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HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest

MAHA KUMBH THE ETERNAL CONFLUENCE OF DHARMA

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समं पश्यन्हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमीश्वरम् ।
न हिनस्त्यात्मनात्मानं ततो याति परां गतम् ॥29॥

- श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 13.29

samañ paśhyan hi sarvatra samavaśthitam īśhvaram
na hinaśty ātmanātmānañ tato yāti parāñ gatim

Those, who see God as the Supreme Soul equally present everywhere
and in all living beings, do not degrade themselves by their mind.
Thereby, they reach the supreme destination.

- Bhagvad Gita, 13.29

ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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MAHA KUMBH: THE ETERNAL CONFLUENCE OF DHARMA DEVOTION, AND DESTINY

The Kumbh Mela, named after the pitcher of Amrut (nectar) that emerged from the cosmic Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), stands as a profound symbol of the eternal struggle—individual, religious, and spiritual—to purify oneself, society, and the cosmos. This grand Dharmic festival transcends its physical manifestation, aligning millions of people, sacred river confluences (Sangam), and celestial configurations into a singular, timeless event.

In Hindu darshan (philosophy), every Katha (parable) carries a threefold teaching: Adi Bhoutik (physical), Adi Daivik (divine), and Adhyatmic (spiritual). The Kumbh Mela embodies this layered wisdom, drawing not only devotees from across Prithvi Lok (earthly realm) but also, as tradition holds, beings from Deva Lok (divine realm) and Brahma Lok (cosmic realm). Its antiquity is unparalleled—tracing back at least 8,000 years, it is among the oldest observances in Sanatan Dharma. With each iteration, surpassing the last in scale and splendor, the Kumbh illuminates humanity with the radiant glow of eternal Hindu Dharma, signaling its endurance.

Acknowledged by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, the Kumbh Mela is the world's largest peaceful holy gathering. The 2025 Maha Kumbh welcomed an estimated 66.21 crore (662.1 million) visitors. This spectacle extraordinaire unites people beyond jaati (caste), panth (creed), or geography, as millions take a sacred dip at the Triveni Sangam—the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the disappeared Saraswati—seeking moksha (liberation). It dissolves perceived social divides—caste, varna, or the oft-accusation of untouchability—so frequently weaponized by critics to malign Hindu society. At the Triveni Sangam, all bathe as equals, their distinctions washed away by the sanctifying waters. The 2025 Maha Kumbh drew pilgrims not just from India's farthest corners but also from around the globe, underscoring its universal appeal.



Beyond its spiritual core, the Kumbh Mela has long been a crucible of historical and cultural significance. During India's freedom struggle, leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak leveraged its vast gatherings to galvanize nationalist sentiment. Post-1857, British colonial authorities kept a watchful eye on the event, wary of its potential to ignite mass movements. In modernity, it projects Hindu Dharma's global soft power. On February 1, 2025, 118 diplomats from 77 nations attended, affirming its stature as a beacon of spiritual and cultural influence.

Rooted in the Samudra Manthan—where gods and demons collaborated to churn the ocean for divine nectar—the Kumbh Mela weaves a shared heritage that binds ascetics and grihastha (householders) alike in a narrative of cosmic struggle and triumph. The Maha Kumbh of 2025 stood as a monument to unity—spiritual, social, and cultural. This ancient festival reaffirms our shared humanity, the unbroken thread of Dharma, and the timeless pursuit of truth and transcendence. As millions stood shoulder to shoulder in the sacred waters, the Kumbh Mela whispered a resounding truth across time and space: we are all seekers, united by faith, devotion, and the eternal quest for The Divine. ■



Celebrating a Year of Devotion: Ayodhya Sri Ram Mandir Anniversary

One year ago, the Hindu community came together to celebrate the historic inauguration of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir. From the grand celebrations in January 2024 to the spiritual journey of Shree Ram Rath Yatra in all 50 states across USA visiting 850+ temples, these moments have left a lasting impact. To commemorate the first anniversary of this momentous occasion, the excitement was endorsed with a new initiative—"Shree Ram Ka Swagat," a Performing Arts Competition designed to celebrate devotion, talent, and Hindu heritage.

Co-ordinated by Smita Daftardar and Surinder Dhar, the competition invited individuals and groups from across Atlanta to showcase their artistic talents in three categories: Singing (Solo or Group), Dance (Solo or Group), and Acapella. Participants, ranging from ages 8 to 21 and beyond, performed on either the celebrated song Shree Ram Ka Swagat or the devotional bhajans dedicated to Lord Ram, in all languages.

A Platform for Talent, Tradition, and Triumphs

The response to this competition was overwhelming, with participants from music schools, dance academies, and independent performers eager to take part. A unique aspect of this

event was the submission of video performances, which were carefully judged by esteemed professionals in the field. The winners had the honor of performing live at the grand celebration on January 25, 2025.

The event was graced by Chief Guest Vinod Krishnan, the renowned artist behind the composition of Shree Ram Ka Swagat for the Ayodhya Ram Mandir-Pran Pratishtha. His presence added to the spiritual and artistic connotation of the occasion. Mr. Vinod Krishnan along with the President of VHPA Atlanta Chapter, Smt. Veena Katdare, inaugurated the event by lighting the lamp.

The enthusiasm for this celebration was not limited to any specific age group. The event featured performers from blossoming 7 years old's through to seniors of inspiring 82-years young age, proving that devotion knows no boundaries.

Recognizing Outstanding Talent

Emceed by Preeti Gupta and Surinder Dhar, the audience was engaged with their repartee and the VHPA particulars regarding the various networks that are actively engaged in the community for the purpose of Sewa, Sanskriti, Sampark and Prachar. Shri. Jayant Daftardar, VP (Seva) of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America was invited to the podium to share his personal experience of





his visit to Ram Mandir, Ayodhya. His narration brought Ram Mandir odyssey to life for 140 spectators present for the occasion.

Celebrating the Power of Art and Community

The cultivated event was a promise in an immersive experience of music, dance, and devotion, with live performances by talented individuals, including renowned singer Madhuri Jadhavji, a Zee TV Sa Re Ga Ma Pa finalist and an All-India Radio artist. She, along with other distinguished performers like Smt. Leera Sujal Rawal, disciple of Padma Bhushan Smt. Kumudiniben Lakhia and great Kathak Maestro, Padma Vibhushan Pandit Birju Maharaj ji, Mr. Shyam Gupta, a talented vocalist, Atlanta Idol and Golden Voice Contest finalist and Smt. Sagnika Mukherjee, acclaimed artist and classically trained dancer & teacher of Bharatnatyam and Odissi, appraised and elevated the celebration with their artistry.

The sense of unity and cultural pride that this event fosters is a testament to the strength of the Hindu community. As one participant eloquently proffered that, "You have built a cultural Ram Setu in Pardes!" This celebration is not just about ostentatious display of talent but about endowing the rich traditions of Bharat on to future generations—with a heartfelt tribute to Lord Ram and the enduring spirit of Hindu culture. The judges, participants, and audience alike



have expressed their desire for this event to become an annual tradition, reinforcing the cultural and spiritual bond among the diaspora.

January 25, 2025, the aggrandizing demonstration of virtuosity in Hindu community will be evoked as a divine and memorable day that honored and celebrated the Hindu heritage.

The program ended with vote of thanks by Smt. Veena Katdare and Sangh Parthana by the VHPA volunteers.■

Program Volunteers: Surinder Dhar, Smita Daftardar, Preeti Gupta, Deepanjali Sahoo, Veena Katdare, Sarika Jaswani, Sanjay Gupta, Shobha Shivaram, Jayant Daftardar, Kusum Khurana, Manju Tiwari, Puneet Bhatnagar, Sabitha Venugopal, Raghu Veeraraghavan, Manjula Reddy





Kali Krishna Hindu Darshan

By Sushim Mukerji



Hindu dharma is not a publicity convenient religion. In olden days our grandmas never had any ambivalence on offering sindur and flowers at the feet of naked Mother Kali adorned with a garland of human heads when the same grandma dutifully lighted a lamp at the tulsi-manch in the evening for Narayan and offered sweets for Madan Mohan in Vrindavan Lila where the youthful Lord was engaged in His dance drama with scores of married and unmarried women (Gopis) without the presence of any other male. It is her grandchildren educated in Christian influenced education/society in modern ages who are aghast at Hindu worship practices for the blood smeared naked Mother Kali and the questionable morality of God having good times with young women without the knowledge of their husbands and other family members.

Today's generation is not aware of the universal spread and intricacies of Hindu practices. Some of them apologize for the seemingly insane Hindu observes, some ridicule them while others simply dismiss those "barbaric" practices. While performing pujas in USA for years I encountered several Hindu women complaining about the bizarre practices of Hindus. A woman from Uttar Pradesh did not approve of Sri Ram going to vanavas (adopting an uncertain jungle life in place of the safety of a civilized society) taking his wife with Him because according to her the husband should follow "Pati Dharma" (duty of a husband) by protecting his wife at home in a civilized society, not taking her in the uncertain forest abound with wild animals (and demons) just to keep a promise to his aging father. A Punjabi woman told me that she thinks Lord Shiva with matted hair,



and all is too wild as God for her children. A Maharashtrian woman told me that she keeps her daughter away from Radha-Krishna business because Radha was not Krishna's wife; she is scandalized by Radha-Krishna relations. Hindus too want a warm, uncontroversial and comfortable religion as with a Santa Claus in Christmas.

Krishna has a positive image in the western world. Daughter of a friend of mine hailing from Uttar Pradesh, told me that her professor and her classmates in the University of Delaware discussed Vrindavan Lila (divine sport of Sri Krishna at Vrindavan) in the class and they all approved the antics of Lover Boy God. It dovetails well with the current western idea of love as religion. That's the kind of God our children in America, and perhaps their Hindu parents, feel comfortable with though perhaps not for the right reasons. Dance drama (Lila) displayed by Sri Krishna with the young women (Gopis) at Vrindavan is termed Madhur Bhava which is characterized by sweet devotion to God where the devotees lose all sense of me and mine; only thou (God) remain manifested



as unconditional love. Gopis lost their ego and body consciousness, a rare treat that happens only by grace of God, and not by personal efforts, nor by reading the shahstras (scriptures). Endowed with such grace they ignored all societal norms on modesty which forbade them to adore a male outside their close family in the presence of others. Most of the casual admirers of Sri Krishna at the university may not be aware that the same Krishna when He was a mere infant sucked the life out of Putana, the demoness, when Putana came to kill Him by pretending to be a wet nurse. Also, the same Sri Krishna who was surrounded by adoring women (Gopis) in Vrindavan in His youth vanished suddenly never to return and went to Mathura to slay the demons Kamsa and Chanur to protect His devotees. How the same Krishna later taught Hindu Darshan (Hindu world view and spiritual philosophy) in a battlefield through Gita is unknown to most of them.

Kali comes from the word Kalah meaning Time. Time destroys everything, hence Kali, the destroyer. In Gita too the Lord declared "I am Time (Kalah), the all destroyer" (Gita Ch 11 Verse 32). Both Kali and Krishna



are the same. Sri Ramakrishna, the 19th century spiritual master, said, “whoever is Krishna is Kali, whoever is Kali is Krishna.” In Vishwarup Darshan (Gita Chapter 11, Verses 23-31) Lord Krishna is described in a form- bloodthirsty and all- no less terrible than Kali, the Mother. People wrangle over name and form, but both Kali and Krishna are infinite; they remain indefinable. Krishna in Gita or in Vrindavan is not just the one holding the flute nor is He just the charioteer of Arjuna. Krishna is infinite and beyond time and description. Kali is called Digambari meaning naked in everyday language. But not so fast; this is Hindu philosophy expressed in unique Sanskrit language. “Ambar” means attire/ clothing. “Dik” means direction, as in east/ west/ north/ south. Digambari means one (here feminine gender) who is attired in direction. It is an imaginative concept. If one starts going toward the east it will remain east; one can go forever and still it is east, it never ends. So, if one is wrapped in direction (if there is any such expression in English) one is infinite. The great Chidambaram Temple in Tamil Nadu dedicated to Lord Shiva means the same, Shiva-the Infinite- attired in Chit (consciousness); Shiva is infinite. What a strange expression compared to today’s simplistic statements. At the feet of Mother Kali is Lord Shiva Himself who is called Digambar, also meaning infinite. Both Kali and Krishna are dark meaning unfathomable; they remain abstruse no matter how one tries to understand them. Mind does not reach them nor does speech (as eloquently stated in Kena Upanishad 1.3-9), simply because if mind or speech reaches anything it is defined. Kali and Krishna are faces of the infinite and will ever remain indefinable. To understand Kali or Krishna in everyday language using societal experience and conventional ethical values will always lead to a wrong conclusion.

Kali looks terrible being adorned with a garland of severed (human) heads. They represent severed heads of false values, wrote Swami Chinmayanand, one of the founders of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bharat. What are false values? The prime false value is Ahamkara (ego), the sense of me and mine; this is repeatedly mentioned in the Gita taught by Sri Krishna as prime impediment to God realization, goal of life as taught by Hindu Darshan (spiritual philosophy). Ahamkara says “I do”, “I know”, “I own”. Ahamkara is our constant companion. We feel proud of it and do not let it go. Because of ego we don’t want to admit our mistakes. Because of our ego we feel jealous of others. It is the cause of our stress and unhappiness because ego creates barriers between people. Worse, it is a barrier between us and God; we feel we shape our future with our work, not God (Gita 3.27). Sri Ramakrishna said ego is hard to eradicate; it is like the roots of a banyan tree. You

can cut down the tree, but the roots will shoot another tree nearby. Ego is so basic an imperfection in humans that it is hard to conquer. Sri Krishna declared in Gita that we are indeed a fragment of God (Gita 15.7). But we do not know it because of our ego; ego keeps us separate from God. We keep acting petty in our selfish desires and keep feeling less of ourselves because ego keeps us in the dark of our inalienable connection to divinity (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2). Sri Krishna taught in Gita that ego gives rise to Raga (attachment), Dwesha (aversion), Kama (desire/ craving), Krodha (anger) that keeps our mind disturbed in whatever we do. In that state of mind whatever we do to maintain

Krishna has a positive image in the western world. Daughter of a friend of mine hailing from Uttar Pradesh, told me that her professor and her classmates in the University of Delaware discussed Vrindavan Lila (divine sport of Sri Krishna at Vrindavan) in the class and they all approved the antics of Lover Boy God. It dovetails well with the current western idea of love as religion.

family values and societal etiquette is ultimately selfish. We maintain peace among members of society and family by ignoring missteps of others and fostering ego. People strive to maintain poise in society while the mind remains agitated. To realize God, aim of Hindu darshan, one must forsake worldly values/ attraction totally, no matter how impractical they might appear. The option is stark, either the Jagat (world) or Ishwar (God), stated in no uncertain language in Purushottam Yoga, Gita (Chapter 15.Verse 3) where Lord Krishna asked the Sadhak (striver) to cut off the attachment to Samsar (the ever-changing world) remorselessly with a sharp sword of detachment (termed Asanga in Gita). Elsewhere the same Lord Krishna stated repeatedly that desire for worldliness and ignorance about our divine heritage must be cut off single mindedly with the sword of knowledge (Gita 3.43, 4.42). There is no sugar coating on this subject by Sri Krishna. The hard truth on how to achieve the aim of life was taught by Sri Krishna on the battlefield far from the scene of divine dance drama at Vrindavan. Sri Ramakrishna too stated that when one is keen on realizing God one looks at his own family and friends as deep sink holes on the ground; he avoids them desperately. To the seeker the only thing that is real is God, the ultimate reality; everything else is real only for the



moment. Mother Kali adorned with severed human heads similarly is a stark reminder of how a Sadhak (an intently seeker of God) looks at his goal; the Sadhak has to tear himself from his ego as ruthlessly as Mother Kali showing Herself wearing the garland of severed heads. Can a Sadhak achieve such a feat easily? Not at all. But trusting Mother's blessings the striver braces himself and keeps trying to tear himself from Raga (attachment), Dwesha (aversion), Kama (desire), Krodha (anger), Ahamkara (ego) and be free. How is one able to get rid of the base qualities that prevent us from realizing God?

In Gita Arjun, the pure minded and dutiful person who was fortunate in having Sri Krishna Himself as his Guru (teacher), knew that his mind is too restless with desire and ego to settle on God, the eternally constant. So, Arjun asked how to control the ever-restless mind. And the Lord responded in no uncertain terms that nothing less than undaunted repeated practice (Abhayas) and dispassion (Vairagya) will achieve his goal (Gita 6.33-35). This is a momentous statement from Sri Krishna, the teacher in Gita. There is no shortcut; the Lord will not do it for you. There will be ample failures. The Lord, however, assured Arjun that the goal, though tough, was achievable by ardent strivers. Keep practicing, the loving God kept encouraging

His disciple as a consummate coach does for an Olympic champion. Mere display of ethical values, niceties and etiquette among family members and society will not achieve the goal. Swami Vivekananda too stated that God's devotee must develop a stubborn streak for his quest for God realization. The striver must follow the arduous path of yoga to practice dispassion, overcome ego and realize that he is not the doer; his body, mind and senses do everything while he, the unblemished Atma (self) remains the eternal witness (Gita 3.27-30, 4.13-20).

What happens to the Sadhak (striver) after he sacrificed his ego with such consistent practice and so ruthlessly? The same Krishna who talked so resolutely of using sharp weapons to cut down attachment (to the world) now said that the successful yogi's life will be marked by unmitigated love for others. The successful yogi (Sadhak) will rejoice when others are happy regardless of his own life situation, and he will cry in distress when others are suffering (Gita 6.32). The stubborn Sadhak (striver) having conquered ego will be transformed into an epitome of love like one in Vrindavan Lila. Not just that. This Sadhak has been transformed into a super worker; he works for the welfare for all without expecting any return (Gita 12.4).

That is the mark of a Sadhak (striver). All through Gita Sri Krishna taught various ways to conquer false righteousness, passion, and timidity to achieve Tyaga (dispassion). Only through tyaga one can conquer one's ego and realize there is no barrier between him and Ishwar (God). Sri Krishna taught that dispassion (tyaga) is not loveless; it is unmitigated love. And Sri Krishna taught this great truth on a battlefield. Mother Kali teaches Tyaga in stark reality by wearing a garland of severed human heads. Be a Yogi, Gita said by giving up. Be a Sadhak, asked Mother Kali by giving up.

The process of giving up is taught during our puja proceedings. During pujas there is a step termed Matrika-Nyas/ Pitha-nyas. Nyas means a process by which anything ordinary is replaced by a super-purified one. Thus, for example, the priest who uses his body, mind, fingers (none of which can be purified completely no matter what process is used) purifies them one by one using certain mantras. Only then the priest's body and mind become qualified to perform pujas and only then the priest could offer to God whatever has to be offered during the puja. Mantras, such as, Dharmaya Namah (I bow to righteousness), A-dharmaya Namah (Namah to un-righteousness), Jnanaya Namah (Namah to Knowledge), A-Jnanaya Namah (Namah to ignorance) and other similar mantras are recited to make a point that only by accepting contradictory values with poise as gift from God we become qualified to approach God.



Righteousness & unrighteousness, Knowledge & ignorance came from the same source (God). Such mantras are meant to increase our capacity to accept life from the most attractive to the most revulsive as gift from God. Such a change of heart does not happen in one day. The striver has to keep at it tenaciously as explained by Lord Krishna in the Gita (Gita Chapter 6. Verse 5-10, 18-25, 35). Then something wonderful happens; we are not disturbed by changes in life anymore. This non-judgmental attitude removes the disturbances in the mind (Raga- attachment and Dwesha- aversion) caused by the ever-existent presence of opposite values. Only an undisturbed mind is qualified for meditation (Dhyan) that allows one to turn the mind toward the Eternally Unmoved (termed Achyut in Sanskrit) called God. This is Hindu darshan (Hindu world view). Other religions believe that it is the devil which brings about impure objects and objectionable behaviors which imply there are two masters- God and devil. In Hindu shastras there is no question on who the source is; it is God alone (Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.7). The universe came from God and is known as Prakriti. Prakriti (Nature) appears as mountains, trees, meadows, rivers; it also includes our body, senses and mind. Prakriti is ever changing, like a mirage. So long as the mind is attached to Prakriti, i.e., anything we experience, one is not able to realize God. That is why Hindus believe the world is Mithya. Mithya is translated in English as

Hindu darshan teaches us our real identity. We are no different from Brahman (Ultimate Reality, God sometimes with and without form and sometimes with and without attributes). We are Atma which is a small fraction of Brahman (Gita 15.7).

Our relation to Brahman is like a drop of ocean to the ocean itself. But we forgot that. For reasons unknown, termed delusion or Maya, we forget our divine heritage and identify ourselves with our perishable body-mind-sense complex and relate ourselves with the ever-changing world, thus creating confusion to reality.

false. Mithya (false) does not mean it does not exist; it does. However, everything we know from dew drops to the universe has limited existence. When God projects the world (called Shrishti) everything comes out in three different qualities- goodness/ calmness (Sattva), restlessness/ passion (Rajas) and inertness/ laziness (Tamas); that is the package deal. That is why in Devi Mahatyam (also known as Chandi) we find that that when God created Brahma, the Creator, He also created Madhu & Kaitava (the demons) and the epic struggle began between God and the demons. In Hindu pantheon the demons are not castigated; demons simply play their

roles and finally get vanquished only to rise later again. God always blesses the demons. In Durga puja we recite Mahishasuraya Namah (I bow to the demon Mahishasura). Why do we bow to the demon? It is because the created one (here, Mahishasura, the demon), no matter how vulgar and arrogant, was created by the same God. Touch of God is in the demon too.

Hindu darshan teaches us our real identity. We are no different from Brahman (Ultimate Reality, God sometimes with and without form and sometimes with and without attributes). We are Atma which is a small fraction of Brahman (Gita 15.7). Our relation to Brahman is like a drop of ocean to the ocean itself. But we forgot that. For reasons unknown, termed delusion or Maya, we forget our divine heritage and identify ourselves with our perishable body-mind-sense complex and relate ourselves with the ever-changing world, thus creating confusion to reality. When one relates oneself with changeable entities one sets oneself for attachment, aversion, disappointment, stress, anger and low self-image.

Message of Hindu Darshan is how to conquer our lower nature by our higher nature and realize God. Both Mother Kali and Sri Krishna remind us of our real nature in various ways so we may keep our focus on who we really are and come out victorious. Celebrate diverse Hindu practices that lead us to the same truth. Say Jai Sri Krishna, Jai Ma Kali. ■

About the Author

Sushim Mukerji is a longtime VHPA volunteer and has extensively served VHPA in various capacities. He started Support-A-Child program in 1985, which has grown several folds since then and currently supports education of over four thousand children in Bharat.



THE PEARL NECKLACE

By Sarika Jaswani

The recent succession of stampede incidents, despite a plethora of security measures, begets introspection: how can an ecliptic alignment of six planets coincide with a misalignment of mindset? Perhaps a holy dip in the scriptures is obligatory before jostling to celebrate the once-in-144-years auspicious Maha Kumbh Mela. Conceivably, reading Tulsidas's Bhakti Rasa on Lord Hanuman's life story will inspire us to prevent sins rather than merely seeking to wash them away.

Scarabaeidae, the taxonomic family name of scarabs-or as we commonly know them, dung beetles-were considered sacred by the ancient Egyptians. They believed the dung beetles kept the earth revolving like a giant ball of dung, linking the insect to Khepri, the Egyptian God of the rising sun. Today, we understand that dung beetles do exactly what their name suggests-utilizing the nutrient rich manure of herbivorous animals like cows and elephants by rolling it into a ball and burying it. The dung is then used either for laying eggs or as food.

The fascinating idiosyncrasy of these creatures is not just the enigmatic colors of their exoskeleton but also the remarkable way they use their hind legs to roll dung ball to their burrows. In human terms, it would be akin to holding a massive boulder upside down, walking on one's hands, and pushing it backwards with one's legs. Equally perplexing is their ability to navigate using sunlight, guiding themselves home. It is undeniable that dung beetles play an integral role



in the planet's ecosystem. However, what is fundamental to their survival-and to survival of all life on earth-lies 149 million kilometers away: the Sun. The celestial body gently caresses

us every eight minutes, reminding us of our eternal connection with light. Metaphorically this serves as the simplest explanation of humanity's love affair with light. Love is Light, and Light is Love.

Since time immemorial, the fear of darkness, in human terms, has been synonymous with disease, death, and decay. Darkness is dreaded as something that engulfs, whereas light is considered as a beacon of hope, a guiding force that can lead us home. Albert Einstein captured this fascination with light when he pondered, "What if we were to ride, to chase a beam of light at the speed of light, to catch up with the wave and move with it, like a surfer riding the wave?" Philosophically, light represents enlightenment, the transcendence from the mediocrity of physical matter. Our obsession with light is unparalleled.

Perhaps that is the reason actors in India are referred to as a "stars." They seem to transcend the ordinariness of an average life. The massive premiere of Pushpa 2 at Hyderabad's Sandhya



Theater and the ensuing colossal stampede-where thousands rushed just to get a glimpse of Allu Arjun-reflect two sides of the same neurotic coin. A desperation to escape the shadowed inadequacies of common life and an infatuation to bask in the dazzling glow of a star, all in hope of capturing some of the brightness for oneself.

Maha Kumbh 2025, a once-in-144 years event, is not merely a congregation of millions but also a celestial spectacle. Six planets will align, creating a mesmerizing symphony of lights in the sky. Millions of people have rallied the city of Prayagraj for the Amrit Sanan-the sacred dip-at the confluence (Trivani Sangam), of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. Over 45 days, from January 12 to February 26, more than six hundred million people-exceeding the population of United States-visited the holy city. The sacred ritual is believed to cleanse the sins, liberate devotees and their ancestors from the cycle of rebirth, and ultimately grant moksha (spiritual liberation). Travelers from all corners of the world flocked to witness the divine event.

Despite the presence of 50,000 security personnel, 2500 cameras (some AI powered) monitoring crowd movement, the inevitable occurred-a chaotic stampede resulting in injuries and deaths.

When contemplating on such recurrent disasters at grand events, it becomes evident that human existence (strife) oscillates between rolling away the dung of tribulations and an upsurging to ascend the ladder of triumphs. To prevent such distressing occurrences, it is imperative for each of us to evoke Hanuman ji in our ethos. The beloved Hanuman ji is not only a revered source of strength but is an eternal symbol of unwavering devotion and righteous conduct.

The story begins when Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya after his victorious conquest of Lanka and was crowned the king. Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, came to the court and presented Rama a priceless pearl necklace as a gift. Rama suggested that Vibhishana offer the necklace to Devi Sita. Sita, who, in turn gifted it to Hanuman as a token of his devotion for Rama. However, Hanuman astonished everyone by breaking the necklace apart. He meticulously examined each pearl and discarded them one by one. Sita, confused and offended along with others in the court, questioned his seemingly disrespectful behavior. Hanuman humbly replied that he was searching for Lord Rama and Devi Sita within the pearls, as anything devoid of them was useless to him, no matter how precious. To further emphasize he proclaimed that every inch of his being contained Rama. Doubtful of his claim, the court challenged him to prove it. In a moment of profound reverence, Hanuman tore open his chest, revealing Lord Rama and Devi Sita glowing within



his heart. The powerful depiction in Bhakti Shiromani, by Tulsidas is a testament to Hanuman's innocence and unshakeable devotion.



The real dubki (immersion) of the devotee does not lie in an external place or object. If one dares to peer deep within for one penetrating moment, it becomes crystal clear—the radiant pearls of wisdom reside between our very eyes. Devotion cannot be attained by rationalizing sacred places as a contest to win the gold of purity nor can light of faith burn bright on the wax of heavy heart. No one can push their way to transcendence.

The heart of a blue whale weighs over 1,300 lbs. (±600 kg)—the size of a small car. The gigantic heart beats 8-10 times per minute, and each heartbeat can be heard from over two miles (3.2

km) away. The essence of all sacred narratives is to cultivate a heart vast enough that its beat resonates across eons. Even the Grinch's heart swells up at the end of *How the Grinch stole Christmas*. Such stories remind us that all we need is a nurturing to grow a tolerant heart on a sage mind.

Ganga is the river of patience that flows within us when we attend to an aging parent. Yamuna is the river

of perception in us, guiding a heedless child onto the right path. Saraswati is the river of compassion reflected in the kindness towards a neighbor. The Sangam of all three sacred rivers exists within us. We are already pure. Once in a blue moon, we need to tear our chest like Bajrangbali to discover that the brightest light radiates from within, evincing that we are already home. ■



About the Author

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.



Religious Tourism in the Native Land of Sri Ramakrishna A Sustainable Approach II

● By Subhasish Chakraborty

A Meaningful Life in The Abode of Sri Ramakrishna:

If there is one thing we fear – and fear it most desperately than death itself, it is the dread of living a life without significance. This dreadfulness has become more prominent as we advance technologically in our struggle to master the external world. We chase impossible goals that turn to ashes in our own hands. Our interior world remains unexplored, uncultivated and barren. Even though we have enjoyed remarkable technological progress, the psychic cost has been great. It is like we have dangled ourselves over the edge of a rocky promontory.

The world that we have made for ourselves is a very complex one indeed. Particularly in the Western world, where life is vastly easier and most people live longer, eat more and work less. Many live in private homes and drive to work alone in their own cars. Office workers communicate instantaneously across continents through telephone, fax and E-mail. Industries crank out new goods faster than people can buy them in ever-bigger shopping malls. All these advantages comes for a price : new kinds of health problems, many caused by dirty air and water left behind by industries, the loss of parkland as highways devour open spaces and sprawling desolate suburbs where neighbors are strangers and fear of crime isolates people behind locked doors.

Psychologists and Psychiatrists lay more and more emphasis on the mental health of the people living in highly automated urban surroundings and rightfully advise leisure and recreation activities which need not necessarily mean physical rest but also genuine mental regeneration. But in what form? The answer is Tourism that is sustainable in nature.

For more than a century the Ramakrishna Math &

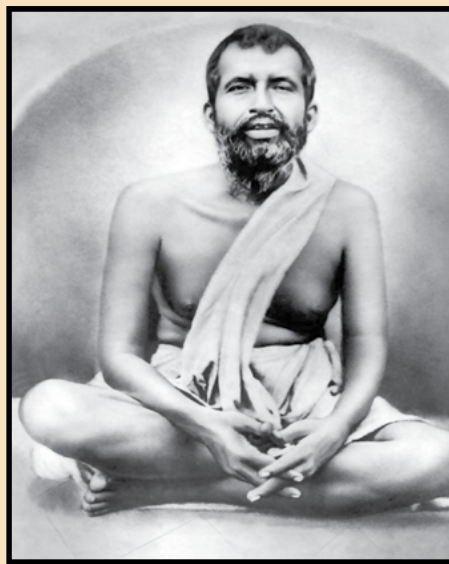


Mission has been laying emphasis on living a life, which is perfectly in accordance with the Vedas. The Vedic way of life is as Eco-Friendly as one can possibly imagine. The tranquility that surrounds the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit will come as a total surprise to the discerning international visitors. The slow moving Ox carts still ply on the village roads, the thatched hutments are still in existence, joyful Jattras (village theatres) are still performed by rural artists, cows and buffaloes are still being used in tilling the soil and the popular folklore is still alive even to this day in spite of the onslaught of modernity.

The burgeoning surge in the number of visitors, both domestic as well as international who visit the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is due primarily to the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's ideology – “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth”. How inspiring indeed!

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission endeavors to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. And it all started from two miniscule villages (Kamarpukur and Joyrambati) located in one of the remotest corners of the state of West Bengal.

The circuit is replete with sparkling water bodies, ruins of old buildings and temples that bears ample testimony to its rich virile past. The lush green hinterlands surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit offers breathtaking scenic vistas of the romantic Bengal countryside. There is also the quintessential rural Bengal sweet shops that still churn out mouth watering traditional Bengali sweets like Jelabi, Nolen Gurer Sandesh, Rajbhog,



Lady Keannie, Kalo Jam, Payesh etc... that is sure to make the most discerning foodie succumb to his or her tastebuds.

During the festival season, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, particularly Kamarpukur and Joyrambati takes on a whole new look. The two main festivals – Durga Puja and Kali Puja are celebrated with great pomp and grandeur. Equally impressive are the celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi that attracts visitors from all over the world and its carnival time out here.

The security that mankind knew once is now long gone. The faith that knit our lives together slowly unraveled with the intrusion of science. The paradigm shift in the West's worldwide view over the past century has rendered God, if not dead, at least coolly marginalized. It is the "spiritual outlook" that gives meaning to life. It is the spiritual approach to life that recognizes that our lives have meaning and that there is a purpose and a goal.

It is this element of security that is on offer in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. Add to it the characteristic features of Religious Tourism and you have all the makings of an "Eden on Earth".

Volunteer Opportunities

These days the discerning international travelers crave for an experience that is elevating and enriching. Today's travelers are no longer interested in the "Homogenized Mass Tourism". With the burgeoning growth of Eco-Tourism and Sustainable Tourism, the concept of "Volunteer Tourism" has now made its presence felt in the fast changing global tourism industry. One of the principal reasons for the growing popularity of "Volunteer Tourism" is the opportunity to travel safely and cheaply.

In the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, there will be opportunities galore for overseas volunteers to offer their skill and expertise in restoring the monuments, temples as well as natural and cultural heritage sites that are intimately connected with the life and times of one of India's greatest spiritual giants – Sri Ramakrishna. The opportunity to live with a local family and even attending lively temple services with the simple village folks can indeed be a very rewarding experience.

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is poverty ridden and according to Suzanne Edmonds from USA, who had recently visited the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati – "When you see the dreadful sight of poor children sifting through garbage, you inevitably tend to carry that image back home with you. And once you are at home, you marvel at the privileged life that you lead as you relax with the Jacuzzi".

An increasing number of people are joining the Volunteer Tourism bandwagon to make their holidays fun filled and joyous. From rebuilding homes in Tsunami-hit Southern India to teaching English in a remote hamlet in Thailand, Volunteer Tourism is on the rise.

It has finally dawned on the holidaymaker that its doubly exciting to perhaps lead a relief mission in earthquake hit Gujarat to donning the Scuba Diving gear to collect vital data related to the Dolphins in Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Volunteer Tourism is essentially tourism with ethics. The volunteers abhor the very idea of experiencing an alien culture through the windows of a hotel room or bus. Today's volunteer tourist is quite willing to part company with a 5 star deluxe hotel room for a night's halt in a poor



fisherman's hut in one of the remotest corner of planet earth. As tourists, they go back home with an experience that is elevating and that their holidays had a purpose, which no amount of "Sunbathing" could have bestowed.

As a philanthropic organization, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been providing charitable and philanthropic services to the poor and the needy. With a dedicated set of monks who are also experts in relief and humanitarian works, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has carved a niche for itself as an organization that has provided high quality humanitarian assistance to millions of underprivileged Indians.

Today as a result of extending unmatched humanitarian services to the nation for the past many decades, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has its own hospitals, mobile dispensaries, schools, colleges and Technical Training Institutes. Needless to say, there is always the need for skilled and qualified people who are in a position to impart education and training to the budding youths of India, offer the light of education among the tribal or even provide maternity facilities to the rural womenfolk.

The spirit of "Volunteerism" is particularly noticeable amongst North Americans, Australians, Western Europeans as well as the Japanese people.

Volunteer Tourism is known to have a "Domino Effect". Volunteers from affluent western countries very often are known to sponsor holiday trips for the local host families with whom they share a deep understanding. While there are others who repeatedly keep on visiting their Volunteer Holiday Spot and kind of get captivated and obsessed with that holiday spot.

Volunteer Tourism isn't just meant for the young and the agile lot. In fact, there are instances galore of people who are 60 plus, embarking on a Volunteer Holiday and being involved in challenging projects involving preservation of natural and cultural treasures in a destination of his or her choice.

As far as the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati are concerned, there are opportunities galore for volunteer tourism activities. Apart from the common activities like imparting education to the poor village folks and providing medical relief to the needy, one key area that might have a lot of relevance is to involve volunteers from abroad to be associated with the restoration of temples and structures that are intimately associated with the Ramakrishna Movement. Volunteers from affluent Western countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, France the Netherlands etc... may be offered with the opportunity to join the local community in their restoration efforts. This is one great opportunity for



the people of the Western world to put their heart and soul towards the preservation and protection of one of the great spiritual centers of India.

There are many full time as well as lay devotees in the West, particularly in USA and UK who feel disconnected at the fact that they haven't been able to offer their services to Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi in the manner they could have. If an opportunity were provided to them so that they may be allowed to work and serve as Volunteers during their holidays in India, it would be the perfect culmination to their long cherished desires.

As a matter of fact, Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna believed that it was through exchange of cultures between the East and the West that the world would become a better place. As a religious and philanthropic organization, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission works with the people belonging to diverse cultures and faith.

Conclusion:

The Government of India's Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal may deliberate and formulate a comprehensive policy for regulation and management of Religious Tourism in this region, which gels with the requirements of the existing tourism policy of the state of West Bengal. This would help in sensitizing the pilgrim tourists and spiritual institutions like the Ramakrishna Math & Mission which form a major component of the entire tourism in the region, to the needs of development and sustenance of "Environment Friendly Religious Tourism" in the region. ■

About the Author

Subhasish Chakraborty is a Travel Writer & Consultant Tourism.

Hindu Mandir Empowerment Council & Hindu Mandir Priest Conference 2025



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HWN Conference Inspires, Invigorates and Strengthens Sense of Community

On Saturday, February 22, 2025, as a prelude to International Women's Day, the Hindu Women's Network of Atlanta (HWN) hosted its annual Hindu Women Conference at the Best Western in Roswell, Atlanta, Georgia.

HWN, an initiative of the VHPA, aligns with the values of Seva (service), Samskara (values), Sampark (network), and Prachar (awareness), fostering discussions on women's empowerment and enrichment.

The entrance to the Best Western boardroom transformed into a vibrant archway, as saree-clad volunteers welcomed attendees beyond the hydraulic doors. Registrations were available online, with additional booths set up for walk-ins. The eight-hour session commenced with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony led by VHPA President Veena Katdare, Vice President Kusum Khurana, and keynote speakers Shrimati Esther Dhanraj and Dr. Arati Joshi. This was followed by prayers led by Manju Tiwari, Smita Daftardar, Preeti Gupta, and Neetu Sharma.

Sabitha Venugopal, the facilitator of the conference, initiated the program with a welcome speech, house rules, and an overview of the schedule spanning from 9 AM to 4 PM. She then introduced the first session, "Women in Dharma," featuring Shrimati Esther Dhanraj.

Esther Dhanraj, with an extensive background in Christian



doctrines and a master's degree in English literature, emphasized the significance of academic inquiry in religious understanding and practice. As the Director of Community Outreach at the Hindu University of America, she leverages her experience in mobilizing funds for Dharmic causes. Her inspiring journey from a

conventional Hindu upbringing to a devout Christian and back to Sanatan Dharma resonated deeply with the audience.

The core of her autobiographical speech underscored the importance of critical inquiry in religious exploration. She highlighted that Dharma, the moral order of the



universe, offers a framework for righteous living. Hindu parents, she emphasized, must not only immerse their children in Hindu traditions but also educate them in Shatrubodha (awareness of adversaries). The study of Hindu Dharma, she argued, extends beyond memorizing scriptures to embracing Purvapaksha—an intellectual approach that fosters debate (Tark) rather than blind belief. Esther Dhanraj leads a Gharwapsi movement in Bharat, advocating for raising children without the fear of hell, and directs Sadhana Marg, an initiative that engages in debates and provides spiritual counseling for adolescents.

The next session, moderated by Manjula Reddy, featured Dr. Arati Joshi, a practicing physician and certified yoga instructor. Dr. Joshi guided the audience through breathing exercises, including Pranayama Bhramari, Dwitiya, Tritiya, and Omkar Sadhana, which revitalized participants. She stressed the importance of maintaining core strength and balance through asanas such as Tadasana, Vrukshasana, Utkatasana, and Virbhadrasana. She emphasized that consistent yoga practice fosters self-awareness and long-term well-being.

The following session, "Money Matters," was conducted by financial experts Dr. Girish Pore and Shradda Pore. They provided a comprehensive guide on financial responsibility, introducing the DIME framework: Debt, Income protection, Mortgage, and Education. The discussion focused on securing financial futures and ensuring a smooth transfer of assets to the next generation.

Before breaking for lunch, Smita Daftardar, a veteran Balvihar teacher, highlighted the growth of the VHPA organization. She traced its semicentennial journey, beginning with the founding of Balvihar Hindi School in 1969, followed by the establishment of the Hindu Student Council in 1990, the Coalition of Hindu Youth in 2010, and the Bhagavad Gita Sanatan Dharma Scholarship in 1993, later expanded into the Sharada Scholarship Program in 2022. Additional initiatives, including the Durga Project for abused women and the Hindu Women's Network, further support the community. She also underscored the importance of April 20th as Hindu New Year for Hindus living in the U.S.

After lunch, the group participated in Yoga Nidra, guided by Dr. Arati Joshi, who led them into deep relaxation. The event's smooth progression was expertly managed by timekeeper Neetu Sharma.

The next session, "Vastu Shastra," was moderated by Preeti Gupta and presented by Dr. Deepika Gupta, an expert in Vastu Science and Astrology. Dr. Gupta, author of *The Numeroscope: A Complete Guide to Numbers*, introduced



attendees to the concept of numerical vibrations and their impact. She elaborated on the significance of balancing the Panch Mahabhootas (five elements) in the right directions to optimize living and working spaces for better health and prosperity.

Sarika Jaswani, a contributor to Hindu Vishwa Magazine and moderator for the HWN Book Club, introduced attendees to the club's mission. The club focuses on reading unconventional and original works that delve into history, philosophy, and beliefs. Books are discussed over multiple Zoom sessions, with authors occasionally engaging in dialogue. The club aims to foster literary discussions and build a community of women supporting women. Interested individuals can join via the provided link: HWN Book Club WhatsApp.

The Hindu Women Conference concluded on a high note, leaving attendees inspired and invigorated with newfound knowledge and a strengthened sense of community. HWN continues to be a beacon for women seeking empowerment, education, and spiritual growth.

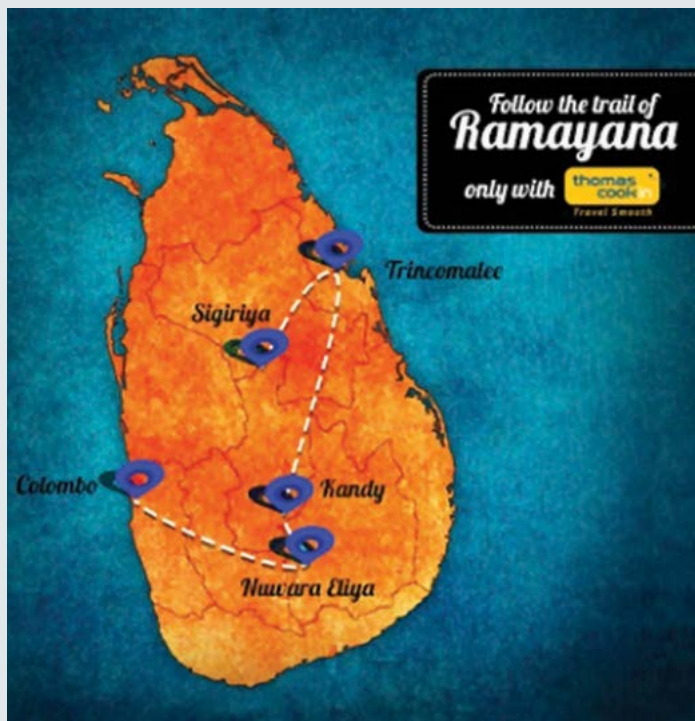
The program, wrapped up with vote of thanks by the President-Veena Katdare, prayers, and triumphant volunteers huddling for group pictures and selfies along with the dignitaries present. Each participant went home with a hint of epiphany and a load of empowerment. ■



Tracing Bhagwan Shri Ram's Journey in Sri Lanka

● By Renu Gupta





Visiting Ramayana trail had been our dream. We were not sure if any landmarks, symbols or points are left in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is land of Ram or Ravana? During our recent visit to trace footsteps of Bhagwan Ram, Mata Sita and Bhakta Hanuman ji, we encountered several interesting and pleasant but many painful experiences.

Sri Lanka was a Hindu Nation for several centuries back, then converted to a Buddhist nation. At present there are 65% Buddhists, 15% Hindu, 10% each Muslims and Christians. On the surface it looks very integrated well-knit society but as a Hindu we felt hurt, because almost with all Hindu monuments, Stupa or Buddha Statue was installed and Hindu Mandir was pushed on the back side. For Sri Lankans today, Ram and Ravana both are irrelevant. Now Government of India is working hard to manifest the sites of Ramayana trail. Hindus are visiting Sri Lanka in large numbers from all over the world.

The total land area of Sri Lanka is 65,610 sq. km. and is astonishingly varied. A length of 435 km (270 miles) North to South and breadth of 240 km (150 miles) East to West encompasses beautiful tropical beaches. Actual working ground of Ramayana trail is about 200 km. Real action place of Ramayana trail is from Sigiriya (Ravana's Palace) to Nuwara Eliya

(Ashok Vatika and last battle ground where Ravana was killed). *Below are the details of the prominent temples and places.*

1) Munneswaram temple

This regional Hindu temple complex has been in existence for at least 1000 years as myths surrounded with the temple associate with the epic Ramayana. In Tamil, "Mun" means long time ago and "Eswaram" means Shiva temple. So, this also can be considered as one of the ancient and popular Hindu temples in Sri Lanka Puttalam district. This temple is in Munneswaram, which is a village with mixed Sinhala and Tamil population situated in the Tamil division region (Demala Pattuva).

2) Manavari temple

It is one of the important Hindu Temples located in Chilaw, Puttalam District of Northwestern province. Bhagwan Sri Ram wanted to do penance after killing Ravana, a Brahmin. Therefore, while going back to Ayodhya, he installed and prayed the Shiva lingam after the war with king Ravana. It is believed to be the only lingam which has been named after him other than the one in Rameshwaram, India.

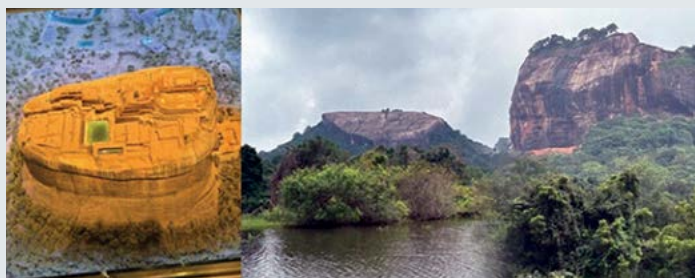


3) Sigiriya Rock Fortress

It is considered Ravana's Original Palace (though there is no landmark of Ravana palace inside, it is of previous kings). On the top is the entertainment complex of Ravana and his queens from where the whole Lanka can be watched. It was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. Sigiriya serves as a fine example of ancient urban planning. Sigiriya is a significant site of the Cultural Triangle and perhaps Sri Lanka's most iconic historical destination. It is also called a lion rock as it looks like a lion from front and looks like an

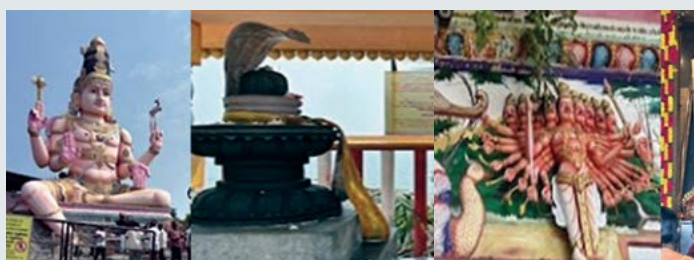


elephant from the back. The next mountain is called the helipad to land the Pushpak Vimana. The lion rock is surrounded by about 10 feet water reservoirs then six feet solid boundary wall, as mentioned in Ramayan serial when Lanka was described.



4) Koneswaram Temple in Trincomalee:

The grand Koneswaram Temple stands on Swami Rock cliff. It is the oldest temple in Sri Lanka. While this is a Grand Shiva temple, it is also a Shakti Peeth, where Mata Sati's groin is found. The holy complex contains ornate shrines and a massive statue of Shiva. Nearby Gokanna Temple has panoramic views over the city and the coastline. Perched atop Swami Rock in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, the Koneswaram Temple is a magnificent Hindu shrine that holds deep spiritual significance. We also visited small cave in the side of the temple, where Ravana worshiped Bhagwan Shiva and got the boon, Chadrahas sword etc. As per common belief, this is the place where Ravana recited Shiv Tandav Stotra.



5) Sri Bhakta Hanuman Temple:

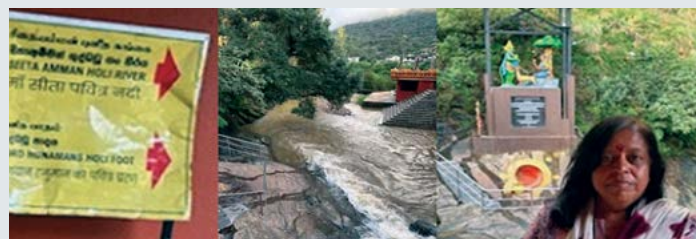


It is dedicated to the worship of Lord Hanuman and is situated in the city of Ramboda, amidst lush greenery. The temple is revered by devotees who come to pay their respect and seek blessing. In front of the temple, there is a large mountain, where it is believed that

after landing at the coast of Lanka, Bhakta Hanuman ji rested on this mountain in the night, and the next day he met Mata Sita.

6) The Seetha Aman Temple and the Ashok Vatika:

The Seetha Amman Temple in Nuwara Eliya, is believed to be where Sita was held captive by Ravana in the Ramayana. The temple complex is surrounded by lush greenery and includes shrines dedicated to Sita, Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Ravana. On the back side, there is a mountain, a forest and a very fast-flowing river. They have a marked spot where Sita Mata was sitting under the Ashok tree. The rocks near the river have small and large spots, looks like footsteps. They are considered footsteps of Hanuman ji when he was small and big in his form.



7) The Agni Pariksha place and the last battle site between Bhagwan Ram and Ravan:

We were not sure initially to visit this place where Mata Sita gave Agni Pareeksha. This is also the last battle ground of war between Ram and Ravan. It is believed that Ravan was killed here. Being a Buddhist Nation, we saw Stupa in several Hindu Mandirs. The main space is taken by Stupa and the side corner was given to a mandir. There are huge trees and it's believed that this is the place where Sita Mata gave Agni Pariksha. The young and learned priest gave us detailed commentary, then he took us in front of a small room/





mandir. He had a large key in his hand and invited the senior most woman in the group and asked her to open the door. Inside, we found a large statue of Mata Sita. All women were standing in the front, Priest lit the lamp and prepared the Pooja thali. He directly put his finger in the flame, we all did pooja of Mata Sita. Priest directed us to touch the sindoor and put our palm on the palm of Mata Sita. We felt strong vibrations on our palm, it was a very divine experience.

8) Nikumbla Mata Mandir:



This is Gaytri Mata mandir, but believed to be Nikumbla Mata mandir, where Meghnad performed pooja to become undefeatable and to kill Laxman.

9) Ravan Fall and Ravan Caves:



There was a big talk about Ravan caves and a waterfall. As we approached famous Yala forests, we saw a huge waterfall and water coming from the mountain. It is called Ravana Fall. Ravana caves were nearby but unreachable. It is

a turtle shaped huge cave where Ravan used to park his Pushpak Vimaan as per common belief.

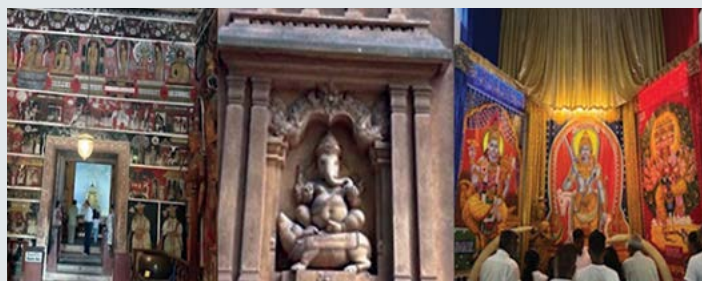
10) Kelaniya Vibhishana Temple (Buddhist Temple):

Ramayana states that after the death of King Ravana, King Vibhishana was crowned by Lakshmana, Kelaniya is the place that was ruled by Vibhishana. This mandir is in a huge complex north of Columbo. Outside walls are full of sculptures of Vibhishana Abhishek. Inside the mandir also has many wall paintings, but the main deity was Bhagwan Buddha. That was a total surprise. It was very painful to see Mandir outside in a small room.



11) Panchamuga Anjaneya Mandir:

This is the famous Hanuman mandir, where Hanuman ji has five faces. Main entrance of mandir is very impressive.



12) Ussangoda:

It is located near the southern coast of Sri Lanka, this is a fascinating site known for its striking red



soil and unique geological formations. This place is considered the landing spot of Hanuman ji in Sri Lanka. ■

About the Author

Smt. Renu Gupta is based in Cincinnati, Ohio and is ex Vice President of Seva, VHPA. She is currently involved in VHPA's Support-A-Child program (serving the educational needs of underprivileged children in Bharat), which continues to thrive in her able leadership and. She may be contacted via email: renurajvanshigupta@gmail.com



TRUE MEANING OF HOLI

● By Sandip Shah

In recent decades, Holi festival seems to have gained a huge worldwide popularity and momentum as celebration of Indian spring festival of colors, which Hindus have gladly accepted but ignored its characterization. In reality, this is far from the truth and the Hindus are pretty much responsible for allowing this reduction if not an outright smear.

Yes, colors, joy and dancing are all happy components of the celebration, but what is not appropriate is to celebrate Holi merely as an event of entertainment. The question is - what are we celebrating? One thing we hear repeatedly is that Holi represents "victory of good over evil". That is true but every festival is created to spiritually uplift a person. So, how is that helping us as an individual?

Is colorful celebration really the only purpose of Holi? No, it has a very strong underlying spiritual / adhyatmic meaning. Any celebration without fully understanding its true meaning and significance will only provide a temporary happiness. It will be without instilling its core message and will be an exercise in futility. So, let's break the superficial cover of colors and dive deeper into the true meaning of Holi. Below are the primary elements of the spiritual meaning of Holi beyond its history that most of us have heard several times.

■ **Victory of good over evil** - think about our bad practices and behaviors, burn it one by one and overcome with goodness in our hearts to enrich our lives.

■ **Happiness** - become optimistic, look forward to a better day with enthusiasm and positive attitude. Nothing will change what you are going to achieve.

■ **Colors** - acceptance of different colors from others means accepting others the way they are, forget the past grievances, forgive and embrace them with love and joy. Strengthen bonding within family and friends with love, unity, respect and helping others. Experience the joy of freedom from previous grievances. Use of



colors came from Shree Radha and Krushna, how they colored each other on this day with joy and effort to give happiness to others.

■ **Adhyatmic essence** - The root of Holi is bhakti. Understand bhakt Prahlad by reading about Prahlad bhakti siddhant.

Bhagwan / God is everywhere and in everything- reminder that we all are an Ansh (part) of Bhagwan / Paramatma and Bhagwan resides in everything. ईशा वास्यम् इदम् सर्वम्. Make progress in our Adhyatmic journey.

हरेर्नाम हरेर्नाम हरेर्नामैव केवल । कलौ नास्त्यैव नास्त्यैव नास्त्यैव गतिरन्यथा ॥

About the Author

Sandip Shah is VHPA Cincinnati chapter president.



Swami Aksharananda: Contribution to Education and Culture in Guyana

● By Ramnarine Sahadeo B.A., LLB.

Swami Aksharananda, the ubiquitous, indefatigable Hindu monk from Guyana received the Pravasi Samman Award on January 10, 2025, the highest that India hands out to any individual or organisation from the Diaspora. In this case it was Saraswati Vidya Niketan, (SVN) the school founded by Swami was recognised for its contribution to education and culture. Both the event and the timing are of tremendous significance and connect us with this most ancient culture.

Both President Droupadi Murmu and Swami bowing to each other with hands clasped in the traditional manner, it would be interesting to know how many Hindus in the West still greet each other this way. It is only one example of how far we have strayed from the ways of our foreparents.

It is also the time for the festival of Maha Kumbh Mela an extraordinary event held every 144 years at the holiest of locations, Prayagraj, the confluence of three sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

The academic achievements of this "model school" as recognised by many Ministers and Heads of



State are well known throughout Guyana and Caricom countries. In 2022 one of the best performers for the entire Caribbean was SVN student Atistha Seenarine.

What few may not recognise is how this piece of land within the country can teach governments and the populace about nation building.

CONSTRUCTION

The structure itself started as one building in the 1990s. For a while progress was slow with limited support. However, the determined monk used his contacts in Canada where he visited and appealed for help. Within a few years support poured in from

many countries outside Guyana and the first building was open for a unique form of education in 2003 with an enrolment of about 30 students.

Once the excellent CXC results showed it was among the best schools in the country the student population ballooned to about 500 today and other buildings were constructed to meet the demand. There are plans to expand to include classes from kindergarten once financial support makes this possible. Supporters in New York have opened a special account for donations and friends are supporting many students by way of scholarships. The latest school is named after the late Mohan



Nandu, a cultural icon from the same village as the school.

STUDENTS

Students and teachers come from every race and religion. While they may be exposed to Sanskrit prayers and some aspects of a Vedic lifestyle, upon graduation they leave without being asked to change their religion. This is much different from the days of Colonialism when one had to be converted to get a job as a teacher or a public servant.

Swami is one of the foremost opponents of any form of religious conversion, overt or covert, and is one of the most vocal religious leaders anywhere in the world when he learns that people are told to change their religion or they will go to hell. He finds it a harmful falsehood handed down from the days of the Roman Empire and forced upon colonies by their European masters who felt their culture and religion were superior.

Even students from the Amerindian communities attend and excel at SVN. Readers may recall the rare coincidence of Amerindian twins from St. Cuthbert's Mission achieving identical results in their examinations in the same year.

A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Throughout Guyana and especially in the towns and the capital, Georgetown, the sight and stench of garbage is quite evident. Contrast this with the premises of SVN and one would think they are in another country. Visit SVNGUYANA.ORG for more pictures and the latest info.

Education Ministries and Boards can learn much by visiting this oasis of cleanliness, peace and tranquility. Students pay fees but happily perform the task of cleaning the classrooms and the entire compound from 7.30 each morning and are ready for morning prayers and assembly at 8.00 am. Lateness and absenteeism is recorded daily.

While they are permitted to bring their own vegetarian lunch most purchase hot meals cooked on the premises each day.

Students are not allowed to have cell phone or tablets. Whether at school or at home use of social media can lead to disciplinary measures. Drugs,

alcohol and cigarettes are prohibited.

These strict rules are not attractive to all parents and children but there is still a waiting list as the school still needs to expand to meet a growing demand.

School buses are provided for students thus sparing them from the noise and harassment on taxis and mini buses. SVN compound is a space of bliss and serenity that rescues the occupants from the noise some call music. PM Narendra Modi must have thought he was in India that is Bharat when he visited this unique school in November 2024. His positive impressions may have had something to do with the award.

The cornerstone of this peaceful environment most conducive of learning is the strict discipline expected of both teachers and students.

It is also the institution that contributes annually to the nation's blood bank. This is the best form of giving as the donors do not know who benefits from their generosity.

TEACHERS

The teachers are well qualified and trained. Some have several degrees. They are dedicated to the goal of excellence in the little humans who pass through their hands. They comprise a mix of experienced retired teachers and former students, work weekends and generally longer hours than those in Government institutions yet carry on their normal lives. Current principal is Nirmala Singh, one of the first batch of students, a mother of three who has played a key role in guiding teachers and students in living up to the high standard that was established since the institution opened its doors in 2003.

All students are now included in educational cash grants from Government but pay for their own uniform and text books.

It is noted that in nearby Trinidad salaries of teachers of private schools are met by the State without interfering with the administration of the schools or the Boards.

If there are going to be significant changes in the behaviour of the citizens especially with regards to cultural knowledge and how to lead a pollution free life many more such institutions will be necessary. Each region should have at least one. It may be a long while before Caribbean countries follow suit but, in the



meantime, cultural continuity can be promoted if a few students attend similar schools in Guyana, Trinidad or Surinam.

Many Hindus who have migrated have achieved material success and now know more about the principles of Sanatan Dharma popularly known as Hinduism and the contribution that Universal Vedic values can make to any nation. There will always be a need for qualified dedicated teachers who will return or remain home to share with future generations the values that sustained the oldest civilization on earth. The current festival of Maha Kumbh Mela which anticipates attendance of over 450 million devotees this year over a 44 days period is the largest gathering of humans on the planet. It should certainly impress the most skeptical of those who are now delving into the history of this spiritual Empire.

SWAMI AKSHARANANDA

The challenge in Guyana and the Caribbean is to find or mould a few more dedicated, fearless Aksharanandas for the region. Guyana which received about 238909 Indentured Servants from India since 1838 has only produced one home grown leader of his calibre so far.

He was born in the village of Cornelia Ida where the school is located and emphasised cultural education as a medium of change and development at an early age. He was a teenager in the 1960's when he got his first job as a teacher. Government has taken over the denominational schools and establishing new ones and the requirement of religious conversion was abolished. It was a decade of racial and political violence as part leading up to struggle for Independence. The experience has left indelible impressions on young

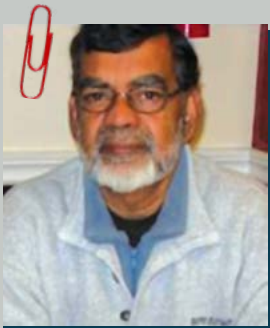
minds.

Swami is one of the few leaders who consistently and publicly denounce the practice of religious conversion. He echoes the sentiments of the great ones like Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda describing it as violence and the single most destructive threat to peace and prosperity. If there are good and bad people in all religions there has to be some other explanation other than credit given to any single one.

Swami's spiritual search led him to the land of his ancestors regularly and over the years he has developed special connections with prominent and influential leaders including Prime Minister Modi who visited SVN on his last trip to Guyana in November 2024. He is quite fluent in Sanskrit and completed his Bachelor and Masters degree from Banaras Hindu University in India and his Doctorate in Hindu studies from the University of Madison, Wisconsin, USA.

Once he was satisfied that he was on the right path he took his oath as a monk which includes that of celibacy. There were many religious leaders who visited Guyana and many priests who continue to perform rituals and keep the culture alive but none can match the scholarship, dedication, courage and discipline of Swami Aksharananda.

He does not hesitate to praise Swami Purnananda the founder of the Hindu College at Cove and John for his initiative of starting that institution. This son of India had arrived in Guyana before Independence and influenced many to retain and promote the values of their ancestors. Swami Aksharananda revealed the secret of this success with one word DISCIPLINE and with that he has trained the young minds to excel at the school he founded. He has recently passed on the role of Principal. We hope it is to serve a more universal purpose. ■



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Bhagwad Gita for Children IV

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

Chapter 1 and 2 Summary

Last time we discussed Shloke 70 of 2nd chapter, which completes the 2nd chapter. Today we will revise the first and second chapters.

The first chapter is called Arjun Vishaad Yog. The key word here is Vishaad, which means depression, not being happy, not feeling well mentally. That mental state is called Vishaad. Before the war started, Arjun went into a depression.

The second word we talked about is Moh, which means delusion or confusion. We all go through that state sometimes. Some days we get confused, we cannot decide what to do. As we grow, the confusion grows within us. The purpose of study is to get knowledge so that there is no confusion. That is why Bhagwad Geeta is still relevant today.

So, we see that the two key words in the first chapter are vishaad or depression, and moh or confusion.

The second chapter is Sankhya Yog. Sankhya means knowledge. This chapter is very important, once we understand it, the rest of the Geeta becomes easier.



Chapter 2 Shloke 7,

kārpaṇya-doṣhopahata-svabhāvaḥ
prichchhāmi tvām dharmā-
sammūḍha-chetāḥ
yach-chhreyaḥ syānniśchitaṁ
brūhi tanme
śhiṣhyaṣte 'ham śhādhi mām tvām
prapannam

*With my very being smitten by
the vice of faint-heartedness and my
mind puzzled with regard to duty,
I beseech you! Tell me that which is*

*decidedly good; I am your disciple.
Pray, instruct me, who have taken
refuge in you.*

This shlok is a Prarthana. Prarthana is sometimes described as prayer, but it is much more than prayer; it is a request with Shraddha (dedication and commitment) and Shreyas, which is good for all.

What do we do when we want a solution to some problem? We go to our parents and do a Prarthana,



which we can call a request with surrender. Arjun went to Bhagwan Krishna to find the solution. He did Prarthana to Krishna to help him find the solution.

Arjun says: I am doing this Prarthana, I am puzzled, guide me, tell me the right path, which is Shreyas (what is good for all.)

Bhagwan gives him fundamental (basic) knowledge.

Shloke 23

nainam chhindanti śhastrāṇi
nainam dahati pāvakaḥ
na chainam kledayantyāpo na
śhoṣhayati mārutaḥ

*Weapons cannot cut the Self,
nor can fire burn it; water cannot
wet it, nor can wind dry it.*

This is Atma-gyan (Self-knowledge). You are not this body, you are the Atma, you cannot be hurt by anything. Atma cannot be cut by any weapon or burnt by fire. Atma is invincible. Atma is always happy. That is my core nature.

Shloke 48:

yoga-śtṛaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ
tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā
samatvaṁ yoga uchyate

*Arjun, perform your duties
established in Yog, renouncing
attachment, and be even-minded
in success and failure; evenness of
mind is called "Yog".*

When you give up attachments and are even-minded, that is Samatvam, balanced in all situations. The Buddhi (mind) is balanced. When Buddhi (the mind) is balanced, that is called

Karma Yog.

When you ride a bike, you first learn how to balance, so that you do not fall on either side. Similarly, the act of balancing the Buddhi is Karma Yog. When Buddhi is focused on the action, that is Karma Yog.

Karma Yog is the right action, right duty, the action which helps you to unite with Bhagwan.

The last thing we saw in this chapter is "Sthit Pragya".

Shloke 55

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

*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.*

When Buddhi wanders around, you will fall. When Buddhi collapses, everything collapses. Buddhi has to be balanced. So, when one is stable of mind, one is Sthit-Pragya, One who doesn't get disturbed and is stable.

Shloke 70

This summarizes the whole teaching of Stith Pragya.

Āpūryamāṇam achala-
pratiṣṭhāṁ, samudram āpaḥ
praviśhanti yadvat
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśhanti
sarve, sa śhāntim
āpnoti na kāmā-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.*

All the rivers fall into the ocean, but the ocean is undisturbed. The quality of ocean is Achal Pratishtam, meaning it is calm, it is not disturbed. All the rivers, all the dirt, everything comes into the ocean, but the ocean just absorbs everything and does not get disturbed. It purifies everything, it creates clouds, rain. We should be like the ocean and not let things disturb us. Similarly, things come from all sides, but we should not be disturbed. How do we do that? We focus on Bhagwan. That Buddhi does not get disturbed which is focused on Bhagwan.

The goal of life is that everyone should be happy, not just me.

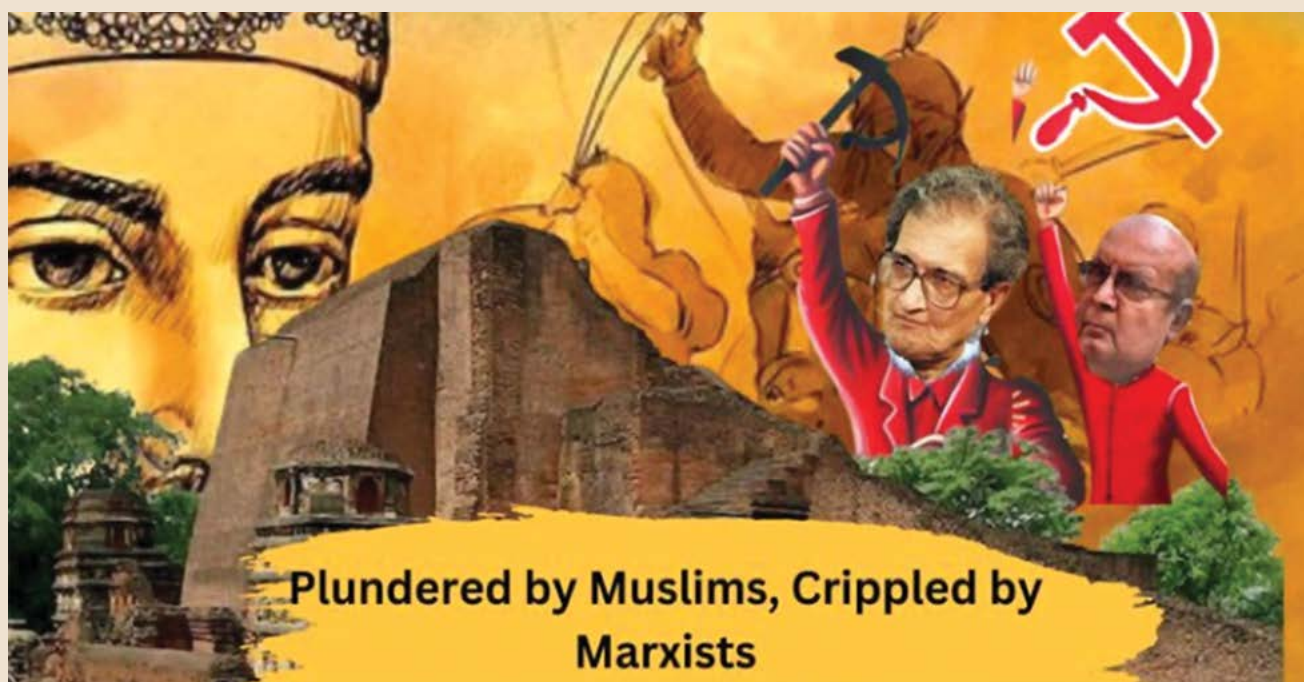
Story: A man was cutting a tree with a saw which was not sharp. A passerby saw him and said, "your saw is blunt, you won't be able to cut the tree, take some time to sharpen the saw, and you will be able to cut the tree easily." The foolish man said, "I don't want to waste time in sharpening my saw, I will just go on cutting the tree." But he took a long time and was not able to cut the tree. If he had taken the time to sharpen the saw, he would have saved time.

Sharpening the saw is like sharpening the mind, sharpening the buddhi. Whatever you do, play, spend time with friends, study, make your Buddhi sharp, and you will be happy. That is called Sthit Pragya. ■



Nalanda University: Plundered by Islamic Invaders and Crippled by Marxists

● Rakesh Krishnan Simha



From Islamic invaders in the 12th century to modern-day mismanagement under Amartya Sen, Nalanda University's legacy has been twice tarnished, facing controversies and financial improprieties.

■ **Historical Destruction:** Nalanda University, once a renowned institution, was destroyed in the 12th century by Islamic invader Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji, resulting in the loss of invaluable manuscripts and the massacre of scholars.

■ **Modern Revival:** In 2010, the Indian government aimed to revive Nalanda University with a significant budget, appointing economist Amartya Sen as the chancellor to lead the project.

■ **Mismanagement Allegations:** Under Sen's leadership, the revival project faced severe setbacks due to allegations of mismanagement, nepotism, financial impropriety, and slow progress.

■ **Controversial Appointments:** Key positions at the university were filled with Sen's associates and politicians' relatives, leading to accusations of cronyism and lack of transparency.



■ Cultural and Academic Impact: Critics argue that Sen's administration prioritized personal gains over restoring Nalanda's historical and cultural significance, undermining its potential as a center of ancient Indian learning.

Nalanda University has the unfortunate distinction of being destroyed twice. In the 12th century, the university faced wanton destruction by the Islamic invader Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji.[1] Its towering nine-story library, containing nine million priceless books and manuscripts, was burnt down, and many scholars, including hundreds of Buddhist monks, were slaughtered. This event is regarded as one of the most horrific instances of cultural vandalism in Indian history.

Nalanda suffered a second crippling blow in the 21st century at the hands of a cabal of avaricious Marxists led by the economist Amartya Sen

Nalanda suffered a second crippling blow in the 21st century at the hands of a cabal of avaricious Marxists led by the economist Amartya Sen. The Indian government revived the university in 2010 with a budget of more than Rs 2,000 crore (approx. 250 million USD) via the Nalanda University Act. [2] The project was the brainchild of former President APJ Abdul Kalam and was endorsed by the 16-nation East Asia Summit. The government appointed Sen as the chairman of the Nalanda Mentor Group (NMG) and chancellor of the university with an unheard-of basic salary of

US\$ 80,000 per year. [3] (Despite drawing a fat salary, Sen remains the only Bharat Ratna awardee to avail of Air India's free travel offer, traveling 21 times between 2015 and 2019.)

The project was a disaster, with the Marxist academics on the university's governing board accused of mismanagement and financial fraud. Progress was so slow that academic courses commenced only in 2014—four years after launch. So, on June 19, 2024, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new campus of the university in Rajgir, Bihar, and commented that “Nalanda's shutdown pushed India into darkness,” he could have just as easily been commenting on the shenanigans of Sen and his Marxist freeloaders.

Riddled with controversies

Over the years, the government's narrative, notably the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), responsible for Nalanda University, suggests that Sen presided over a non-transparent institution with lax fiscal oversight and limited managerial competence. “Leaked internal government communications and reports from the Comptroller & Auditor General have criticized the university for excessive tax-free salaries, unauthorized foreign trips, meetings held in luxury accommodations, and opaque appointment practices.” [4]

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) highlighted

[Amrtya Sen's] extravagant spending and controversial appointments

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) highlighted his extravagant spending and controversial appointments, which were criticized by President Kalam. In a letter dated July 4, 2011, to the Minister of External Affairs, SM Krishna, he wrote:

“Having been involved in various academic and administrative proceedings of Nalanda University since August 2007, I believe that the candidates to be selected/appointed to the post of Chancellor and Vice Chancellor should be of extraordinary intellect with academic and management expertise. Both the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor have to personally involve themselves full-time in Bihar so that a robust and strong international institution is built.” [5]

Kalam was clearly hinting at how Sen was populating Nalanda with his sidekicks and political appointees. Sample this [6] :

■ Gopa Sabharwal: An ordinary reader in the Department of Sociology at Lady Sriram College. She had no knowledge of Buddhist studies for which the university was established.

■ Upinder Singh, Daman Singh, Amrit Singh: All three are daughters of the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and two of them continued their stay in the US while drawing salaries from Nalanda University.



■ Anjana Sharma and Nayanjot Lahiri: Both friends of Gopa Sabharwal and Upinder Singh.

Also, Kalam's remark that both the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor work full-time in Bihar alluded to Sen holding meetings of the NMG in cities like New York, Delhi, Tokyo, and Singapore while making infrequent visits to Nalanda itself during his nearly decade-long tenure. Consequently, the university struggled to make significant progress during that period.

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In September 2011, disgusted by Sen's unabashed nepotism in appointing his Marxist cronies at inflated salaries to key positions at Nalanda, Kalam dissociated himself from the project. [7] The CAG, too, disagreed with

how schools were being established. "The university failed to establish schools in time and could not start the construction of university campus work," the CAG report revealed. [8]

In 2021, BJP leader Subramanian Swamy lodged a complaint with the Central Bureau of Investigation, seeking the registration of a corruption case against Sen. [9] According to Swamy, "The FIR may be registered on the basis of the CAG audit reports for defalcation and reckless misuse of funds, lack of accountability, criminal breach of trust, criminal misappropriation of public funds, and embezzlement of about Rs 3,000 crore of taxpayers' money."

Willful sabotage?

It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that Marxists are dead opposed to a revival of Hinduism. Like the Ram Mandir in 2024, Nalanda has the potential to become an iconic destination that

contributes to the growth of Indic culture. An experienced economist like Sen would have known that and would have tried everything to kill the project or, at the very least, kill its momentum.

It was obvious that Sen wasn't keen on launching Nalanda University as a center of ancient Indian learning. How else can one explain the conspicuous absence of the university's chancellor at the grand re-opening of this esteemed institution, an event occurring eight centuries after Nalanda's destruction by Islamic invaders? "Some observers believed that the likely poor strength in the classes may have forced Sen to skip the inauguration. But if he claims to be so interested in the post now, one wonders why he did not show this enthusiasm on the inaugural day." [10]

To Sen, Nalanda University appeared more as an exotic venture. "One might have appreciated it if Amartya had declared that having achieved everything an academician could aspire to, building Nalanda University was his life's mission, and he intended to settle in Bihar for that purpose. Instead, Amartya seemed to view Nalanda University as an opportunity for frequent trips (at the expense of Indian taxpayers) and eloquent speeches." [11]

Negationism in Indian history

[Sen] justified the inherent, barbaric violence and iconoclasm of Muslim invaders as "but this nature is in their blood."





Sen's appointment was controversial from the get-go. His views on the Islamic invasions of India effectively created an intellectual shield for the oppressors. [12] He justified the inherent, barbaric violence and iconoclasm of Muslim invaders as "but this nature is in their blood." According to writer Sandeep Balakrishnan, "In the same vein, Amartya Sen's wisdom-laden thesis denies Hindus the right to avenge this unprovoked violence."

Sen is part of the group of negationist historians who want to whitewash the crimes of Islamic invaders. This is deeply ironic because they are attempting to create a new narrative that contradicts what Muslim chroniclers and rulers have mentioned in their memoirs. For instance, in the case of Nalanda, the Muslim historian Maulana Minhaj-ud-din, in his *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, has left a detailed account of how Mohammed Bhaktiyar Khilji and his fanatic hordes swooped upon the defenseless university and systematically burnt it down to the ground after killing hundreds of Buddhists and Hindu monks. [13] Yet revisionists and negationists like D.N. Jha blame Hindus for this barbaric act.

Minhaj-ud-din writes what the Muslim army of Khilji saw after storming Nalanda in 1197 CE: "The greater number of inhabitants of that place were Brahmans, and the whole of those Brahmans had their heads shaven, and they were all slain. There were a great number of books there, and when all these books came under the observation of the Musalmans, they summoned a number of Hindus that they might give them information respecting the import of those books, but the whole of the Hindus had been killed. On being acquainted (with the contents of the books), it was found that the whole of that fortress and city was a college, and in the Hindu tongue, they call a college Bihar [vihara]."

So, what does Jha say about this episode? In 2004, Jha was the president of the Indian History Congress. In his presidential address, he claimed "Hindu fanatics" had burnt down Nalanda:

"A Tibetan tradition has it that the Kalacuri King Karna (11th century) destroyed many Buddhist temples and monasteries in Magadha, and the Tibetan text Pag Sam Jon Zang refers to the burning of the library of Nalanda by some 'Hindu fanatics'."

However, Sarat Chandra Das, the translator and editor of Pag Sam Jon Zang, sets out the account of the destruction of Nalanda as given in this text:

"While a religious sermon was being delivered in the temple that he (Kakuta Sidha, a minister of a king of Magadha) had erected at Nalanda, a few young monks threw washing water at two Tirthika beggars. The beggars, being angry, set fire to the three shrines of dharma ganja, the Buddhist university of Nalanda — that is, Ratna Sagara, Ratna Ranjaka, including the nine-storey building called Ratnadadhi which contained the library of sacred books." (page 92)

Such are the blatant – and amateurish – ways that Marxist historians lie!

According to Belgian Indologist Koenraad Elst, there was no "long-standing antagonism between Brahmans and Buddhists", if only because most Buddhist writers were born Brahmans and partook of Brahminical culture. "Buddhist institutions in India flourished under Hindu rule for 16 centuries, otherwise there would have been nothing of them left for the Muslim invaders to destroy. By contrast, when Islam appears on the scene, Buddhism disappears, and not on account of two Tirthika beggars. Cases of polemics between Buddhists and Brahmans may be cited, as also between different Brahminical schools and different Buddhist sects, but they were only the normal exercise of freedom of opinion. They cannot be equated to the Islamic destruction of Buddhism in Central and South Asia." [14]

Conclusion

Sen's blatant disregard for the rules is an act of unprecedented audacity, causing the revival project to lose sight of its original noble vision. Following the expiration of his term in July 2015, when the Narendra Modi government showed no inclination to extend his tenure at the university, he resorted to the media, shamelessly claiming "political interference in education."

However, according to journalist R. Jagannathan, Sen's arguments have no legs. "One wonders why he thinks his own appointment as chancellor of Nalanda University was not political in nature. There is little doubt that Amartya Sen was the intellectual father of many of Sonia Gandhi's social spending schemes. And



Sen himself kept making political statements in support of “my friend” Manmohan Singh, and, famously, said that he would not like to see Modi as Prime Minister. [15] For so political a person to complain about how politicians are meddling with academic institutions is interesting.”

Sen’s casual dismissal of the genocide of Hindus by Muslim invaders shows that he is a trenchant hater of Hindus and, by extension, Indic culture. He was clearly the wrong person for a project aimed at reviving an iconic Dharmic institution. His appointment as the chancellor – a position which he doggedly held on to well into his eighties – will rank as one of the most egregious decisions of the Manmohan Singh-Sonia Gandhi government.

With their crackpot ideology foundering and a Hindu revival in motion, Marxists are desperate to stay relevant. Lies are the only tools they have. It is up to those who seek the truth to deny the Marxists the space to operate on campuses, in government, and in the workplace.

Source: <https://stophindudvesha.org/nalanda-university-plundered-by-islamic-invaders-and-crippled-by-marxists/>

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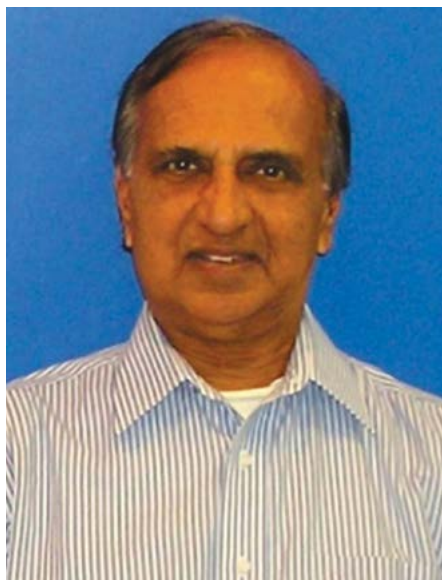
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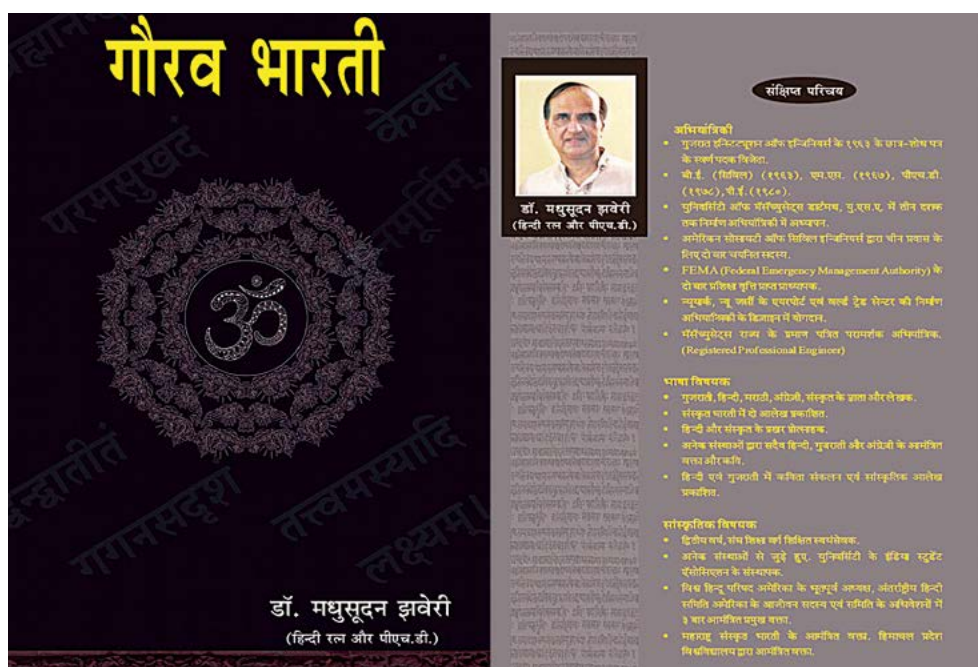
Madhubhai Jhaveri, as I Knew Him

By Gaurang G. Vaishnav, Tampa, FL



Dr. Madhusudan Jhaveri

Jan 21, 1936 - Jan 17, 2025



It was the early 1970s and I had just been introduced to VHPA by Dr. Mahesh Mehta. In the beginning my association was tentative as I was trying to understand what Hindu movement was and what role VHPA was playing in it. I was impressed by Maheshbhai's towering personality and his vision, but I was not yet fully committed. That commitment materialized during weekend workshops for volunteers in 1972 when I listened to talks given by another giant named Dr. Madhusudan Jhaveri. Here was a person in prime of his youth who was erudite, articulate and in command of his thoughts. Words were flowing from him like a torrent of Ganga ji. There was

fire in what he said, and he was an accomplished orator. This was my initial impression of Madhubhai.

As time passed, we came to know each other closely. I found out that he was a good singer with a baritone voice. While Maheshbhai was immersed in deep thoughts, Madhubhai would regale everyone with jokes and hearty laughter.

Madhubhai had deep study of Swami Vivekananda's writings and when he presented Swamiji's thoughts, one would feel as if Vivekananda ji himself were speaking. Madhubhai had the ability to explain difficult subjects like Vedanta in lucid way. I can visualize Madhubhai expounding about Vyashti, Samashti and Parmeshti (व्याष्टि, समष्टि, परमेष्टि) or

Prakruti, Vikruti, and Sanskruti (प्रकृति, विकृति, संस्कृति.) His favorite subject was four Purusharthas described in our scriptures.

Madhubhai, a Gujarati was brought up in Maharashtra, so he was fluent in both Gujarati and Marathi. He had powerful grasp on Hindi as well as Sanskrit. He was a born writer and poet too. He has composed excellent poems in all four languages and in English.

Though he was a man of literature, he excelled in technical studies. He was a gold medalist who did his Ph.D. in structural engineering. He was a sought-after professor at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth.

Madhubhai published his Gujarati poems in a book titled



"पाईनना वृक्षो तळे" (Under the Pine trees.) He used Triveni Tanay as his nickname because his mother's name was Triveni and Tanay in Sanskrit means "born of."

Madhubhai's poetry was philosophical and full of deep meaning, but he was equally at ease with lighthearted writings too. The poetry that became very popular with Gujarati audiences was titled TDC थी BDC सुधी, meaning from TDC to BDC. This was written for college magazine when he was studying engineering. It used various technical terms used in engineering studies, e.g., TDC is Top Dead Center and BDC is Bottom Dead Center which refers to movement of a piston in an engine. He took Roman numerals Eta (η), Beta (β), Theta (θ) used in equations and rhymed them with Nita, Rita, and Gita. He took technical terms Alumina and silica and rhymed them with Meena and Sheela! I had occasions to listen to this poem so many times and as an engineer, I could understand and appreciate the humor and pathos in it that revolved around the state of mind of a first-year engineering student.

His other poem दरदनी पोटली (a bundle/shoulder bag of pain) was also telling. It talked about a bright student that fell in love with a girl and neglected his study. The girl leaves him and that rejection, though painful, propels him to excel in his studies.

One can see imprint of his Samskaars cultivated in RSS in his poetry too. In one poem he talks about the desire to be the



foundation stone, buried deep and unseen and not the top of a structure which everyone sees and appreciates. His ten-page preface to this book is worth reading for anyone who wants to understand the inner working of Madhubhai's mind.

Madhubhai was a prolific writer and wrote regularly on प्रवक्ता. कोम (Pravakata.com). Madhubhai authored two more important books in Hindi. These are शब्द भारती and गौरव भारती. शब्द भारती consists of many articles that go into etymology of our languages. It shows how rich Sanskrit, and other Bharatiya languages are; Madhubhai also gives a key to creating innovative words in Sanskrit. In his preface he says,

भण्डार अनुपम, शब्द का, गुलाम क्यों
बहार ढूँढता
नाभि में कस्तूरी क्यों, संसार हिरना
छानता?

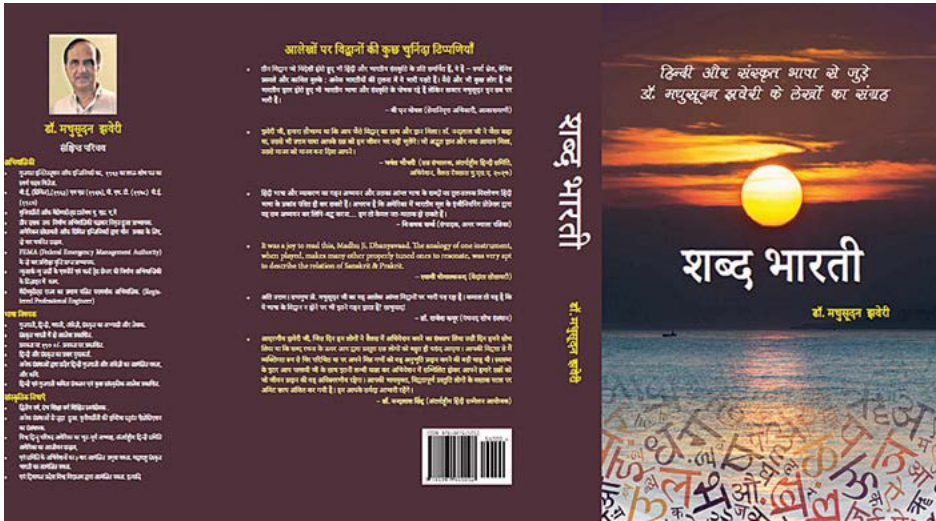
(When you have unique treasure of words, why do you slavishly look (for words) at other languages? Deer has musk in its own naval, why is it running

around looking for it?

गौरव भारती is a compendium of highly thoughtful articles on varied subjects. There are articles on our family system, ills of Valentine Day, live in relationship, lies of Aryan Invasion theory, Power of the words Vande Mataram, Method of imparting Samskaras to children, Historical blunders about languages, How to bring about positive feeling for NRIs in USA, America's Swayamsevak during Indira Gandhi's Emergency, etc.

Both these books are available from VHPA bookstore. I recommend every reader to buy these books. These are written by a scholar who also was intensely dedicated to reestablishing glory of Hindu Dharma and Bharat Rashtra.

So far, I have written about Madhubhai's brilliance only. But above all, he was a dedicated volunteer of VHPA and many of us learnt how to be an ideal Swayamsevak of VHPA, what to read to sharpen our understanding of Hindu Dharma and Hindu



issues, how to organize and execute a program, etc. at his feet.

Like many other senior members of VHPA, I was very fortunate that I met Madhubhai in my formative years in VHPA. We worked together for 1984 and 1993 mega Hindu conferences, several smaller conferences and in dozens of youth camps in the northeast. Spending one week of camp with Madhubhai was what we all looked forward to. He was easy to approach and his educational classes in the camp for teenagers were a treat to listen to. Teenagers have a lot of questions and doubts. Madhubhai will put his points so effectively that even the most doubting student would go back convinced. Madhubhai prepared a PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) chart, a management tool taking a camp as a project so that we worked more efficiently. Madhubhai served as the President of VHPA and led it during its growth and challenges that come with rapid growth.

Madhubhai played Kabaddi very well. He was of stout build.

I remember one incident from a visit of Shri L. K. Advaniji to Boston. We had arranged a public meeting, and some troublemakers had infiltrated the audience. This was post Babri destruction, so tempers were running high. When Advaniji was about to start his address a few of these guys stood up and started shouting slogans. Madhubhai quickly got up from his seat, grabbed one guy from collar and shook him. That was the end of hooliganism at that meeting. Madhubhai loved to eat. Many a time he would be at our home in Connecticut. When some tasty dish or dessert was left over after everyone ate, Madhubhai would say, let us give justice to this item and lustily finish it up.

He used to call me on and off, but conversation had become difficult because of his hearing loss. I last met Madhubhai three years back in March 2022. It was a blustery, snowy evening. He was in failing health, but he was very happy to see me. He inquired about how I passed my time in retirement and mentioned that he felt lonely

and bored. I tried to tell him that he was the motivator for all of us and how could he be bored now? But in my heart, I realized that in the family system that we have in the USA, old age is inevitably lonely. He asked me to take a few copies of his poetry book, which I did. It was a heavy parcel, but I was weighed down more by the burden of the fact that Madhubhai, who was a lion of a man was feeling lonely at the end of a productive and illustrious life.

Madhubhai is gone now, as we all must, but he has left an indelible imprint on thousands of minds. He has inspired many by his writings, his talks, and the way he lived his life. Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Madhusudan Jhaveri for his lifelong contribution to the organization he helped build from the grounds up.

This article will not be complete without mentioning Pallavibahen, Madhubhai's Sah-Dharmacharini. Pallavibahen worked shoulder to shoulder with Madhubhai in all his endeavors. I cannot count how many times she cooked for dozens of people for meetings and gatherings. She always wears a bright smile and despite her own health issues, she took care of Madhubhai as an ideal Bharatiya woman to the end. I salute both Madhubhai and Pallavibahen. ■

About the Author

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Former Vishwa Vibhag Samyojak Dr. Shankar Rao Tatwawadi Passes Away



Dr. Shankar Rao Tatwawadi
(1933-2025)

Dr. Shankar Rao Tatwawadi, fondly known as Shankar ji, a veteran Pracharak, an eminent scholar, and the former Samyojak of Vishwa Vibhag, passed away on March 12, 2025, at the age of 92. Born on March 20, 1933, in Nagpur, he dedicated his entire life to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its global outreach.

A brilliant student from a young age, Dr. Tatwawadi completed his early education in Nagpur before earning an M.Sc. in Chemistry from Nagpur University. He then pursued his doctoral studies at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Furthering his academic excellence, he undertook post-doctoral research in the United States at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Kansas in the mid-1960s. Dr.

Tatwawadi joined BHU as a professor in the Department of Pharmacy, where he later became the Head of the Department. He took early retirement in 1992 to devote himself fully to the Sangh work.

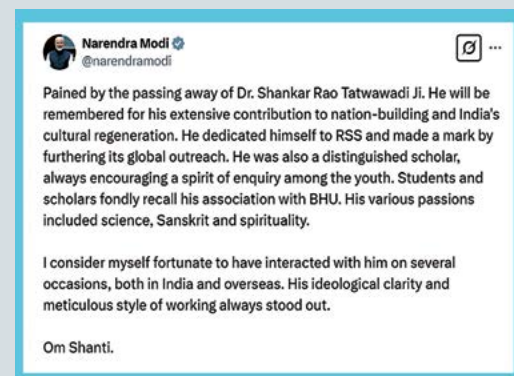
Even during his academic career, he remained deeply involved with RSS activities, holding responsibilities at the shakha level in Nagpur and at the prant level in Banaras. He also served as a Shikshak in Sangh Shiksha Vargas. Dr. Tatwawadi played a pivotal role in expanding Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) activities in the USA and worked as a Vistarak for many years. He frequently travelled to the UK and other countries while continuing his professorship.

In 1989, he was officially assigned as Pracharak for the UK, where he worked tirelessly until 2011. He took charge as Vishwa Vibhag Samyojak in 1993, travelling across more than 60 countries, overseeing major programs like Vishwa Sangh Shiksha Varg, Vishwa Sangh Shibir, Hindu Sangam in Milton Keynes (UK), and the Hindu Marathon in the UK. Under his leadership, shakha activities outside Bharat expanded significantly across all continents.

After 2011, Dr. Tatwawadi

associated himself with Vijnana Bharati as a Margadarshak, travelling across Bharat to mentor karyakartas and engage with prominent personalities in the scientific field.

A deeply affectionate and approachable person, Dr. Tatwawadi maintained close ties with countless karyakartas and their families worldwide. He will be remembered for his travels across the world to contact Hindus. The RSS established its global outreach arm, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) in 1947. However, it was Dr. Tatwawadi who made a major contribution by actually travelling across the globe to



strengthen the organization, remember old-timers. Apart from Europe and the US, he also reached out to Hindus living in Latin America and Africa.

Dr. Tatwawadi was living at the Dr. Hedgewar Bhavan in Nagpur since 2011, and every volunteer visiting Nagpur would meet him. In recent months, his health had declined, and he faced difficulty walking. On March 12, 2025, at 10:30 AM, he breathed his last at Mahal Karyalay. Fulfilling his wishes, his mortal remains were donated to AIIMS Nagpur in the evening. ■

Source: <https://organiser.org/2025/03/13/282124/bharat/nagpur-veteran-pracharak-scholar-and-former-vishwa-vibhag-samyojak-dr-shankarrao-tatwawadi-passes-away/>



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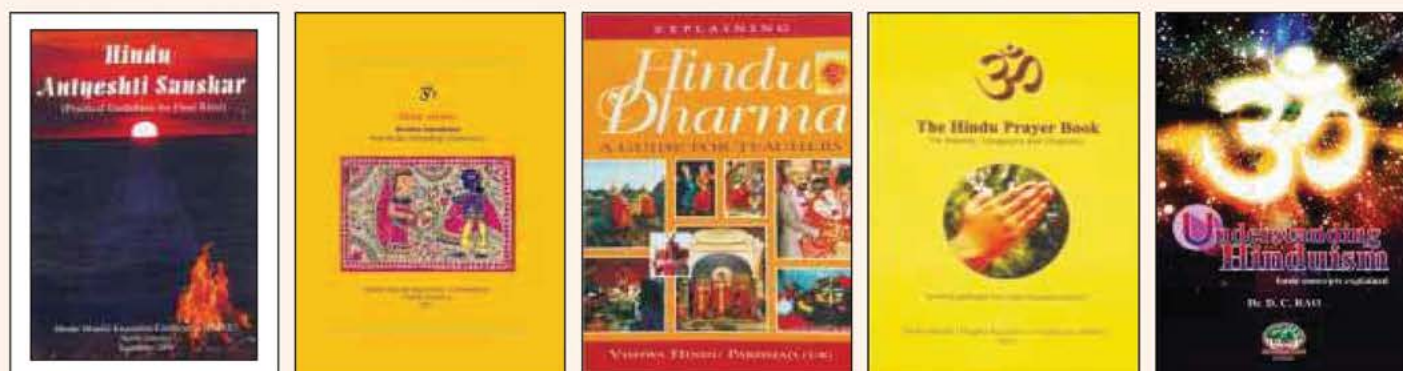
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Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

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