective and stick to one chosen deity.

J- We need unity, simplification and bold system that will reduce the exploitation of the masses in the name of religion.

The list can go on. Hindu society must change its belief system and people should study the essential teaching of the Hindu faith through self-study. We have depended on fake or semi fake 'gurus' for a longtime. Ultimate Guru is within us. I believe it is time we, as the Hindu society wake up and face reality. Dharma is doing our duty and being kind to others. Our ancient faith tradition is as good as any other religion or any new denomination. Our ancient sages were wise and they taught moderation in life. Life is to live, learn and love. ■

About the Author

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24 Teachers of the Saint



By Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)

We are all life-long students, always observing others and learning from them. We try to accumulate knowledge through books and other sources as well. If we are true students we come to realize that we can learn not only from fellow humans but also from other creatures and elements of nature.

Once a Hindu saint named 24 teachers whom he regarded as his gurus. He learned the first lesson from the earth. We dig up the earth, walk upon it and light fires on it. The earth, however, does not swerve from its course. We learn from the earth that we should never become distracted from patience and love, and that we should dedicate our life in the service of others.

The second lesson was learned from air. Air is pure and odorless, and it blows on fragrant as well as foul-smelling objects without discrimination. Just as air takes on the fragrance or foul odor of its surroundings but then goes back to its naturality, we should live in the world but remain unaffected by joys and sorrows we experience through objects of the senses.

The third teacher was the sky. The sky sometimes takes different colors and hues. At times it becomes overcast, dusty or smoky. However, it truly retains its colorless self and remains untainted and unstained. We learn from the sky how to remain free from emotional reaction to objects and events.

The fourth teacher was fire. Fire burns everything. It produces warmth and light. The saint learnt how to absorb everything that life brings and how to turn it into a flame which enlightens his life and that of others.

The fifth teacher of the saint was the sun. The sun appears as many, when reflected by water in many pots. Likewise, the one true self manifests itself as

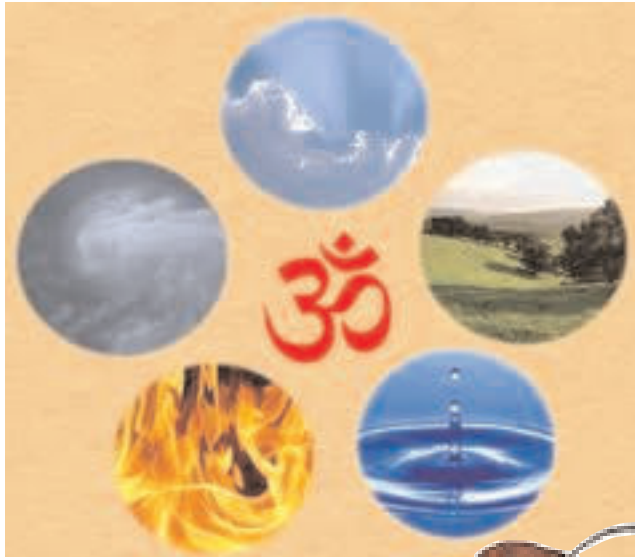
many selves of living beings. As the sun illuminates the many forms, the sage too illuminates the true nature of all things to the devotee.

The sixth teacher of the saint was a pigeon. Once a pair of pigeons lived together on a tree, bringing up their young ones with love. One day a hunter caught the young ones in a net. The mother pigeon returned to the tree with food for her children and saw their plight. Since she was unable to leave them, she leapt in the net to be with them. Sometime later, the male pigeon came along and unable to bear the separation from his family, he too jumped in the net and met his end. Reflecting on this, the saint realized that despite being born as an intelligent human, man is caught in the coils of possessiveness and brings about his own spiritual destruction. The self identifies with the material body and gets caught in the endless cycle of birth and death.

The saint learned the seventh lesson from a python which is very sluggish and fails to move briskly to catch its prey. The python lies in wait and devours whichever creature it comes across. The saint learned that man should refrain from running after material pleasures, and be content with whatever he gets.

The saint learned the eighth lesson from the ocean which maintains its level despite the number of overflowing rivers that empty into it. The ocean maintains its water level even when all the rivers dry up in the summer. The sage is like the ocean. He does not become elated by the joys of life, nor does he become depressed by sorrows. Just as the ocean never crosses its threshold, the wise one never forgets to abide by the highest standards of morality. Like the sea, the wise one is unconquerable and is not troubled by anything. Like the unfathomable ocean, the sage's true nature cannot be easily comprehended by anyone.

The ninth teacher of the saint was the moth which is so attracted towards fire that it jumps in and gets burnt by it. An indiscriminate individual, likewise,



becomes enticed by fleeting pleasures of the senses and gets caught in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

The elephant became the tenth teacher of the saint. A clever hunter makes a stuffed female elephant and the wild tusker mistakes it for a mate. When it approaches the potential mate, it is caught in the trap. So too, humans become trapped by infatuations due to many desires of the mind.

The ant was the eleventh teacher of the saint. The ant stores up foodstuff which it neither eats nor gives away to other creatures. Consequently, many creatures are tempted to plunder the ant. So too, a human being who hoards material treasures becomes victim of robbery and murder. The ant teaches a wonderful lesson to the seeker as well. Just as the ant works tirelessly without becoming discouraged by obstacles and setbacks, so too a seeker must seek God tirelessly.

The twelfth teacher of the saint was the fish which swallows the bait greedily and immediately gets caught on the hook. Man too meets his destruction by

cravings for delicious food. The sense of taste is extremely strong and it should be controlled by the seeker. However, the fish has a positive lesson to teach also. Just as the fish never leaves its home, so too the seeker should never lose sight of his true self.

There was a dancing girl named Pingala who was waiting anxiously for a client who would pay her very handsomely. She waited hours for him, until late into the night. When he did not show up, she thought, "How ignorant I have been to neglect the divine spirit within who is the nature of bliss, and to await a worldly man who only increases my lust and greed. I shall now meditate on God and attain immeasurable happiness." The saint learned from Pingala that a spiritual seeker should not be attracted by anything less than the realization of God and eternal happiness. The dancing girl thus became the thirteenth teacher of the saint.

The fourteenth teacher of the saint was an arrow maker who was completely engrossed in molding a sharp arrow. A royal pageant passed by but the arrow



maker did not see or hear anything. The saint learned from this man that single-minded contemplation on God eliminates trivial interests in the world.

A carefree child became the fifteenth teacher of the saint. A child knows neither honor nor dishonor. A child does not hold grudges or prejudices. He does not distinguish between what is theirs and what belongs to others. He does not expect happiness from external objects, people or places. The saint learned that the stage of enlightenment is exactly the same as that of the child.

The moon appears to wax and wane during the bright and dark fortnights, but in fact it remains ever the same. In this, it is like the spirit soul. While a man appears to pass through the stages of infancy, childhood, youth, maturity and old age, it is his body that changes while his real self remains unchanged. Having taught this truth, the moon became sixteenth teacher of the saint.

The honeybee became the seventeenth teacher of the saint. As a honeybee wanders from flower to flower drawing honey without harming the flowers, so should a spiritual aspirant gather knowledge from various scriptures and retain only the knowledge useful for spiritual practice.

The eighteenth teacher of the saint was the deer. Deer are extremely fond of music, and hunters use this weakness of the deer to trap and kill them. The saint learned from the deer that weakness for worldly attractions will make a spiritual seeker lose whatever progress he has made on the path.

One day the saint saw a bird of prey carrying away a dead rat. Seeing this, many birds such as crows and eagles attacked the bird, pecking on its side in an effort to knock off the prey. The bird wisely let its prey fall, and all the other birds rushed after it. Now the bird sighed in relief. From this the saint learned that anger, greed, hatred, pride and jealousy chase after a fellow who pursues worldly pleasures. As soon as he learns to conquer his worldly desires, he spares himself much unhappiness, and becomes at peace with himself.

Once the saint visited a maiden who was being visited by a family seeking her hand in marriage for their son. As the young girl's mother was away, she had to entertain the guests with refreshments. So, she started pounding food grains with a pestle. The glass bangles she was wearing started knocking against each other. The maiden thought that the guests might hear the sound and be unhappy for having caused her so much trouble. So she kept two bangles on each

hand and removed the rest. Even then, they were making a noise. So, she kept only one bangle on each hand and finished her task quietly. Seeing this, the saint understood that when a number of seekers live together, a lot of unwanted noise is created. When a spiritual aspirant is in solitude, he can carry out his practices efficiently. The maiden became the twentieth teacher of the saint.

The saint observed that a serpent does not build its own dwelling place; it simply lives in burrows dug by other creatures. In the same way, worldly people undergo many hardships in building a house for themselves but a monk does no such thing. People build monasteries and the monk lives in them. But he is just as likely to live in old temples, on a mountain top or in a cave. Just as a snake sheds its skin leaving it behind, so does the monk leave his body at the end of his life without being frightened by death. The serpent became the twenty-first teacher of the saint.

The spider became the twenty-second teacher of the saint. This creature weaves its web from thread in the form of a fluid. After some time, it gathers up the web into itself. God too reveals the entire creation out of Himself and in due course of time, withdraws it into Himself at the time of dissolution.

The saint recognized the caterpillar as his twenty-third teacher. The wasp carries its caterpillar and safely places it in its nest, then goes on buzzing about it. The young caterpillar hears the incessant buzzing of its mother and cannot think of anything else until it too grows up into a wasp. Similarly, a true disciple is so engrossed in the teachings of his guru that he cannot think of anyone other than him. Through constant contemplation on his great guru, the disciple too becomes great one day.

Water became the twenty-fourth teacher of the saint. It quenches everyone's thirst and sustains all creatures. While it renders such great service, it is never proud of itself. On the other hand, it humbly seeks the lowliest of places. The wise ones too should be benevolent to all creatures while remaining extremely humble. Just as the saint looked upon God's creation as his teacher, we too must be humble enough to learn from fellow humans, other creatures and elements of nature. ■

*Visit www.radhamadhavsociety.org
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The Holy Mantra: Gaayatri

By Dr. Kishna M Gutala

(Summary of a talk at ICC Cupertino, 21st March 2016)

1. Introduction

Mantra is a Sanskrit poetic format, short or long, conveying deep meaning, or even just an invocation. What does a Mantra mean? It has been stated:

"Mananaat TraayatayIti Mantra"

Mantra is that which, when we delve deep into, and reflect upon it, it protects us". It directs us in the right way, and illumines the mind. It envelopes the one who recites, from head to toe, and builds up around one an ethereal shield as it were.

In this vast creation, it is humans alone that can think and reflect. Our founding father is 'Manu', which means one who can 'manutay' i.e., think and imagine (do 'mananam'). Being descendants of Manu, we are called 'manuja' and also 'maanava'. The equipment we have for such 'mananam'(reflection) is our mind ('manas').It can do so from the sphere of material and mundane, to that of highly spiritual, a vast potential of incredible range. God's most precious gift to humans. However, its weak and strong points are, it can entangle one with endless material desires and suffocate, or, can also enlighten one, leading to Liberation. It is said:

"Manasyva Manushyaa-naam Kaaranam Bandha
Moakshayeh",

meaning 'it is mind alone that is the cause of either bondage or Liberation'. It would be good if it operates in the right direction, being able to comprehend Truth and pursue towards it. But unfortunately, mostly it does not do so, being 'asamskrita' i.e., unrefined. It has mainly two defects. Either it cannot comprehend at all, or, may comprehend wrongly, mistaking one for the other. These two 'gunas' (qualities) are called 'Tamoeguna' and 'Rajoeguna'. The former makes one lazy and dull, and the latter resulting in distraction and diversion. Such minds need purification, to make them 'Saatvik' i.e., acquire the desirable 'guna'. Such a refinement is possible thru the medium of 'Mantra'.

All Mantras that we normally chant, are from the 'Vedas', the most ancient literature of the world, that thrived in 'Aaryaavarta' (much later called 'India'), believed to be a few millennia prior to Christian era. Each Veda has four sections: Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishad. The Upanishad that comes in



the end, is called 'Vedanta', that which comes at the end of the Veda. All Upanishads belong to some Veda or other. All the Mantras that are frequently recited, have for their source either an Upanishad, or some other portion of some Veda or other. For example:

'Maatru Devo Bhava Pitru Devo Bhava.'

Taittireeya Upanishad.

'Asatoama Sudgamayaa...'

Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad.

'Sahanaa Vavatu Sahanou Bhunaktu...'

Taittireeya Upanishad.

'Poorna Madaha Poorna Midam...'

Brihadaraanyaka Upanishad.

'Gaayatri Mantra'

Rig Veda.

'Triambakam Yajaamaheh Sugandhim...'

Rig Veda.



There are innumerable '*Japa Mantras* (recited during daily worship) from one to twenty four syllables, from 'Om' to '*Gaayatri*'. To name a few:

Panchaakshaari: Namassivaaya

Ashtaakshari: Om Namō Narayanaaya

Dwaa dasaakshari: Om Namō Bhagavateh

Vaasudevaaya etc.

The four objectives of life for which a devotee aspires, called '*Purusharthas*', are: *Artha* and *Kaama* (wealth and desire-fulfillment), and, *Dharma* and *Moaksha* (religious and spiritual objectives). The former two are designated '*Aihika*', and the latter two '*Aamushmika*'. Many of the *Mantras* are of the *Aihika* category, but the *Gaayatri Mantra* fulfills both. Hence it is said.

'Na Gaayatriyaa Paroe Mantra

Na Maatuhu Paradaivatam'

(No other Mantra superior to Gaayatri, no other Goddess other than mother'.)

In general, every *Mantra* has some essential characteristics, such as: **1.** Having a specific Deity (*Devata*), **2.** A particular *Rishi*, **3.** A characteristic meter (**Chhandas**), **4.** A *Sakti* (Power, Capability), and **5.** A *Siddhi* (Fulfilment). For the *Gaayatri Mantra*, the Deity is '*Savita*' (Sun-God). The *Rishi*, who first intuitively had a comprehensive vision of the *Mantra*, to reveal it to the others, is *Viswamitra* (meaning 'friend of the universe'). The meter format is '*Gaayatri*' meter itself. The *Sakti* is, mental purification. The *Siddhi* is liberation itself (*Moaksha*), from the bondage of '*samsaara*'.

The meaning of the word '*Gaayatri*' is:

'Gaayati TraayatehIti Gaayatri'.

'That which descends singing, and protects us'. The full *Gaayatri Mantra* has three components: **1.** The facial component (called '*Vyaahriti*'), **2.** The core component (*Mantra Garbha*), to be recited and meditated upon, and, **3.** The concluding *Siroe Mantra*.

Facial component:

Om Bhoo, Om Bhuvaha, Om Suvaha, Om Mahaha,

Om Janaha, Om Tapaha, Om Satyam".

However this, for recitation, has been condensed to "*Om Bhoor Bhu Vassuvaha*".

The Core component (Mantra Garbha):

"Tut Savitur Varenyam

Bhargoe Devasya Dheemahi

Dhiyoe Yoanaha Prachodayaat".

The conclusive (Siroe) component:

"Om Aapoe Jyoati Rasoamritam

Brahma Bhoor Bhu Vassuvaroam"

(Note that the full *Mantra* begins and ends with 'Om'.

So also are most of the *Mantras*).

In reciting these *Mantras*, there is a specific style, a specific intonation, a musical format, in reciting them. It is all the more incumbent, a must, in the case of the *Gaayatri Mantra*. This should be recited in the format of three tones: upper, middle and lower. The upper and lower tones are indicated by bars above and below the respective *aksharas* (alphabets).

The *Gaayatri Mantra* (the condensed form of the facial component i.e.,'

Om Bhoor Bhu Vassuvaha'

plus the core component) is recited for 108 times, using a '*Japa Maala*' (rosary) for the count. Under inevitable time constraints, it could be reduced to half that number, or a minimum of at least eighteen times.

Explanation of the Gaayatri Mantra:

At this stage, a classification could be considered for three categories of aspirants, depending on their comprehensive ability and earlier exposure.

1: Not so receptive, as also reluctant to persevere in knowing the deeper meaning. Content with the obvious external meaning, '*Baahyaardha*', and prone to plunge into mechanical recitation and ritual. This category is termed as '*AdhiBhoutika*'.

2: Those who would approach a Preceptor, and strive with dedication and concentration, to know the deeper meaning, '*Antaraardha*'. This category is termed as '*Aadhyaatmika*'.

3: Those, by virtue of their learning and background, can mostly grasp on their own, with self-study and reflection, and persevere till knowing the core meaning, the very '*Paramaardha*'. This group is termed '*Adhi Dyvika*'. Those with '*Kusaagra Buddhi*' i.e., super sharp intellect.

Meanings under the three categories will now be briefly given.

2. Baahyaardha (AdhiBhoutika Meaning)

(a) The Facial Component:

'Om Bhoo Om Bhuvaha Om Suvaha Om Mahaha

Om Janaha Om Tapaha Om Satyam'.

The first five are the '*Pancha Bhootas*', the five basic elements, viz., earth, water, fire or effulgence, wind and the sky (ether). The sixth '*Tapaha*' is 'reflection' upon the seventh i.e., '*Satyam*' (Truth). Om is all these. This sequence is the reverse gear from Creation to the Creator, from the grossest to the Subtlest, from the end product to the very Basic Source, the Eternal Truth, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sut-Chit-Ananda*).

The implication is, the Supreme Reality, during Its '*Avaroahana*' i.e., 'Descent', through Its own '*Maaya Sakti*' seemed to have transformed Itself, through all



these stages, into this vexatious cauldron of 'Samsaara'. Hence, it is incumbent on us that we have to 'right about turn', and persevere in the 'Aarohana' (Ascent), to the Original Divine State, towards which, Om is beckoning us. Hence we have to meditate upon Om. This is tantamount to meditation upon the *Gaayatri Mantra* itself. In a way, it can be said that the condensed form of *Gaayatri Mantra* is Om, and, the expanded, projected version of Om is the *Gaayatri Mantra*. To put it picturesquely, if all the *Vedic Japa Mantras* were to be arranged in a circle, beginning with the smallest one, the single-syllable 'Om', and proceeding around the circle with Mantras of gradually increasing syllables, we can see that, by the time we reach the end of the circle, with the *Gaayatri Mantra* of maximum syllables (twenty four), it coincides with the starting point 'Om'! Thus, one is identical with the other. Thus, Om is symbolic of the Supreme Divinity. This is what is implied in Bhagavad Geeta wherein it is enunciated that

"Om Ith Ekaaksharam Brahma".

Here, the word 'Brahma' is not the One of Trinity (Brahma-Vishnu-Maheswara), but the 'Brahmam', the Supreme Omnipresent Eternal Truth.

Amplification of 'Om':

The Source of one interpretation is 'Soahum'. This is

'SoAham', meaning, 'That Iam'. This is the fundamental Concept of all Upanishads, and their quintessence Bhagavad Geeta. To eradicate all ambiguity, the two statements are: 'That I am' and 'I am That' (Aham Brahmaasmi), which emphasize the total identity of both, the same implied in Bhagavad Geeta which says "Whoso discerns the Me in all, and all in Me".

Coming back to the point, if one repeats 'Soahum' faster and faster, it seems to end up with 'Om'! Looking from another angle, 'Om' is said to consist of three alphabets 'AUM'. The first of them is the sound that emanates when we open the mouth. The last one 'M' is the sound heard when we close the mouth. This is said to be symbolic of 'Srishti - Sthiti - Laya' i.e., Creation, Sustenance, and Dissolution, that form a trinity. Actually, 'Om' is said to represent many a trinity such as: 'Avasthaha Traya' (wakefulness, dream and deep-sleep), 'Tri Gunas' (*satwa, rajas and tamas*), 'Tri-Roopas' (*Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram*), 'Tri-Swaroopas' (*Jeeva, Jagat and Eeswara*), and 'Tri-Kaala' (past, present and future). Om is all these. In the sound of bells, is the echo of Om. The waves of Om spread out in ever-widening circles, enveloping everything. All is Om.

(b)The Core Component (Mantra Garbha):

In this Component, the all-embracing 'Om' is represented, symbolized by the key word 'Savita'

meaning, that which delivers (causes birth of) or creates. In this "Adhi-Bhoutika (Baahyaardha)" interpretation, this 'Savita' is the Sun-God, easily comprehensible by our senses, and not abstract. Our lives are so dependant on Sun. We are blessed with His radiance, externally and internally. The warmth in our body is caused by Him. Then, by interaction with earth and water, He is making available our food, and nurturing us. In every way Sun, through His rays (*bhargo*), is safeguarding and protecting us. One thing, when we say 'Savita', it is not the mere physical globe of Sun, but the 'Deva' the latent Divinity within. This Core Component dwells upon this Savita:

" Tut SaviturVarenyam

Bhargoe Devasya Dheemahi

Dhiyoe Yoanaha Prachodayaath "

Offering our salutations to, and meditating upon that 'Savita' is the core content of this Mantra Garbha, at the physical level. 'Varenyam Bhargoe' refers to the Benevolent Luminescence of the rays of Sun-God, which are 'Devasya' i.e., Divine. If we meditate upon That, and fill our mind with That, then the fruit of labor would be ' Dhiyoe Yoanaha Prachodayaath'. Our minds and intellects would be activated, propelled and enlivened.

(c) The Siroe Mantra Component:

Aapoe Jyoati Rasoamritam

Brahma Bhoor Bhu Vassuvaha Om "

This is in essence a re-affirmation of the Facial Component which enunciates that all is indeed 'Om'.

2. Antaraardhha (Aadhyaatmika Meaning)

In this explanation, we have to orient our reflection so that 'Savita' gets linked to our 'inner being', our 'inner faculty' (*Aadhyaatmika*), rather than an external entity like Sun God. Further reflection on the Mantra would lead to our linking 'Savita' to our own Intellect which alone hassel f-awareness as its very nature, and supplies the same to sense organs. That indeed is 'Devasya'. It transmits 'Dhiyaha', thought vibrations, which however are of three types, the three 'guna-s' (saatwik, rajasik and tamasik). The 'Varenyam Bhargaha' of the Mantra, are the soothing and refined saatwik thoughts, which we must 'Dheemahi' i.e., meditate upon, and fill our minds with. That would 'prachodayaath' (discard, drive away) the undesirable *rajasik* and *tamasik* 'Dheeyaha', and lead us on the right path. (Note that the meaning of the word 'prachodayaath' has totally changed here). This alone is the basic difference from the previous interpretation. The rest is about the same.

3. Paramaardhha (Adhi-Dyvika Meaning)

In the final analysis at the deepest level, our sole aim

should be how to break the shackles of this problematic 'Samsaara'. Thinking deeper, we would realize that Intellect also is not by itself self-luminous, but a Higher Agency imparts the illumination to it, just as the electric current does to the filaments of the bulbs. The purpose of creation is to provide a means to help us realize that, all 'this' (what we observe) is nothing but 'That', the 'Tut' the Divine Principle. The crux of the Upanishadic Wisdom is, the Supreme Divine Consciousness alone exists, and all that is observed is merely Its own Expression (*Vibhooti*), Its own 'Projection'. It transformed Itself into all 'this'. Thus, at this level of reflection of the *Gaayatri Mantra*, the 'Savituhu Devasya', is the Divine Awareness Itself which is the 'Varenyam Bhargaha' of the Mantra. That 'Tut' is designated as 'Sut-Chit-Saamaanya', the 'Generalized Existence-Consciousness', unseen within the cloak of the 'Sut-Chit-Viseshas' (the ever-changing qualities, attributes, 'naamaroopas' i.e., names and forms, ideas and things, the magic oven by the 'Maaya Sakti' the Dynamic Aspect of the Supreme Self. It is the radiance of that *Sut-Chit-Saamaanya*, which we must 'Dheemahi' i.e., meditate upon, and fill our minds with, and, 'prachodayaath' i.e., totally dispel our obsession with *Sut-Chit-Viseshas*, to realize the life's supreme objective of Liberation.

Harihi Om

Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi!

About the Author

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Source: Discourses of Advaita Siroamani Late Sri.

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