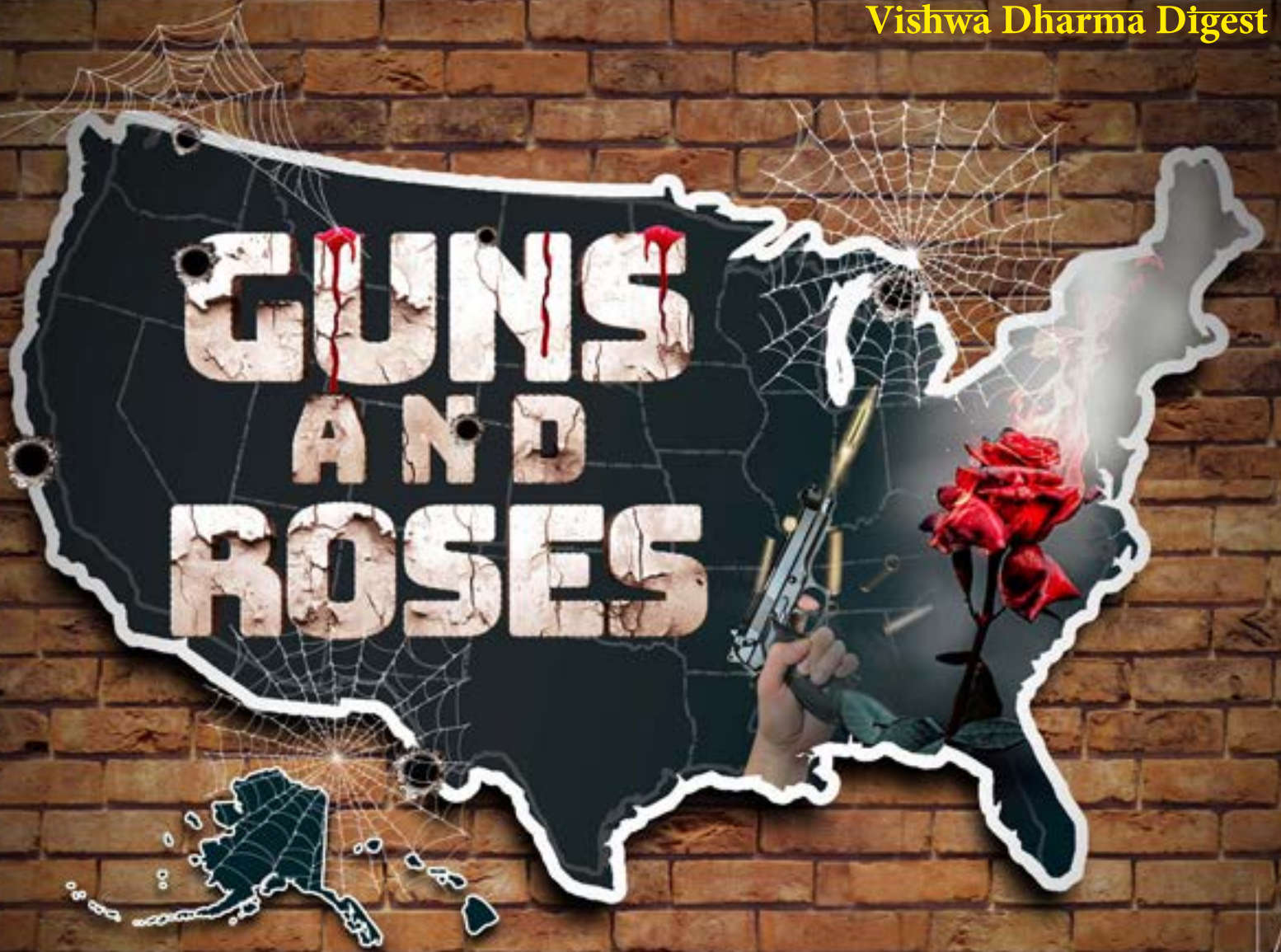




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HINDU VISHWA

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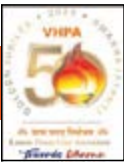
Anjeebhen Pandya
(1949-2021)

Anjeebhen's life was dedicated to the cause of Hindu Dharma. She exemplified selfless service. She was an organizer and leader par excellence. To keep her memory alive, we are announcing scholarships to deserving women at the Hindu University of America (HUA) and Emerging Hindu Women Leadership Internships for high school and college students.

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मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।
मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥

- श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 9.4

mayā tatam idaṁ sarvaṁ jagad avyakta-mūrtinā
mat-ssthāni sarva-bhūtāni na chāhaṁ teṣhvavasthitaḥ

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

- Bhagvad Gita, 9.4

ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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

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A TURNING POINT FOR HINDU AMERICANS

Trump's strong stance on global issues such as Islamic extremism and support for the Jews and Hindus, the biggest victims of global terror factory, aligns closely with the geopolitical priorities of the Hindu diaspora. While Trump's leadership is far from flawless, his consonance with the issues central to Hindus has solidified this historic shift.

The 2024 U.S. presidential election, culminating in Donald Trump's victory, marks a profound shift of preference for the Hindu Americans and a broader global implication for the US international relations. The campaign and its outcome shed light on critical issues, including political, cultural, and strategic dynamics relevant to Hindus worldwide.

The rise of proud Hindu leaders like Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Usha Vance in the Republican power structure signaled a welcome shift and openness in Republican Party. These leaders articulate civilizational values while countering the "woke" anti-family narratives that clash with Hindu traditions of familial responsibility and meritocracy. Kamala Harris, despite her Indian heritage through her mother, has often distanced herself from Hindu identity, identifying primarily with her Black and Christian roots. Trump openly acknowledged the challenges faced by Hindus globally, including strong statements condemning attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Harris, meanwhile, remained silent on such issues. Hindu Americans, recognizing this disparity, overwhelmingly supported Trump, with some reports stating 70% voting in his favor, a record-breaking shift from traditional Democratic support.

The farcical BAPS temple raids in New Jersey and California's SB403 caste bill subterfuge targeting Hindus by the far left and Islamists who have infiltrated the Democratic Party alienated the Hindu community from the Democrats. Further, policies like fake DEI-driven quotas have undermined meritocracy, disproportionately impacting high-achieving Hindu students and professionals.

Trump's strong stance on global issues such as Islamic

extremism and support for the Jews and Hindus, the biggest victims of global terror factory, aligns closely with the geopolitical priorities of the Hindu diaspora. While Trump's leadership is far from flawless, his consonance with the issues central to Hindus has solidified this historic shift.

Despite the strategic alignment, the Trump coalition also harbors elements that are inimical to Hindu Americans. The resurgence of right-wing white supremacist movements, emboldened under his leadership, poses a threat to Hindus. These groups often conflate non-Christian, non-white immigrants with threats to their flawed vision of American identity, fostering hostility that has historically manifested acts of violence and discrimination. In addition, the growing influence of Christian fundamentalists within Trump's base raises concerns about targeted proselytization efforts and legislation that undermines the pluralistic ethos cherished by Hindus and enshrined in the US Constitution. For instance, aggressive conversion campaigns and anti-Hindu rhetoric often find support in these circles posing a threat to the Hindus.

The current shift towards Trump brings both opportunities and risks. We should pursue the incoming administration to advance our priorities, and parallelly reason with the Democrats to shed their hostility towards Hindu interests. While leveraging alliances for strategic gains, we must continue to assert independent Hindu identity and safeguard our interests in an ever-evolving political landscape. The US election outcome could be reversed in the future so we must always focus on Hindu interests and community we serve, and not be merely reduced to aligning with any political party. ■

Chaturvedi, who expertly led the audience through the entire program.

The first item was a beautiful bhajan sung to perfection by Aupsara Banik. Aupsara is a 13-year-old Hindu from Bangla Desh, who has been learning Hindustani and Western Classical music since the age of 4. Even at this young age, she donates all she earns via her singing to charity. Her beautiful rendition of “Sukh ke sab saathi” moved everyone to tears.

Geetanjali then introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Bhanumati Narasimhan. Bhanu di, as she is affectionately called, is the Chairperson of Women’s Welfare and Childcare programs of the Art of Living, a not-for-profit, educational and humanitarian NGO. She has deep roots in spirituality and a broad vision for service to humanity. For over three decades she has been committed to bringing a positive social transformation with a focus on education, environment and women empowerment.

She has written a book on “Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love”. In this book, Bhanumathi ji shows us the world through the eyes of Sita Mata.

Bhanu ji talked about Sita, her character, and her deep influence on the Hindu psyche over the ages. Drawing from her book, she talked about Sita’s strength of character, her beauty, serenity, sensitivity, ethereal but so approachable. She talked about seeing beyond the events of Ramayan, to understand her state of mind, which will give one a different perspective and understanding into the character that is Sita. Raised as a princess, she was able to manage all of life’s challenges with such ease, from life in the forest to being a single mother and raising twins in the ashram, always loving, never bitter about that fate had been doled out to her.

The keynote speech set the stage for the panel discussion. The first two panelists were the husband-wife team of Dr. Archana Shyamsundar and Karthik Shyamsundar.

Karthik is a Distinguished Engineer/Fellow at a major internet company and also serves as adjunct faculty at Johns Hopkins University, specializing in Big Data, Cloud, and AI.

Beyond his professional life, Karthik is deeply committed to Hindu Dharma. He actively participates in the Valley Interfaith Council in Winchester, VA. As a long-time Bal Vihar teacher, he also leads a Gita study group.

Archana is an accomplished nephrologist who has been practicing in Winchester, VA, for two decades. She completed her medical education at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, and her fellowship in Nephrology at the George Washington University in Washington DC. Archana is trained in Indian classical dance and has performed at

Glorious Women in Rāmāyaṇa

Dr. Archana Shyamsunder
and
Karthik Shyamsunder

Lessons Learned from Anasūyā

- Positive and supportive interaction
- Open appreciation
- Sharing relevant knowledge
- Thoughtfulness



Verse 2.118.18

here are divine gifts; garland clothes ornaments
idam divyam varam mālyam vastram abharaṇāni ca |
anga rāgam ca vaiidehi mahā arham anulepanam ||
perfume Oh Sita! a rare cream

इदम् दिव्यम् वरम् माल्यम् वस्त्रम् आभरणानि च |
अन्गा रागम् च वैदेहि महा अर्हम् अनुलेपनम् ||

Word by word meaning:

siite = O; Seetha; vaiidehi = the daughter of Videha kingdom!; idam = here are; divyam = divine; varam = gifts; maalyam = a garland; vastram = apparel; abharaNaanicha = jewels; aNga raagamcha = scented cosmetic; mahaarham = and a rare; anulepanamcha = cream; idam = these are all; dattam = given;

Translation:

“O, Seetha, the daughter of Videha kingdom! Here are divine gifts: a garland, an apparel, jewels, a scented cosmetic and rare body-cream.”

various charitable events.

Karthik first talked about the Ramayan, that it is not mythology, which is a term that comes from the root mithya (false), but that it is an “Itihaas” or history, a word that means “this is indeed how it happened.”

Choosing a few very appropriate shlokas from the Valmiki Ramayan, he and Archana led the audience

chat box which the panelists answered, further increasing the knowledge of all watching.

Comments from the audience were very complimentary. Some comments:

“I learned so much about these humble yet powerful women in Ramayan.

“Such a beautiful depiction of these amazing women. I had never looked at them in this light.”

“Awesome descriptions.”

“This has been such an enlightening program.”

Jaya Asthana proposed the vote of thanks and closed the event with a short prayer.

Hindu Women’s Network (HWN) gives a voice to

the Hindu women’s perspective on contemporary issues affecting all women. HWN develops programs for holistic physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. HWN’s goal is to form a vibrant network of Hindu women to promote collaboration and communication at local, national, and international levels.

For more information or to start a chapter of Hindu Women’s Network in your area, please visit <https://www.hwnusa.org>.

If you missed the program, the video is available at the link below:

<https://youtu.be/l9PvyFtkW8U> ■

Third Annual 5k Walk Organized in Atlanta by HWN



The third annual 5K walk organized by the Hindu Women’s Network (HWN) was held on October 20th this year. As in previous years, the venue was Webb Bridge Park in Alpharetta Georgia. This is part of the activities that The Atlanta Chapter organizes to celebrate Hindu Heritage Month. The walk this year was to raise funds for the Drake House a women and children’s shelter

in Georgia.

The brisk fall day with beautiful blue skies and a chill in the air provided the perfect backdrop for walkers and runners of all ages. Teenagers, and adults participated in the event with some early birds choosing to start their morning running through the trail. The trail though unpaved is an easy one that is laid in a 1.1 mile loop around some small



bodies of water and woods. Deer have been known to make their presence felt especially early in the day.

The first runners started off the event at 8 AM and the whole event wrapped up by 11:30 AM. Volunteers had marked the track very clearly and were on hand guiding those who were not familiar with the trail. It was great fun as participants banded into groups and motivated each other to complete the 5K with three loops around the trail.

Volunteers had prepared a hot breakfast and chai for all, with cereal bar, fruits and water for those who chose to grab them to go. Each registered participant got a T-Shirt which was designed specifically for this year.

The local chapter will donate half the money raised to Drake House and use the rest to defray the expenses. This outreach helps those who are vested in donating to causes that benefit the local community to participate and become part of the local chapter.

Park visitors who were curious stopped by to talk to volunteers about the activities we undertake and to learn more about the organization. A number of them expressed interest in joining future events and provided their contact information.

The walk achieved its purpose of fundraising but more than that it brought visibility to newer people in the area who had not heard about HWN and generated interest which will translate into more outreach and participation from the local community.

We would like to recognize the local chapter volunteers for their dedicated support and tireless efforts to make this event happen year over year as we gain momentum. We have come a long way, but we also have a long way to go to make this event a larger and more popular one. ■

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) Elects New President

Her journey with VHPA began in 2016 when she became a VHPA Governing Council member, and in 2018 she accepted the responsibility of Joint General Secretary.

On Dec 11th 2024, VHPA elected Smt.(Mrs.) Tejal Shah from NJ as its new President effective Jan 1st 2025.

Tejal ji holds an Electrical Engineering degree from Sardar Patel University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat and Master in Computer Science from Stevens Institute of Technologies, NJ.

She worked as a President of Indian Student Association @ Stevens Inst. of Technology in 1995-96. But that was just the start of her volunteer work in the USA. Her decades long list of community service includes working for various social, cultural, educational and spiritual institutions like Hindu Community Center, Garfield NJ, Anoopam Mission PA to name a few.

Her journey with VHPA began in 2016 when she became a VHPA Governing Council member, and in 2018 she accepted the responsibility of Joint General Secretary. In 2022,

she took the responsibility of the Hindu Mandir Empowerment Council (HMEC) Convener. She successfully organized HMEC national conferences in 2022, 2023 and 2024 bringing together around 200 attendees from various Mandirs and other Hindu organizations to network, discuss and collaborate to meet common challenges and discover opportunities for sustaining and serving Dharma in North America and Caribbean. In the first half of 2023, she was part of the VHPA traveling team for Ram Rath Yatra, a pilgrimage through 850+ Mandirs across all states of the USA.

Professionally, she began as an Asst. Lecturer in her early years immediately after graduation in her school. She worked in IBM for 23 years and continued working in various positions after retiring from IBM and currently works as a Business and Service Delivery Manager in another company.



Smt.(Mrs.) Tejal Shah

More importantly, Tejal ji attributes all her achievements in life to the grace of her Spiritual Guru (Master) Brhamlin Mahrshi Punitachari Ji Maharaj (Girnar Sadhna Ashram, Junagadh, Gujrat).

She lives with her entrepreneur husband and the family in NJ and credits them for their strong support for pursuing her passion of serving Hindu Community in the USA. ■

Guns & Roses

By Sarika Jaswani

Gun violence affects every person in America, but the weight of this crisis is not felt equally across demographic groups. Understanding how gun violence affects historically marginalized communities is critical to developing data-driven and culturally competent interventions and policy solutions.

Although preventable, gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States, costing the country approximately \$557 billion per year and New York approximately \$11.4 billion per year. According to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) 2022 data, gun violence is the leading cause of death in the US.

Gun violence affects every person in America, but the weight of this crisis is not felt equally across demographic groups. Understanding how gun violence affects historically marginalized communities is critical to developing data-driven and culturally competent interventions and policy solutions.

At 5'3" I am a thorn sized imp between the 10' giants that stood tall in my childhood garden. Not yet urbanized, my suburban yard of the 90s was not fenced but plotted in with barbed wires. The rose faced blooming giants would unwaveringly put up a show in red, yellow, orange, pink colors all throughout the year despite everyone's envy for our verdant foliage. In the early hours, young moonlighters from our neighborhood would brave the thorns and mug the giants of their beautiful bounty. Unbeknownst to the culling, the roses bloomed in gratitude to their beloved gardener-My Maa.

My green thumb mother would tend to them every week and would wear the blooms in her luscious, long hair.



As a matter of fact, family and friends fondly share the memory of a fierce math teacher who matched the color of roses to her saree when she adorned them on her way to school. In between the steady crop of roses in our garden, seasons and trends were rapidly changing.

Besides the political shift during the 70s and 80s in India, an average household was catalytic for a transition on

many levels. A stage was set for women to step out of gender specific roles and establish themselves in mainstream showmanship of a white-collar jobs. Indira Gandhi became the first and the only female Prime Minister of India. A time wherein women set a piece by not giving up on her role as a caregiver but adding on a role as a breadwinner of the family.

It is a commonly observed fact that significant changes throw you out of comfort zone, challenge our self-perception and belief systems. Momentous changes put you on guard and cause anxiety and stress. And with challenges there comes the strength to face them. My maiden home is a renaissance trip to some such days in the sun, literally and figuratively. Where weekdays were wrapped tight in schedules and weekends were spread out on white sheets on terrace with sun-dried homemade delicacies. My matriarch brought work-life balance effortlessly. It was almost magical. Each corner of our home seemed endowed with an omnipotence of colors, omnipresence of fragrances and

“The human hand is a marvel of nature. No other creature on Earth, not even our closest primate relatives has hands structured quite like ours, capable of such precise grasping and manipulation”. The sensory motor cortex, a slice of brain dedicated to sensing and moving distinct parts of the body, is topologically divided. About a third of the cortex is dedicated to moving the face, another third to everything below the neck, and the last third is dedicated solely to the movement and control of fingers and hands. If the mapping of our brains is any indication, hands are remarkably important. Infact fine motor activities have been proven to be impactful on how we think or feel.

Mental health check as a practice early on, is imperative in this day and age. Children today are exposed to violence through social media, video games, and movies, which wasn't the case in antiquity. There is an impact of climate change, wars, and senseless violence on their world view. Capping it off are the incidences of gun violence - living with that fear or cascade of collective traumas if exposed to gun violence are an immediate threat for their innocent minds. School shootings are a uniquely American epidemic. Each day 12 children die from gun violence in America.

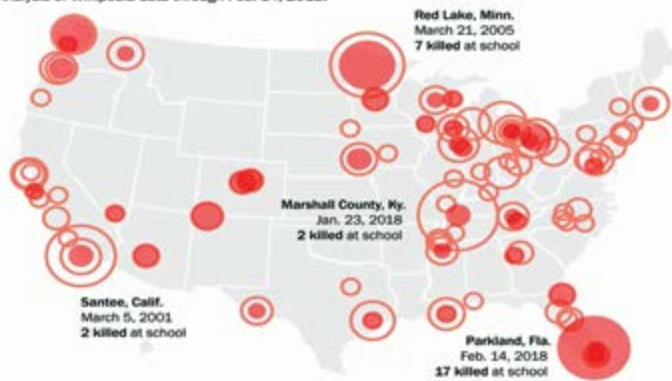
Guns are leading cause of death among American children and teens. 1 out of 10-gun deaths are in the age range of 19 or younger. Since the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, more than 338,000 students in USA have experienced gun violence at school. An estimated 4.6 million children live in a home where at least 1 gun is kept locked and loaded. Children living in urban and rural areas are more likely to die due to gun violence. About 1 out of 5 LGPTQ+ youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. Children of color are far more likely to experience campus gun violence. The majority of individuals diagnosed with mental illness do not engage in gun violence. 90% of teenagers killed in an act of dating violence were girls. 88% of school shooters had at least one social media account and 76% posted disturbing content on guns and messages. 72% of shooters had at least one reported adverse childhood experience and 60% reported being bullied in person or online.

School shootings are events that can shatter an entire community and leave generations of students and adults devastated. When we zero down on the rationality of the violence it comes down to the core human psyche – the need for validation.

Validation is critical to human psychology because it meet one of our fundamental, social, and emotional needs: feeling understood, accepted and valued. The key psychological benefits observed in children when their

Shootings at high schools since 2000

Analysis of Wikipedia data through Feb. 14, 2018.



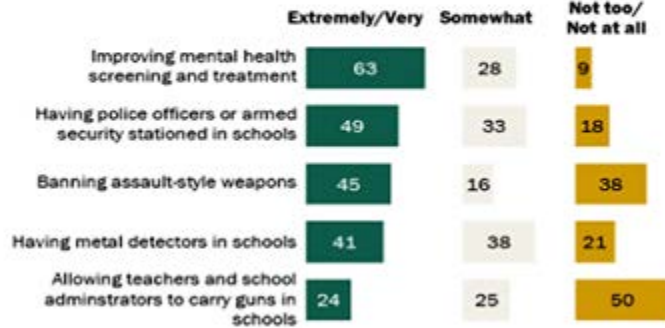
omniscience of light. In the center of it all was my mother an incarnation of Maa Durga in all her glory with her beautiful, jeweled attire and her multitasking, ostensible ten hands. Her busy hands brought much composure and calmness to her rumpus routine. Her mystical aura was and still is awe-inspiring after her passing.

What was true then is verifiable even today. Furthering the concept on a fascinating world of mental health and reducing stressors in everyday life, The New York Times article from March 28, 2024, elaborates on the hands-on activities like writing, gardening, and knitting and their direct correlation in improving your cognition and mood. Less so for typing, tapping or perpetual hours of scrolling.



63% of American parents say improving mental health screening and treatment would be a very or extremely effective way to prevent school shootings

% of U.S. parents saying each of the following would be ___ effective at preventing school shootings



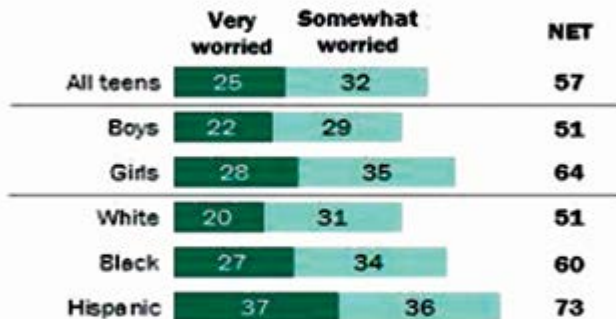
Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. parents conducted Sept. 20-Oct. 2, 2022.

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feelings, thoughts and experiences are acknowledged is the reduction in anxiety and enhanced sense of well-being. It increases the sense of self-worth and self-esteem, fosters trust and encourages open communication. Engagement with others leads to introspection and self-reflection brings personal growth. Better connection mitigates feelings of loneliness which inculcate feelings of empathy. In essence, validation provides psychological nourishment

Majority of U.S. teens worry a shooting could happen at their school

% of teens saying they are ___ about the possibility of a shooting happening at their school



Note: Whites and blacks include only single-race non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to net total due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 conducted March 7-April 12, 2018.

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that strengthens resilience, reinforces social bonds, and promotes mental health.

In the wake of the deadly school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas school of Parkland Florida on February 14th, 2018, there was an understandable focus on school safety. However, the gridlock in American governance on effective laws against gun violence stems from combination of partisan polarization, interest group influence, and legislative processes. The result is meaningful reforms stall or fail despite recurring incidences of gun violence and we are left fumbling to tackle with the unfaced monster of a problem.

Reflecting back on the 90s, the simpler times when I studied in an all-girls only school. The only wounding we had were the array of subjects, including stem courses, regional and international languages, and sports, we were also introduced to arts, crafts and moral sciences as grade level courses. These were compulsory yearlong courses with weighted tests and scores. Resentments ran high as we struggled to purl the yarn on the knitting needles for crafting in the finals. But in hindsight the hands-on subjects were weaving our brains for bouncebackability. Each semester would also include an expedition to weed the fields of our school grounds. At the dining table the subject would become a light banter with our parents of how the nuns at our convent are saving money for lawn care by making us work in the schoolyard. However, they had the foresight to weed out the anomalies that invariably grew alongside our developing brains.

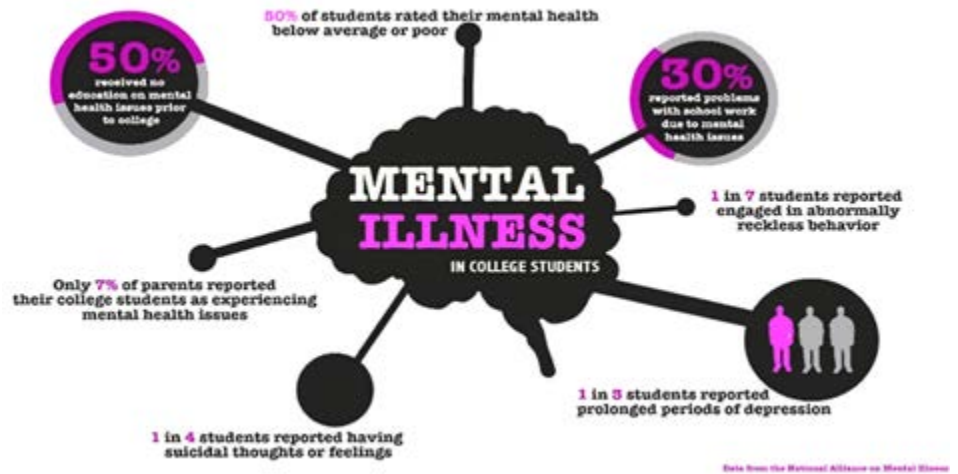
Hands-on activities have numerous psychological benefits by engaging our mind and body with achievable purposes. The repetitive focused actions help shift attention away from stressors, allowing the mind to relax. Focusing on the present moment, reduces anxiety and promote a state of calm. Completing a craft project, big or small, provides a sense of achievement. The boost in self-esteem helps reinforce self-worth and can counteract negative feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt. The concentration and attention to detail encourages mindfulness, supporting mental clarity. Crafting allows us to express the inner world in a tangible form. This self-expressor is especially helpful for individuals who might struggle to communicate their thoughts and feelings verbally so they can channel their emotions into their creations. Crafting is often a communal activity. Shared activities foster a sense of belonging and community.

Recently though, The President's Committee on Arts and Humanities in America published a report stating that due to budget constraints and an emphasis on high stakes

testing and sports, arts instruction in school is on a downward trend since the last decade. When my child enrolled in AP music in 2021 the curriculum had shifted to a virtual portal due to fewer enrollments and lack of funding.

Creative arts are integral when utilized in supporting mental health in a variety of ways. Art therapy involves various integrative techniques to captivate the soul, body, and mind in ways verbal expression is ineffective. Researchers have used art intervention to facilitate identity development in teens recovering from mental health conditions or suffering from isolation. However, I am far from suggesting that art is the only solution for children with mental health issues.

Many Americans live with mental illness. Indeed, one in five Americans have a diagnosis of mental illness. Violence has many contributing factors, and mental illness alone is very rarely the cause. Only 4% of violence in United States can be solely contributed to mental illness. Policies that focus on a mental health diagnosis will not stop gun violence. Instead focusing on evidence based behavioral risk factors, past violent behavior, domestic violence, substance use, risk factors related to life experiences, personality and identity, all need to be considered to tackle this pluridimensional brobdingnagian problem.



‘Busy hand, Quiet mind’ is a legacy my mother left when she took heavenly aboard during the Covid Pandemic. The famous lyrics from ‘Guns n Roses’ aptly end quote: -
 “I know it’s hard to keep an open heart.

When even friends seem out to harm you
 But if you could heal a broken heart
 Wouldn’t time be out to charm you?” ■

About the Authors



Doctor by profession. **Sarika Jaswani** is a Crochet Artist, Art Tutor, Writer of Children's Stories. A philanthropist at heart she runs a non-profit by selling her fiber art on Etsy. A published poet who passionately reads & writes poetry. An art Lover, bird lover, she's a dreamer and blogger. Her poetry has been received well by various online literary magazines and anthologies.

misinformation. Positive deeds reflect upon others, which both positively influence the world and oneself.

Dharma is a pillar of Sanatana Dharma and is a very important aspect of Hindu Dharma. Dharma is defined as one's duty in life - a combination of spiritual discipline, moral values, and self-determination. While there are many different types of Dharma, arguably the one that is most relevant to people in the twenty-first century is swa-dharma, or dharma based on individual levels. Swa-dharma is like an instruction manual given to a person wherein the simple fulfillment of their roles and responsibilities properly leads to success in life. A student's swa-dharma is to study. Likewise, a worker's responsibility is to do his or her job well, and a guru's responsibility is to impart knowledge on to their students or disciples. Fulfilling Dharma allows for the successful functioning of both a blossoming society and a person. Dharma is an ever-evolving concept; it changes based on the heartbeat of the community. For example, modern-day society might not require the father to be the provider of the household, but the mother as well. The concept of 'dharma' in a familial situation requires at least one parental figure to guide the child through the early stages of his or her life in today's world, where before it used to be the jurisdiction of the mother. Basic swa-dharma does not have to fit 'conventional' standards,



but only the duty that is expected from one for the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

The concept of "one Bhraman" is a beautiful theology presented in the earliest Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Vedas. The Upanishads, specifically, mention the existence of "sat-chit-ananda" (sat, meaning being; chit, meaning consciousness; and ananda, meaning bliss), which roughly translates to the state of being - a collective consciousness - when all beings come together in the Bhraman to form one, united consciousness. However, not everyone has the time or the ability to seek spiritual revelation through penance and seclusion. Sanatana Dharma maintains that, when everyone in the world performs righteous deeds, follows their duty,

and works to make the world a better place (Dharma, Karma, and Seva), there is a collective grouping of similar mindsets formed. This sense of unity personifies the phrase "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" वसुधैव कुटुंबकम् - which means the whole world is one family. Human beings are creatures that are ever-evolving, and while reaching a state of perfection is a tedious task requiring thousands of years of societal tweaking, practicing Sanatana Dharma encourages both Hindus and the people around them to become better people. Practicing Sanatana Dharma and the values it encourages maintains cultural identity within Hindus around the globe while promoting universal peace and prosperity altogether. ■

About the Authors

Gojiri Mhaski a 10th grader at J. P. Stevens High School in New Jersey, has been an active volunteer of HSS since 2016. She enjoys art and reading, and especially enjoys learning about the human body and science. She is also a part of NHS, HOSA, and a three-season athlete at school. When not drawing or studying, you can often find her bird watching or reading outside. She is strongly connected to Indian culture, and also volunteers at BMM Marathi Shala to help tutor kids.

Exploring the Deep Roots of Jewish-Hindu Connections with Dr. Nathan Katz: Part II

By Dr. Jai Bansal



Insights from an Indic scholar on India's embrace of diverse communities

This article is based on one of his interviews with Dharma Explorers. A complete video recording of the interview can be accessed here at

<https://stophindudvesha.org/event/exploring-the-deep-roots-of-jewish-hindu-connections-with-dr-nathan-katz/>

■ *Dr. Nathan Katz, a distinguished scholar of Indic studies, discusses his academic journey, extensive contributions to Indo-Judaic studies, and his experiences in India.*

■ *Highlighting the harmonious coexistence of Jews in India, Katz recounts his experiences with the Jewish community in Kochi, emphasizing their dual identity as proud Jews and Indians, and the acceptance and lack of anti-Semitism they experienced.*

■ *Katz elaborates on the similarities and differences between old religions like Hinduism and Judaism and newer, more missionary-oriented religions, discussing their respective approaches to spirituality, tradition, and proselytization.*

■ *Katz reflects on India's long-standing tradition of welcoming and integrating diverse religious and cultural communities, contrasting it with the history of persecution faced by Jews in Europe and emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and understanding between different faiths.*

Dr. Nathan Katz is a distinguished professor emeritus at Florida International University. He also served as the Bhagwan Mahaveer Professor of Jain Studies, Director of Jewish Studies, and founding Chair of the Department of Religious Studies. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Camden, New Jersey, Nathan earned his BA from Temple University in 1970. He spent two years in India studying classical languages before returning to Temple for graduate



studies in religion. He was a Fulbright dissertation fellow in Sri Lanka and India from 1976 to 1978 and received his PhD in 1979.

Nathan has taught at many prestigious schools, ultimately joining Florida International University, where he started the Department of Religious Studies. He also helped launch programs in Jewish Studies, Asian Studies, Gender JAIN Studies, and the Study of Spirituality. He is best known for his work in Indo-Judaic Studies and has written several books on the subject. Nathan has also been an adjunct professor of Hinduism at the Hindu University of America and taught at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in the Bahamas. Currently, he is the Dean of CYS College of Jewish Studies.

Nathan has received numerous awards and accolades, including being a finalist for 'Who Are The Jews of India?' and winning the 2004 Vyasa Award from Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan Vak Devi Saraswati Award from India. He received the President's Award for Achievement and Excellence and Florida International University's Faculty Senate Awards for Research and Service. He was named Scholar of the Year by the University of South Florida in 1992.

The West often portrays Hindus as polytheistic, whereas Hindus themselves do not care for or about such descriptives. Fundamentally, they see divinity in everything, including inanimate objects, which accounts for their inclusiveness. The question is, why should anyone care how Hindus or followers of other faiths relate to the divine? Do you think the perception of Hindus as polytheistic is why there is so much missionary activity directed towards them?

In 2007, a significant event occurred that planted the seeds of change in interfaith dialogue: the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha invited the Chief Rabbinate of Israel to send a delegation to New Delhi for discussions. This was followed by a reciprocal invitation from the Chief Rabbinate for the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha to visit Jerusalem in 2008. This series of exchanges marked the beginning of a profound interfaith dialogue between Hindu and Jewish religious leaders.

One of the key figures in these discussions was former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, David Rosen, a respected and well-known figure within the Jewish community. Before the meetings, Rabbi Rosen visited me in America to gain a deeper understanding of Hinduism from someone familiar with both Jewish observance and Indian religious scholarship. Our conversation was part of his preparation to engage meaningfully with the Hindu leaders in India.

The dialogue sessions in New Delhi and Jerusalem were intense and productive, leading to a groundbreaking joint statement. This statement acknowledged the worship of one supreme being in both religions, clarifying that Hinduism's diverse deities and icons represent different aspects of the same singular divinity, much like how different streams merge into one ocean. This was a pivotal moment because it recognized that both traditions, despite their apparent differences, ultimately share common spiritual goals and values.

Most significantly, the rabbis admitted to seeing similarities in how the supreme being is conceptualized in both faiths, challenging long-held perceptions within their community. They learned that Hinduism's diversity, often mistaken for polytheism, was actually a form of monotheism, a revelation that came from directly engaging with and listening to Hindu scholars. This interaction underscored the importance of listening and learning directly from adherents of other faiths rather than relying on second-hand interpretations.

The rabbis shared insights from their traditional sources that supported this view, arguing that while Jews have direct commandments from their historical experiences, such as the revelation at Mount Sinai, other religions might use different symbols or rituals to connect with the same divine presence. This mutual recognition fostered a deeper understanding that all righteous believers, regardless of their religious affiliation, share a potential place in the spiritual realm, or what might be called heaven or moksha, in different traditions.

This revelation was not just theoretical but had practical implications for how religious teachings are approached and understood. It demonstrated that the older, established religions have the capacity to recognize and respect the depths of each other's core teachings, which can sometimes be lost in newer religions that focus more on expanding their reach and doctrine.

My personal academic journey, enriched by learning directly from Indian scholars and texts, has shown me that profound religious insights often come from direct engagement and dialogue, not just solitary study. In universities and scholarly settings, we often debate and discuss religious texts to challenge and refine our understanding, a practice common in both Hindu and Jewish traditions.

When people talk about Hinduism, they often think of it as one monolithic set of beliefs. But just like Judaism, there are many forms and expressions within Hinduism. Scholars today talk about "Judaisms" and "Hinduisms" to reflect

this diversity. Religions are not single, unchanging entities; they have many streams and interact with each other.

While studying Jews in India, I found that Jewish texts from the first century not only discuss Hinduism but do so with great admiration. It's fascinating that these early writings are so positive yet often overlooked. Jews and Hindus have had commercial exchanges for at least 2,000 years, possibly longer. It's not a recent discovery. While views have varied over time, many Jewish scholars have had a positive attitude toward Hinduism despite the debate over polytheism versus monotheism—a debate influenced by Christian thought.

As an aside, one of my students explored these interfaith dialogues in his master's thesis, analyzing the supporters and controversies involved, including the roles of NGOs and other organizations impacting foreign policies. His study highlighted the concurrent strengthening of India-Israel relations. Interestingly, a recent survey in Israel revealed that 82% of Israelis favor India as their most liked country, underscoring the deep affection between the two nations.

The enduring bond between Jews and Indians spans thousands of years, though not all details are widely known. In my experience, even while simply walking down the street, I often encounter Indians who recognize and approach me with warmth, curious to learn about Jewish culture and achievements, such as our disproportionate share of Nobel Prizes. This interaction highlights mutual respect and a keen interest in understanding how such a small community has contributed so significantly to global knowledge. This respect also stems from a traditional Jewish emphasis on

rigorous intellectual training, a value we cherish and continue to uphold across our community.

We call ourselves Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Dharma, but we're widely known as Hinduism. Similarly, there are other "isms" like

brush—oppressive, destructive, and genocidal. From your perspective, how can we address this corrosive phenomenon that has been around for a long time but is becoming more intense in modern times? How can our communities come together to tackle it?



Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Shintoism. However, it is interesting that two of the 3 Abrahamic faiths do not use the 'ism' suffix. They are called Christianity and Islam and not "Christism" or "Muhammadism."

Do you think there's a subliminal message here? I looked up "ism" in the dictionary, and it says "an oppressive and especially discriminatory attitude or belief." Could this be a message being passed on at a subliminal level?

Wow...I did not know 'ism' implied what you just said!

Let's talk about a rather painful subject: antisemitism and Hinduphobia. Jews have faced blood libel for 2,000 years, and now Hindus are being painted with a similar

In these challenging times, the attacks and intimidation both Jews and Hindus face are unlike anything I have witnessed in my lifetime. We are in dire need of strong, respected allies, and India stands out as an essential partner in this regard. The friendship between the Indian and Israeli political leaders is heartening, yet I hope to see this solidarity reflected more consistently in international policies, particularly at forums like the UN.

The similarities between anti-Semitism and anti-Hindu sentiments are striking, with both forms of bigotry employing similar stereotypes and accusations that hark back to old, hateful narratives. Such prejudices often stem from jealousy over the achievements of both communities, who are known to excel in various

societies due to their hard work and dedication. Sadly, those who harbor resentment towards us often do so because they cannot fathom the effort required to achieve such success, preferring instead to believe we succeed by unfair means.

often gathers for demonstrations, a practice that began about 20 years ago. I've noticed an increasing number of Hindu participants at these events, which is truly heartening. Alone, our voices may seem like whispers, but together, they resonate powerfully.

purposes, even though they're not inherently political.

Some time ago, I was in a film about Muslim-Jewish dialogue. One of the Muslim participants was a friend. We discussed many common issues and potential solutions for the Middle East.

Recently, that same person, who I thought was on the same side as me, now has opposing views. We can't be friends anymore. These conflicts go deeper than rational thinking. I can't maintain a friendship with someone who criticizes Israel excessively, especially during the current crisis. As a result, I have significantly fewer friends now, which makes me sad.



Forgive me for asking, but do you think the “mono” aspect of monotheistic faiths contributes to conflicts, with its “my way or the highway” mentality?

Today's level of hostility is profoundly alarming. As someone who isn't new to observing world events, I find the current wave of hatred to be deeply concerning, and I wish I had the answers to eliminate it. We must strive to strengthen our bonds and support each other in these trying times, promoting understanding and cooperation against the forces of intolerance and ignorance.

This unity recalls Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s march in Birmingham, where figures like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel stood by him, showcasing a united front. Such alliances across different communities underscore a powerful message of solidarity and can profoundly influence public perception and responses. It's crucial that we continue to show up, sign petitions, and be visible in these movements.

Let's face it: Muslims and Christians learned from us but got some things wrong. Yes, the idea of one God is very important to us. However, if the Swamis, Hindu Dharma, or Chinese beliefs are correct, then they also have value. As I've retired and grown older, I've been learning more about Kabbalah and Hasidic meditation techniques. I wouldn't have reached my current level in Jewish practice without spending years studying Hinduism and Buddhism.

You mentioned that antisemitism and Hinduphobia seem to come from the same playbook. Do you think it's time for our communities to come together and fight these issues as one phenomenon rather than separately? How can scholars like you help promote this common approach?

With the world in increasing conflict, do you think religion is truly a solution, or could it be the root cause of many of these conflicts?

There's a story about a great rabbi who said that if someone sells coal and someone else sells diamonds, the coal seller won't care about the diamonds because they focus on their own business. But if they sell sapphires, they can appreciate the beauty and value of the diamonds. This applies to religions too. If you don't understand the inner dimension of your own religion, you won't recognize it in

When troubling events occur in Israel, the Jewish community here

It's both. Yes, it can help solve problems, but it also causes problems. I'm not sure if the root is really religious disagreement because those issues often get used for political



in Navsari and other volunteers were going to Varanasi I decided to join them. This time it was sleeper train with triple bunk beds to the airport. We were met at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Varanasi and taken to a most comfortable living quarters for visitors, contractors and volunteers who travelled from many States to work on the Swarved Mahamandir in Varanasi. There, in the premise of Swarved Mahamandir Sansthan, I got the opportunity to take the Darshan and the blessings of Sant Pravara Vigyandeo ji Maharaj of Vihangam Yog Sansthan, Prayagraj, India.

A driver plus a guide and interpreter, another retired Bank Manager, accompanied me to the ancient Ganges and the village of my ancestors. I felt a strange feeling as we entered the village and the word quickly got around that this person who speaks only English was looking for his ancestors. The way the cattle and other animals intermingled with people and other life forms reminded me of my own childhood and our dependency on nature and cows. We did not find any relatives. The oldest person who was 90 years old, called around with his cell phone, and attracted a curious crowd but no luck. When someone said she knew my great grandmother who left in 1886 I resorted to my own mental calculation. This could not be possible unless she was over 134 years old. It was a turn off and warning to others who may want to take this emotional trip. Many are hoping to trace their ancestry in their last days but state and central Governments in India and Diaspora countries need to coordinate on this project so that records can be digitized before they are destroyed and reduce the prospect of corruption. My own conclusion was that unless relatives maintained ancestral property it would be very difficult to trace those who left since the 1880s as a result of famine and were virtually nomads.

Another friend from Fiji had no difficulty for his family kept their land even though some of them had left over a hundred years ago.

Furthermore my relatives who had returned to India from Guyana in 1906 could not locate any relatives at that time. They had to leave Varanasi again on another contract for Trinidad where a brother was located. Eventually they made their way back to Guyana and decided it was home.

KOLKATA, BHARAT SEVASHRAM SANGH (BSS) NERVE CENTRE

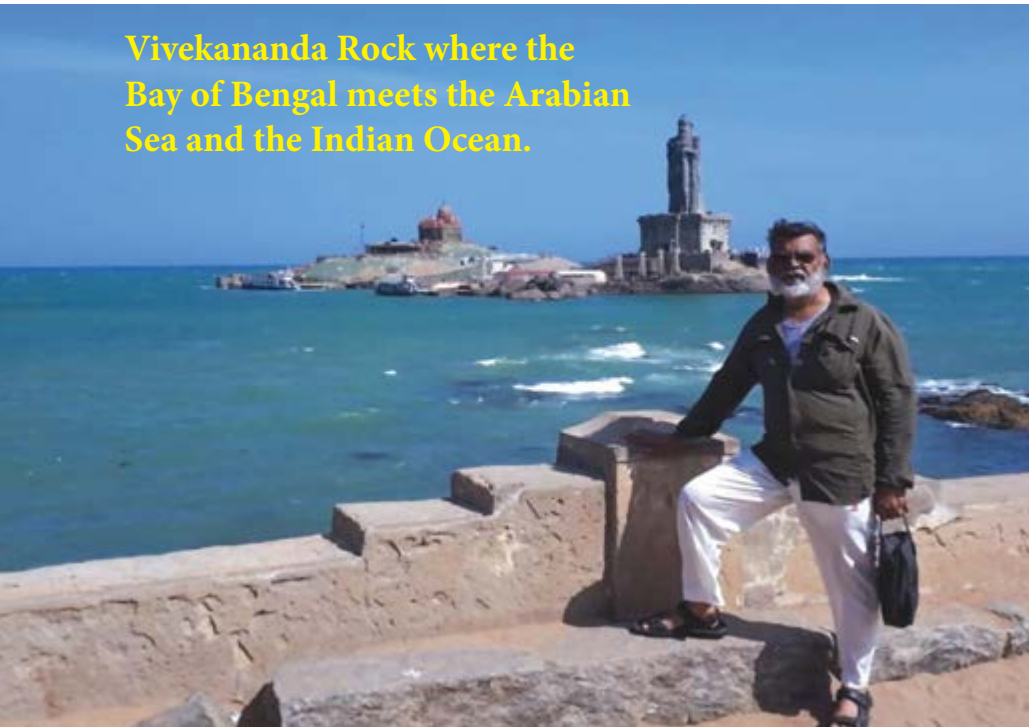
Once I landed at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Airport in Kolkata the name alone made me recall the history of this revolutionary and understands why he is still admired. My inability to speak any language other than English was not a source of pride. Fortunately I met a Buddhist Monk and expressed my concern about price variations to him so he accompanied me to find transportation. He ascertained the cost and gave my destination to the driver who spoke no English.

BANANA SHAKTI

My room which was luxury compared to the ones I shared in my University and law schools days. The buildings showed their age but the rooms were large with a comfortable bed, washroom and shower. Unlike student days however I did not have to coexist with any strange roommate. What was most memorable was a bunch of bananas which was my welcoming gift. The buildings housed mostly students and visitors at the upper level while the lower level functioned as a medical clinic during the days serving long lines of patients without charge.

Next morning on my way to my first meeting with Swami Biswatmanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary of BSS, I observed a medical patient in obvious pain. The boy was about 6 years old and clinging to his worried mother waiting to see a doctor. Since I was also planning to visit Tagore Shanti Niketan and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math in West Bengal for the next 2 days and I did not want the bananas to spoil I decided to give two to the child. He smiled and took it. Miraculously his face changed and the pain seemed to have subsided immediately. His mother also seemed relieved and told him something. With my little knowledge of the language I recognized two words Shukria and Babaji. I translated the sentence to mean Tell Babaji Thanks. This may seem unbelievable to many but those few minutes, his smile and a light in his eyes was one of the highlights of my trip and the image was to come back to keep me company later on. I wondered whether if I was complying with one of the universal codes of Sanatan Dharma without knowing it. The Bhagavad Gita CH.17:20 States: CHARITY, given as a matter of

Vivekananda Rock where the Bay of Bengal meets the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.



duty, without expectation of any return, at the right place and time, and to the right person is said to be SATVIKKA. I had shared something that was given to me, it was going to be spoilt and for a brief moment that act removed pain from a totally innocent stranger whom I never met before and may never see again. Was this the wonder of Seva, Karma, and the eternal principles of Sanatan Dharma? For about 17 hours with only myself as company I had more time to contemplate that smile act as I travelled alone from Bangaluru to Kerala on a sleeper bus.

I scouted the area around the Ashram and quickly recognized I was in the hub of a global service center.

About one hundred years earlier in 1917 this organization was formed and I was now standing at 211, Rashbehari Avenue, Kolkata,

the heart of a worldwide monastic humanitarian organization that has branches all over the globe even as far away as Guyana, South America. It was the land that produced spiritual giants like Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sri Aurobindo, and Paramhansa Yogananda. In a few days I observed their daily activities: serving the poor with meals, healing the sick, assisting students with housing and educational needs, managing temples, hospitals, dharamsalas and even gow shalas. This was all consistent with the humanitarian philosophy of the founder Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj who asked "If a man sees another suffering and he does nothing about it, can he call himself a human being?"

The room was reserved for

me even when I left for a few days to visit Swami Vivekananda Centre and Ramakrishna Mission in Belur. Next day we took first-class air-conditioned train from Howrah for an overnight trip to Shanti Niketan, home of Rabindra Nath Tagore. While there it was not difficult to imagine how students were taught in an open air setting surrounded by nature in all its colours and splendor. Flowers, giant shade trees, luxurious grounds and well-manicured lawns must have influenced the works of the Bengali poet, writer, playwright, composer, painter and social reformer. It is no wonder that he was the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for Gitagali. There we stayed at a simple hotel named MUD HUT indicating the composition of the walls.

Next to Bangaluru, the IT capital. After a week with the family of Toronto resident Soma Shekhar visiting schools and several ashrams around Bangaluru I headed south. Another memorable event was being in the presence of the oldest person I knew as the family and villagers celebrated his grandmothers 105 birthday. His brother Anand Kumar was most helpful in hosting and making transportation arrangements.

THE BANANA IMAGE RETURNS.

Shekhar was supposed to accompany me to Kerala but plans had changed and he could not spend more than a week there as

business demanded his presence in Toronto.

For the first and only time during my five weeks sojourn I was without company. The sleeper bus from

Bangaluru took about 17 hours before I could reach my destination in Kerala. It was like a small

bedroom with a bed, no electrical outlets, no washroom, and no food. All I had was my own self and a bottle of water which I sipped every few hours. I could not recall being with myself in such a closed space all my life. I had a cell phone but could not charge it and did not want to use up the battery as it would be needed to call contacts once I got off the bus. I had books but could not read as there was no light. The bus stopped several times for washroom breaks but since I could not speak the language it was ready to take off before I knew what was going on. I came off to use the local bushes as washroom only once for a few minutes before I heard Jaldi, Jaldi. The last thing I wanted was to be left in a dark countryside without being able to communicate with anyone. I recalled my experience in 1996 while in Lahore, Pakistan at midnight looking for directions to a hotel when a group of young men made all kinds of comments amazed that I could only speak English.

When I was not sleeping, I tried practicing Yoga and meditation while lying or sitting on the bed but the eyes and the smile of the child and his mother from Rashbehari medical clinic came back to me constantly. I had time to reflect on my own life like never before and was amazed how simple an act of giving a banana to a child made such a difference not only to his life and that of his mother but now it seemed to be my best company. The banana was donated by devotees to the Ashram, then to me and then to a total stranger and had I not given it away it would have been wasted.

The definition of Seva in the Gita came to make my 17 hours trip a blissful period of introspection. I explored the question how are all forms of life connected. We breathe the same air which is a source of universal life and energy but the act of giving and receiving seems to be part of the essence of universal consciousness. We came with nothing and will leave only with a record of Karmic deeds and sharing with one another whether a flower, a fruit, affection, thoughts or a few pleasant words seems to be one way

to connect with the universal energy.

I spent a relaxing week at BSS Kerala as guest of Bramchari Sukdev. From there we took an overnight visit by train to the BSS ashram at Kanyakumari to the Vivekananda Memorial Rock built in 1970. Here he had obtained enlightenment before he left for the West to spread the message of Sanatan Dharma. Thousands amass daily either to see sunrise or the sunset at this southernmost part of India and yes it's HOT.

We returned to the Kerala Ashram for a day until a flight was arranged to

INDIRA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT in Delhi to connect flight to the adopted homeland, a long rest with time to reflect on a trip etched in memory forever.

An impressive practice at all the Ashrams was to issue a receipt immediately for every donation no matter how small, and to ensure that visitors are well fed with a sumptuous vegetarian meal.

PS. I may return to Bharat for there is much to learn about this spiritual empire that withstood invaders for centuries but retained its essential distinctiveness. However those of us who grew up in the West must develop that third eye to appreciate the mystery of this ancient land. We also should rely less on Google translation and interpreters. A lot is lost in the translation and we cannot continue to blame the British for all our current limitations. ■

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Bhagwad Gita for Children III

From a series of talks by Sanjay Mehta, transcribed and
Compiled by **Jaya Asthana**

Chapter 2 is called Sankhya Yog also called Gyan Yog, Sankhya means knowledge. In this chapter we are trying to learn how to do the right thing. That is called Vivek, the power of discrimination. Before that, the question comes: Who am I? Am I this body? Bhagwad Geeta tells us that I am not this body, I am this Atma. The Atma has a swadharma (right duty).

To re-cap:

“**Samatvam Yog ucchyate**”. This means “the evenness of mind”.

In spite of trying our best, sometimes we get disturbed. Just like the swing that goes up and down, it also comes to the middle. One side may be happy, other side may not be so happy. When it is in the middle, it is even, it is called Samatvam.

Yogah karmasu kaushalam:

When your mind is at an even state, it is not disturbed. You are fully with that action. The action (karma) does not disturb you. We are bound by Bandhan, which means bondage. Karma binds the

mind. We are bound by expectation. Kaushalam means that you are not bound by that action. Karma Kaushalam means that even karma does not bind me, I am free.

Ch 2, shloke 55:

**prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha
mano-gatān
ātmany-evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthita-prajñas
tadochyate**

Bhagwan said: Arjun, when one thoroughly casts off all cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the Self through the joy of the Self, then he is called stable of mind.

Bhagwan says: if you are greedy, the mind is never stable. But do you really need all the things that you desire? Think of it is need vs greed. Do you need that object, is it essential to your life? Or do you desire it,



is it your greed? It is like the chocolate, is it necessary for maintaining good nutrition, or you just want it for its taste? The human mind has a tendency to become greedy very quickly. Like a bottomless cup, you keep pouring milk, but the cup never fills. In order to fill the cup, you have to put a bottom to the cup. Your wish of filling the bottomless cup is greed. How much milk do you need? If you take only one cup of milk, you are satisfied. That is how you put the bottom on the cup. One who is satisfied in himself is able to fulfill his needs.

Chapter 2 Shloke 58:

**yadā sanharate chāyaṁ kūrmo' ṅgānīva sarvaśhaḥ
indriyāṅindriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā**

When, like a tortoise that draws in its limbs from all directions, he withdraws all his senses from the sense-objects, his mind becomes steady.

The turtle has four legs and one head. His back is very strong. Whenever there is danger, he pulls his legs and head into his shell, and he becomes very strong, nobody can harm him. Even if an elephant steps on him or a car runs over him, he does not get hurt. Bhagwan says we should be like the turtle. Whenever you think there is something that will disturb your mind, just withdraw into yourself. For example, you have a craving that you must eat a donut. You try to control yourself but find that it is very difficult. You can control yourself by thinking about something else, by withdrawing the senses and not eating it. A turtle is like a self-controlled person, he withdraws into himself. Such a person is called "Sthith pragya" - one who has a stable mind.

Shloke 62:

Read and memorize these in Sanskrit. They have a message that applies to all of us.

dhyāyato viṣhayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas

**teṣhūpajāyate
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt
krodho' bhijāyate**

The man dwelling on sense-objects develops attachment for them; from attachment springs desire, and from (unfulfilled) desire ensues anger.

An example of a sense object may be a smart phone, or a game, or ice cream, something you are always craving, you constantly think about that thing. When you don't get that object, your desire is not fulfilled, you get angry. But your expectation that all your desires will get fulfilled is not realistic. Nobody in the world gets all their desires fulfilled.

Suppose anger is a tree. The tree is in the seed, but you don't see it, because it is in the soil. But when the soil is watered, the tree comes up. Suppose anger is like a tree. The seed of anger is in the object. Maybe the object is a bike. The seed is in the bike. You want a bike; you are always thinking of the bike. If you don't get it, you get angry, sad or agitated. Sadness or agitation is similar to anger, it causes you to be upset.

Shloke 63:

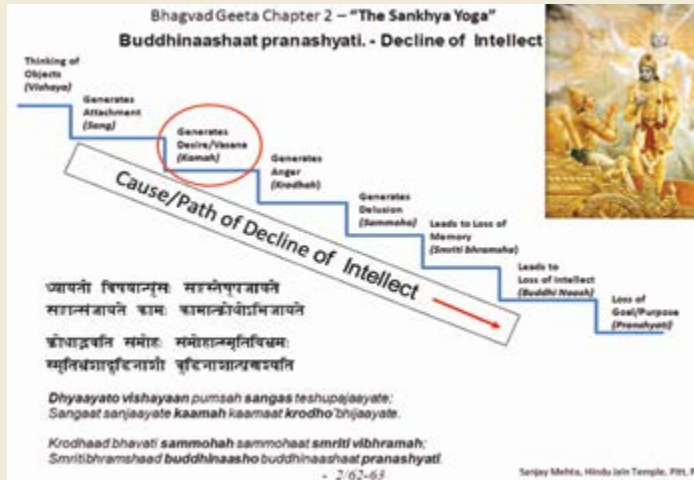
**krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt
smṛiti-vibhramah
smṛiti-bhranśhād buddhi-nāśho buddhi-nāśhāt
praṇaśhyati**

From anger arises delusion; from delusion, confusion of memory; from confusion of memory, loss of reason; and from loss of reason one goes to complete ruin.

When we are angry, we are not in our right mind, we are cannot think rationally. The mind is clouded. When we are angry, we forget to behave properly, we may lose control of our actions or thoughts. That is delusion. From delusion arises loss of memory. When memory is lost, logic and intellect is not working properly. Our judgement may become clouded. We

lose our ability to reason properly. Then we forget the purpose of what we were doing. We forget our goal. Similarly in life, I cannot help others when I am angry. In order to help others, I need to be able to remain calm. I need to have a positive mindset.

Let us look at a diagram.



That is the ladder of decline. It shows the path of decline, how one negative thought can lead to downfall. We have to be careful, otherwise we will lose our focus.

Bhagwan gives us the solution. He shows us how to stop falling down from this ladder. That is our goal. These 2 shloke’s show exactly what happens.

Shloke 64:

**rāga-dveṣha-viyuktaiḥ tu viṣhayān
indriyaiḥ charan**

**ātma-vaśhyair-vidheyātmā prasādam
adhigachchhati**

But the self-controlled Sadhak, while enjoying the various sense-objects through his senses, which are disciplined and free from likes and dislikes, attains placidity of mind.

Bhagwan says you should have objects, like a car,

a toy etc, you may have them and enjoy them. The difference between the ordinary person and the self-controlled person is that the self-controlled person still enjoys the objects, but he does not have likes and dislikes. He is able to detach himself from the object. Just like you are able to put it away when you are done playing with the toy, not thinking about it all the time. That should be our attitude, our way of living.

Shloke 70:

**āpūryamāṇam achala-pratiṣṭham, samudram
āpaḥ praviṣhanti yadvat
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviṣhanti sarve, sa
śhāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī**

As the waters of different rivers enter the ocean, which though full on all sides, remains undisturbed; likewise, he in whom all enjoyments merge themselves without causing disturbance attains peace; not he who hankers after such enjoyments.

Bhagwan is giving us a metaphor. All the rivers enter an ocean. The waters from the ocean evaporate and become a cloud, then the cloud becomes rain. Rain falls on the mountain and becomes a river. This is a cycle. But since the ocean is very deep, it is undisturbed when the rivers enter it. Similarly, the person who is a practitioner of Bhagwad Geeta enjoys everything but doesn’t get disturbed. Just like in a ball game, if some players are disturbed, and then they may lose the game. If someone says something about us, should we let our mind get disturbed? No, we should remain calm and undisturbed like the ocean, which is very deep. How do we become undisturbed like the ocean? By doing Gayatri Mantra japa, by reading Bhagwad Geeta.

What is the purpose of life? To be balanced, happy and peaceful, to have an undisturbed mind, like the ocean. ■



Intersection of Tradition and Modernity. Next, Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, International Director of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh, Bharat talked about Preservation and Transmission of Vedic knowledge.

The plenary session this year, set the tone of the conference. The sessions address key points through a great lineup of speakers and panelists. The First session addressed the Evolution (sustenance) of Sanatan Dharma in the Diaspora. Smt. Vallabha Tantry from the Hindu Society of Minnesota was the moderator for this session. The session was kicked off by Kumari Drishti Patel from BAPS followed by Shri Frank 'Gopal' Cohen from ISKCON who spoke about Evolution, Adaptation and Growth of Dharma. Swamini Shraddhananda Saraswati spoke about Evolution for American practicing Hindus. Shri Sanjay Mehta talked about the Basics of Hindu Dharma in modern context.

The Second session talked about the Challenges and Opportunities in Sustaining Dharma. The moderator for this session was Shri Vishal Agarwal from the Hindu Society of Minnesota. Dr. Arpan Yagnik from Pennsylvania State University explained the Challenges faced by Hindus in the Diaspora in maintaining Sanatan Dharma. Shri Shajive Jeggannathan from the Hindu Society of Minnesota explained Strategies for addressing these Challenges. (TBD from the Hindu University of America spoke about the Opportunities of Spiritual growth and cultural preservation by Academics in Dharma Knowledge). Shri Gadi Das Magyer from the Murari Sanctuary in Tennessee spoke of the Opportunities while Respecting Traditions - Gaushala.

The Third session was a panel discussion focused on Dharma Education and K to 12th Education.



This session was moderated by Smt. Aparna Amin. Our panelists were Shri Tushar Barot from Humanity International, Dr. Pankaj Parikh from Hindu Dharma and History workshop, Pandit Gyan Prakash Upadhyay from the Vedic heritage School and Smt. Falguni Pandya from Namaste Global. These panelists were joined by a local Hindu school representative. The main discussion in this panel was the different types of work done by all these organizations to help keep our Hindu students connected to our roots as much as possible while understanding and helping them navigate the challenges faced in regular schools/universities.

Session Four spoke about Socio cultural issues and their proposed solutions. The moderator for this session was Captain Manohar Mahajan, Chair, Board of Director of

the International Hindu University. Shri Rana Reddy a student of Duke University, North Carolina presented on the Socio-cultural issues from Mandir and Youth point of view. Smt. Shama Mehta from North American Hindu Chaplains Association (NAHCA) and Michigan Medicine spoke about Hospital and Jail Chaplaincy. Shri Swami Svatmananda Ji from Arsh Vidya Gurukulam, Pennsylvania created and presented a Mental Wellness Manual. Smt. Madhu Sharma announced the launch of Spiritual Care for the Community. HMEC and other Partners have announced a Spiritual Care Coach program. In this program, anyone can be trained to become a Spiritual Care Coach.

We were blessed and honored to receive blessings from Param Pujya Shri Shantananda Swami Ji from



Chinmaya Vrindavan, New Jersey.

Session Five revolved around Community Building and Services (Sewa). This Session was moderated by Shri Naga Rajan Ji. Shri Lalit Mahadeshwar from Hindu Society of North Carolina spoke about the Hindu Meal Program in local schools. Shri Madhav Enaganti from the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and Sewa International talked about Sewa Diwali. Smt. Devyani Desai from Florida spoke about Hindu Matrimonial. Smt. Deepa Karthik from HinduPACT talked about HinduVote. Shri Upendra Shelar from HOMA, Pennsylvania spoke about HOMA. Shri Vipul Patel from Gayatri Chetna Center, New Jersey spoke about Performing Weddings

and other Samskaras as Sewa. Smt. Sunita Agarwal from Hindu Temple of Dayton, Ohio spoke about Festivals and Hindu Heritage Month (HHM) Celebrations with Community Service Providers. Shri Suresh Lohiya from Hindu Temple of Irvine, California talked about a Devotee owned Temple.

Session Six, Part one and two were Panels mainly consisting of Priests. Part one was moderated by Shri Laxmi Bhamidipati and was about Temple Management and Priest relations; gaps and opportunities. This panel was constituted by Pandit Murali Bhattar, Pandit Rajendra Joshi, Pandit Keshava and Pandit Balaji Varadarajan. Two suggestions were made, one on educating priests to expand their community impact

beyond spiritual services, and another on the expectations of both management and priests. Emphasized the importance of understanding the expectations from both sides to improve communication and coordination.

Part two was moderated by Shri Dhanesh Budhram and was about "Why understanding Community Services, Advocacy and Spiritual Care Taker Role is important for Priests. An interactive panel was designed to engage the audience and provide a unified answer from the Priests on these matters. The panel consisted of Pandit Shreyas Joshi, Pandit Madan Gopala Dasa, Pandit Jayesh Vyas, Pandit Mukundan and Pandit Krishna Kumar. The team discussed effective communication when addressing sensitive topics like interfaith weddings and caste issues. A Code of Conduct booklet to be developed.

There was a poster session where different individuals/organizations can bring their posters and display it and explain what their poster is about.

The Seventh session was about Advocacy - Hindu Hate/Hinduphobia/Hindudvesha. It was a panel discussion that touched on various Advocacy topics like SB403/Caste as the Classified Class, Mandir Vandalism, Difference between Swastika and Hakenkreuz, Holiday for Diwali. The moderator for this panel was Pandit Satish Sharma. The panelists were Shri Ajay Shah from HinduPACT, Shri Utsav Chakravarthi from HinduAction, Shri Sangeeta Sarkar from Hindu American Foundation and Shri Mohinder Gulati from Global Hindu Temple Network.

This day was concluded by a Community event which consisted of Welcome speech by Shri Sajjan Agarwal, the Chairman of the Hindu Society of North Carolina; Ram

Title	Priest Name	Temple
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman L. V. Rajagopal Bhattar	Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Riverdale, GA
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Narayana K. Bhattar	Hindu Temple of Delaware, Hockessin, DE
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Rajendra Joshi	Hindu Temple of Kentucky, Louisville, KY
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Varadarajan Golluru	Sri Venkateswara Temple of North Carolina, Cary, NC
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Satyanarayana charyulu Dittakavi	Sri Venkateswara Temple of North Carolina, Cary, NC
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Devanathan Mahadevan	South Florida Hindu Temple, Southwest Ranches, FL
Archaka Bhushana	Sriman Lakshmpuram V. Govind Bhattar	Hindu Temple of Rochester, Pittsford, NY
Archaka Shri	Sriman Chet Rizal	Hindu Society of North Carolina, Morrisville, NC
Archaka Shri	Sriman LakshmikanthTumkur	Hindu Center of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
Archaka Shri	Sriman Balaji Varadaraj Bhattar	Hindu Center of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
Archaka Shri	Sriman Ashok Kumar Bhanu Prakash Trivedi	Hindu Center of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
Hindu Dharma Paripalaka	Sriman Pravin Shukla	Hindu Center of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
Hindu Dharma Paripalaka	Mata Krishna Priya Devi Dasi	ISKCON New Goloka Dham, Hillsborough, NC

JanmaBhoomi Celebrations across the USA by Shri Amitabh Mittal, General Secretary of VHPA, Hindu Diaspora and Mandirs Across the Globe (outside Bharat) by Mananiya Milind Parande Ji from Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharat; Hindu University of America activities overview by Shri Kalyan Viswanathan, President of the Hindu University of America and Presidential Remark by Shri Ajay Shah, President of VHPA. This was

followed by a lively cultural program.

Our last session took place on Sunday, which was about Youth Engagement and Empowerment. This session was moderated by Kumari Priya Amaresh. This session discussed strategies for engaging and empowering the youth in Hindu communities in the diaspora to connect with their cultural and spiritual heritage. Explore the role of education, mentorship, and

community involvement in fostering the next generation of leaders committed to upholding Sanatan Dharma values. Mandirs ought to establish strong bonds with Hindu students in nearby colleges and universities. This can be done by establishing and nourishing Hindu Chaplains (or spiritual care givers), establishing a regular food program or even a host family program. The speakers in this session were Shri Sudi Thota (Geeta Pariksha student), Kumari Siddhi Tantry (Hindu Society of Minnesota), Kumari Vasundhara Pathak (Hindu Yuva), Kumari Arushi Ramka (Hindu Students Council), Kumari Shraddha Upadhyay (VHPA Atlanta), Shri Shashank Bhattar (Hindu Society of Minnesota).

We had the HMEC team advisory committee members talk about how far HMEC has come in the last Seventeen years. The esteemed Priests were awarded for their years of hard work towards our Dharma.

There were two awards given to Key Contributors who have supported the HMEC all along. They are Stephan KnapJi (Nandnandan DasJi) from Michigan, and Arunima SinhaJi from South Carolina. ■



Religious Tourism in The Native Land of Sri Ramakrishna A Sustainable Approach I

By **Subhasish Chakraborty**



Introduction:

Tourism today is the world's fastest growing industry and revolutionary changes are taking place in the world tourism industry. The Indian state of West Bengal is a land of stupendous dimensions with a rich cultural tapestry, undulating mountains, spectacular beaches and haunting wildlife. Few states in India can match the enormous variety that the state of West Bengal has to offer. And it's a state, which somehow gets into your blood. Love it or hate it, you can never ignore Bengal. A visit to Bengal is not something that you clinically see. It is a total experience.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is a popular place of pilgrimage in the state of West Bengal by virtue of being the native land of one of modern India's spiritual giants – Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort – Sri Sarada Devi. While Sri Ramakrishna was born in Kamarpukur, Holy Mother Sarada Devi was born in the village of Joyrambati. In fact, the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati are separated by mere 3 miles from each other. If one adds Gar Mandaran (1.5 Kms. from Kamarpukur) – renowned for its scenic beauty and dreamy landscape with Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, it makes for a truly fascinating religious tourism circuit.

These two villages are not only visited by pilgrims from India but a large number of visitors from far away countries too pour in during the peak tourist season in search of inner peace and tranquility.

In both the villages, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission have centers that are run and administered by Belur Math, the worldwide headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission. Apart from preserving the sanctity of the

birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi by way of ritual worship, discourses on religion and celebrating important festivals like the Durga Puja, Kali Puja etc... there are numerous other philanthropic services rendered by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission by way of providing primary and vocational education, free medical checkup, upgrading rural livelihood etc. all of which aims at the development of the rural folks.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has a unique traditional way of life, rich in culture, crafts and folklore all of which are of great interest to the discerning international traveler.

Even though the state of West Bengal is blessed with a variety of tourist products, the state hasn't been able to tap its inherent tourism potential. Today, in terms of tourist arrivals, West Bengal is at the bottom level as compared to its counterparts like Kerala and Rajasthan. The state's most hallowed river – "Ganga" is now heavily polluted and the city of Calcutta is literally bursting at the seams with every bit of space being occupied to build concrete structures. Needless to say, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit too has for long remained neglected.

The environmental problems facing the world are of such great magnitude that it is not just the government – local or central whose cooperation is required. There is always the need for involving the entire community and all the individuals to contribute positively if we are to survive on planet earth.

There is an urgent need to develop world-class tourist infrastructure like Tourist Information Centers, hotels, high quality way side amenities, folk museums, craft bazaars as well as renovating the age old temples and monuments

that are closely connected with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi.

Swami Vivekananda – India’s foremost Tourism Ambassador:

Let us remind ourselves that the genesis of Ramakrishna Math & Mission traces its origin to the untiring efforts of Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who made his mark on the world stage with his soul stirring speech as an ambassador of Hindu religion in the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in the year 1893. This unheard-of monk was for all practical purposes India’s first tourism ambassador to the West and keeping in sync with his Master’s philosophy of – “Harmony of World Religions”, contributed admirably towards enriching the overall spiritual consciousness of the Western world.

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission believes that Swami Vivekananda’s mission of “Harmonious Cultural Synthesis Between India and the Rest of the World” is an ongoing process and see the present world tourism scenario as an opportunity to showcase the very best of India’s 5000 year old spiritual heritage. As the Ramakrishna Math & Mission plunges dedicatedly on their mission to take the new age traveler on a journey of discovery, courtesy the Integrated Religious Tourism Circuit of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati, it is of utmost importance to draw some strength and vitality out of Swami Vivekananda’s forays in the world of tourism.

Today we are facing the age of great transformation, caused by the end of World War III. Everybody is well aware of the consequences of World War I and II; however, the other important war that many people have not yet come to recognize is the Cold War between the East and the West, which is what the World War III was all about. There are many phenomena occurring in this rapidly transforming world and at the same time we are facing another crisis, that is, the beginning of World War IV.

The Second World War was fought between the fascist regimes and the free world and the Third World War was the fight between the East and the West. Now the Fourth World War might be fought between the North and the South. Under this situation, the global community is trying to build a “New World Order” and the United Nations is at the center of this movement. The Ramakrishna Math & Mission feels that the “New World Order” will not be established by the United Nations alone.

The world is grappling with millions of problems and searching for a new civilization; otherwise we might face a very dangerous era in the coming decades. Modern



civilization is based on mass production and mass consumption. If the people of the industrialized countries continue with their present life style as they do today, then by mid-21st century we will have used up all of the resources available. On the light of the above observations, what the world really needs is the creation of a totally new civilization, which can supersede the modern civilization. Now who will take the initiative in creating such a new civilization?

Drawing succor from Swami Vivekananda’s predictions, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission believes that the new civilization will be created by Asian countries. The economies of USA and Europe are on the decline; however, the Asian economies are rapidly expanding and growing and all the leading international organizations like the United Nations, The World Bank, The World Trade Organization etc. are unanimous in their opinion that in the 21st century Asia will continue to lead the global economy.

At least a century back, the great “Cyclonic Monk” Swami Vivekananda had predicted that Asia will lead the world not only in terms of economics but also in terms of culture and in the creation of a new civilization.

It is only logical to believe that an organization like the

was overwhelmed by the simplicity of rural Bengal and he states – “If you leave Kolkata airport early one morning on a West-bound flight, you will be able to have supper that night at Rome. If instead, you take a car to Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna’s birthplace, you will easily arrive in time for lunch. In the first case, you will have traveled well over four thousand miles; in the second, about seventy. Yet in one sense the shorter journey can be said to be the longer, because it takes you backward in time.

In spite of the backwardness of the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, devotees and pilgrim tourists from the Western world as also domestic pilgrims have continued to flock to this part of rural Bengal, braving pot holed roads, lack of electricity, lack of sanitized drinking water, telecommunications and other bottlenecks in tourist infrastructure. The tourist circuit of Gar-Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati have changed little in appearance during the last hundred years and according to Isherwood – “if Kamarpukur has changed more than its neighbors, it is in having become an international center of pilgrimage with a modern temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. That is to say, it is less concerned with the possibilities of its future than with the great event of its past”.

The houses of these village hamlets are predominantly built of mud and the roofs are made of thatch. The rural hutments are more often than not barren with just a single cot and a bunch of sleeping mats. The kitchen floors are still rubbed with cow dung as it used to be century’s back.

The village roads, although narrow, meanders through in a zigzag manner with sewerage gutters on either side. The well or the village pond still serves as the primary source of drinking water and these rain-feed ponds or reservoirs also doubles up as places for bathing and washing clothes.

These villages even if taken together is not large enough to find mention on the tourist map of India or for that matter the tourist map of West Bengal. The characteristic feature of these villages are that usually they will be shielded by groves of banyan trees or even mango orchards.

Most Western visitors are truly charmed by the sight of rice growing agriculture lands and the century’s old system of ploughing through Ox and Water Buffaloes.

However, with India positioning itself on the world stage, the winds of change are there for all to see. Due largely to the pioneering charitable-philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, public education, state-of-the-art healthcare system, emancipation of women etc...are now a reality. And the slogans of democracy too are being heard in these miniscule villages.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist

circuit offers all the simplicity of an Indian village along with the lofty ideals of Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy of “Harmony of World Religions” and “Service to Mankind”.

The age old and time-tested ideal of “Doing Good to the World with a Spirit of Worship and thereby paving the Path for One’s Own Salvation” (“Atmano Mokshartham Jagad Hitaya Cha”) is what drives the Ramakrishna Math & Mission’s spiritual-philanthropic activities. Through the manifold activities that range from discourses on the Bhagvad Gita by senior monks to holistic Ayurvedic healing therapies and local community activities to the mind elevating meditation sessions, an amazing array of new age survival strategies relevant to every generation is on offer in the sylvan surroundings of rural Bengal – the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati pilgrim tourist circuit.



This circuit is at once the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi and blends splendidly with the fascinating undisturbed, unpolluted and untainted rural bliss, which is the trademark feature of this tourist circuit. The circuit has the authenticity of rural India and an ocean of spiritual bliss that still attracts the crème de la crème of the world.

In the light of the above observations, it is only logical that an Integrated Religious Tourism Circuit be developed for the new age traveler to undertake the journey of spiritual discovery from the place from where modern India’s spiritual regeneration or the great Indian Spiritual Renaissance began. ■

About the Author

Subhasish Chakraborty is a Travel Writer & Consultant Tourism.

VHPA Strongly Condemns Atrocities Against Minorities in Bangladesh

VHPA strongly condemns the unabated attacks on Hindus, Hindu temples and other minorities in Bangladesh. The arrest of Chinmay Prabhu, a prominent Hindu leader from ISKCON, points to the ferocity and viciousness of the current Bangladesh government.

Amitabh Mittal, General Secretary of VHPA said, "The silence of global media regarding the ongoing atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh is deafening. The recent arrest of an ISKCON priest and the violent attacks on Hindu temples underscore the alarming rise in religious intolerance. These incidents are part of a broader pattern of discrimination, as reported by organizations like Human Rights Watch, which has highlighted increasing attacks on Hindu and other religious minorities in the country. The lack of international condemnation only further emboldens the perpetrators and threatens the safety and freedom of minority communities in Bangladesh"

Ajay Shah, VHPA President said, "We have warned the world about the drip-drip genocide of Hindus in Bangladesh. Just last week, over 150 Hindu organizations and temples submitted a letter to the House Foreign Affairs Committee asking the State Department to impress upon the Muhammad Yunus government in Bangladesh to protect its religious minorities, including Hindus. The news about ISKCON's Krishna Das Prabhu, the de facto spokesperson for Hindus, and the vandalism of Kali Mandir in Chittagong, along



with rising attacks on Hindus across Bangladesh, is disconcerting. Is this the human rights legacy the Biden administration wants to be remembered for?"

Shyam Tiwari, VHPA spokesperson and VP said, "Violent attacks on Hindus and targeting of Hindu leaders by the law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh should be condemned by all. Silence around the world on killing of Hindus and other minorities only spells doom for humanity in general and amounts to implicit if not complicit condonation. We should never forget that past silence of world over attacks against Jews and Hindus resulted in the Holocaust in Germany during WWII and 1971 Hindu genocide in

Bangladesh respectively."

Tejal Shah, Jt. General Secretary of VHPA echoed, "As a representative of all the Hindu Mandirs across the USA, I very strongly condemn putting Shree Krishna Das Prabhuji in jail, vandalism and destruction of Hindu Mandirs in major cities of Bangladesh. The minorities are living in constant fear, being harassed and the world is silently watching. This suffering must stop, the rights of Hindus, who are minorities, must be protected. The petition signed by more than 150 Hindu Organizations and Mandirs shows the reality, the expectations of American Hindus, which should not be undermined by the administration. ■"



you practice inner simplicity. This simplicity is a byproduct of contemplating the eternal reality that our essence is the soul, and the realization that the soul receives no satisfaction whatsoever through material possessions.

As the knowledge of the •self• becomes deeper, you will automatically feel like downsizing and simplifying your life. Now the connection to the soul becomes stronger while relationship with the world becomes healthier. You will appreciate and enjoy Nature's bounties more than before. Simple pleasures of life that had been overshadowed by the constant chatter of social media, will provide immense satisfaction to the mind.

Commit to a simple life and discover the immense joys it can give you.

Nourishing power of love

Love is a healer like no other. It picks you up when you are down. It gives inspiration when all seems lost. Love gives confidence when you most need it. It is a tonic that provides an instant boost of energy.

I speak not of superficial expressions of love communicated on social media through cute emoji's, but of a deep love which is kind, patient and understanding. The kind a teenager needs from her parents as she lashes out at them. The loving mother interprets the teenage daughter's hateful words and venomous behavior as, "I am frustrated, and I don't know how to deal with life right now. I know I am safe with you, and I know you will tolerate my rudeness. You also know I don't hate you."

A man shows love for his family by washing the dishes and changing the baby's diaper. A wife shows love for her husband by cooking him a hot meal. A man should not confuse taking care of the infant with 'babysitting' the child. Babysitting is a job; taking care of the child is a responsibility and an act of love. A woman should not confuse lovingly taking care of her husband with slavery.

Children raised with love grow up to be well-rounded and secure adults. They become confident in who they are. A strong foundation of love allows us all to add beautiful layers to our individual personalities.

Raise the alarm

You may be using a daily alarm to help you remember when to take your medication. An alarm reminds you to take cookies out of the oven, call your mother, or to go to your daughter's school to volunteer. There are many ways in which alarms help us live a more organized life.

For me, the best use of the alarm is as a reminder of God.

Try it if you are not already doing so. Set up the alarm on your phone, another gadget or on your alarm clock. Set it on an hourly basis, and associate the sounding of the alarm with God. Each time the alarm rings, visualize God in the way you find comfortable. It's very important to visualize Him. Bow before Him in your mind, and then get back to work. Next time when the alarm sounds, visualize God and thank Him from your heart. Then get back to work. An hour later, the alarm will sound once again. This time, tell Him how happy you are to belong to Him. Then get back to work.

After a few days or weeks of this practice, set your alarm to sound every 45 minutes. Your mind will now be reminded more frequently to think about the Divine Beloved. You will happily notice that now the mind is automatically thinking of God every so often even without the alarm. Your mind is forming a habit, and this is a most gratifying feeling.

Practice diligently and you will find over time that there is no need to set the alarm, as your mind has become accustomed to thinking of God throughout the day.

Protect your earnings

Some people earn a lot but spend more than they earn. Not only are they unable to save, they end up incurring a large debt. Some people earn a little but manage to save a substantial amount over a period of time. These individuals spend a lot less than they earn. They are wiser of the two.

Just as it is with material wealth, devotional wealth must be earned more and more, while we try to spend (waste) less and less of it. We must protect our devotional wealth vigorously, not giving in to the vices that steal it away from us.

Suppose you have meditated on God for half an hour. Consider this to be your earning. When you gossip with a coworker, family member or a neighbor, you are spending. By thinking kind and good thoughts you accumulate spiritual wealth but lose it all by criticizing others and by bringing impure thoughts into the mind.

To maximize spiritual earning, you must do two things. First, think good and Godly thoughts. Secondly, take care not to spend too much. Take precautions. Do not read literature that will rob you of pure thoughts. Refuse to watch damaging material via movies, TV, video games and the internet. Do not eat food that will encourage worldly thoughts. Do not spend time with people who will affect your mind negatively. ■

Note: You may ask your spiritual questions to me directly at s_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org



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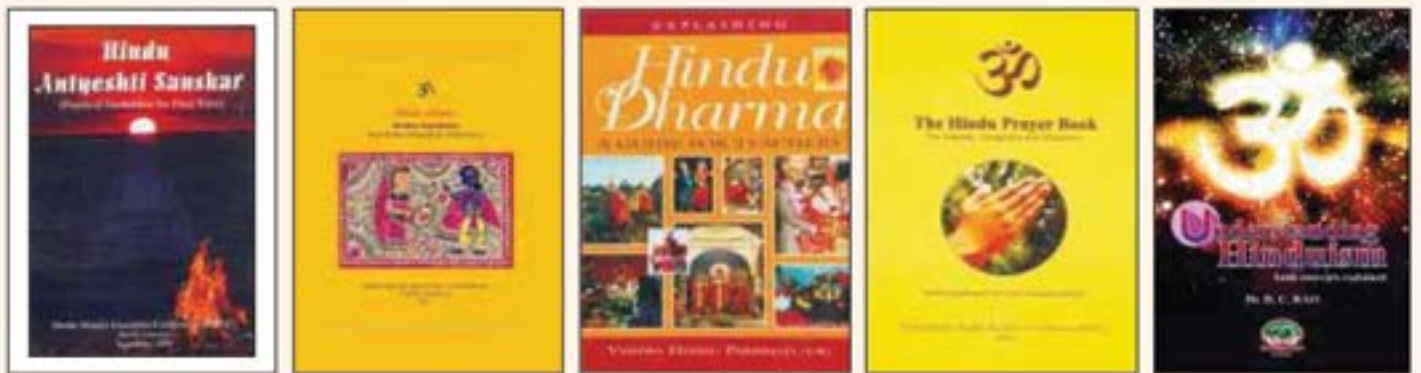
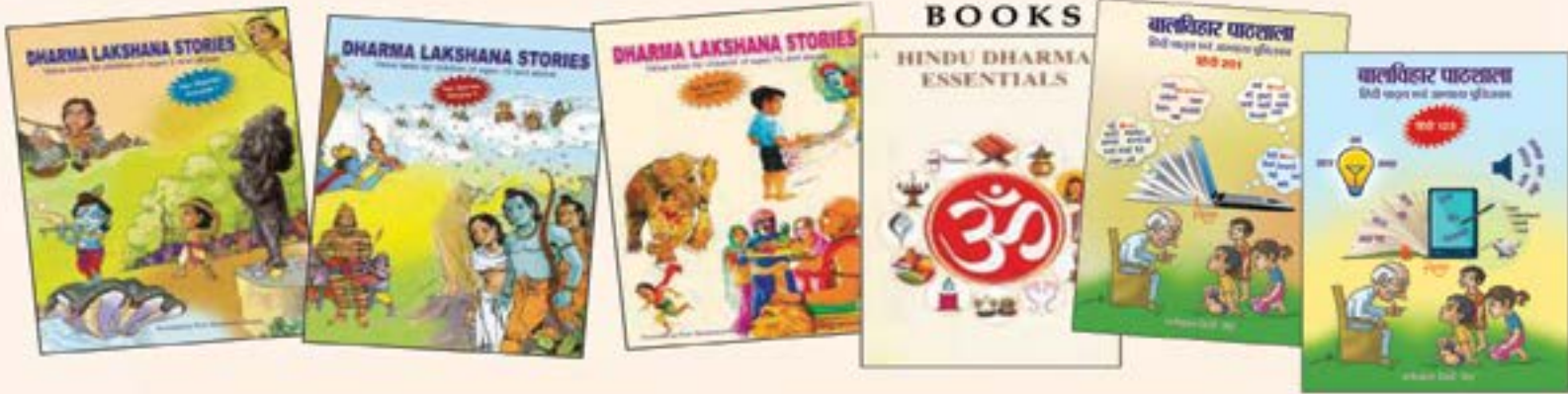
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ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्माऽमृतम् गमय ।।

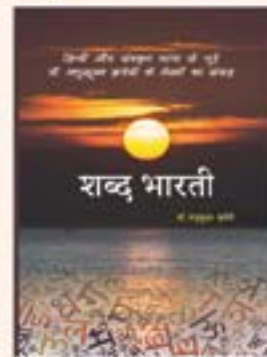
Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

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