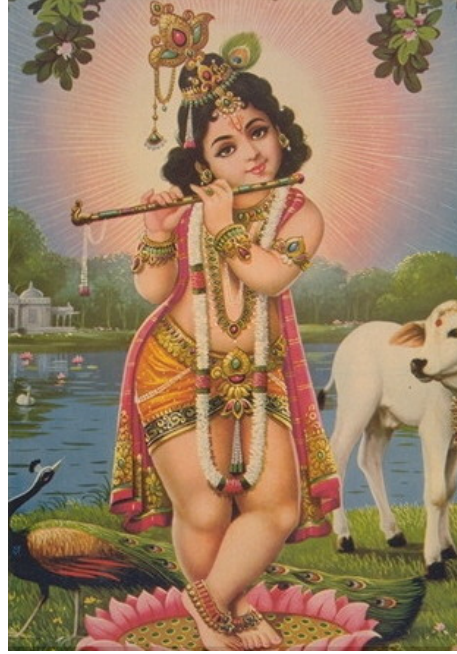




HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH'S
balagokulam
HINDU DHARMA FOR KIDS, TEACHERS & PARENTS



Balagokulam Guide

Name: _____

City, State: _____

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)

PREFACE

We are extremely joyful to provide the *balagokulam* guide for all HSS *karyakartas* who are engaged in conducting weekly *shakhas* all over US. They have been putting considerable amount of their time to determine the *bouddhik* program and find or develop suitable *bouddhik* material for their respective *shakhas*. We hope that this guide will be a good resource for them and it will also reduce the amount of time and energy they have been investing in finding or developing *bouddhik* material.

The *balagokulam* guide is a result of immeasurable efforts of many individuals. It has contents that are good enough for at least two years. It covers *shloka*, *subhashita*, *amrutvachan* and hundreds of articles divided in different categories such as festivals and stories. It has been reviewed and perfected by erudite individuals. However, it is possible that you may find any discrepancy. In that case, feel free to contact us and we will be happy to rectify it when the guide is published next time.

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Your Plan: Year I

Build your own plan. Fill in the brackets with appropriate page numbers.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
January	A2, B1, C6...				
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					

Your Plan: Year II

Build your own plan. Fill in the brackets with appropriate page numbers.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
January					
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					

What is Shloka?

Shlokas are four to five lines verses written using a particular meter. They have been written on a variety of subjects by intellectuals through the ages. The Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Geeta are all made up of Shlokas. Shlokas can be religious or even scientific in their explanation.

What is Subhashita?

Subhashitas are words of wisdom. As the word suggests, Shubha, in sanskrit, means good and ashita is advice. These words are full of wisdom and advice. By understanding the meaning of these shubhashitas and using them in your day-to-day life, you can become a better human being.

What is Sayings?

Sayings are proverb often illustrates something such as a basic truth or practical wisdom.

What is Amrutvachan?

Amrutvachan are quotes by great people. We remember great personalities and try to emulate them by reciting their amrutvachan.

Shloka

रामस्कन्धं हनुमन्तम् वैनतेयम् वृकोदरम् ।

शयने यः स्मरेनित्यम् दुस्वप्नम् तस्य नस्यति ॥

rAmaskandhaM hanumantam vainateyam vRukodaram |
shayane yaH smarenityam dusvapnam tasya nasyati ||

Meditating upon Hanumanta, Bhima (vRukodara) and Garuda (vainateya) before going to bed ensures a sleep without disturbing dreams.



मनोजवं मारुत तुल्यवेगम् । जितेन्द्रियं बुद्धिमतां वरिष्ठम् ॥

वातात्मजं वानरयूथमुख्यम् । श्रीरामदूतं शिरसा नमामि ॥

manojavaM mAruta tulyavegam | jitendriyaM buddhimatAM variShTham ||
vAtAtmajaM vAnarayUthamukhyam | shrIrAmadUtaM shirasA namAmi ||

I take refuge in Hanuman who is as fast as the mind, equals his father, Maruta, in speed, is the master of the senses, the foremost amongst the learned, the leader of the Vaanara forces and the great messenger of Shri Rama.



अखण्डमण्डलाकारं व्याप्तं येन चराचरम् ।

तत्पदं दर्शितं येन तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

akhaNDamaNDalAkAraM vyAptaM yena charAcharam |
tatpadaM darshitaM yena tasmai shrIgurave namaH ||

Salutations to the respected Guru who showed us the place of the one who pervades the vast universe with all its movable and immovable things.



गुरवे सर्वलोकानाम् भिषजे भवरोगिणाम् ।

निधये सर्वविद्यानाम् दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः

gurave sarvalokAnAm bhiShaje bhavarogiNAm |
nidhaye sarvavidyaAnAm daxiNAMurtaye namaH ||

Salutations to dakshinamurty, the Guru of all being, the healer who cures all worldly-illness and the embodiment of knowledge.

गुरुब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।

गुरुः साक्षात् परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

gururbrahmA gururviShNuH gururdevo maheshwaraH |
guruH sAxAt parabrahma tasmai shrIgurave namaH ||

My salutations to Guru, who is Brahma, who is also Vishnu, and who is also Maheshvara. Guru is none other than the all-pervading supreme Self.



ध्यानमूलं गुरोर्मूर्तिः पूजामूलं गुरोः पदम् ।

मन्त्रमूलं गुरोर्वाक्यं मोक्षमूलं गुरोः कृपा ॥

dhyAna-mulaM gurOrmurtiH pujAmulaM guroH padam |
mantramulaM gurOrvAkyaM mOkshamulaM guroH krupA ||

The basis of meditation is guru's murti; the support of worship is guru's feet; the origin of mantra is guru's word; the cause of liberation is guru's mercy.



गुरुरादिनादिश्च गुरुः परमदैवतम् ।

गुरोः परतरं नास्ति तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः ॥

gururAdinAdishca guruaH paramadaivatam |
guroH parataraM nAsti tasmai shrIguruve namaH ||

(My) salutations to that guru who is the beginning and the beginningless, who is the highest deity and for whom there are none superior.



कर्पूरगौरं करुणावतारं संसारसारं भुजगेन्द्रहारम् ।

सदा वसन्तं हृदयारविन्दे भवं भवानी सहितं नमामि ॥

karpUragauraM karUNAvataraM saMsArasAraM bhujagendrahAram |
sadA vasantaM hridayAravinde bhavaM bhavAnI sahitaM namAmi ||

I salute to the Ishwara along with Bhavani (Parvati), who is as white as camphor, an incarnation of compassion, the essence of this world, who wears a bhujagendra (roughly translated as serpent, but represent the ever changing, moving aspect of the Universe) around his neck and is ever present in the lotus abode of our hearts.



सरस्वति नमस्तुभ्यम् वरदे कामरूपिणि ।

विद्यारम्भं करिष्यामि सिद्धिर्भवतु मे सदा ॥

saraswati namastubhyam varade kAmarupini |
vidyArambhaM karishyAmi siddhirbhavatu me sadA ||

Oh Bhagavati Saraswati, I bow to you, the fulfiller of my wishes. I begin my studies seeking your blessings so that I shall always be successful.

सर्वमङ्गल माङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके ।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

sarvamangaLa mAngalye shive sarvArthasAdhike |
sharaNye tryambake gauri nArAyaNi namostu te ||

Oh Gowri, the auspiciousness in everything auspicious, the one who brings goodness, the one who makes all wishes come true, the one who protects, the three-eyed and the Embodiment of Narayana, salutations to you.



वक्रतुण्ड महाकाय सूर्यकोटिसमप्रभ ।
निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा ॥

vakratunda mahAkAya suryakOtisamaprabha
nirvirghnaM kuru me deva sarvakAryeShu sarvadA ||

O Ganapati, One with a curved trunk, a large body, and a brilliance equal to a crore (10 million) suns!
O God, please make all my undertakings free from obstacles always.



रामाय रामभद्राय । रामचन्द्राय वेधसे ॥
रघुनाथाय नाथाय । सीतायाः पतये नमः ॥

rAmAya rAmabhadrAya | rAmacandraya vedhase ||
raghunAthAya nAthAya | sItAyaH pataye namaH ||

My salutations to Bhagawan Sri Rama, the protector of all, one who knows all, the descendant of the Raghu dynasty, the husband of Sita and the Bhagawan of the entire universe.



त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव । त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव ।
त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव । त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव ॥

tvameva maataa cha pitA tvameva. tvameva bandhushcha sakha tvameva |
tvameva vidyaa draviNaM tvameva. tvameva sarvaM mama devadeva ||

O Bhagawan, you only is (my) mother, you only is (my) father, your only is (my) relation, you only is (my) friend, you only is (my) knowledge, you only is (my) wealth, you only is everything, you are the BHAGAWAN of the Devas.



शुक्लाम्बरधरं विष्णुम् । शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ॥
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् । सर्वं विघ्नोऽपशान्तये ॥

shuklAmbaradharaM vishNum | shashivarnaM chaturbhujam ||
prasannavadanaM dhyAyet | sarva vighno'pashAntaye ||

For the removal of all the obstacles in my effort, I meditate upon Bhagawan Vishnu, who wears a white garment, who is all pervading, who has a bright complexion (like a full moon), who has four shoulders, who has an ever smiling face.



अगजानन पद्मार्कम् गजाननं अहर्निषं ।
अनेकदमतम् भक्तानां एकदन्तं उपास्महे ॥

agajAnana padmArkam gajAnanaM aharniShaM |
anekadamtam bhakthAnaM ekadanthaM upAsmahe ||

Seeing elephant-faced Ganesha all the time, Goddess Parvati's face lighted up, just like how a lotus opens up seeing the sun. I meditate upon the God with single tusk, the giver of many boons to the devotees.



वसुदेव सुतं देवम् कंसचाणूर मर्दनम् ।
देवकी परमानन्दम् कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥

vasudeva sutaM devam | kansa-chaanura mardanam ||
devaki paramA-nandam | krishnaM vande jagad-gurum ||

I bow to Sri Krishna, son of Vasudeva, the divine being, guru of the entire world, the killer of wicked Kamsa and Chanoora, and the source of happiness to mother Devaki.



यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।
तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥

yatra yogeshwaraH kRiShNo yatra pArtho dhanurdharaH |
tatra shrIrvijayo bhUtirdhruVA nItirmatirmama ||

Wherever there is a Krishna, the God of Yoga, and wherever there is Partha (Arjuna), the archer, there will be everlasting prosperity, victory and righteousness; this is my firm conviction.



शमी शमयते पापम् शमी शत्रुविनाशिनी ।
अर्जुनस्य धनुर्धारी रामस्य प्रियदर्शिनी ॥

shamI shamayate pApam shamI shatruvinAshinI |
arjunasya dhanurdhArI rAmasya priyadarshinI ||

Shamee, the remover of all sins, the destroyer of all enemies bore witness to Arjuna taking how bow and Shree Rama coming back to his near and dear ones.



योगेन चित्तस्य पदेन वाचा मलं शरीरस्य च वैद्यकेन ।
योऽपाकरोत्तं प्रवरं मुनीनां पतञ्जलिं प्राञ्जलिरानतोऽस्मि ॥

yogena chittasya padena vAchA malaM sharirasya cha vaidya-kenal
yo-a-pAkarottaM pravaraM muninAM patanjaliM prAnjali-rAnato-a-smi ||

With joined hands, I stay bowed to Patanjali-the preeminent among the sages, who removed the impurities of the mind by (explaining) yoga, of the speech by (commenting on) grammar and of the body by (expounding) medicine.



शुभं करोति कल्याणम् । आरोग्यं धन-सम्पदा ॥
शत्रुबुद्धिर्विनाशाय । दीपज्योतिर्नमोस्तुते ॥

shubhaM karoti kalyANam | aArogyaM dhana-sampadA ||
shatrubuddhir-vinAshAya | dIpajyotir-namostute ||

The lamp brings auspiciousness, prosperity, good health and abundance of wealth. Let (my) salutations be to you for the destruction of ignorance, which is the intellect's enemy.



सर्वज्ञे सर्ववरदे सर्वदुष्टभङ्करि ।
सर्वदुःखहरे देवि महालक्ष्मि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

Sarvagye sarva-varade sarva-dushta-bhayankari
Sarva duh-kh hare devi mahaa-lakshmi namo-a-stu te||

You know every thing. You give all kinds of boon to all. All demons fear of you. You destroy all kinds of unhappiness. O MahaaLakshmi, I bow to you.



नमस्ते गरुडारुढे कोलासुरभयङ्करि ।
सर्व पाप हरे देवि महालक्ष्मि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

namaste garudA-rudhe kolAsura-bhayankAri |
sarva pApa hare devi mahA-lakshmi namo-a-stute||

O Goddess, who rides on Garuda, creates fear in Kola monster, who removes all sins, I bow to you.

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदम् पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
 पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ।
 ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

om pUrNamadaH pUrNamidam pUrNat pUrNamudachyate |
 pUrNasya pUrNamAdAya pUrNamevAvashiShyate |
 om shAntiH shAntiH shAntiH ||

OM! That is full. This is full. From that full, this full has come; when this Full is taken from that Full, it always remains Full! Om Peace, Peace, Peace!



आकाशात् पतितं तोयं यथा गच्छति सागरम् ।
 सर्वदेवनमस्कारः केशवं प्रतिगच्छति ॥

aAkAshAt patitaM toyaM yathA gacchati sAgaram |
 sarvadevanamaskAraH keshavaM pratigacchati ||

Just as every drop of rain that falls from the sky flows into the Ocean, in the same way all prayers offered to any Deity goes to Bhagawan Krishna (Bhagvan Vishnu).



कराग्रे वसते लक्ष्मीः । करमध्ये सरस्वती ॥
 करमूले तु गोविन्दः । प्रभाते करदर्शनम् ॥

karAgre vasate laxmiH | karamadhye sarasvati ||
 karamule tu govindaH | prabhAte karadarshnam ||

Bhagawati Lakshmi dwells at the tip of the hand. In the center of the palm resides Saraswathi, the Bhagawati of wisdom. At the base of the palm is Govinda. Hence, one should look and meditate on the hand early in the morning.



समुद्रवासने देवि । पर्वतस्तन मण्डले ॥
 विष्णुपत्नि नमस्तुभ्यम् । पादस्पर्श क्षमस्व मे ॥

samudravasane devi | parvatastana maṇḍale ||
 viṣṇupatni namastubhyam | pādasparśam kṣamasva me ||

Forgive me mother earth for I have to step on you. O Mother, my salutations to you, who is covered by the oceans, whose breasts are the mountains and who is the consort of God Vishnu.



यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं स्रुजाम्यहम् ॥

yadA yadA hi dharmasya glAnirbhavati bhArata |
abhyutthANamadharmasya tadAtmAnaM srujAmyaham ||

“Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice (dharma), O Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend Myself.”



परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

paritrANaya sAdhUnAM vinAshAya cha duShkrUtAm |
dharmasaMsthApanArthAya sambhavAmi yuge yuge ||

“To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I (Bhagavan) Myself appear, millennium after millennium.”



ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ॥

मृत्योर्मा मृतं गमय । ॐ शान्ति शान्ति शान्तिः ॥

AUM asato mA sad gamaya | tamaso mA jyotirgamaya ||
mR^ityormAmR^itaM gamaya | AUM shAnti shAnti shAntiH ||

Lead me from the unreal to the real, Lead me from darkness into light,
Lead me from death to immortality, Peace Peace Peace..



ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः । सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ॥

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु । मा कश्चिदुःखभाग्भवेत् ॥

AUM sarve bhavantu sukhinaH | sarve santu nirAmayaH ||
sarve bhadrANi pashyantu | mA kashchiduHkhabhAgbhavet ||

Om, May All become Happy, May All become free from Illness.
May All see what is Auspicious, Let no one Suffer.

Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

Subhashita

येन बद्धो बलिः राजा दानवेन्द्रो महाबलः
तेन त्वाम अनुबध्नामि रक्षे माचल-माचलः

yena baddho bali rAjA dAnavendro mahAbalaH |
tena twAm anubadhnAmi rakshe mA chala mA chala ||

I am tying a Rakshaa to you, similar to the one tied to Bali the powerful king of demons. Oh Rakshaa, be firm, do not waver.



तेजः क्षमा धृतिः शौचमद्रोहो नातिमनिता ।
भवन्ति सम्पदं दैविम् अभिजातस्य भारत ॥

tejaH xamA dhRitiaH shauchamadroho nAtimanita |
bhavanti sampadaM daivim abhijAtasya bhArata ||

Splendor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, basence of malice and absence of pride; these are the qualities of those endowed with divine virtues, O Arjuna.



अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धि ज्ञानयोग व्यवस्थितिः ।
दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यास्तप आर्जवम् ॥

abhayaM sattvasaMshuddhi GYAnayoga vyavasthitiH |
dAnaM damashca yaGYashca svAdhyAstapa Arjavam ||

Fearlessness, purity of heart, perseverance in the yoga of knowledge, charity, sense restraint, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity, honesty (these transcendental qualities belong to godly men)



दम्भो दर्पोऽभिमानश्च क्रोधः पारुष्यमेव च ।
अज्ञानं चाभिजातस्य पार्थ सम्पदमासुरीम् ॥

dambho darpo.abhimAnashca krodhaH pAruShyameva ca |
aGYAnaM cAbhijAtasya pArtha sampadamAsurIm ||

Hypocrisy, arrogance, pride, anger, harshness and igonrance; these are the marks of those who are born with demonic qualities, O Arjuna.

नरस्याभरणं रूपं रूपस्याभरणं गुणः ।

गुणस्याभरणं ज्ञानं ज्ञानस्याभरणं क्षमा ॥

narasyAbharaNaM rupaM rupasyAbharaNaM guNaH |
guNasyAbharaNaM GYaanaM GYaanasyAbharaNaM xamA ||

Handsome is the ornament of men; quality is the ornament of handsomeness; knowledge is the ornament of quality; (and) forgiveness is the ornament of knowledge.



उद्यम साहस सत्य नय संस्कृति कला विलास ।

सरस्वति लक्ष्मी तहां अविचल करे निवास ॥

udyama sAhasa satya naya saMskRiti kaLA vilAsa |
saraswati lakShmI tahAM avichala kare nivAsa ||

Where hard work, courage and truth are the life principles that nourish the culture, literature and art, it is there Goddess Saraswati and Lakshami make their permanent abodes.



सत्येन धार्यते पृथिवि सत्येन तपते रविः ।

सत्येन वायवो वान्ति सर्वं सत्ये प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥

satyena dhAryate pRithwi satyena tapate raviH |
satyena vAyavo vAnti sarvaM satye pratiShThitam ||

The earth is borne by the truth. The sun heats due to the truth. The winds blow due to the truth. Everything is based on the Truth.



न चोर हर्यम न च राज हर्यम । न भ्रातृ-भाज्यम न च भारकारि ॥

व्यये कृते वर्धति एव नित्यम् । विद्याधनम् सर्वधनम् प्रधानम् ॥

na chora haryama na cha rAja haryama | na bhrAtRi-bhAjyama na cha bhArakAri ||
vyaye kRite vardhati eva nityam | vidyAdhanam sarvadhanam pradhAnam ||

It can not be stolen by thieves, nor it can be taken away by kings. It can not be divided among brothers (others), and it does not cause load on your shoulders. If spent, it always keeps growing. The wealth of knowledge is the most superior of all.



अपि स्वर्णमयी लंका न मे लक्ष्मण रोचते । जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी ॥

api svarNamayI laMkA na me laxmaNa rochate |
jananI janmabhUmishcha svargAdapi garIyasI ||

Lakshmana! Although Lanka is golden, it does not appeal to me. Mother and motherland are superior to the heaven.

भाषासु मुख्या मधुरा दिव्या गिर्वाणभारती ।
तस्माद्धि काव्यं तस्मादपी सुभाषितम् ॥

bhAShAsu mukhyA madhurA divyA girvANabhAratI |
tasmAddhi kAvyaM tasmAdapI subhAShitam ||

Among the languages, the speech of the gods is the foremost, sweet and divine. Sweeter than poetry. Sweeter than the good saying.



पदे पदे च रत्नानि योजने रसकुपिकाः ।
भाग्यहीना न पश्यन्ति बहुरत्ना वसुंधरा ॥

pade pade cha ratnAni yojane rasakupikAH |
bhAgyahInA na pashyanti bahuratnA vasuMdhara ||

There are gems from step to step (every step); there are cups of juice at every yojan (mile); but the unfortunate ones do not realize them. The earth has numerous gems.



उद्यमः साहसं धैर्यं बुद्धिः शक्तिः पराक्रमः ।
षडेते यत्र वर्तन्ते तत्र देवः सहायकृत् ॥

udyamaH sAhasaM dhairyaM buddhiH shaktiH parAkramaH |
ShaDete yatra vartante tatra devaH sahAyakRut ||

Diligence, enterprise, fortitude, intelligence, power, bravery; where these six exist, the destiny becomes helpful.



यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति ।
तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणशयति ॥

yo mAM pashyati sarvatra sarvaM cha mayi pashyati |
tasyAhaM na praNashyAmi sa cha me na praNashyati ||

He, who sees ME (the Universal self) present in all beings, and sees all things as existing in ME, I am never out of sight for him, nor he is out of sight of ME.



काव्यशास्त्रविनोदेन कालो गच्छति धिमताम् ।
व्यसनेन तु मुखार्णां निद्रया कलहेन वा ॥

kAvyashAstravinodena kAlo gacChati dhimatAm |
vyasanena tu murkhANAM nidrayA kalahena vA ||

The wise spend their time learning the arts and sciences, while fools waste their time in addiction, unnecessary sleep or useless arguments.

हिमालयं समारभ्य यावत् इन्दु सरोवरम् ॥
तं देवनिर्मितं देशं हिन्दुस्थानं प्रचक्षते ॥

himAlayaM samArabhya yAvat indu sarovaram ||
taM devanirmitaM deshaM hindusthAnaM prachaxate ||

Starting from Himalayas and extending upto Indu sarovaram (Indian Ocean) is the nation created by God which is known as 'Hindusthan'.



नास्ति विद्या समं चक्षुः । नास्ति सत्यं समं तपः ।
नास्ति रागं समं दुःखम् । नास्ति त्यागं समं सुखम् ॥

nAsti vidya samaM chaxU | nAsti satya samaM tapaH |
nAsti rAga samaM duHkham | nAsti tyAg samaM sukham ||

There is no sight such as knowledge - By knowledge, one can see what cannot be seen by a naked eye. Knowledge gives the vision to see beyond some obvious things. One has to do lot of hard work to be on the side of Truth. There is no sorrow such as the desire - Desires of a person brings much sorrow to him. There is no happiness such as sacrifice - Sacrifice brings more happiness to the person.



नरस्य आभरणं रूपं । रूपस्य आभरणं गुणः ॥
गुणस्य आभरणं ज्ञानं ज्ञानस्य आभरणं क्षमा ॥

narasya AbharaNaM rupaM | rupasya AbharaNaM guNaH ||
guNasya AbharaNaM GYAnaM GYAnasya AbharaNaM xamA ||

Beauty is like an ornament of the human. Good qualities is an ornament of the beauty. Knowledge is an ornament of good qualities and forgiveness is an ornament of knowledge. In other words, good looking is useless without good qualities and good qualities will seem more nice with knowledge and above all forgiveness (kind hearted) will make the above qualities person a real good person.



व्यायामात् लभते स्वास्थ्यं । दीर्घायुष्यं बलं सुखम् ॥
आरोग्यं परं भाग्यं । स्वास्थ्यं सर्वार्थसाधनम् ॥

vyAyAmAt labhate svAsthyaM | dIrghAyushyaM balaM sukham | |
ArogyaM paraM bhAgyaM | svAsthyaM sarvArthasAdhanam | |

one gets health, strength, long life and happiness by (body) exercise. Good health is greatest blessing, health is means of everything (if you are healthy, nothing is impossible to you).

Amrutvachan

Through the process of introspection, we must rid ourselves of all weaknesses. We should acquire such attributes as may contribute to the enhancement of our work and due to which we can attract other people towards us.

- Dr. Hedgewar

The secret of Shivaji's success lay particularly in motivating the people to strive and sacrifice for the establishment of a free Hindu State and not for the sake of any individual king or chieftain. He transformed the idea of personal loyalty to some particular chieftain into one of loyalty to the entire nation and its liberty.

- Shri H.V. Sheshadri

Man has realised, from his experience, that the success of a great venture, is the result of putting together many small efforts, to produce a powerful force. Similarly, success is secured, even in a work considered to be very difficult, when millions of people gather for an hour every day, in a disciplined and dedicated manner.

- Shri Guruji Golwalkar

The grace of the Guru is like an ocean. If one comes with a cup he will only get a cupful. It is no use complaining of the niggardliness of the ocean. The bigger the vessel the more one will be able to carry. It is entirely up to him."

- Ramana Maharshi

The test of true friendship is the ability to remain unoffended in face of adverse comments. Even if a person says or does something which in the eyes of others appears to harm or insult him and still he does not in the least feel its prick, then alone can he claim true friendship with that person.

- Shree Guruji Golwalkar

We are to take care of ourselves-that much we can do-and give up attending to others for a time. Let us perfect the means; the end will take care of itself. For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.

- Swami Vivekananda

Education should be Man-Making education. A negative education is worse than death. It should be able to create Shradha in the student to all life (parents, society, nation etc). Education is not the amount of information that is put into a brain and runs riot there, undigested, all life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

- Swami Vivekananda

When a man has begun to be ashamed of his ancestors, the end has come. Here I am one of the least of the Hindu race, yet proud of my race, proud of my ancestors. I am proud to call myself a Hindu, I am proud that I am one of your unworthy servants. I am proud that I am countryman of yours. You are the descendants of the sages, you are descendants of the most glorious Rishis that world ever saw.

- Swami Vivekananda

If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bombshell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word, fearlessness. And the only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of fearlessness. Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil.

- Swami Vivekananda

It is wrong to assume that science inclines us to materialistic view of the world, that everything in the world can be reduced to matter and motion. If science tells us anything it is this, that the mind of man is capable of grasping the secrets of nature and is thus superior to nature. There is a non-natural element in man if we identify nature with our environment, which sits in judgement over nature and grasps its character and tendencies.

- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

It is necessary for the worker to sit in solitude daily in the mornings and night and probe his mind. With a discerning intellect he must find out whether any unworthy thought had entered his mind. If so, he should resolve to throw them out, and become purer from the next day. He should detach his mind from unholy associations and make it immersed in thoughts concerning the chosen mission of his life. He will, in course of time, find that his mind has become less prone to evil propensities and more attuned to the noble impulses.

- Shri Guruji Golwalkar

It is very wrong notion that science and religion are opposed to each other. May be that some religious dogmas are in conflict with scientific theories, but the spirit of religion that there is a mystery in the world which can not be comprehended by scientific calculations is accepted by some of the greatest scientists. Einstein, for example, affirms that science is inadequate to grasp the spiritual verges. A little science takes us away from religion but a little more science brings us back to it.

- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

We should have firm faith in this great work. This alone should be our lifetime task. Let us keep this goal always alive in our hearts. We have to generate a new spirit of self respect among Hindus and a sense of fearlessness. We have to arouse self pride and self confidence in every person by building the spirit of dedication to the society.

- PP Dr Hedgewar

We need do nothing else than to just organize our society, make it strong and invincible. If we just achieve this the rest will fall in place itself. All those political, social and economic problems that bother us get easily resolved.

- PP Dr Hedgewar

Sangh gives considerable importance to samskaras. A person's actions are guided by his thoughts, and a gathering of those who have similarity of thought and action contribute to a creative environment. Let us build throughout this country a pure and respectable, devoted to the cause, hopeful, inspiring and refreshing environment. Wherever swayamsevaks go they should carry the spirit of such an environment.

- PP Dr Hedgewar

Have complete and unshakeable faith in Sangh's philosophy. We are determined to work for the protection of our nation, our dharma and our culture. As it is the true path we need not worry or fear about any dangers. Dangers do not just present themselves. In fact they are God's blessings in disguise. They convey His wishes to us not only to strengthen ourselves and succeed fighting through disasters but also show us a better future direction.

- PP Dr Hedgewar

Tying of Raakhi to the sacred Bhagavaa Dhvaj at the start of the function signifies social and cultural aspect. Not only do the participants in the function develop a sense of love and affection amongst themselves but they also affirm their loyalty and devotion to the society of which they are the children. Their commitment to protect each other and also the society as a whole is emphasized through this simple ceremony.

- H. V. Seshadri

Everyone points to the other man, who, according to him, is happier. But the only one, who has the courage to declare that he is truly happy, is he who has relinquished all his passions and hungers from within.

- Swami Chinmayananda

Hinduism.....gave itself no name, because it sets itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavor of the human spirit. An immense many-sided and many staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, Santana Dharma....

- Shri Aurobindo

From every sentence (of the Upanishads) deep, original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit....”In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. They are destined sooner or later to become the faith of the people.” “ It has been the solace of my life -- it will be the solace of my death.”

- Arthur Schopenhauer

“After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophic, and none so spiritual as the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. The more you know it, the more you will love it; the more you try to understand it, the more deeply you will value it”

- Dr. Annie Besant

Sayings

परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम् ।

paropakAraH puNyAya pApAya parapIDanam |

Helping others gives spiritual merit, hurting others is sin indeed.



परोपकारार्थमिदं शरीरम् ।

paropakArArthamidaM sharIram .

This (human) body is for helping others.



गुणाः सर्वत्र पूज्यन्ते ।

guNAaH sarvatra pUjyante .

Virtues are respected everywhere.



दानं हस्तस्य भूषणम् ।

dAnaM hastasya bhUShaNam |

Selfless giving is the ornament of hand.



भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः ।

bhadraM karNebhiH shR^iNuyAma devAH |

Let auspicious words always fall on our ears.



न कूपखननं युक्तं प्रदिप्ते वह्निना गृहे ।

na kUpakhananaM yuktaM, pradipte vahinanA gR^ihe |

It is not wise to sink a well after the house is on fire.



महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ।

mahAjano yena gataH sa panthAH |

Follow the path of great people.

बहुजनहिताय बहुजनसुखाय ।

bahujanahitAya bahujanasukhAya |

For the good of many, for the happiness of many (majority of people)



सत्यं कण्ठस्य भूषणम् ।

satyaM kaNThasya bhUShaNam |

Truth of is the ornament of throat (Always speak truth)



शीलं परं भूषणम् ।

shIlaM paraM bhUShaNam |

Good character is the best ornament.



जीवेत् शरदः शतम् ।

jIvet sharadaH shatam |

May he lived hundred years.



वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ।

vasudhaiva kuTumbakam |

The whole world is one family.



सत्यमेव जयते ।

satyameva jayate |

Truth alone succeeds.



एकं सत् विप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति ।

ekaM sat viprAH bahudhA vadanti |

Truth is one; learned men express it differently.



शरीरमाद्यम् खलु धर्म साधनम् ।

sharIramAdyam khalu dharma sAdhanam |

The body is the primary instrument of fulfilling our duties. We should take care of our body.

Meaning of Sangh Prarthana

'Prarthanaa' means prayer. In Sangh, we sing Prarthanaa at the end of every Shakha. It is a collective vow. Prarthana sheds light on the following questions.

1. Whom are we praying to?
2. Who are "we"?
3. What qualities are we praying for?
4. What is our collective vision, mission ?
5. What is our means to realize that vision ?
6. Firm conviction that this is divine mission - God's work

This topic is to be covered in two weeks. In each week, practice how to sing and then explain the meaning of Prarthana.

Whom are we praying to?

*Sarva Mangala Maangalyaam
Deveem Sarvaartha Saadhikaam
Sharanyaam Sarva Bhootanaam
Namaamo Bhoomi Mataram (1)*

*Sachchidaanada Roopaaya
Vishwa Mangala Hetave
Vishwa Dharmatika Moolaaya
Namostu Paramaatmane (2)*

First two stanzas provide answer to this question. First, we are offering our salutations to Mother Earth. Mother Earth is described as the auspiciousness of all that is auspicious, fulfiller of all our needs and the refuge of all the beings. Since the Vedic times, Earth has always been looked upon as Mother and is respected by Hindus. Truly it is Mother Earth, who fulfills all our necessities and provide the shelter for all the beings. Exploitation of earth and nature in general is deplored in our traditions. Mother earth has enough resources to satisfy every one's need but not their greed.

Next, we offer our salutations to God, who is described as the very embodiment of truth, consciousness and bliss. God is also addressed as the source of all good things happening in the world. God is also the source for Dharma, which upholds the universe.

Who are “We”?

*Vishwa Dharma Vikaasartham
Prabho Sanghatitaa Vayam
Shubhaam Aashisham Asmabhayam
Dehi Tat Paripoortaye (3)*

In the 3rd stanza, we introduce ourselves as people who are getting organized for the sake of spreading and blossoming of ‘vishwa dharma’ (universal dharma). To realize this grand vision, we are seeking the blessings of the God.

What qualities are we praying for?

*Ajayyam Aatma Saamarthyam
Susheelam Loka Poojitam
Gyanam Cha Dehi Vishwesham
Dhyeya Maarga Prakaashakam (4)*

We are praying God to make us better equipment to fulfill this noble mission. In the above stanza, we are asking God to bless us with three qualities.

‘Ajayyam Aatma Saamarthyam’ - Invincible Strength: We should be strong so that no one would dare insult us, offend us. Our strength is not to do harm to any one, but to ensure that no one does harm to us. The world understands the language of Strength. The world respects and worships Strength. That’s why Hindus worship Mother Durga, the Goddess of Strength.

‘Susheelam loka puujitam’ - Good character that commands respect from all: Along with the physical strength, we should possess good character. Strength without character is dangerous to the society. Character without strength is not of much use.

Dhyeya maarga prakaashakam Jnaanam: Knowledge that would throw light upon our mission: Here we are asking for the right knowledge that would enlighten us and bring clarity in our minds about our chosen mission.

Material progress and Spiritual upliftment

*SamutKarshostuno Nityam
Nishreyasa Samanvitah
Tatsaadhakam Sphuratwantah
Suveera Vratamujwalam (5)*

Our aim is to achieve splendid material progress and facilitate spiritual development of each individual. The two phrases, 'samutkarsha' and 'nishreyasa' convey these two concepts of material and spiritual progress.

We pray for that enlightening vow to realize such a society to spring from our hearts.

Let our commitment to the cause be firm

*Vishwa Dharma Prakaashena
Vishwa Shaanti Pravartake
Hindu Sanghatanaa Kaarye
Dhyeya Nishthaa Sthiraastunah (6)*

We want to achieve world peace and harmony in the light of our universal Dharma. In this mission of organizing people towards that, let our commitment be firm.

Our grand Vision - Pinnacle of Glory

*Sangha Shaktir Vijetreeyam
Krutvaasmad Dharma Rakshanam
Paramam Vaibhavam Praaptum
Samarthaastu Tavaashisha (7)*

Our grand vision is to establish peace and harmony in the world. It will be a glory to the human civilization whereby every individual can realize his or her potential to the fullest. The means to achieve this is by protecting the 'Dharma'. We are seeking your blessings so that this organized strength will be triumphant.

This is God's work. Offerings

*Tvadiiye Punya Kaaryesmin
Vishwa Kalyaana Saadhake
Tyaaga Seva Vratasyaayam
Kaayome Patatu Prabho (8)*

This mission of welfare of the entire humanity is God's work. We are only instruments in this noble task. We are praying God that let our life be offered in this life of sacrifice and service.

Vishwa Dharma Ki Jay
|| Victory to the Universal Dharma ||

Shakha Commands

We go to shakha regularly. Shakha has some unique commands. Those commands are used in shakha to maintain discipline, efficiency and to conduct programs orderly and effectively. Some of the commonly used commands are detailed below. They are in sanskrit.

Commands during beginning and conclusion of Shakha:

These commands are useful to bring all swayamsevaks and swayamsevikas together efficiently in the least time possible and implement the activities in a disciplined fashion.

Saavadhan: When it is time for the shakha to start, or whenever the shikshak wants the attentions of everyone the command Saavadhan is used. It means:- Be attentive, please listen for the next command or set of instructions.

Sangha Daksha: This command brings the entire organization to attention. The word Daksha means attention.

Agresara: When mukhyashikshak will decide on the number of Agresaras required and will call upon them. An Agresara is a person who stands in the front of the line to be formed.

Agresara Samyak: The agressars looks to the right to check his placing. The right most agressar does not move. The word samyak in this case, means equal placement.

Sangh Sampada: The rest should fall in line behind the agressars swiftly without talking or making any other distracting sounds or actions. The word Sampada means to join.

Sangh Samyak: The Agresara turns around to check if the line is straight. It is important for all in line to be attentive and notice what the Agresara directs you to do. If someone is not in line the agresara should say so by using hands only. There should be no talking or whispering when in line.

Prarthana: This is the command to start the prarthana.

Dhwaja Pranam: This is the command to join your hands and offer salutations to the Bhagwa Dhwaj (The saffron flag). Do this on the count of three.

Vikira: This is the command to disperse. Turn to the right, do pranaam to the Karyavaha and disperse.

Commands during the Shakha programs:

During shakha programs such as games, yoga, geet, shloka/stotra, and story sessions other commands are used. Commonly used commands are detailed

below:

Mandala: This command is given when the shikshak wants you to form a circle. The word mandala means circle. This is used mostly while playing games, doing yoga and exercises.

Uthishta: This command is given when the shikshak wants you to stand up. The word uthishta, means to stand.

Upavisha: This command is given when the shikshak wants you to sit down. The word upavisha means to sit.

Kuru: This command is given when the shikshak wants you to start something. The word Kuru means begin. For example: a race.

Stabha: This command is given when the shikshak wants you to stop doing whatever you are. The word Stabha, means stop.

Other Commands

There are some other commands that are used while in formation. Formations can be used when you are marching together in a parade or demonstrating a skill like Danda Prayog (lathi or stick use), Yog-chap (lezim), Yoga, Niyudha, or any exercise. A few of these commands are detailed below:

Vrutha

The word vrutha means to turn. There are various ways of turning:

- Ardha Vrutha: Turn around 180 degrees. Turn from the right side.
- Vama Vrutha: Turn around by 90 degrees. Turn to your left.
- Dakshina Vrutha: Turn around by 90 degrees. Turn to your right.

Ek Shaha Sampada: This command is given when the shikshak requires all of you to come together in a line by order of height. As soon as the command is given the tallest person stands in front of the shikshak. The rest follow by standing to the left of the tallest person in accordance with height. You stand using a half-arm distance between each other. Following this the shikshak might give a command to divide the entire gana into divisions.

Gana Vibhajan: If the shikshak wants to divide the gana in two groups, a command Gana Vibhag will be given followed by the command dwi-tathi. Gana Amshabag/tri tathi will be used to divide the gana into three.

Tathi

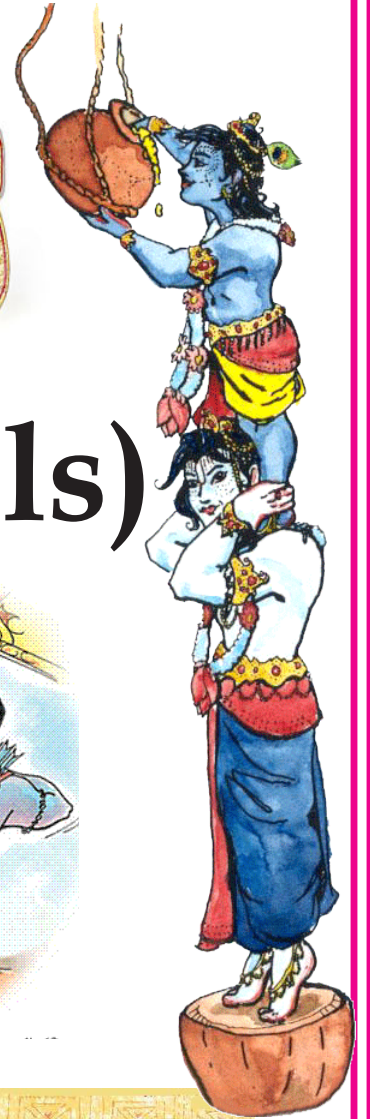
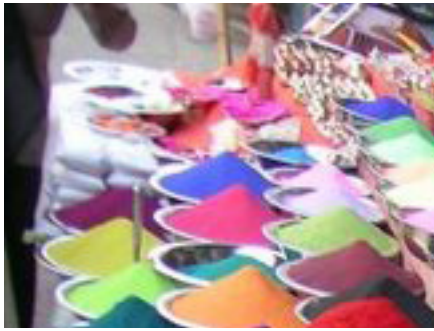
• The word tathi means lines or divisions. When the shikshak wants to divide the gana into two or more tathis a command will be given. For making two lines it is dwi-tathi and for three it is tri-tathi.



Calendar Months and relevant topics

There could be several articles on one particular topic. For example, Dr. Hedgewar and Stories of Dr. Hedgewar. So, try to find relevant topics using following search strings.

Months	Relevant topics (search strings)
January-February	Makar Samkranti, Swami Vivekananda, Mahashivaratri, Shiva, Narendra, Golwalkar, Devavrata,
February-March	Mahashivaratri, Yugadi, Hindu Calendar, Hedgewar, Shri Ram, Ram Navami, Shiva, Golwalkar,
March-April	Yugadi, Hindu Calendar, Hedgewar, Shri Ram, Ram Navami, Hanuman Jayanti,
April-May	Hanuman Jayanti, Savarkar, Buddha Jayanti, Shravan Kumar,
May-June	Buddha Jayanti, Savarkar, Hindu Sanghatan Diwas, Shivaji, Rana Pratap, Shravan Kumar, Tanaji
June-July	Hindu Sanghatan Diwas, Shivaji, Rana Pratap, Kelkar, Hindu Scriptures, Gurukul, Dhaumya Rishi, Tanaji
July-August	Hindu Scriptures, Guru Poornima, Freedom Movement, Dhaumya Rishi, Gurukul
August-September	Ganesha, Janmashtami, Krishna, Raksha Bandhan, Freedom Movement, Janmashtmi, Ganesha Chaturthi
September-October	Krishna, Raksha Bandhan, Hedgewar, Vijayadashami, Navaratri, Ganesha Chaturthi
October-November	Hedgewar, Vijayadashami, Navaratri, Deepavali, Goddess,
November-December	Vijayadashami, Navaratri, Deepavali, Krishna, Gita Jayanti, Guru Nanak
December	Gita Jayanti, Guru Nanak, Guru



Utsav (Festivals)



Makara Samkranti

A change towards a balanced life

The month of January has several significant events of the history such as birth of Swami (sage) Vivekananda and Martin Luther king. One of the most auspicious days for the Hindus, Makara Samkranti, also falls in the same month, generally on the 14th January. Makara (Capricorn) is a name of one of the 12 divisions of the zodiac. The analogy of Samkranti is Samyak-Kranti. Samyak in Samskrita language means balanced, equal or orderly state of existence and kranti means a forward fundamental change. Briefly, Samkranti means a forward transition. Thus, the basic meaning of the Samkranti is a change towards a balanced life, social setup and brotherhood amongst all individuals.

Celebrations

Makara Samkranti is celebrated in almost all parts of the Bharat (India). As Bharat is a diverse and multilingual country, this festival is called by different names in different parts of the country such as 'Pongal', 'Lohri', 'Khichari', 'Paush Samkranti', 'Magha Samkranti', 'Bhogali Bihu'. This festival is also celebrated in different ways. During this day, elders in the family give special gifts to the younger members of the family. Thousands of people fly colorful kites. They also hold kite competitions. Especially kids and youngsters take part in the kite competitions and play enthusiastically. Kite-playing has been a unique and famous game being played in Bharat. People from northern parts of the India get up early in the morning and do the Ganga-Snan (bathing in the waters of the holy river - Ganga) and Surya-pooja (worshipping the Sun). The month January is the peak of the winter. On the eve of Samkranti, people light huge bonfires around which all friends and relatives gather together. In some parts of the Bharat (India), a til-gud (a mixture of til - sesame seeds and gud - jaggery) is served to friends and family members. In cold days, eating til-gud helps to maintain the body temperature and to keep the



health good. Womenfolk, especially recently married ones, invite each other for the get together called 'Haldi-kumkum' and give gifts which are useful in the daily routine. In southern parts of Bharat, it is celebrated by worshipping the Sun. People eat and serve a pongal - a delicious dish of sweet rice and jaggery. In villages, cows, bullocks and cattle are washed, decorated and worshipped. Birds are fed colorful pongal balls. Bullock cart races are held where the village people get together and participate. There is a tradition of special art called Rangoli, which is drawn during this festival season. This art is done in front of the house with the Rice flour and colors. As described in the beginning, though Makara Samkranti is being known by different names and celebrated in different ways, the message delivered by it is one and the same for all. Despite the variety of rituals and customs, there is a unity and homogeneity in the basic concept of this festival.



Social Aspect

On the social ground, Makara Samkranti carries a vital significance for society's welfare. It stands for the brotherhood amongst all individuals which is the basic requisite of the great precepts of liberty and equality. The selfishness, the ultimate destructor of the social fabric cannot stand where a spirit of brotherhood is alive. As described earlier, it is the tradition to eat and serve til (sesame seeds) and gud (jaggery). Til represents an individual whereas jaggery represents sweetness, love and affection. The paste of jaggery (love and affection) holds all til (individuals) together to form a social harmony. In today's world, where variety of faiths and beliefs exist, this kind of attitude is very much essential. This is the day considered as a time to express gratitude to the elements of Mother Nature which help to nurture and enrich human lives. From this day, the duration of sun-light increases and that of night (darkness) decreases. Light symbolizes knowledge, and brighter aspects of our lives and darkness represent ignorance and duller aspects. Thus 'Samkranti' signifies this positive change of increasing the good qualities in us and decreasing the negative ones.

Astronomical Significance

As per the Hindu calendar (panchang or panchangam), the seasonal year is divided into two parts: The first part/period of the year (first six months) is

called as Uttaraayana. The Sun's apparent trajectory in the sky heads northward during this period. The second part/period is called Dakshinaayana wherein the Sun appears to head southward. Further, as Earth revolves around the Sun, the Sun appears to cross each raashi about once a month. This transit from one raashi to the next is called samkranti. Makara Samkranti is the first such samkranti day in the Uttaraayana period. Similarly, Karkataka samkranti is the first one during Dakshinayana. Amongst the twelve samkranti days in the Hindu tradition, both these 'ayana samkranti' days are especially celebrated. In particular, the Makara Samkranti is very popular. Due to the precession of the Earth axis, the beginning of the ayanas moves backwards from one raashi to the previous in a cycle of about 26,000 years. Thus, the beginning of Uttaraayana and Dakshinaayana is not locked to any samkranti. However, the significance of the ayana samkrantis lie in the fact that they constitute the 'morning' and 'evening' sandhyaa times of the luminaries (devas). Our one full year making up their one day-night cycle. These 'deva sandhyaa' times are the sacred times for meditations just as our dawn/dusk times are sacred for our daily meditations or poojas.

Makara Samkranti as a Sangh Utsav

Makar Samkranti is special for the Bala-Gokulam (Sangh) too. It is considered as one of the six utsavs that Bala-Gokulam focuses on. The Bala-Gokulam focusses on this utsav because it promotes brotherhood amongst all individuals which is the need of the time. It is the day of introspection and making resolves for the entire year. In Sangh, the new adhikari gana is initiated and utsav is rounded off by distributing til-gul at the end.



Pitamaha Bhishma was one of the greatest characters of Mahabharata. He had a boon to choose the day to die. In the Mahabharata war, he fought with Arjuna. Arjuna wounded him so badly that he could not even move. He was lying on the bed of arrows. Even in this wounded condition, he chose to wait for the day of Makara Samkranti to die and he breathed his last on this auspicious day.

Sri Shiva

The Destroyer

Shiva is one of the Hindu Trinity (Trimurti) - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva). The Trimurti together operate (Generation, Sustainance and Destruction) the Universe. Shiva's job is to destroy the universe. That is why He is also known as the destroyer.

Sri Shiva - The Destroyer?

You may ask, "Well, if Shiva is a destroyer, then how come He is a God!?" Shiva destroys the universe **for good**. In fact, change is the characteristics of anything born in the universe. This changing aspect of the unchanging Almighty is Shiva. "Shiva" also means auspicious and sacred. Every creation sustains itself by balance between the opposing forces of expansion and contraction. Winter is essential for spring to appear and the night is necessary for the morning to follow. A goldsmith has to melt old irreparable golden jewelry to create new beautiful jewelry (ornaments). Similarly when the balance of the universe is disturbed and sustainance of life becomes impossible, Sri Shiva dissolves/destroys it for creation of the next life cycle.

Though, God is formless and attributeless, Hindus see Shiva in a very unique form for the worship. Shiva is contemplated in the form of the very universe. He has a blue complexion that stands for an endless body, like the blue sky or ocean. He carries a snake around his neck, which represents evolutionary power (power to keep growing and changing) in the universe. Shiva has four hands - one is holding a drum to announce the Big Bang at the beginning of the Universe, the next is holding the fire of destruction or a Trishul (a weapon), the third offers blessings. Shiva's blazing hair represents movement within a circle of fire and the circle encasing him shows that there is no end or beginning to the universe.



Various names of Sri Shiva

Sri Shiva is known by various names. His few names are - Mahadev (The Great God), Tri-netra (three eyed), Neelkantha (blue necked), Nataraja (divine cosmic dancer), Ardhanareeshwara (half man and half woman), Mrityunjaya (conqueror of death), Rudra (God of Anger), Kailaspati (God of Kailash - a mountain), Pashupatinath (God of the beings), Umapati (the husband of Uma), Gangadhar (bearer of the sacred river Ganga), Jatadhari (one who has matted hair), Vira Bhadra (valor personified). There are legends behind each name. Try to learn those legends from other sources.

Symbol of Sri Shiva - Shiva-linga

Shiva-Linga (see picture) is a symbol of Sri Shiva. Wherever you find the icon/image of Sri Shiva, Shiva-linga is also found alongwith it. It represents the infinite cosmic energy necessary for the life. Shiva-linga neither has any form, nor is formless. That is why it is also called aruparupam (formless form) which also represents the 'formless', 'attributeless' and 'omnipresent' state of the God.



Maha Shivaratri

According to the Puranas, during the great churning of the ocean called *Samudra Manthan*, a pot of poison emerged from the ocean. The devas and the asuras were terrified as it could destroy the world. They ran to Sri Shiva for help. Sri Shiva drank the deadly poison but held it in his throat instead of swallowing it. This turned his throat into blue and since he came to be known as "Neelakantha" which means the blue-necked one. Maha Shivaratri is celebrated to offer prayers to Sri Shiva for saving the universe from the imbalances. Actual meaning of Maha Shivaratri is "the great night of Shiva" or "the night of great Shiva". It is also believed that on this day Sri Shiva was married to Parvati.

Maha Shivaratri is celebrated by Shiva devotees. It falls on the 14th day of the dark half of the Hindu month 'Maagha' (as per Shalivahana shaka). The ceremonies take place particularly at night. On this festival people worship Sri Shiva. This night marks the night when Sri Shiva danced the '*Tandav*' (a type of dance). Hindus observe a strict fast on this day. Some devotees do not even take a drop of water and they keep vigil all night. The Shiva-lingam is worshipped throughout the night by washing it every three hours with milk, curd, honey, rose water, etc., whilst the chanting of the Mantra "Om Namah Shivaya" continues.

Offerings of bael leaves are made to the Lingam as bael (bilva) leaves are considered very sacred.

Twelve Jyotirlingas

Worship of Shiva-linga is considered the prime worship for the devotees of Sri Shiva. The significance of the Shiva-linga is that it is the light (flame) form of the Supreme - solidified to make the worship of it easier. Hence is the name *Jyotirlinga*. Sri Shiva manifested Himself at twelve different places in Bharat. Two on the sea shores, three on river banks, four on the heights of mountains and three in villages located in meadows; the twelve Jyotirlingas are spread out like this. There are legends mentioned in different Puranas about each manifestation. Try to learn about those legends from other sources. Refer to the map of Bharat (India) to learn the locations of each *Jyotirlinga*.



Yugadi

The Hindu New Year

Festivals are an integral part of our life and culture and Hindu tradition offers them in plenty. There is a festival for every reason and for every season. Every celebration centers around rituals of prayer, seeking blessings, exchanging goodwill, decorating houses, wearing new clothes, music, dance and feasting. Do you know the most important festival that falls in the month of April? It is Yugadi!

Yugadi is one of the most important festivals that we celebrate. Yugadi means “Beginning of New age” (Yuga=Age and Aadi=beginning). Hindu culture is diverse and Hindus speak many languages. No wonder! This festival is recognized by various names and celebrated in various ways and on different days. Some call it as “Varsha Pratipada”, and some as “Gudi Padva. Some call it as “Naba Barsha” and some as “Goru Bihu”.

Yugadi comes close on the heels of festival Holi every year. While the strong colors of Holi start fading away, the freshness of spring lingers on with sprightliness all around. It is a spring festival when the Goddess of Nature gets bedecked as a divine bride. This season has a characteristic fragrance in the air; fully blossomed neem trees make the air healthy. We listen to chanting of birds and smell fragrance of flowers from distance. The onset of spring also marks a beginning of new life with plants (barren until now) acquiring new life, shoots and leaves. The vibrancy of life and verdant fields, meadows full of colorful blossoms signifies growth, prosperity and well-being.

Yugadi is also a beginning of a new year according to the Hindu Panchang. You must be wondering, “*What is Hindu Panchang?*” Hindu Panchang is the Hindu Calendar. Just like the Gregorian calendar, Hindus also have their own calendar. They use it for the religious customs and ceremonies. Its time reckoning is based on the apparent motions of the celestial bodies such as the Sun, the moon, and the planets. This astronomical method of the Hindu calendar is very old – the oldest reference is in a text called Vedanga Jyotisha of about 1200 BC whose source was a still far ancient sage called Lagadha. It has been revised by Aryabhata,

Varahamihira, Bhasakar, etc. By custom and tradition, the New Year is marked when the celestial positions of the Earth and the beginning of the Mesha raashi line up with the Sun or the Moon. The lineup with the Moon is called the chaandra (lunar) Yugadi and that with the Sun is called the saura (solar) Yugadi. Any of us with a little bit of imagination can visualize what is going on in the sky around Yugadi. As an astronomical fact, these two Yugadis occur close by. Also, the chaandra Yugadi day heralds the new 'samvastara' in our tradition. Since it is the start of New Year, people launch new projects, start new ventures, open new offices. They purchase jewelry, and gold on this auspicious day. Reading and understanding of the panchang is also an important activity on this day.



Ways of celebrations

Hindus celebrate this festival in various ways. Preparations for the festival begin a week ahead. Houses are given a thorough wash. Shopping for new clothes and buying other items that go with the requirements of the festival are done with a lot of excitement. People wake up before the break of dawn, apply coconut oil on their skin and take a bath after which they decorate the entrance of their houses with fresh mango leaves and intricate rangoli designs reflecting the brightness of the Spring. Wearing new clothes, they offer Pooja for the God and seek his blessings. They pray for their health, wealth and prosperity and success in business too. Some people celebrate this festival by hoisting a gudi - a bamboo pole with a rich and gorgeous cloth of magenta or saffron color and a small branch of neem tree and garland. It symbolizes Shree Rama's triumphant entry into Ayodhya and is erected in homes as a mark of triumph of good over evil. It also symbolizes the Brahma-dhwaj (flag of the Creator).

Some find a different way of celebrating the festival. Kavi Sammelanam (poetry recitation) is quite famous in southern Bharat (India). Yugadi is also a time when people look forward to a literary feast in the form of Kavi Sammelanam. Many poets come up with new poems written on subjects ranging from Yugadi to politics to modern trends and lifestyles.

As the day starts, they eat the paste of bitter-sweet leaves of Neem tree, tamarind and jaggery. The neem paste is believed to purify blood and build up immunity in the body against diseases. Special dishes such as "pulihora" (like tamarind rice), "bobbatlu" (sweet rotis), "Shrikhand" (like sweet yoghurt) are prepared for the occasion. Yugadi is thus a festival of many shades. It ushers in the New Year, brings a rich bounce of flora and fills the hearts of people with joy

and contentment.

Mythological and Historical Importance

It is believed that, on this day, the Universe was created by Sri Brahma. This is the day when Sri Vishnu incarnated himself as Matsya (fish). On this day, Shri Rama killed Vali. The great Mathematician Bhaskaracharya's calculations proclaimed the Yugadi day from the sunrise on as the beginning of the New Year, new month and new day. This day recalls the inspiring occasion when the king Shalivahana defeated the barbaric forces of Shakas who came from Central Asia and invaded Bharat (India) during the 1st century A.D. The founding of new Era in the name of Shalivahana signifies the supreme importance accorded to them in the Hindu history. And what a happy coincidence! A great patriot, revolutionary and the founder of the organization - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) , Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was also born on this day of Yugadi.

Spiritual Significance

All the major Hindu festivals have their own purpose and significance, i.e., to show their relevance and importance in the context of the eternal world cycle of history. As mentioned earlier, people eat the paste of bitter-sweet leaves of Neem tree, tamarind and jaggery. Apart from its medicinal value the eating of this mixture has an inner significance. Jaggery represents joy and happiness and Neem represents sorrow. Their mixture indicates that life is a mixture of good and bad, joy and sorrow, success and disappointment, and all of them have to be treated alike. Everyone should resolve to face calmly whatever happens in this year, accepting it with good grace. Consider everything is for one's own good. We should rise above sorrow and happiness, success and failure. Jaggery represents Krutayuga and Tretayuga which is full of purity, prosperity and peace. Neem represents Dwaparyuga and Kaliyuga which consists of sorrow, chaos and impurity. So, it is the time to change ourselves or to purify ourselves by inculcating the divine virtues.



A great visionary, revolutionary, patriot, true and fearless leader and a founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was born on the day of Yugadi. He sacrificed his whole life for the expansion of the Sangh work.

Hanuman Jayanti

The Birth-day of Sri Hanuman

Sri Hanuman is well known as the best among the heroes, devotees, and scholars. During his life he worked wonders and exhibited superhuman feats of strength and valour. He has left behind him a name which, as long as the world lasts, will continue wielding a great influence over the minds of millions of people.

The birth of Sri Hanuman is celebrated as Hanuman Jayanti. Sri Shiva incarnated as Hanuman in the bodily form like us through the grace and blessings of his god-father Pavandev (God of Winds), with Anjana and Kesari as his earthly parents. He was born at the most auspicious hour of the morning of Chaitra Shukla Poornima – the March-April full moon day.

Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated with great devotion. Devotees visit Hanuman shrines, observe fasts, offer prayers and puja and read the Ramayan. On this day, the murtis of Hanuman are given a special coating of vermilion mixed with clarified butter. People offer “besan ladoo” or “boondi” as prasad and chant various hymns eulogizing his glory.

Hanumanji mentally chose Surya (the Sun-god) as his preceptor. Therefore, he approached Surya with the request to be taught the scriptures so that he may manifest spiritually in daily life. Surya agreed to have Hanuman as his disciple but pointed out that it was not possible for him to stop his journey across the sky as that would cause chaos in the world. But Hanuman was so mighty that he surprised all the gods by facing his Guru, who had to be constantly moving, thus (Hanuman) traversing the sky backwards and at the same time concentrating fully on his lessons.

In this way, Hanuman enabled Surya to perform his duty and to impart knowledge



“Chiranjiv” means immortal. However, immortal does not mean eternal. Even immortal things are dissolved at the end of the universe. For Hindus, there are seven immortal (Chiranjiv) individuals - King Bali, Sage Parashuram, Sage Vyasa, Sage Kripacharya, Ashwatthama, Vibhishan, and Hanuman. Hindus call them Chiranjivi.

at the same time. Within a short period of 60 hours, He mastered all the scriptures. Surya considered the manner in which Hanuman accomplished his studies as sufficient dakshina (tuition fees), but Hanuman pressed him to accept more. Surya then asked Hanuman to assist his son Sugriva, who was living in Kishkindha (a province in Bharat). Hanuman joined Sugriva as his minister, a friend and a constant companion. He guided him now and then. He was the one who arranged a meeting between Sugriva and Sri Rama.

Hanuman was a great devotee of Sri Rama. When He went as a messenger to Ravana’s court He said to Ravana, *“I am a humble messenger of Sri Rama. By the command of Sri Rama, I have come here to give you his message. I am fearless by the grace of Him. I am not afraid of death. I welcome it if it comes while serving Him.”* See how humble Hanuman was! How deep was his devotion to Sri Rama! He never said -- I am the brave Hanuman. I can do anything and everything.

After winning the war against Ravana and reaching Ayodhya, Sri Rama Himself said to Hanuman, *“I am greatly indebted to you, O mighty hero. You did marvellous, superhuman deeds. Sugriva has his kingdom restored to him. Angada has been made the crown prince. Vibhishana has become king of Lanka. But you have not asked for anything at any time. You threw away the precious garland of pearls given to you by Sita. How can I repay my debt of gratitude to you? I will always remain deeply indebted to you. I give you the boon of everlasting life. All will honour and worship you like myself. Your icon will be placed at the door of my temple and you will be worshipped and honoured first. Whenever my stories are recited or glories sung, your glory will be sung before mine. You will be able to do anything, even that which I will not be able to!”*

Hanumanji is therefore the living embodiment of the power of Ram-Nam



(Rama's name). He was an ideal selfless worker, a true Karma Yogi who worked desirelessly. He was a great devotee and an exceptional Brahmachari (one whose mind always treading in the Brahman) or celibate. He served Sri Rama with pure love and devotion, without expecting anything in return.

Hanuman was the wisest of the wise, strongest of the strong and bravest of the brave. It is said that one who meditates on him and repeats his name attains power, strength, glory, prosperity and success in life. Hanuman is said to be Chiranjivi (immortal) and is present in the world even today. He is the link between the devotees and God. As instructed by God, he serves, protects and inspires the devotees of God.

Hanuman Jayanti is designed to remind people about the purpose of Hanuman's life. On this day, devotees fast and worship Him. They spend whole day in reading Sri Hanuman Chalisa and doing Japa (chanting) of Ram-Nam (Sri Rama's name). They believe that Sri Hanuman will bless them with a success in all their undertakings. Hanuman can be a very good role model for swayamsevak. His life exemplifies how an ideal swayamsevak should work selflessly and with dedication for the society.

It can be said that in the history of no other country is there an individual so powerful, learned and philosophic as Sri Hanuman. May we always proclaim, "Bajrangbally Ki Jai", victory to Sri Hanuman, who has the strength of the thunderbolt.

Glory to Sri Hanuman! Glory to Sri Rama!



Sometimes, Hanuman, Sugriv, Vali and several others in Sugriv's kingdom are referred as monkeys or monkey-gods, **which is not appropriate**. Valmiki, the author of Ramayana, refers them as vaanara i.e. people habitating in the woods. They lived in Kishkindha, the present-day northern Karnataka which was heavily wooded during Sri Rama's time. The vaanara means monkey is a later distortion. Sri Rama organized them into a mighty army to defeat Ravana and his asuri forces.

Hindu Sanghatan Diwas

Coronation of King Shivaji

Sangh emphasizes six utsavs (festivals) - Yugadi or Varsha-Pratipada, Hindu Sanghatan Diwas, Guru Pournima, Rakshabandhan, Vijayadashami and Makar Samkranti. All these utsavs, except Hindu Sanghatan Diwas, are celebrated even outside the Sangh. Traditionally, Hindu Sanghatan Diwas is not really an utsav (festival). Naturally, the question arises in mind that, *“why did Sangh start a new utsav, while we already have so many utsavs?”* This article explains the reason and purpose of this utsav.

Background

Our spiritual root, Bharat, had been under the yoke of the foreign invaders for a long time. For the last 1000 years until 1947, foreign invaders, including British, not only looted Bharat but also tried to destroy her culture. Under foreign rule, people could not even follow their rituals and Dharma.

A few attempts were made by some warriors and kings to defend the country against these invaders. They were even successful to some extent. But, that did not last long. It was a general perception that Bharatiya people were cowards and Bharat was a place where all can throw their dirt. Furthermore, there was not a single successful Hindu king in last 1000 years. But, this situation was changed when Shivaji was born.

Shivaji

Shivaji was a son of a Maratha warrior/chieftain, Shahaji. His parents instilled a pride in him about his country and culture. In his childhood, Shivaji took an oath that he would fight against foreign invaders and establish a Hindu kingdom.

In his lifetime, Shivaji fought many battles. He did not hesitate to put his own life in danger. His warfare strategies, tactics, diplomacy, administration, politics, justice, foresight and judgment were second to none. The most unique thing was that he united all Hindus regardless of their cast and encouraged them to fight against the foreign rule. He gained the trust of the common people. Common

people were even ready to die for him.

The secret of Shivaji's success lay particularly in motivating the people to strive and sacrifice for the establishment of a free Hindu kingdom and not for the sake of any individual king or chieftain. He transformed the idea of personal loyalty to some particular chieftain into one of loyalty to the entire nation and its liberty.

Shivaji did many exceptional things. He introduced new military strategies, new weapons, new type of training to soldiers, building up new resources from scratch, new rules of administration and taxation. His personal heroism was matchless.



Shivaji started from nothing. After a continuous 17 years of efforts, he established an ideal Hindu kingdom and was coronated as a king. His coronation was the most remarkable thing happened in those days. People were extremely happy to see their own kingdom and king after a long time of 1000 years. Sangh celebrates Shivaji's coronation day as a Hindu Sanghatan Diwas. It means Hindu Unity Day. The choice of this particular day for celebration lies in its inspiring historical significance. This occasion holds up inspiring lessons for the Hindus for their future march.

What is the importance in today's world?

Now, you may ask, "Ok! We appreciate Shivaji. But why is it so significant in today's world!!?" Today, we see that Hindus have lots of talent and knowledge. As an individual, they are excellent, but they are divided. There is a lack of unity amongst them. Also, there is a perception that Hindus cannot be united. In past, Shivaji changed this perception and brought back glory for Hindus. Today, Hindus are humiliated and dominated just because of lack of unity. Sangh has taken up this task to unite all Hindus and bring back the glory for them. It should be noted that Sangh has chosen Shivaji's coronation day for celebration, because for Sangh, Shivaji's coronation day is more significant than his birth day or any other day.

Hindu Dharma is not a closed book. This utsav is a value addition to it.



Guru Poornima

A day of reverence to the Guru

The full moon day of the month of Ashadha (July-August) is traditionally celebrated as Guru Poornima. Guru means teacher and Poornima means the full moon day of the month. This day is also known as Vyasa Poornima.

The great sage Vyasa classified the accumulated spiritual knowledge of the Vedas under four heads - Rig, Yajur, Saama and Atharva. He also composed the authentic treatise of Brahma-sootras to explain the background of Vedas. In addition, he wrote the eighteen puranas and upa-puranas, the stories of our great heroes and saints, to carry the spiritual and moral teachings contained therein to the common masses. Therefore he is the Adi-Guru for all.

How does Samskrit word (Guru) come from? 'Gu' stands for Gunatheeta (attributeless) and 'Ru' signifies Rupavarjita (formless). Thus, the one, who is formless and attributeless, is the true Guru. God!! The Guru helps us to give up the ignorance, light the lamp of wisdom and ultimately merge in the Divine. It is very well expressed in the one of the verses of Hindu scriptures.

Gurubrahma Guruvishnu Gururdevo Maheshwaraha |
Guruha sakshaat Parambrahma tasmai Shrigurave namaha | |
(Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is Mahesh (Shiva). The Guru is Parambrahma (The Almighty). Thus respect Guru)

There is also another interpretation of Guru. The "Gu" means darkness or ignorance. "Ru" denotes the remover of that darkness. Therefore one who removes darkness of our ignorance is a Guru. A Guru also inspires and guides us on to the path of God-realization. In other words, Guru is the one who gives us knowledge. Thus mother is considered as the first Guru (teacher). But, we acquire knowledge from others too such as a school teacher, a baseball coach or even the shikshak at our balagokulam. They all can be referred as Guru. One should always be thankful to whom he or she gains knowledge.

In Hindu tradition, the Guru is looked upon as an embodiment of God

himself. It is through his grace and guidance that one reaches the highest state of wisdom and bliss. The Guru or teacher also guides us into the right path when we lose track. Guru also boosts our energy when we run out of steam. On this auspicious day of Guru Poornima, many disciples perform a puja of their respective spiritual preceptor (Guru). One may even celebrate in silence, reading the religious scriptures. The best form of worshipping Guru is to follow his teachings, remember/ implement them and propagate them.

In our Balagokulams, we have considered sacred Bhagava Dhvaj (saffron flag) as the true Guru. Why is that? Why don't we consider an individual as a Guru? There have been various sages (saints), teachers and spiritual leaders who have been teaching countless individuals. But, is there anyone who can be looked upon as the preceptor for the entire Hindus - for all their past, present and future generations? Obviously, no individual can play that role. A human being is after all mortal and, however great, has own limitations and flaws. Therefore, any human being cannot be a permanent guide for all time to come. However, there is one who can be a permanent guide to all for all the time! Sacred Bhagava Dhvaj (saffron flag)! The sacred Bhagava Dhvaj that represents all the Gurus is worshipped as the Guru of the entire Hindu society. That is why we consider Bhagava Dhvaj as a Guru in our Balagokulams.

Bhagava Dhvaj is as ancient as the Hindu Dharma itself. It has flown over the hermitages of the seers and sanyaasins and also over the celestial palaces of emperors. It has flown triumphantly over the battlefields of freedom struggle and has symbolized the immortal spirit of freedom in the Hindu mind. It is the one supreme symbol held in universal reverence by all sects and castes, and all creeds and faiths of the Hindus. It is in fact the greatest unifying symbol of the entire Hindu world. The color of the Bhagava Dhvaj - the saffron, depicts sacrifice and service. The flames rising from the yajna are saffron in color and indeed reflect this spirit.



The annual function of Sri Guru Poornima in our Balagokulams presents a moment of introspection for us to check up how far we have progressed in this path of renunciation and selfless service to the society over the last one year, and take lessons from it and resolve to march faster in the current year.



Raksha Bandhan

The Universal Oneness Day

The Raksha Bandhan is a celebration of the abiding and chaste bond of love between the brother and the sister. It is also known as Rakhi Purnima as it is celebrated on the full moon (Purnima) day of the holy month Shravana (August). The Raksha Bandhan festival stirs up one of the deepest and noblest emotions in the human heart - the abiding and chaste bond of love between the brother and the sister. The duties of brothers and the love and affection of sisters are symbolized through the tying of Rakhi. In earlier days, it was merely a festival of brothers and sisters, but now it has become of all.

On the Raksha Bandhan day, the festivities start by the day break. Everyone gets ready early and gathers for the worship of the deities. After invoking the blessings of the Gods, the sister performs brother's aarti, puts tika and chawal (rice) on his forehead and ties Rakhi. Then she gives him sweets and gifts. The brother accepts her offerings and vows to take care of her and be by her side in the time of need. As a token he gives the sister a return gift and sweets. Emotions can be expressed through emails, greeting cards, and rakhis through internet or mail in case siblings cannot meet in person.

On this day, in the coastal regions of Bharat, Bharatiya people worship the rain God Indra and the Sea God Varuna. They offer coconut and seek their blessings. Fishermen start their voyages on this day for fishing. The farmers start sowing seeds on this day and pray for a good crop. It is said that Sri Rama started for Lanka to rescue Sita on this day. He crossed the sea from the bridge made by the Vanar Sena by throwing stones in water.

Thousands of events highlight the importance of the Raksha Bandhan. For instance, in Mahabharata, when Sri Krishna kills Shishupaala with his weapon, Sudarshan-Chakra, his finger gets wounded. Seeing this Draupadi tears a piece of cloth from her sari and ties on the wound. And after quite some time, when Draupadi was insulted by the Kauravas, Sri Krishna rescues her by showering saaris. In another incident, once Yudhishthira asked Sri Krishna how best he could guard himself against impending evils and catastrophes in the coming

year. Sri Krishna advised him to observe the Raksha ceremony.

The sister-brother relationship highlighted by the Raakhi goes far beyond the mere personal protection of a female from a male. It also implies the basic element of an amicable and harmonious social life where all members of the society look upon themselves as brothers and sisters and as children of mother Earth. In Hindu tradition, Raksha has assumed all aspects of protection of the forces of righteousness from the forces of evil.



Raksha Bandhan festival helps to develop the sentiment of the universal brotherhood which is the need of today's world to keep the social harmony and piece. The sentiment of universal brotherhood will eventually lead us to the sense of universal oneness. A society imbued with this spirit can live and prosper amidst all kinds of challenges either from within or without. Powers of intellect, body, and of material wealth and influence will then be utilized for the upliftment and service of others. The idea of the Hindu has always been:

Sarvepi sukhinah ssantu, sarve santu niraamayaah |

Sarve bhadraani pashyanttu, maa kashchit dukkhabhaag bhavet | |

(Let everyone be happy, let everyone be free from all ills, let everyone behold only the auspicious, let no one be afflicted.) Raksha Bandhan is the most useful mean to bring this idea into reality.

In Sangh, the festival is celebrated in a little different way. Sangh participants not only tie *raksha* to each other, but also to *bhagava-dhwaj* (Saffron flag). *Bhagava dhwaj* symbolizes entire Hindu society. The tying of *raksha* to the sacred *bhagava dhwaj* at the start of the function signifies this social and cultural aspect. Not only do the participants in the function develop a sense of love and affection amongst themselves but they also affirm their loyalty and devotion to the Hindu society. Their commitment to protect each other and also the society as a whole is emphasized through this simple ceremony.

Raksha Bandhan is the most auspicious occasion to recharge ourselves every year with the true spirit of service and sacrifice for the welfare of the society, and find therein the highest spiritual fulfillment of human life.



Krishna Janmashtami

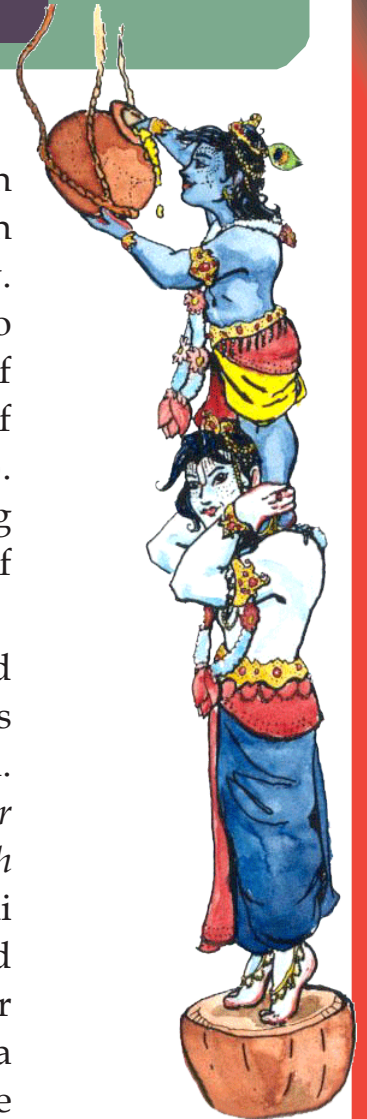
The birth-day of Sri Krishna

The festival of Krishna Janmashtami is the celebration of Sri Krishna's birthday. Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Sri Vishnu, is a unique character in Hindu history. He was naughty in his childhood days and proved to be a profound philosopher in his adulthood. The birthday of Krishna falls on the Ashtami of Krishna Paksh (the 8th day of the dark fortnight) in the month of Bhadrapada (July-August). Krishna was born at midnight, in the prison of Kamsa, during the middle of a perilous rain and storm. Thus goes the story of Krishna's birth.

Kamsa, a despot, was the king of Mathura. He had imprisoned his father in order to become the king. Devaki was Kamsa's sister and was married to a noble man Vasudeva. Kamsa one day heard a heavenly voice, saying, "*Kamsa, your days of tyranny will soon be over, you will be killed by the eighth child of Devaki.*" Scared Kamsa immediately imprisoned Devaki and Vasudeva. He did not want to take any chance and killed at birth each and every child of Devaki, until the time came for the delivery of the eighth child. To feel more secured, Kamsa increased the number of prison guards, kept strict vigilance and put Vasudeva in chains. But God planned otherwise.

At midnight when the eighth child was born, the guards fell fast asleep and Vasudeva's chain fell off his hands and feet. Wasting no time, Vasudeva picked up the baby and carrying it in a basket, he started towards Gokul. Gokul was a village of cowherds, located across the Yamuna river, where his friend Nanda lived. It was a dark stormy night with blinding rain continuously pouring from the sky. When Vasudeva reached the bank of river Yamuna, the river was in spate. The wind and storm were blowing wild, and Vasudeva was in a fix.

"God, what should I do?" murmured Vasudeva. Suddenly a miracle happened,



the river parted and Vasudeva walked over the river bed. Throughout the way, Vasudeva and the baby were protected from rain by the hood of the great eternal snake, Vasuki. Finally Vasudeva reached Nanda's house. Upon reaching Nanda's house, Vasudeva found the mother, Yashoda, and her newborn baby girl in deep sleep. He had no time to think. He quickly exchanged the babies and returned to the prison with the infant girl, while the guards were still asleep.

As soon as Vasudeva entered the prison cell, the door got locked behind him and he was chained again as if nothing happened in between. The guards woke up and heard the cry of the baby. Kamsa was immediately informed and he came running to kill the child. But to his utter surprise he found it to be a girl and not a boy. Devaki begged for the newborn baby's life from her brother.

"What can a girl do to you Kamsa? Spare her life, please!" appealed Devaki. But the Kamsa did not pay attention to the appeal. As he was ready to kill the baby, the child slipped out of his hand and flew towards the sky. At that moment, a heavenly voice was heard, *"Kamsa, the one who shall destroy you still lives. He is growing in Gokul."*

Next morning Nanda and his wife Yashoda discovered the boy left by Vasudeva. They were little puzzled but did not fuss about it because they might lose the baby. The baby was of dark complexion, so he was named Krishna.

Kamsa was frightened by the heavenly voice. He immediately sent Puthana, his wicked maid, and asked her to kill all the babies born on the same day when Devaki gave birth to the baby. Puthana smeared poison on her breast and went around in the town of Gokul, breast-feeding the babies born on that day. She reached Nanda's house and lovingly asked Krishna's mother, Yashoda, to give the baby to her to love and fondle. Yashoda gave the baby and, without any suspicion, went on with her daily chore.

Suddenly there was a loud shriek. Everyone came running to the courtyard and found to their surprise the dead body of Puthana lying on the floor while Krishna was smiling and kicking. People now knew that Krishna was not an ordinary boy. Yashoda happily picked up Krishna and felt safe. Baby Krishna grew in Yashoda's house until he reached his teens. He later challenged Kamsa and killed him. Then he released his grandfather Ugrasena and reinstated him to his throne. He respected and loved his own parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, and



his adopted parents, Nanda and Yashoda.

Janmashtami is celebrated with great pomp and show in Hindu temples and homes in Bharat and other countries. The festival is celebrated for two days; on the day when Krishna took birth in the prison of Kamsa at Mathura and also on the following day to commemorate Krishna's presence in the house of Nanda and Yashoda at Gokul. Ardent devotees pray at the middle of the night celebrating Krishna's birth on the first day. Children join the celebration on the next day with worship (puja) and sweets (prasaad).

Decorations depicting Krishna's birth and his transfer to Gokul, are displayed everywhere. This is called jhanki, a peek in the past. In Bengal, it is called, Gupta Vrindavan, meaning hidden Vrindavan, where Krishna spent time with his consort Radha. It is a great fun planning and executing the decoration that depicts Krishna's life in Gokul. The display is left for few days for friends and relatives to enjoy. The grandparents narrate to the children the interesting stories of Krishna, his pranks of childhood, Radha's divine love for Krishna in his young days, and finally, his days of kingship offering us the eternal truth of the great Bhagavad Gita. There is nothing in the world that can be compared with the profound philosophy of Gita written in that hoary past.



Sri Krishna was born in the mid-night at the first hour, and Sri Rama was born in the afternoon at the first hour. Sri Krishna travelled all the way from west to east (in Bharat) to kill the demon Narakasura and Sri Rama travelled all the way from North to South (in Bharat) to kill the demon Ravana. These two iconic personalities bind Bharat together as a whole.

Ganesha Chaturthi

Bhagawan Ganesha bestows wisdom and wealth, removes obstacles, and grants success in any noble endeavor. He is one of the five devatas of daily worship in the system of panchayatana pooja (the five are: Surya, Ganapathi, Ambika, Shiva, and Vishnu). He is known by many names, such as Vinayaka, Ganapathi, Lambodara, Herambha, etc. Ganesha Chaturthi is His birthday. It is celebrated on the fourth tithi during the bright half (shukla paksha) of the bhaadrapada maasa (month). Celebrations with daily homas, poojas, and prayers continue for ten days till the anantha chaturdashi day. The earliest celebrations of this festival go back to the times of Shatavahana (230BC-22CE), Chalukya (540-750 CE), and Rashtrakuta (6-7th century) rules in Bharat. Since Shivaji's time and through the period of Bharat's freedom struggle, this festival became a great unifier of the Hindu society. As the resistance to the British rule in Bharat increased during the 1890's, the British banned public assemblies. This led to Lokamanya Blagangadhara Tilak popularizing the public celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi and using it as a means to spread the message of the freedom struggle.

Festival Celebrations:

These days Ganesha Chaturthi is one of the most colorful public festivals celebrated by Hindus throughout Bharat as well as in many countries outside Bharat. For a typical festival, a life-like clay model of Lord Ganesha is made 2-3 months prior to the day of the festivities. The size of this murti may vary from 3/4th of an inch to over 25 feet. On the day of the festival, it is placed on a raised platform (in home or an outdoor tent). Divinity is then invoked into the murti amidst the chanting of mantras. This is 'pranapratishtha'. After this the 'shodashopachara' (16 ways of paying tribute) follows. Coconut, jaggery, 21 'modakas' (rice flour preparation), 21 'durva' (trefoil) blades and red flowers are offered. The murti is anointed with red unguent or sandal paste (rakta chandanam). Throughout the ceremony, Vedic hymns from the Rig Veda and Ganapathi Atharva Shirsha Upanishad, and Ganesha stotra from the Narada Purana are chanted. For ten days,

from bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi to the ananta Chaturdashi, Ganesha is thus worshipped. As in any Hindu festival, food offered (naivedyam) is saatvic; onion and garlic are strictly avoided!

The public venue serves as the focal point for free medical checkups, blood donation camps, charity for the poor, drama performances, films, devotional songs, etc. during the ten days. On the 11th day, Ganesha ji is taken through the streets in a procession accompanied with drumbeats, dancing, singing, and then immersed in a river or sea symbolizing a ritual see-off of the Lord to his abode in Kailasa. Throughout Bharat, thousands of such processions carrying the Ganesha murtis on decorated floats are taken and the murtis are immersed with great splendor.



Stories about Ganesha ji:

Puranas narrate several stories associated with Ganesha ji. He is the Son of Sri Shiva and Devi Parvati; Lord Kartikeya is his brother. His form is that of the pranava (aum). As the pranava is recited in the beginning of any mantra, so is Ganesha ji worshipped first in any pooja, homa, or prayer. He rides the mooshaka, signifying the mastery over the ego. The story of the birth of Ganesha ji, as depicted in the Shiva Purana, goes like this: Once Devi Parvati, while bathing, created a boy out of the dirt of her body and assigned him the task of guarding the entrance to her bathroom. When Shiva, her husband returned, he was surprised to find a stranger denying him access, and struck off the boy's head in rage. Parvati broke down in utter grief and to soothe her, Shiva sent out his squad (gana) to fetch the head of any sleeping being who was facing the north. The company found an elephant and brought back its head, which was then attached to the body of the boy. Shiva restored its life and made him the leader (pati) of his troops. Hence his name is 'Ganapati'. Shiva also bestowed a boon that people would worship him and invoke his name before undertaking any venture. The story associated with His birth and attaining the head of a gaja ('elephant') is the re-telling of the process of cosmic creation (Devi Parvati 'making' him out of the material world) and the attainment of the knowledge that the Supreme Self (gaja) is in everything. Ganesha or Gajanana indeed is the Supreme Self. All the universes exist in His

belly.

Regarding His single tusk, there are two popular stories. In one, as Vyasa Maharshi was speedily dictating the Mahabharata to Ganesha ji, Ganesha ji broke his pen; He then hurriedly broke one of his tusks and, using it as a pen, continued writing! This signifies that even the message of the Mahabharata is that the divine Almighty is One, since Eka dantam (the one with one 'tooth') also conveys Ekadam tam (You are One). The Mahabharata is the process of discovering That One in the many. This message is distilled in Shri Krishna's teachings to Arjuna in the 700 verses of the Bhagavadgeeta. In another story, Ganesha ji gets angry at Chandra deva (moon) for making fun of Him and throws one of His tusks as a missile at Chandra. Here 'chandra' represents our mind that sees the dual and the differences. The missile from Ganesha (the Self) when directed to the mind makes it realize that there is no duality. Ganesha ji reminds us not to discriminate anyone.

A third story with the same inner meaning of Vedanta is the competitive race around the universe by Ganesha ji and Kartikeya ji. In the Balagokulam guide there is a skit based on this story. Kartikeya attempted to go around the biggest thing, i.e., the universe. The wise Ganesha ji knew that the bigger-than-the-biggest, the Brahman, is the smaller-than-the-smallest that exists in every tiniest thing. So by going around Sri Shiva and Devi Parvati, He not only educated us about the importance of revering our parents, he also revealed the Vedantic Truth.

Forms and Names:

Just as Bhagawan Vishnu's dashaavataars, Ganesha ji too appeared in several avatars. Ganesha Purana narrates the four avatars (Vinayaka, Mayureshwara, Gajanana, and Dhumrakeu), one for each of the four yugas. The Mudgala Purana states eight inner avatars of Ganapathi. These can be understood as the eight divine qualities that vanquish the asuri tendencies, as listed below:

Vakratunda - recognizing the nirguna Brahman alone overcomes matsara (jealousy)

Ekatanta - recognizing the Oneness (advaitam) overcomes mada (arrogance)

Mahodara - recognizing the world as "my own" overcomes moha (attachment, delusion)

Gajanana - recognizing the Almighty as the face of creation subdues lobha (greed)

Lambodara - the essence of sattva defeats krodha (anger)

Vikata – the right knowledge (intelligence) overcomes kaama (lust)

Vighneshwara, Vighnaraaja – anyone forgetting the above will face all the obstacles in life; remembering Him will relieve our mamatvam (feeling of possessiveness)

Dhumravarna – the destructive power of Brahman overcomes aham (ego, raw pride)

According to Ganesha Purana, Ganesha ji is worshipped in two forms: 1) Varada Ganapathi, and 2) Sankatahara Ganapathi. The first is used in the Ganesha Chaturthi. Worship of the second relieves us from all fears. This takes place in every krishna chaturthi. Thus, Bhagawan Ganesha is worshipped in every chaturthi (i.e., on the fourth tithi), about 24 times a year! The bhaadrapada chaturthi is the most popular one but other chaturthi vratas too are common in the Hindu temples across the USA. Further, Mudgala Purana and the aagama shastras narrate 32 forms of Ganapathi, i.e., 32 murti images used in Ganesha worship. His naamaavalis list His 12, 108, or 1008 names too.

Thus Ganesha Chaturthi with all its merrymaking festivities is a deeply spiritual journey that reveals the fundamental characteristics of Hinduism: That One Supreme Divinity exists in fullness right here, in everyone, in everything, and yet beyond mind's grasp. With total shraddha, one can experience this abiding Truth of this universe and us. Life with such a 'seeing' indeed is called 'brahmacharya' (= walking in the Brahman) and Bhagawan Ganesha is the foremost among the brahmacharis.



Vijayadashami

The festival of Victory

Vijayadashami is one of the most important festivals of Hindus. The way Deepavali is festival of lights, Vijayadashami is a festival of victory. In Samskrit, 'vijaya' means victory and 'dashami' means 10th day. Thus 'Vijaya Dashami' means victory on the 10th day. It is one of the most auspicious days in the Hindu calendar. It falls in the month of October. It comes as the finale of the nine-day festival of Navaratri. Navaratri festival is celebrated for nine days. On the 9th day, Saraswati pooja is celebrated. Special poojas are offered to Goddess Saraswati - the divine source of wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment and Goddess Durga - Goddess of strength and power. The 10th day is "Vijayadasami". This festival of victory is preceded by worship of Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Lakshmi, and Goddess Durga.

Vijayadashami - a festival of victory

Vijayadashami is a festival of victory because it is resplendent with many an inspiring episode reflecting the victorious culmination of deeds of valour of our ancestors. This day is marked by significant victories in Ramayana and Mahabharata. On this day, Shri Rama killed Ravana and achieved a triumphant victory over the asuras. Shri Rama worshipped Goddess Durga just before the battle with the demon Ravana started. Shri Rama worshipped Shami tree on this day just before proceeding to Ayodhya. In Mahabharata, Pandavas spent thirteen years in exile. During the last year of ajnaat-vaas (living incognito), they had hidden their arms in the Shami tree. This is the day, their ajnnat-vaas was over and they had taken out their arms from the Shami tree and revealed their identity. That marked their preparation for the victorious war of Kurukshetra. Invoking these inspiring memories, the Shami tree is worshipped on this day.

The story of how the asura Mahishasura was killed is also striking. Mahishasura performed severe penance and became immortal and ruler of all three worlds; heaven, earth and the nether-world. Gods became powerless. As per Sri Vishnu's advice, they parted with a portion of their divine powers to form into a new physical form - Goddess Mahishasura Mardini. Literally "Mahishasura

Mardini” means destroyer of Mahishasura. Thus Goddess Mahishasura Mardini took a physical form as the combined might of all Gods. She killed the demon Mahishasura after a ceaseless fight of nine days and nights.

Celebrations

Grand processions of all Gods and Goddesses are taken out in every town and village on this day, signifying the victory of the forces of righteousness over those of wickedness. It marks a new and prosperous beginning. New ventures, started on this day, are believed to flourish and bring prosperity. This day, as culmination of Saraswati pooja, is also called ‘vidyaadashami’ and is considered as a good day for the beginning of the new studies (vidyaarambham). Therefore, children start tutoring on this day - to have a head start in their education. In the



medieval period, the Hindu Kings used to start their mission on this day and that is called ‘seemollanghan’, i.e., going beyond once own boundaries. This, in Sangh tradition, has evolved into starting new shakhas, sampark and sewa projects.

In old days, each individual used to carry a weapon. They used to worship their weapons on this day. It is called “Aayudha (weapons) Pooja”. The same tradition is continued with some modifications. Now-a-days Hindus worship different types of things which are modes of their earning and progress. For example, student worship books, businessmen worship their factories and machines, musicians worship their instruments and technical workers worship their tools. Even vehicles are also washed, decorated and worshipped.

To celebrate Shri Rama’s victory, Rama-leela is observed by the people with great enthusiasm. Ram-Leela is a stage enactment of Ramayana. On this day, people arrange a street play based on the Rama-Ravana war. They create dummies of Rama, Sita, Lakshamana and Ravana. Rama-Lakshamana aim at Ravana’s dummy with burning arrows and burn dummy Ravana. After that, people welcome Rama, Sita and Lakshamana as if they are welcoming real ones. The lesson of this legend is so beautifully clear. Even the good and the righteous can succeed against the evil forces only when they come together in an organized endeavour. Could there

be a more telling message to the present-day?

Vijayadashami as a HSS Balagokulam Utsav

Vijayadashami is celebrated as one of the six utsavs of HSS. For HSS, Vijayadashami is more special than just a festival. It is because this day is the birth day of an organization - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - which has been an all time inspiration source for HSS. On this very day, a great Hindu leader, Dr. Hedgewar, founded RSS in Bharat in 1925 for the rejuvenation and reorganization of the age-old Hindu Dharma.

Truly it has been said that *Sanghe Shaktih Kalau Yuge* - Organization holds the key to strength in Kaliyuga (today's world). Dr. Hedgewar realized that though Hindus are immensely superior in culture, wealth and armies, they were defeated by foreign aggressors because they were disorganized. Though having all qualities of "Universal Dharma", Hindu Dharma has not been able to achieve that status because of disorganized Hindus. Knowing this fact, Doctorji started RSS in Bharat on this day to organize Hindus in Bharat. Keeping the tradition of Vijayadashami, RSS has been marching from success to success in all sectors of life.

Organizing Hindu society outside Bharat is also necessary which is one of the objectives of HSS. As Vijayadashami being a festival of victory and a birth day of RSS, HSS too has given it a place in its six utsavs. HSS Balagokulams celebrate it with a great zeal. Participants of the Balagokulams are encouraged to participate in ganavesh (uniform). Several close-by Balagokulams come together and perform various physical activities including surya-namaskar, vyayam-yog (drill), danda (stick), ni-yuddha (how to fight without weapons) and sanchalan (parade) with ghosh (musical band). The purpose of these activities is to show the strength and unity. Utsav is culminated with 'aayudh-pooja', a bouddhik (lecture) from Sangh Adhikari and sangh-prarthana.



Navaratri

Festival of Nine Nights

Navaratri is a festival of Goddess Durga. Goddess Durga is also known as Universal Mother. Goddess Durga is believed to exist in many forms such as Goddess Bhavani, Jagdamba, Mahakali, Chamundeshwari and Amba. The word “navaratri” literally means nine nights. This festival is celebrated for nine days. The nine days are divided and devoted to Saraswati (Goddess of Learning), Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity), and Durga (Goddess of Strength and Courage).

Goddess Durga is considered as a Goddess of strength and courage. In other words, SHE is energy (and power) aspect of the Almighty. That is why SHE is also known as “Shakti (power)”. Thus on this day, we invoke the energy aspect of God in the form of Durga. Literally, Durga means the remover of difficulties.

Why Goddess Durga is worshipped on this day? and why for nine days? Well! There is striking story behind this. The story goes like this: Mahishasura performed severe penance and became the ruler of the three worlds; heaven, earth and the nether-world. Unable to stand his atrocities, Gods requested Sri Vishnu to help. Sri Vishnu advised them that Mahishasura could be killed only when the combined strength of all gods strikes him. So, Gods, including Sri Vishnu, combined their powers in a physical form of Goddess Durga. Goddess Durga, then, fought with the demon Mahishasura. The battle lasted long for nine days. At last, on the tenth day, SHE killed the demon Mahishasura and freed the three worlds from his shackles. That is why SHE is also called by “Mahishasura Mardini”, destroyer of Mahishasura.

How is it celebrated?

Navaratri is divided into sets of three days to adore different aspects of the supreme Goddess. On first three days, the Supreme Goddess is invoked as powerful force called Durga in order to destroy all our impurities, vices and defects.



The next three days, the supreme Goddess is adored as a giver of material and spiritual wealth, Lakshmi. The last three days are spent in worshipping the supreme as the goddess of wisdom, Saraswati. In order to have all-round success in life, we need the blessings of all three aspects of the divine supreme.



The most common form of public celebration is the performance of garba and/or dandia-raas. Garba is a graceful form of dance, wherein women, dressed in traditional clothes, dance gracefully in circles around a pot containing a lamp. Besides, the Garba is the "Dandia" dance, in which men and women participate in pairs with small, decorated bamboo sticks called dandias in their hands. The dances usually commence late in the night and continue until early morning. Another prevalent practice is of sowing pulses, cereals and other seeds on the first day of this festival in a pot, which is watered for nine days at the end of which the seeds sprout. This pot is worshipped throughout the nine days.

There are some other modes of public celebration too. Just like Ganesha festival, people build temporary but huge and beautifully decorated puja mandaps and place images of the Goddess Durga and all together worship for nine days. On the 10th day (vijayadashami) processions with Durga's image are taken out along the streets and immersed in water. Majestic processions of elephants and horses to the temple are also very common. Although there have been different forms of celebrations, the purpose of celebration is one and the same - worship Goddess Durga and get the blessings of all three aspects of the divine supreme.

What message it delivers?

The story of Mahishasura Mardini says that Gods could kill Mahishasura only when their powers were combined together in an organized fashion. Even good and righteousness cannot win over the evil, if not organized. Even in today's world, being good and superior on an individual level is not sufficient. All good people should be united and organized. Only in that case they can win over the evil forces. Truly it has been said that - "*Sanghe Shaktih Kalau yuge*" - means organization holds the key to strength in Kaliyug (today's time).

A second message is that wealth creation and accumulation on the material and spiritual arenas is important individually as well as collectively. Lastly, acquiring the infinite wisdom of our Vedic ancestors so that we personally and socially attain everlasting happiness is the their message of this festival.



Deepavali

The festival of Lights

Deepavali is the festival of lights. Deepa means light and Avali means a row. It means a row of lights. Deepavali, in short, is a celebration for adoration of light. Deepavali has a special place among all the festivals of Hindus. Its greatest characteristic is that it is not related to any specific caste, class or province. Even non-Hindus celebrate this Hindu festival. It is truly a universal festival. The festival is celebrated by all people with great enthusiasm to dispel darkness and light up their lives.



The festival symbolizes unity in diversity as every province celebrates it in its own special way. People wear new and bright clothes. The radiant sight of everybody adorned with new and bright clothes, especially women adorned with the best of ornaments, captures the social mood at its happiest. People clean and paint their houses and adorn them by lighting up "Diyas" (earthen lamps) and making "Rangoli" in front of their houses. Even the humblest of huts are lighted by a row of "Diyas". People invite their friends and neighbours and offer them sweets and snacks specially prepared for the festival. They send greeting-cards to loved ones.

Crackers (fireworks) resound and light up the earth and the sky. Illumination - Deepotsavas - and fireworks, joy and festivity, is to signify the victory of divine forces over wickedness. Illumination in temples and all sacred places of worship symbolize the scattering of spiritual radiance all round from these holy centers. All these illumination and fireworks, joy and festivity, is to signify the victory of divine forces over those of wickedness.



Deepavali is generally a five days festival. Those five days are - Dhana-

trayodashi or Dhanteras, Narak-chaturdashi, Lakshmi-Poojan, Bali-Pratipada and Bhai-Duj. Each day has its own importance. Though there are numerous legends associated with all 5 days, we shall see the most recognized ones.

Slaying of the demon Narakasura by Sri Krishna is the most recognized legend for the second day of Deepavali. With the help of Narakasura's own mother - Bhudevi, Sri Krishna killed him on this second day of Deepavali. Bhudevi herself requested Sri Krishna that this day be celebrated as one of jubiliations. Sri Krishna granted her request and since then the tradition has continued. Bhudevi reconciled herself to the loss of her son as she knew that her son was killed for the welfare of world. Thus she set a glowing example of how one has to brush aside one's personal joys and sorrows in the interest of society.



After the slaying of Narakaasura, Sri Krishna bathed himself smearing his body with oil in the early morning of Chaturdashi. That is why it is a custom to be followed on Deepavali to get up early in the morning, massage the body with a mixture of oil, flour and haldi (turmeric) before the daily bath. This practice is also healthy for our skin.

Third day of Deepavali is the new moon day, auspicious for offering prayers and gratitude to the bygone ancestors of the family and invoking their memories and blessings for treading the path of right conduct. This is also the sacred occasion for the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of Wealth and Prosperity. The business community opens its New Year's account with Her worship. It is believed that Goddess Lakshmi visits everybody's home. People keep their homes clean and light lamps to welcome Her. Lakshmi-Pooja is performed on this very day. It is believed that on this auspicious day Sri Krishna discarded his body.



The next day of Deepavali is Bali-pratipada. Bali Pratipada or Padwa is a symbol of love and devotion between the wife and husband. On this day newly married daughters with their husbands are invited for special meals and given presents. This auspicious day is also considered as a beginning of New Year according to

one Hindu calendar (Vikrama shaka). Therefore, on this day, new ventures are begun, house-warming poojas are performed, and people also may choose to buy gold, silver or property on this day.

There are some legends associated with this day. It is said that Sri Brahma created the Universe on this day. On this very day, Sri Vishnu, incarnated in the form of a dwarf Brahmin by name Vamana and punished the demon king Bali. It is also believed that on this day, Sri Rama returned to Ayodhya victorious after killing the demon king Ravana. This is also the day for Govardhana Pooja and Anna Koota (heap of grains), the former signifying the Govardhana episode in Sri Krishna's life and the latter conveying affluence and prosperity.

The last day of Deepavali is Bhai-duj. It is primarily a day of brother and sister. It is a most touching moment for the family members when even distant brothers reach their sisters to strengthen that holy tie. The sister applies tilak and waves aarati to her brother, wishes him a long & healthy life and offers him sweets with warmth and the brother offers loving presents to the sister. Those who do not have a brother perform a sort of puja to the Moon-God.

There is one more episode associated with Deepavali which is the great event of Mahaaveera attaining the Eternal Bliss of Nirvaana. The passing into Eternity on the same day of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, that leonine sanyasin who was one of the first to light the torch of Hindu Renaissance during the last century, and of Swami Ramatirtha who carried the fragrance of the spiritual message of Hindu Dharma to the western world, have brought the spiritual tradition of Deepavali right up to modern times.



Gita Jayanti

The birthday of Bhagvad Gita

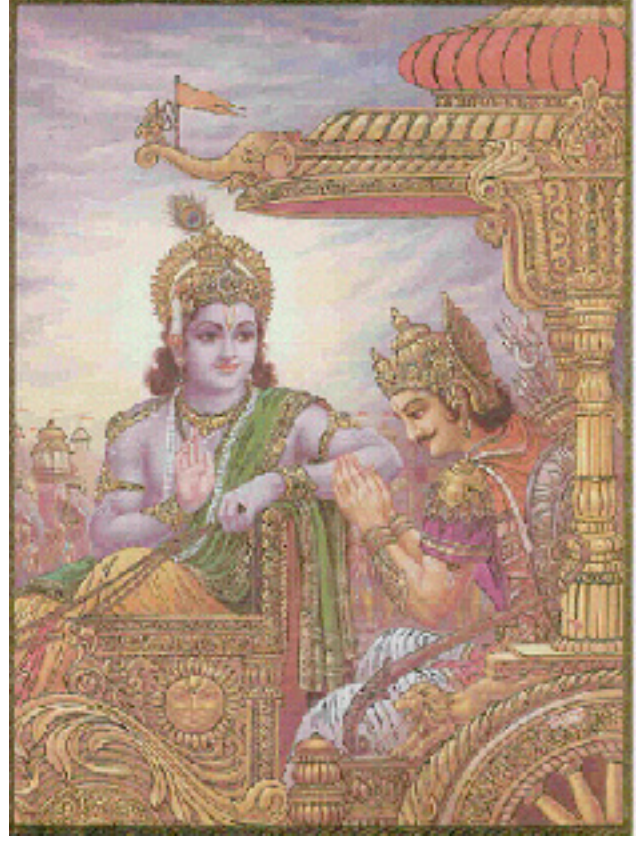
Gita Jayanti marks one of the greatest days in the history of mankind. This festival is celebrated in the month of December-January. A sanskrit word "Jayanti" pertains to birthday and Gita pertains to Bhagvad-Gita – preaching delivered by Sri Krishna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. Thus "Gita Jayanti" is the birthday of Bhagvad Gita. According to Hindu Panchang (calendar), it is celebrated on the 11th day (Ekadashi) of the bright half of the month Margaseersha. Now let us try to explore the background of Bhagvad Gita.

Mahabharata is the greatest historical narrative of the mankind and Gita is a part of Mahabharata. The main story of Mahabharata is the war between two branches of the royal family of the great Kuru kingdom of Hastinapur in Bharat – Kauravas and Pandavas. This occurred about 5,000 years ago. Kauravas were the hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra led by eldest brother Duryodhana and Pandavas were the sons of Pandu (younger brother of King Dhritarashtra) led by eldest brother Yudhishtira.

Pandavas had been cheated out by Kauravas in a game of dice. According to rules, they had to give up kingdom and go in exile for thirteen years. After spending thirteen years in exile, Pandavas came back and asked Kauravas for their kingdom, but Kauravas, particularly Duryodhana bluntly refused to give them anything. They even refused to give them 5 villages. As a final gesture, Pandavas sent his friend Krishna to make a final bid for peace and justice. But Duryodhana refused Krishna too, thereby defying God himself. He even challenged Pandavas and Krishna to fight. Now the war was inevitable. Great kings and emperors around the world either joined Kauravas side or Pandavas side, thereby causing a world-war.

On Pandavas side, Arjuna was a key warrior. Krishna accepted to be his charioteer. In the beginning of war, Arjuna got very much depressed. Throwing his weapons away, he began a dialogue with Krishna, *"Why should I fight with my own people? My opponents are my cousins, my Gurus and people honorable to me. Why*

should I fight with them? I cannot use my weapon against my own people". Krishna tried to persuade and make him ready to fight. While convincing him, Krishna enlightened him with a great knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads. This convincing of Krishna is Bhagvad-Gita. Bhagvad Gita is the only scripture that was taught in the battlefield. That's why it relates so much to all of us. Arjuna was a man of action and not a renounced person sitting in Himalayas.



Gita is later presented in form of a scripture or book. But it is not merely a book. It is a living voice of the Supreme - God carrying an eternally vital and indispensable message to mankind. It is a source of power and wisdom. It strengthens you when you are weak and

inspires you when you are feeble. It contains the message of life that appeals to all, irrespective of race, creed, age or religion. It teaches us how to live a righteous life, how to make conscious choice to act according to Dharma, while performing all our day-to-day duties.

Let us try to recite following shloka which is the most recognized shloka from Bhagvad Gita.

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदाऽऽत्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

yadA yadA hi dharmasya glAnirbhavati bhArata |

abhyutthAnamadharmasya tadA.a.atmAnaM sR^iujAmyaham | |

Meaning: (O Arjuna!), whenever there is a decline of righteousness and predominant rise in unrighteousness, then I manifest myself.





Traditions, Cultures, and Customs





What is Hindu Dharma?



You must be experiencing now and then that your parents always insist you to do something and to avoid some of the things. Daddy says, *“Beta! Raju is your friend. You should not be rude with him!”*. Gramdma says, *“O Dear! Don’t do this. It is bad!!”*. Grandpa says, *“Beta! Ye hamse bade hai, chalo inko pranam karo!!”*. And mom says, *“It is a time for Bala-Gokulam. We should not miss it. Let us get ready!”*. And you must be feeling, *“Oh! My mom and dad are just crazy!!”*. Well! They are not crazy. In fact, they try to teach you what is right and what is wrong. They want you to do only the right thing, in thoughts, words and deed so that you always be good with everyone and become a good man (or woman) as you grow. As a duty of parents, they try to teach you values, manners and behavior which are acceptable to the society and to everyone.

In other words, your parents try to teach you a code of conduct which is acceptable to everyone. This code of conduct is the Hindu Dharma. Now, you may wrongly think that, *“Ok! That is all about Hindu Dharma!”*.... but that is not. In fact, that (code of conduct) is one of the many many aspects of the Hindu Dharma. Hindu Dharma is so huge and ancient with many many thoughts and aspects. Perhaps, we are too young to understand all of them. But let us try to explore some of them here.

Hindu Dharma is known by various names. Each name indicates its important characteristics. Let us try to understand some of them.

Hindu Dharma is a Sanatana Dharma or Vedik Dharma. It is said that the foundation of the Hindu Dharma is based on the ancient scriptures Vedas. Vedas describe the basic principles of the life which are eternal such as ‘nonviolence’, ‘truth’, ‘no-stealing’, ‘cleanliness’ and ‘control of the senses’. Thus as long as human being exists or life exists, Hindu Dharma will exist. That is why it is a Sanatana (eternal) or Vedik Dharma.

Hindu Dharma is a compilation of various thoughts. Unlike other religions, Hindu Dharma did not originate from a single person, a single book or at a single point in time. However, it is evolved by various sages (scholars). who added more

value in it from time to time. Consider Hindu Dharma as a Banyan tree, with its roots representing the Vedas and the Upanishads, the thick trunk symbolizing the spiritual experiences of numerous scholars, its branches representing various theological traditions, and the fruits, in different shapes, symbolizing various sectors and subsectors of it.

Hindu Dharma is righteousness or duty. It says to do your duty without involving yourself into immotions or relations and without expecting anything in return. Our scripture, Geeta, says - Do your duty and expect nothing in return. In Mahabharata, Bhishma says, *“Don't do anything that creates a conflict or disharmony”*. Always do the right thing that helps to unite all and develop pure divine love and universal brotherhood.

Hindu Dharma is something that holds together. 'Dharma' is a samskrit word. It means “to hold together”. Anything that keeps the society or human being together is a Dharma. Good qualities do not make conflict. One should acquire good qualities so that he/she be likeable to everyone.

Hindu Dharma is a Vishwa (universal) Dharma. Hindu Dharma is truly a universal religion because it is based on basic principles which are applicable not only to Hindus but the entire humanity. When a Hindu prays, he does not pray for wealth for himself, his family, his community or Hindu society. Instead he prays for the welfare of all the people of the world. All Hindu prayers are for the entire humanity and not for a particular sector.

Hindu Dharma is not a closed book. Keeping the basic principles intact, it accepts new changes according to the need of the time. Hindu dharma gives freedom of thoughts. Anybody can practice anything as long as it is not harmful. Religious tolerance is one of it's virtues. It has a power to assimilate all faiths and beliefs that exist in the world.

After reading this, you must be feeling confident and proud that you belong to the Hindu Dharma. Though Hindu Dharma is complicated, one aspect of it is quite simple to understand which is - whatever good you do is Dharma and whatever bad you do is A-dharma. So, always do good (always do Dharma). Always be nice and humble to everyone. As you grow, you will learn and experience more about the Hindu Dharma. Since ages, our forefathers have retained this treasure. Now it is our turn to do this job.



God or Gods?

So, you are sitting in your world history class and your teacher is about to discuss ... INDIA (Bharat)! Wonder in itself!! You are dreading with anticipation all the questions everyone is going to ask you, the only Hindu in your class!

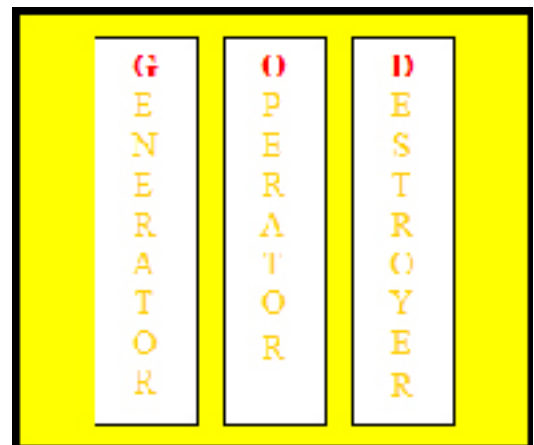
Someone will ask, "How come you worship a cow?" Another will say, "Do you have to wear that dot all the time?" And here comes the hardest, "Do you really worship 330 million gods?" Then you begin to wonder yourself, "Do I really believe in that many Gods?" The answer is both yes and no. Confused? Let's investigate.

Many people think that Hindus are polytheistic (a group of people that believe in many different gods), but that is not true. Hindus believe that there is only one God who can be worshiped by anyone, in any form and by any name. But how can one thing be known by so many different names? Well, let's take a look at Raju.

Raju is your average guy, who goes to work everyday. He has two kids and wife. He also has a dog named Big Bear. Every evening, he goes to his friend's house and hangs out with a lot of guys.

Since Raju does so many different things, he is also known by many different names. To his kids, Raju is a dad. To his wife, Raju is a husband. To Big Bear, Raju is an owner and best friend. And all of Raju's friends know him as Raju Bhai (brother). So, though Raju is really just one person he can be known in many different ways.

In Hindu Dharma, God has appeared in many many forms for specific purpose and goal. Let us try to explore three major forms of God. Each one of the three forms represents one major part of God. There is a Generator (someone who creates), the Operator (someone who maintains) and a Destroyer (someone who takes things apart so they can be created again). An easy way to remember the three parts is by



breaking up the word GOD.

Now lets find out how these three parts are seen in Hindu Dharma.

The Generator

In Hindu Dharma, Brahma is known as the Generator or creator. In the form of Brahma, God created the universe, the world, the demigods and all living beings.

Brahma is usually shown red in color with four heads, bearded faces, and four arms. In his hands Brahma holds four sacrificial tools a kamandalu (pot), a rosary (a sacred string of beads), a ladle, and the Vedas. He is usually portrayed sitting on a lotus or riding a white swan, which is known for it's judgment between good and evil. Unlike other gods, Brahma is never shown holding weapons.



Brahma's main function is to create worlds. A day for Brahma is an entire life span for a world. He creates the world in the morning, it is destroyed by the night and he creates another world the next morning.

The Operator

The most popular form of God is the Operator or Vishnu. Vishnu has four arms - one holds a shanka (conch shell) a sign of the divine sound "Aum," the second holds a chakra (discus) to represent the wheel of time, the third holds Padma (a lotus) as an example of glorious existence, and the last holds a gada (mace) to indicate the power and punishing capacity of the God if discipline in life is ignored. He lies on Seshanag (a powerful, coiled serpent) who represents the sleeping universe.

In order to keep the world at peace, Vishnu will incarnate or take avatars (forms taken by Vishnu on Earth to save the world from evil and establish righteousness) ten times. So far, Vishnu has taken the nine forms. They are - Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama and



Krishna. All these forms of Vishnu are described at length in earlier chapters.

The tenth avatar of Vishnu is Kalki. When Kalki takes form, it will be the last time Vishnu will help save the world from evil. Afterwards, the cycle of the world's destruction and regeneration will begin.

The Destroyer

Shiva, the Destroyer, has a blue complexion that stands for an endless body, like the blue sky or ocean. He carries a snake around his neck, which represents evolutionary power (the power to keep growing and changing) in the human body.

Two well known forms of Shiva are Yogiraj and Nataraj. In Yogiraj (king of yoga), Shiva is seen sitting in meditation with his eyes half-closed. This pose symbolizes peace and perfect inner harmony. The Nataraj (king of dance) form shows Shiva in the endless cosmic dance.

Nataraj has four hands – one is holding a drum to announce the Big Bang at the beginning of the universe, the next is holding the fire of destruction, the third offers blessings and the last hand points to the raised food which shows how to rise above ignorance. The other foot is planted firmly on a man who symbolizes ignorance. Nataraj's blazing hair represents movement within a circle of fire and the circle incasing him shows that there is no end or beginning to the universe.

Once all ten incarnations of Vishnu have finished their role, Shiva must begin to destroy the world so that Brahma can create again. This destruction is not bad nor harmful, but it is useful. One can think of this process like snipping off the dead leaves from a plant so new ones can grow in it's place.

This grouping of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is called the Trimurti – the Hindu Trinity. The Trimurti is usually displayed as one body with the three separate heads of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Now, though Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were separately described and have their own unique features, one must remember that in the end they are all one and the same. Thus, the Trimurti demonstrates that the generator, operator and destroyer ultimately work together as GOD.



Various Names of Sri Ganesha

Sri Ganesha, the son of Shiva and Parvati, is one of the most popular and beloved of all Hindu Gods and Goddesses. He is the Sri of good fortune, the provider of prosperity and the destroyer of all obstacles. It is for this very reason that His blessings are sought and His grace is invoked when any new task is undertaken, for e.g. taking an examination or job interview, performing a ceremony or starting a new business. Throughout the Hindu culture and India, Sri Ganesha is usually the first icon placed in any new home or abode. He is worshipped all over India and is known by 108 different names. Here we try to take a quick scan at the most popular names by which Ganesha is worshipped and understand their significance and meaning.

Ekdanta (One with a single tusk/tooth)

Sri Ganesha, who has the head of an elephant has only one tusk/tooth and his other tooth is broken. It is believed that he lost the tooth in a battle with a Rakshasha. The Ekdanta or single tooth of Sri Ganesha symbolizes mental determination of the mind. The human mind always proposes two alternatives: i) the good or the fact and ii) the bad or the fantasy. In order to accomplish any task successfully, the mind should be determined and should decide firmly on the correct decision. The Ekdanta or single tooth possessed by Sri Ganesha therefore reminds everyone to have a firm and determined mind and thought process instead of a wavering one.

Lambodara (One with a large belly)

Sri Ganesha has the head of an elephant and a human body with a large belly. His human body has a human heart, which has kindness and compassion for everyone in the world. His big belly signifies that a person must be ready to face all pleasant and unpleasant things that life offers. A person must have a large capacity to undertake all kinds of challenges and experiences in life. The large belly of Ganesha indicates that one should digest all unpleasant things and keep on progressing in life.

Ganapati (Head of the celestial armies or all Ganas)

Ganesha is also known as Ganapati or Head of all celestial armies or Ganas. One of the stories behind how He obtained his elephant head and in the process

the name Ganapati, goes as follows:

It is believed that when mother Parvati used to go for her daily bath, there were no attendants or guards to stop anyone from accidentally entering her house. Therefore, she created an idol of a boy out of turmeric paste and infused life into it and this is how Ganesha was born. He was very devoted to his mother and used to obediently follow her orders. She had ordered him to prevent anyone from entering the house. One day while he was standing on guard, Sri Shiva returned from his penance and tried to enter the house. Ganesha stopped him, which got Sri Shiva angry, and they fought a fierce battle. Using his powerful weapon Trishul (trident), Sri Shiva cut off Ganesha's head and hurled it far away. On seeing her son dead, Parvati became very angry and sad and demanded Shiva to restore her son's life. Shiva, taking Brahma's advice asked his Ganas (followers) to bring the head of the first creature they find whose head was facing north. The Ganas or followers of Sri Shiva found an elephant that was asleep with its head facing north. Hence, they brought the elephant's head to Sri Shiva who re-attached it to Ganesha's body and brought him back to life. He also declared that the boy from that instant would be known as Ganapati and would be worshipped by everyone in the world before beginning any new activity.



The other meaning of the name Ganapati is described as the God of wisdom and higher intellect. The word Gana can be split into two parts: Ga->Buddhi or Intellect and Na -> Vajinaana or Higher Intellect. Pati relates to God or Master. Hence the name Ganapati means one who is the God of wisdom and higher intellect. As wisdom and higher intellect are found in every human being, Ganapati dwells in each of us in the form of intellect and wisdom.

Gajanana / Gajavaktra (Elephant headed God)

Gajanana or the Elephant faced God is also one of the popular names by which Ganesha is worshipped. He has an elephant head with a wide mouth and extremely large ears. The large head of an elephant symbolizes wisdom, intellect and understanding that a person must possess in order to attain perfection in life. The wide mouth represents the natural desire which people must have to live and enjoy life. The large ears signify that a person must be a patient and attentive listener. We must have a great capacity of listening to others, which would help

in gathering new thoughts and ideas.

Vighnaharta (Destroyer of all sorrows and obstacles)

The word Vighna means obstacles and harta/hara/Vinashaka means one who destroys all obstacles and difficulties. Hence the words Vighnaharta, Vighnahara or Vighna Vinashaka collectively refer to one who destroys or demolishes all obstacles, sorrows and difficulties. Sri Ganesha is the destroyer of all obstacles and hindrances and is worshipped as the God who bestows good fortune and good luck on all his devotees. It is for this same reason that He is worshipped before undertaking any new task or activity.

Vakratunda / Gajavakra (One with the curved trunk or elephant trunk)

Sri Ganesha, as described earlier possesses the head of an elephant. His trunk is always depicted as curved in all his idols and pictures that we see in temples and everywhere else. The significance of the curved trunk is Viveka (modesty and politeness). An elephant uses its trunk to push down trees, carry huge logs or for similar heavy tasks. At the same time, it also uses the trunk for minute tasks such as cracking a coconut and eating the soft kernel inside or to break a few small blades of grass. Similarly, Ganesha's curved trunk symbolizes that a person should be ready to undertake any task whether big or small, in order to achieve prosperity and progress. A person should not have any ego and should have the modesty and politeness to deal with all kind of situations in life, which would help him achieve spiritual progress. Ganesha's trunk also symbolizes sensitivity which teaches us to always be alert so that we can sniff and recognize the smallest of problems.

Vinayaka (God of All)

The word Vinayaka relates to God of All learning (Vidya) and knowledge. It also means one who is knowledgeable. Vinayaka is the God of Vidya which is the knowledge of the academics as well as the liberal arts such as music and poetry. Sri Ganesha is also worshipped as the bestower of knowledge, wisdom and intellect to all those who worship Him. This is why He is worshipped as Vinayaka and his blessings are sought by those who are in quest for knowledge or wisdom such as students, learned scholars as well as poets and musicians alike.



Celebrating a birth-day

Birth-day has always been a special day for all of us. On this day, we usually want to do something unusual so that we will remember this day for a long time. In today's world throwing parties, blowing out the candles, cutting cake and giving gifts to a birth-day boy/girl is a normal practice everywhere. It is a bit difficult to know how and when it started. But, certainly these practices do not have any ethos or a basis of any religion; neither Hindu dharma nor any other faith.

Have you ever thought how to celebrate birth-day in a Hindu way (our way!!)? For Hindus, birth-day is a not only a day for enjoyment, but also a day for realization, appreciation, showing a gratitude and making a resolution. Let us try to explore what we can (should) do on our birth-days!!

Show Gratitude

It is said that "life" is God's gift. We enjoy God's property - nature, air, water and universe without which we can not survive. On our birth-day, we should offer prayers to God to show our gratitude and gratefulness. Our parents give us the first lesson of the life. They not only nurture us but also protect from all odds. After offering prayers to God, we must seek blessings of our parents and elders.

Spend a day doing good things:

As mentioned earlier, "Life" is God's gift. It is expected that we should utilize our life-time in doing good things. Few guidelines (suggestions) are given below about how to spend this special day or what we can do on this day. Try to implement whichever is possible under your capacity.

- 1) Try to speak 100% in your own language (mother-tongue).
- 2) Call your grand-parents and close relatives who are in Bharat or away from you. They will feel happy that you remembered them on your birth-day.
- 3) Visit a nearest temple in the morning alongwith your parents and others.
- 4) Wear a traditional dress. Think why can't my "traditional" dress become my regular (routine) dress?

- 5) Buy a good book and read it thoroughly.
- 6) Do some "Seva" (service) such as volunteering at temple or old homes, donating your pocket-money for a good cause, serving kids in orphanage.
- 7) Whatever good things you do on this day, note them down in your personal diary. When you grow up you will find them inspiring.

Invite friends and celebrate your birth-day:

- 1) Invite all your friends. Wear traditional dress and also request your Hindu-friends to come with a traditional outfit.
- 2) Let mother prepare a thali with haldi/kumkum, diya, akshata and sweets and perform your "aarti" and apply "tilak" on your forehead.
- 3) Light a lamp (diya) but do not blow out. Blowing out lamp is certainly not auspicious (positive), whereas lighting a lamp symbolizes new life, new beginning or spreading knowledge. Explain your American friends why you do this.
- 4) After lighting a lamp, let your parents and friends chant following shlokas to express their wish. Do not insist your American friends to follow any of these customs. Let them express their wish by their own way.

जन्मदिनमिदम् अयि प्रिय सखे । janmadinamidam ayi priya sakhe |
 शन्तनो तु ते सर्वदा मुदम् ॥ shantano tu te sarvada mudam ||
 प्रार्थयामहे भव शतायुषि । prArthayaMahe bhava shatAyuShi |
 ईश्वरः सदा त्वां च रक्षतु ॥ iishvaraH sadA twAM cha raxatu ||
 पुण्य कर्मणा किर्तिमर्जय । puNya karmaNA kirtimarjaya |
 जीवनं तव भवतु सार्थकम् ॥ jIvanaM tava bhavatu sArthakam ||

O Dear friend, may this birthday bring you
auspiciousness and joy forever

Indeed we all pray for your long life;
may the God always protect you.

By noble deeds may you attain fame
and may your life be fulfilled.

- 5) Distributing and eating sweets has always been a way of celebration. We do it on every festival. On your birth-day, after lighting a lamp, you can

distribute sweets among all invitees. Cake will also do!! Decorate your cake by writing “OM” or following shloka.

जीवेत् शरदः शतम् ।

jIvet sharadaH shatam |

Meaning: May he lived hundred years.

- 6) Now-a-days, exchanging gifts is unavoidable. Your friends may give you gifts and you may also want to give them something in return. Set an example by giving good gifts such as book or any other useful thing. Next time, your friends will also try to follow you!!
- 7) Once celebration is over, your lamp (diya) can be placed in front of the God in the pooja-ghar.

Make a resolution:

Hmm!! Celebration is over. All left home. Everything is quiet. Now What!? Now is a time of introspection. Birth-day is a good time to introspect and make new resolutions. **At the end of the day, sit quietly, introspect yourself and make new resolves that will help you to improve your overall personality** and try to achieve them before the next birth-day comes. Here is something what can be decided and achievable.....

- 1) Improve your fluency in your mother tongue.
- 2) Buy at least 3 new good books and read them thoroughly.
- 3) Learn something that is related to our culture such as learning instruments, dance, understanding our customs, writing in your own language and acquire skill in the same.
- 4) Learn more about your ancestors and your spiritual land - Bharat.
- 5) Participate meaningfully in the BalaGokulam like gatherings.

So! Let us make a new resolve now that we shall celebrate our next birth-day in a Hindu way. Shall we?



Traditional Hindu Diet

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared South Karnataka diet as the “most well-balanced diet”. According to the research done by the UCLA-Veterans Affairs study in 2004, Alzheimer’s disease rates are among the world’s lowest in India. It suggests that “curcumin”, the yellow pigment in curry spice - Turmeric, inhibits the accumulation of destructive substances in the brains of Alzheimer’s patients.

A study published by the American Lung Association has found that Indian children living in England, whose diet consisted largely of foods from their native country, were less likely to have symptoms of asthma and allergy than Indian youngsters who ate a primarily Western diet.

Nutritional Genomics studies the relationship between genes and response to diet. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that our genes shape how we respond to food. Eating a diet that is right for an individual’s genetic heritage is the right way to go. In other words, one size does not fit all. Nutritional genomics also talks about balance between food and physical activity.

This brings us to the next question: *Do we want modern Western research to tell us after several years, that traditional Indian diet is the best diet?* And by then most of us have already made pizza and pasta our favorite foods. May be not... So, let us investigate a little into our traditional Hindu diet.

Traditional Hindu wisdom states that food is not only a mixture of all the basic ingredients like proteins, vitamins, fats and carbohydrates, but it is something, which serves as a source of energy for mind and soul. Food is considered to be one of the most important aspects of Ayurveda as it provides the basic nutrients, which are necessary to carry out the basic activities of digestion.

What is traditional Hindu diet? A traditional diet is a holistic diet that includes all ingredients which nourish the cells i.e. 10 essential amino acids, 15 vitamins, 14 minerals, and 1 essential fatty acid apart from carbohydrates and proteins. In other words it is a Cellular Diet meaning nourishing every single cell of the body. The ingredients used to prepare a traditional diet have several different properties as well.

For example:

1) Spices such as cloves, cardamom, ginger, and turmeric not only add spice and flavor to the food, but also help the body in having properties such as anti-bacterial,

antiseptic, antioxidants, and cholesterol lowering agents, 2) Another essential ingredient of the traditional diet is “Ghee”. Traditional wisdom recommends sautéing spices in ghee because it helps carry the lipid soluble portions of the spices across cell walls of the body. Ghee has a “medhya” quality, which means it supports the functioning of the brain. Ghee in fact contains butyric acid, a fatty acid with antiviral and anti-cancer properties and when used in moderation it actually prevents heart disease. Isn't that a wonder that a fatty substance can prevent heart disease!!!!, 3) Dahi or Yogurt introduces active essential bacteria into the digestive system and research shows that people who consume Dahi everyday lead a healthy prolonged life.

Just a talk about traditional fast food waters the mouth. Who can deny how tasty bhel, chaat, sev-puri, chiwda, vada-pav, dahi-vada are? These combinations are not only yummy but also well balanced. There are no chemicals or preservatives in them and they are made fresh and nutritious too. The most important thing about Indian traditional fast food, they do not super size you.

It's great to eat these foods, but one thing to remember is that moderation is the key when eating any type of food. There were strict food laws written from the days of Vedas that are applicable even today. These laws emphasized on two key points – combinations and moderation. If you observe our traditional diet, none of the food groups are eaten alone. For example, idli+sambar+chutney, dal+chawal+roti+sabzi. Eating in combinations also ensures that all food groups are consumed in moderation only.

Traditional Hindu diet also has a special concept of “Naivadyam”, where food is first offered to the “Brahman” and then alone consumed. It also inculcates the concept patience and reverence towards food. It makes the food sacred too.

Traditional Hindu diet therefore has benefits to keep the mind, body and soul in balance while also being tasty and delicious, so dig in. Always remember, the three obvious identifiers of any culture or tradition in the world are language, clothing and FOOD.

The need of the hour is Pride and Confidence in ancient Hindu wisdom. We can also our self explore the scientific reasons behind the traditional ingredients and combinations and take a more proactive role in incorporating traditional foods in our diets. Lead a holistic healthy Hindu life by making Yoga, Pranayam and traditional Hindu diet integral to ones living. Next time you're hungry dig into the traditional meal Mom makes instead of.....



Prominent Religious Places of Bharat

Often we have heard People saying that “Bharat is a holy land (Punya bhoomi)”. Question may come to our mind that what is it that makes Bharat a holy land. There are different things which comes to our mind. When we visit Bharat with our parents we might have gone to different pilgrimage places and might have visited temples. These places play an important role in making Bharat a special place.

Some people may argue that, since there are so many religious sectors in Bharat, there are divisions and hence no Unity. But History has proven otherwise. If you ask any person in Bharat, “Which Place in Bharat do you like most?”. He would reply, “The whole of Bharat is holy to me”.

For example if you ask a Vaisnavite (worshippers of Sri Vishnu) the same question, they would say the whole of Bharat is Vishnu’s form and they would give an example of 108 Vaishnava holy places which are spread through out Bharat. It includes Badrinath which is situated in the North, Tirupati in the South, Jaganath Puri in the East and Dwarika in the West.

If you ask a Saivite (worshippers of Sri Shiva), different forms of Shiva resides in each and every corner of Bharat. To Prove his point he may quote “Dwadash Linga Stotram” which explains 12 main places where famous Shiva lingas are situated which is again spread through out Bharat. Some of them are Rameshwaram (South), Somnath (West) and Ujjain (Central part of Bharat).

Similarly for the Shakta (Worshippers of Goddess Durga), there are 51 holy Shakti peethas through out Bharat. These shakti peetas or places include Kanyakumari in the South, Vaishno Devi in the North, Kalighat in the East.

All sectors of Hinduism have strengthened the cultural unity of the Bharat through these holy places. These places help in the National integration also. A person from Southern part of Bharat will travel all the way to the North to have darshan of Sri Badrinath and will travel all the way to Amarnath (in the northern most part of Bharat). Same way a person residing in North will visit the mandir at Rameshwaram (in the South) to purify his mind and body.

Kumbh mela is a sacred Hindu pilgrimage that takes place at four locations in Bharat. Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik. The mela is the largest gathering (approx. 20 million get together at one place at the same time) of Hindu Sadhus and devotees at one place. Mela is organized once in 12 years at each of the four locations alternately. This is a classic example of holy places bringing people together.

Also there is a mention of “Sapta Moksha dayaka nagars” (7 places which gives liberation) in our sacred texts. Prominent among them are Ayodhya, Mathura, kashi, Haridwar, Prayag and Kanchipuram.

Ayodhya is situated on the banks of river Sarayu. It is beleived that the city was built by King manu and it was ruled by the kings of Raghu-vamsha of which Shri Ram is 65th. Ayodhya has a very special place in the cultural map of Bharat because it is the birth place of Sri Ram. Sri Ram is considered as a national hero of Bharat and a role model for Hindus. Everywhere in Ayodhya, temples and structures remind us of events of Ramayana. Even in Buddhism, Ayodhya has a very special place. Sri Buddha had visited Ayodhya several times and had stayed there for a longer period of time.

Unfortunately Ayodhya was under attack during the Islamic invasions. In 1528, an Islamic invader Babar and his people demolished the ancient Ram temple which was situated at the place where Sri Ram was born. After demolishing it, he built a mosque over the same place. From that time onwards, Hindus from time to time led several movements to liberate that place. It is a wish of every Hindu that a grand temple should be built at the the site where Sri Ram was born.

Another prominent place in Bharat is Kashi. The word Kashi is derived from “kaas” which means brightness. Kashi is situated between two rivers “varana” and “asi”. So it is also known as Varanasi. The city was ruled by a king named “Banara”, and hence it derived the name “banaras”. It is situated on the banks of holy river Ganga. Hindus believe that he who dies in Kashi gets liberation. It is said that Kashi is described in 14,000 verses in Puranas. For Shaivites (Worshippers of Shiva) Kashi has a very significant place. Kashi was a centre of learning too. Several students from different parts of Bharat used to come to Kashi for their education in Sanskrit, Scriptures and Vedas.

Nalanda was a Prominent University in Bharat during earlier times. Nalanda literally means “Education without hindrance”. It was worldwide famous. It is said that 50% of total students, who used to seek admission in the University, were international students. Each and every subject ranging from Mathematics to Philosophy was being taught in that University. There were 3000 non-teaching staff who used to take care of the University affairs.

Likewise there are hundreds of other religious places through out Bharat which deserve reverence and prominence. Try to get information about them. So!! Considering all these facts, don't you think that Bharat is indeed holy?



The Holy Men of Hindu Dharma

Whenever we go to the temple or any spiritual place, we get to meet some unique personalities (holy men) who are given some special status by the Hindu society. They look different than the common people and our mind get puzzled with many questions - who are they? why do they wear saffron robes? what do they do for living? This topic throws some light on some of these questions.

In the quest for ultimate truth and everlasting happiness, Bharat has produced many a spiritual men. These holy men are classified and given titles according to their various stages and states of spiritual advancement. The different classifications include Rishis, Sadhus, Acharyas, Santas, Swamis and Pujaris.

Rishis:

Rishis are sages or seers who “heard the hymns of the Devas” and then wrote them down as vedic scriptures. It is believed that the rishis who were Hindu scholars were the originators of the Vedas and the Hindu codes of conduct. They are revered as writers of Hindu epics such as the Ramayana (by Sage Valmiki) and the Mahabharata (by Sage Vyasa). The Rishis sought moksha through the way of knowledge (jnanamarga). Seven seers have the special status of Saptarishi. Other classifications of sages in descending order of precedence are Brahmarishi, Maharshi, Rajarshi and Rishi.

The title of brahmarishi was a status defined and recognized in the sacred Vedas. A brahmishi is the ultimate expert of religion and spiritual knowledge. The saptarishis created out of Brahmas thought are perfect brahmarishis. They include Atri, Gautam, Bharadwaj, Vasishta, Vishwamitra, Jamadagni, and Kashyap. The source of a brahmarishis power is the Brahman or the Supreme Godhead. Brahmarishis are not influenced by the material world, nor the cycle of birth and death, and karma.

Maharshi means one who has great, expanded and refined vision, including subtle forms of vision, such as the third eye and intuition, that encompass the entire universe and yet can still maintain precise detail in action and thoughts.

A rajarshi is a king who has turned into a royal rishi. A rajarshi may have left the kingship and become rishi for example Vishwamitra (who later became Bhrahmarishi) or may still be ruling the kingdom but has reached the state of rishi and attained self realization. They still belong to the kshatriya caste. King Janaka (father of Sita) was a rajarshi, spiritually self-realized and advanced in his knowledge of religion.

Sadhus:

Holy men who practice cult religion such as shakta and Naga are typically known as sadhus or ascetics. They are detached from life, although not necessarily devoid of its pleasures. The sadhus practice rituals involving fire, water, yoga and meditations and beg for a living.

Acharyas:

Acharyas are teachers who study the scriptures and interpret and teach them to the masses. The three great acharyas or preceptors, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya revived and reinterpreted different traditions of sanatana dharma. They preached Advaita (non-dualism), Visishtadvaita (qualified monism) and dvaita (dualism) respectively. Acharyas were mainly monks and their medium of teaching was the Sanskrit language.

Santas:

Santas or saints followed the path of devotion (bhaktimarga) as a way to reach God. These servants of God composed brilliant music, created masterpieces of poetry and sang the God's glories, example Soordas, Tukaram, Eknath and Meerabai.

Swamis:

The swamis are typically scholars initiated into religion from a young age and are philosophers. They run educational and social institutions, engage in philosophical debates and on occasions provide political directives. Swamis are depicted as engaged in worship of a deity. Some of the swamis who perform miracles gain divine status and very devout followers (example Sai Baba).

Pujaris:

Pujaris are priests. They are the professional god-men and lead family life living in temples. They perform the Hindu rituals (including birth and death rituals) and daily and festival worships. They are typically brahmins and have inherited the profession.

The above titles being the main classifications, there are other sub-classifications of each. Though they follow different paths (path of knowledge, devotion, action, rituals), the main goal of the holy people in India is union with the Divine and freedom from the cycle of life and death. Their aim is to guide the people towards self-realization by helping them follow the appropriate path that fits their personality (swabhaav).



Bharatiya Nritya (Indian Dances)

Using the body as a medium of communication, the expression of dance is perhaps the most intricate and developed, yet easily understood art form. Dance in India has seeped into several other realms like poetry, sculpture, architecture, literature, music and theatre. The earliest archaeological evidence is a beautiful statuette of a dancing girl, dated around 6000 B.C.

According to Hindu philosophy, the whole universe is the dance of the Supreme Dancer, Nataraja, a name for Sri Shiva, the Hindu ascetic yogi and divine purveyor of destruction of evil.

Origin of Dance in Hinduism

All forms of Indian classical dances owe allegiance to Natya Shastra, regarded as the fifth Veda. Sri Brahma created the Natya Shastra in the beginning of Treta Yug on the request of Indra and other devas as an object of diversion (Kridaniyaka). The Natya Shastra was called the fifth Veda which was open to all, irrespective of caste and creed.

Prior to the creation of the Natya Veda, Brahma entered a yogic trance in which he recalled the four Vedas. He drew taking literature from the Rig Veda, song from the Sama Veda, abhinaya or expression from the Yajur Veda and rasa or aesthetic experience from the Atharvana Veda. It also contains deliberations on the different kind of postures, the mudras or hand formations and their meanings, the kind of emotions and their categorization, not to mention the kind of attire, the stage, the ornaments and even the audience.

When the Natya Veda was ready, the Gods expressed their inability to practise it, and Brahma passed it to Bharata Muni and his one hundred sons who were asked to practice it. The dance was first seen at the Flag Festival of Indra to celebrate the victory of the Devas against the Daanavas.

Shiva learnt the Tandava (masculine) form of the dance, whereas Parvati, his consort learnt the Lasya (feminine) form.

Elements of Bharatiya Nritya (Indian Dance)

- a. **Abhinaya:** Abhinaya is common to all Classical Indian dances and

it is the expressional aspect of dance. In contrast to this, Nritya is composed of only pure dance and will feature striking and aesthetic poses, but will have no expressional meaning and symbolism.

b. **The Navarasas:** The navarasas, or nine emotions, give all dances a completeness that allows the dancer and the audience to experience the full beauty and meaning of the lyrics and the movements they are portrayed by.

These emotions are expressed in the eyes, the face, subtle muscle shifts and the body as a whole. All dance forms are thus structured around the nine rasas or emotions, hasya (happiness), krodha (anger), bhibhata (disgust), bhaya (fear), shoka (sorrow), viram (courage), karuna (compassion), adbhuta (wonder) and shanta (serenity).

c. **Mudras:** All dance forms follow the same hand gestures or hasta mudras for each of these rasas. The dances differ where the local genius has adapted it to local demands and needs.



Do you know that.....

Bharatiya Nritya (dance) is mainly divided in two categories. Classical and Folk dance. Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Odisi, Bharatnatyam are some examples of classical nritya (dance). Folk dances are generally practiced in rural areas as a part of celebration or entertainment.

Classical Dances of Bharat (India)

Hindu philosophy, legends and classical literature provide the themes of the Indian dance. Classical dance is based on rigid rules and discipline. Indian classical dance is performed in different styles. Few classical dances are described here.

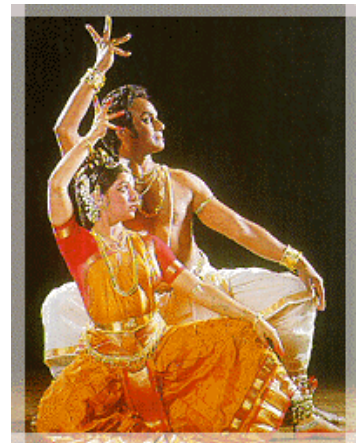
Kathakali: Kathakali is a spectacular combination of drama, dance, music and ritual and is considered to be one of the oldest dance forms in India. Characters with vividly painted faces and elaborate costumes re-enact stories from the Hindu epics, Mahabharatha and Ramayana. The language of the songs used for Kathakali is a mix of Malayalam and Sanskrit. The Kathakali show is usually conducted at night and ends in early morning. The actors will be accompanied by percussionists and singers.



A Kathakali actor uses immense concentration, skill and physical stamina, gained from training based on Kalaripayattu, the ancient martial art of Kerala, to prepare for his demanding role. One of the most interesting aspects of Kathakali is its elaborate make-up code. Characters are categorized according to their nature. Extremely angry or excessively evil characters wear predominantly red make-up and a flowing red beard. Forest dwellers such as hunters are represented with a predominantly black make-up base. Women and ascetics have lustrous, yellowish faces.

Kuchipudi: Kuchipudi is a classical dance from Andhra Pradesh, a state of South India. Kuchipudi is the name of a small village in Krishna district that borders the Bay of Bengal and with resident Brahmins practising this traditional dance form, it acquired the present name.

Siddhendra Yogi is said to be the first scholar to give it the current form of dance drama. Bhamakalapam is one of his celebrated compositions. The actors sing and dance, and the style is a blend of folk and classical. Arguably this is why this technique has greater freedom and fluidity than other dance styles.

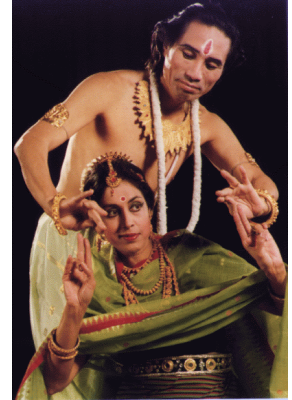


The dance is accompanied by song which is typically

carnatic music. The singer is accompanied by mridangam (a classical Indian percussion instrument), violin, flute and the tambura (a drone instrument with strings which are plucked). Famous dancers Raja Reddy and Radha are shown in the picture.

Manipuri: Manipuri dance is one of the major Indian classical dance forms, which originates from Manipur, a state in the Northeast state of India.

The traditional Manipuri dance style embodies delicate, lyrical and graceful movements. The aim is to make rounded movements and avoid any jerks, sharp edges or straight lines. In contrast with other Indian dance forms, the dancer's feet should never strike the ground hard as this would interfere with the delicate flow of the body movements. Like the movements of the body and feet, the facial expressions in Manipuri dance should be subtle. The main bases of this dance style are devotion and grace.



The musical accompaniment for Manipuri dance comes from a percussion instrument called the pung, a singer, small cymbals, a stringed instrument called the pena and wind instrument such as a flute.

It was originally only performed in temples and continues to form an integral part of the religious and social fabric of Manipur. The people of Manipur are very religious and are exclusively attached to the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna, who are often the main characters depicted in Manipuri dances. Ras Lila is one such Manipuri dance.

Mohiniattam: The theme of this dance form dance is love and devotion to god. Vishnu or Krishna is most often the hero. The spectators can feel His invisible presence when the heroine or her maid details dreams and ambitions through circular movements, delicate footsteps and subtle expressions. Through slow and medium tempos, the dancer is able to find adequate space for improvisations and suggestive emotions.



The Mohini attam dancer maintains realistic make-up and adorns a simple costume, in comparison to costumes of other dances, such as Kathakali. The dancer is attired in a beautiful white with gold border Kasavu saree of Kerala, with the distinctive white jasmin flowers around a French bun at the side of her head.

Odissi: Odissi, like Mohini attam is also based on the popular devotion to Sri Krishna and the verses of the Sanskrit play Geet Govinda are used to depict the love and devotion to God. The Odissi dancers use their head, bust and torso in soft flowing movements to express specific moods and emotions.

The mudras and the expressions are similar to those of Bharatnatyam. Odissi performances are replete with the lore's of the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, Sri Krishna. It is a soft, lyrical classical dance, which depicts the ambience of Orissa, an eastern state of India and the philosophy of its most popular deity, Sri Jagannath, whose temple is in Puri. On the walls of the famous Puri Jagannath and Konark Sun temple the dance sculptures of Odissi are clearly visible.



Bharatanatyam: It is a traditional dance-form known for its grace, purity, tenderness, and sculptural poses. Today, it is one of the most popular and widely performed dance styles and is practiced by male and female dancers all over India.

Bharatanatyam is the manifestation of the South Indian idea of the celebration of the eternal universe through the celebration of the beauty of the material body. The movements of an authentic Bharatanatyam dancer resemble the movements of a dancing flame. Learning Bharatanatyam normally takes many years before the arangetram (debut).

Bharatanatyam proper is a solo dance, with two aspects, lasya, the graceful feminine lines and movements, and tandava (the dance of Shiva), masculine aspect. The music is in the Carnatic style of south India and the instruments for Bharatanatyam include, the mridangam (drum), nagaswaram (long black wood pipe horn made from a black wood), the flute, violin and veena (stringed instrument traditionally associated with Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of the arts and learning). The songs and recitals used in Bharatanatyam traditionally are Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada.



Symbols in Hinduism

The Hindu symbols are divine and have a scientific, logical and spiritual significance. Understanding them lends meaning and appreciation to all Hindu customs and traditions. Hindu culture tailors itself constantly to take the best of the modern technological age without losing its roots. It is this adaptability that has enabled Hinduism to be recognized as one of the world's oldest living religion. The term 'symbol' means 'representation'. Each symbol in Hinduism represents an aspect of Hindu way of life. Here are some of the most prominent and frequently used symbols.

Aum (Om)

Aum is the universal name of Eshwara. The Aum symbolizes the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep), the three deities (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara), the three Vedas (Rig, Yajur and Sama), the three worlds (Bhuh, Bhuvah, Suvah). Aum is also called pranava that means 'that (symbol or sound) by which the Eshwara is praised'.

It is believed that Eshwara began to create the world after chanting Aum. Hence its sound is considered to create an auspicious beginning for any task that we undertake. Aum creates profound effect on the body and mind of the one who chants and also on the surroundings. So it is a frequently chanted sound by Hindus all over the world. The Hindus repeat Aum as a mantra for meditation. They greet each other saying 'Hari Om'. They worship and use this auspicious sign for all spiritual occasions.



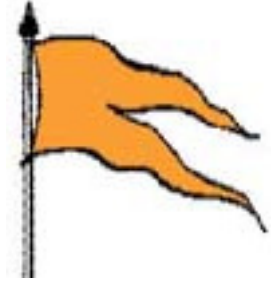
Swastika

Swastika, a sanskrit word, composed of 'su' meaning 'good' and 'asti' meaning 'to be'. Together it means 'well being'. In India, it is used as a symbol of fertility and good luck. Swastika in Hindu culture also symbolizes the sun and the positive energy from it. It is most commonly associated with Ganeshji, the bhagwan of prosperity and wealth. Hindus all around the world use this symbol to denote auspiciousness, good luck and prosperity in their homes and in all kinds of religious occasions.



Bhagwa Dhvaj

Bhagwa (saffron color) represents the “sun”. The sun has the highest place in vedic literature as the sustainer of all and the source of energy. It acts as a reminder of the power of God, the act of selfless service and renunciation. The Bhagwa Dhvaj in the same way represents selfless service and righteousness. It stands for our sustained effort to uphold dharma through self sacrifice. The Bhagwa dhvaj reminds us of our duty towards the Hindu community and the society as a whole. The bhagwa dhvaj can be found on Hindu temples and other Hindu religious sites.



Kamala (Lotus)

Lotus is a symbol of truth, auspiciousness and beauty (satyam, shivam, sundaram). God’s various aspects are compared to a lotus (i.e. lotus eyes, lotus feet, lotus hands, lotus of the heart). Hindu scriptures extol the beauty of the lotus. Many comparisons have been made to the nature of the Lotus. It blooms with the rising sun and closes at night. Similarly, our minds open up and expand with the light of knowledge. It grows in slushy areas yet remains beautiful and untainted despite its surroundings. Similarly, we should strive to remain pure and beautiful from within under all circumstances, not giving up on our basic nature of bliss. Lotus is also said to have emerged from the navel of Bhagwan Vishnu. Brahmaji originated from it to create the world. Hence, it also symbolizes the link between the creator and the protector. Lotus posture (padmaasana) is recommended when one sits for meditation. Lotus is also drawn as a rangoli for festive occasions. Lotus flowers are offered to the hindu deities during pujas.



Shankh (Conch)

Shankh represents dharma or righteousness that is one of the four goals of life. It’s sound is thus also the victory call of good over evil. The story goes, the demon Shankhaasura defeated the gods, stole the Vedas and went to the bottom of the ocean. Sri Vishnu, in the form of matsya (fish), killed Shankhaasura. He blew the conch-shaped bone of the asura’s ear and head. The sound of Om emanated, from which emerged the Vedas. All knowledge enshrined in the Vedas is an elaboration of Om. The conch therefore is known as shankh. Conch is blown traditionally in poojas and sacred occasions. The sound of the conch produces auspicious sounds and drowns all negative noises that disturb the minds of



worshippers. Sri Krishna blew the conch called the paanchajanya when he was charioteer to Arjuna in the Kurukshetra war.

Kalash

A kalash is a pot filled with water. Mango leaves are placed in the mouth of the pot and a coconut is placed over it. Sometimes red and white threads are tied around the Kalash. The water in it symbolizes the giver of life and from which the entire creation is emerged. The mango leaves and coconut represent creation and the threads around it signify the love that binds all in creation. The kalash is therefore considered auspicious and worshipped. It is used to greet learned men acknowledging their greatness and knowledge of the infinite Truth and as a sign of respectful welcome. It is also used in poojas in temples invoking the holy rivers, the knowledge of vedas and the gods' blessings.



Tilak

A tilak is a mark on the forehead. It is applied by all Hindus. It can be in the form of chandan, kumkum or bhasma (ash). It covers the spot between the eyebrows, which is the seat of memory and thinking. It is known as the Ajna Chakra in the language of Yoga. It is applied with the prayer - *'May I remember Eshwara. May this pious feeling pervade all my activities. May I be righteous in my deeds.'* Even when we temporarily forget this prayerful attitude the mark on another reminds us of our resolve. So the tilak is a blessing of Eshwara and a protection against wrong tendencies and forces.



Rangoli

A Rangoli is a creative expression of art through the use of color. It is a symmetrical or freehand design drawn by Hindu woman in front of their pooja room or house. These designs represent auspiciousness and hospitality. It is a warm and colorful way of welcoming every visitor home. A Rangoli can be drawn with rice flour or white stone powder. In ancient times rangolis adorned the walls and floors of all rooms. Rangolis drawn with rice flour served as a source of food for ants and little insects. This concept of 'giving' or feeding every living thing was installed in the minds of Hindus right from the beginning.



Branches of Hindu Dharma

It was a fine and beautiful week-end of the spring. As a regular practice, Raju and his parents visited a nearest temple in their area. Raju's parents met the priest of the temple, took the Darshan of all Hindu deities in the temple and started special pooja of their favourite deity, Sri Shiva. Raju kept curiously observing them, as what he always used to do. The same time, one more couple came up to the temple and did the same what Raju's parents did. But Raju realized that the other couple was worshipping the Sri Ganesha, not Sri Shiva. Raju got puzzled with various questions, *"Why does my mom worship Sri Shiva? Why don't we worship only one god? ... and my neighbours!! They don't even believe in God. Don't they belong to my religion?"* Raju kept thinking about it all day.

You must be surrounded by the same questions what Raju has. Let us try to find out answers to some questions here. To find answers to these questions, we should look at the one of the basic principles of our Dharma. Well! One of the very basic principles of our Dharma is that it gives full freedom of thoughts. It does not enforce to do this or to do that! Following feature points may put some light on Raju's questions.

1) Valuable knowledge of Vedas and Upanishadas was interpreted by different ways by different scholars. Some people followed one scholar, some people followed another scholar, and so on.... Consequently, Hindu society got divided into different groups or sectors.

2) Due to the freedom of thoughts, various faiths and beliefs came into existence within the Hindu Dharma. People were free to pursue any thought and practice any faith and the way they liked.

3) Hindu Dharma has many Gods. It means we have many options. Naturally, when we have many options, we tend to select the option what we like the most. We choose the God by whom we are more impressed; by his powers or deeds and character.

4) You might have heard a word - KulDaivat. 'KulDaivat' of a particular family means the God or the Goddess whom generations and generations of that family have been worshipping. Usually, Hindus like to keep up with the tradition. They like to worship the God who is worshipped by their forefathers. They give more focus on the 'KulDaivat' while doing pooja.

Hmm! By this time, you must have got some explanation on Raju's questions. As described earlier various faiths and beliefs came into existence within the Hindu Dharma. We call them as different branches of the Hindu Dharma. Some people belong to one branch and some people to another. Let us try to explore some prominent branches of the Hindu Dharma.

Vaishnavism:

Vaishnavism is one of the principal division of Hindu Dharma. It adherents worship Sri Vishnu or one of his incarnations.

Shaivism:

Shaivism is one of the principal division of Hindu Dharma. It adherents worship Sri Shiva or Shankar.

Buddhism:

Buddhism was started by a great scholar Gautam Buddha. During his time people were totally in to ritualistic aspect of our Dharma and Buddha wanted people to come out of it and give more stress on karma or actions. He wandered many places with the message of "to do no evil; to cultivate good; to purify ones mind." According to Gautam Buddha, life is full of suffering and to prevent suffering, one has to conquer craving and desire and leads to the path of complete enlightenment.

Jainism:

Another important branch of Hindu Dharma is Jainism. It was founded by Sri Mahavira. It articulates Hindu principles in respect of non-violence and respect for all living beings. It came into existence as a reaction to people over obsession of ritualism. Some of the teachings are... Universe is neither created not sustained by a supernatural being, it is beginningless, endless and operates in accordance of natural law. The primary causes of suffering and injustice in the world are - himsa (violence), nirdaya (lack of compassion), krodha (anger), mada (pride), maya (infactuation), lobha (greed), dwesha (hatred), trishna (craving).

Sikhism

Sikhism began about 500 years ago. It was established by Guru Nanak. Main scripture of the Sikhism is Adi-Granth or Granth-Sahib. The Granth Sahib begins with the following: "There is but one God whose name is true – the Creator". It contains a code of high morals. Purity of life, obedience to Guru, mercy, charity, temperance, justice, straightforwardness, truthfulness, sacrifice, service, and love are among the virtues on which great emphasis is laid; while lust, anger, pride, hatred, egoism, greed, selfishness, cruelty, backbiting and falsehood are vehemently condemned. People who follow Sikhism are known as Sikhs. Sikhs follow path of japa (recitation) of hymn, devotional prayers (kirtana) singing the names of God (e.g., Nama-Smaran).

Some of the teachings of Sikhism are -

- 1) Belief in ten Gurus (teachers) - spiritual guide who dispels ignorance and darkness.
- 2) God is creator of the universe. God is saguna (with attributes) and nirguna (attributeless).
- 3) Attachment to material objects is the primary cause of rebirth on the basis of past karma (action).
- 4) Only way to achieve liberation (mukti) from the cycle of birth and death is by being God-conscious.
- 5) Disapprove asceticism and self mortification as path to enlightenment.

All these groups are just like branches of great banyan tree which is Hindu dharma. If we look at a banyan tree, we can see that its roots, stem branches leaves look different. But we all know that these are all parts of the same tree.



Hindu Dharma is a way of life. It is sanatana (eternal). It is a compilation of various thoughts, faiths and beliefs. It is like a banyan tree with several branches.

Introduction to Hindu Scriptures

The Hindu scriptures are the product of relentless investigations into the facts and truth of life carried out by the ancient sages of Bharat. They contain systematic treatises on varied subjects in the fields of science, religion, metaphysics, philosophy and spiritual knowledge.

They are not limited to a few books because Hinduism does not confine ideas; therefore the scriptures have become a home for many different schools of thought. There is no single textbook for Mathematics nor is there a last or only Mathematician. Mathematics is the collective knowledge of all the Mathematicians over the ages. Similarly what we call Hinduism is the collective knowledge of all the sages who went to discover the Truth. 'Veda', the oldest scripture known to humankind, literally means 'knowledge'.

In Hinduism, there are two categories of books: One, Shrutis, which deal with never changing, eternal principles, and second, Smritis, which often deal with the practical application of those principles to the ever changing social order.

'Shruti' means 'what is heard' and 'Smriti' means 'what is remembered. Shruti being divinely revealed to the great Rishis of yore in the depths of their mystical experience, its authority is supreme. Smritis are the secondary scriptures, which derive their authority from the Shruti. Their business is to explain, elaborate and illustrate the fundamental teachings of the Shruti.

However, according to the Hindu view, revelations are not limited to any individual, time or place. Just as there have been revelations in the past, they can occur at present or in future also. The seer is only a medium to transmit the insight, which he receives. Hence he is no more the inventor of the Veda than Newton is the generator of the law of gravity. The laws always existed and they were only 'discovered' or 'seen'. That's why the Rishis are called 'seers'.

There are four vedas - Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. The Rig Veda is the most ancient scripture of the world. Lokamanya Tilak, on the strength of astronomical evidences, concludes that it is at least 8,000 years old.

The Rig Veda consists of hymns which are mostly prayers. The Yajur Veda deals mainly with sacrificial rites. The Sama Veda contains a portion of the Rig Vedic hymns set to music. These have to be sung at appropriate stages during

a sacrifice. The Atharva Veda, which is a later composition, consists mostly of morals and ethical codes as also a few worldly sciences.

Each Veda is divided into four parts: Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The Samhitas contain prayers and mantras used in sacrifices. The Brahmanas give the know-how of sacrificial rites, Aranyakas teach the art of certain types of meditation. The Upanishads contain the highest philosophical flights of the sages, which can be the pride of the whole human race for all time. Schopenhauer, the German savant, has declared: *"In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death."*

Then comes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular of all the Hindu scriptures. The Gita, as it is shortly called, is so well-known all over the world that it has been the second most translated work. Though the Bible ranks first in this regard it should be remembered that its translations were sponsored by the mighty machinery of the colonial rulers of Europe with the enormous material resources at its command. As for the Gita, its beauty, sublimity and universality prompted its admirers to translate it into different languages of the world.

It's the only religious book that was taught in a battlefield. It was not taught to the disciples in the Gurukuls. It is in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna, the great incarnation of God, and Arjuna, the warrior prince and a man of action, who was caught in a dilemma about his duties. He was confused as to what is right and what is wrong. Serious questions concerning life and death, duty and devotion, knowledge and meditation were discussed, and sensible solutions offered which hold good even to this day. Manliness and selfless devotion to duty are the keynotes of this great scripture. There is a verse in Sanskrit that compares the Upanishads to the cows and the Gita to the milk. In other words, the Gita gives the essence of the Upanishadic philosophy in a simple and practicable form.

List of the Hindu scriptures is incomplete without the two great epics, the Ramayan and the Mahabharata. Though these two great books deal primarily with the story of Sri Rama and that of the Kuru dynasty respectively, they can more rightly be called the encyclopedia of Hindu dharma. These two works have influenced and inspired the Hindu civilization for thousands of years. They are technically called Itihasa (history) since they contain the history of the two most important dynasties that ruled and shaped the destinies of Hindu civilization.

The Puranas are another class of scriptures that describe the teachings of the Vedas through myths, legends and examples of great people. They were created

to popularize and simplify religious teachings. There are eighteen main Puranas and many other lesser Puranas. There is also the Devi Mahatmya which describes the worship of God as the Divine Mother.

The Smritis of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parashara, the Agamas and the treatises on the Darshanas are the other scriptures forming the magnificent edifice of Hinduism built upon the foundation of the Vedas. The Smritis are mostly codes of law intended to regulate society from time to time, according to the principles of the Veda. The Agamas are scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God and prescribing detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. The Darshanas are schools of philosophy.

Buddhism and Jainism deny the authority of Vedas. In Sanskrit, those accept the authority of the Vedas are called 'Astika' and those who reject the Vedas are called 'Nastika'. Buddhist and Jain scriptures are often termed 'Nastika' literature, though they remain firmly within the fold of Hinduism. Dharmapad and Tripitakas in Buddhism and Kalpa Sutra in Jainism are the main scriptures.

Tamil is one of the oldest languages. It has both Shaivism and Vaishnavism in its classical literature. On the Shaivite side, there are four great saints: Appar, Sundarar, Thirujnaanasambandar and Manikkavachagar. Their compositions are known as 'Thevaram' and 'Thiruvachakam'. Another literary masterpiece describing the idealistic forms of behavior, conduct and ethics is 'Thirukkural'. The most popular Vaishnava literature in Tamil is 'Nalayira Divya Prabandham' which comprises devotional songs written by poet saints known as 'Alvars'.

As mentioned earlier, Hinduism is not a closed book. From time to time, sages in Bharat have given new impetus to the faith by removing bad or misleading practices and re-establishing the teachings of the Vedas. One example is Sikhism, which was founded by Guru Nanak Dev about 500 years ago. The 'Guru Granth Sahib' is the main scripture of Sikhism. It is written in Punjabi (Gurumukhi). The concept of 'Ek Omkar' taught by Guru Nanak Dev is rooted in Vedas. Another example is Arya Samaj movement started by Swami Dayananda Saraswati more 100 years ago. His best known book is 'Satyarth Prakash' (Light of Truth).

There are many more books. Some lost in the past, some still being written, and there will no doubt be many in the future. This is the secret of dynamism in Hinduism. Unity in diversity is the strength of our culture, enabling us to survive as the world's oldest religion and yet remain modern.



Rituals and their meaning

When we carefully observe, we find that hindus perform several rituals in thier lives. Even at home, we see, our parents do several things such as doing daily pooja, fasting, putting bindi / marks on forehead, chanting prayers/hymns on different occassions. Initially, we may think that these rituals are unnecessary and they lead to superstition. But once we understand the meaning and objective of these rituals, we will feel those rituals necessary and important. However, some rituals may be irrilivant in today's world as they are not oriented or based on eternal truths. Let us try to learn some of them.

Why do we light a lamp?

In almost every Hindu home, a lamp is lit daily in the pooja-ghar. In some houses it is lit at dawn and in some, twice a day – at dawn and dusk – and in a few it is maintained continuously (akhanda deepa). All auspicious functions commence with the lighting of the lamp, which is often maintained right through the occasion. Light symbolizes knowledge. The God is the “Knowledge Principle”, illuminator of all knowledge. Hence light is worshiped as the God himself.

Knowledge removes ignorance just as light removes darkness. Also knowledge is a lasting inner wealth by which all outer achievement can be accomplished. Hence we light the lamp to bow down to knowledge as the greatest of all forms of wealth

Why not light a bulb or tube? That too would remove darkness. But the traditional oil lamp has a further spiritual significance. The oil in the lamp symbolizes our negative tendencies. When lit by spiritual knowledge, they get slowly exhausted and finally perishes. The flame of a lamp always burns upwards. Similarly we should acquire such knowledge as to take us towards higher ideals. While lighting the lamp we thus pray:

Deepajyothi parabrahma, Deepa Jyotir Janaardana

Deepo harati paapaani, Sandhyaa deepa namostute | |

I prostrate to the dawn/dusk lamp; whose light is the Knowledge Principle (the Supreme God), which removes the darkness of ignorance and by which all can be achieved in life.

Why do we have a prayer room?

Most Hindu homes have a prayer room or altar. A lamp is lit and the God worshipped each day. Other spiritual practices like japa (repetition of the God's name), meditation, paaraayana (reading of the scriptures), prayers, devotional singing etc is also done here. Special worship is done on auspicious occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and the like. Each member of the family – young or old – communes with and worships the Divine here.

The God is the entire creation. He is therefore the true owner of the house we live in to. The prayer room is the Master room of the house. We are the earthly occupants of His property. This notion rids us of false pride and possessiveness.

The ideal attitude to take is to regard the God as the true owner of our homes and ourselves as caretakers of His home. But if that is rather difficult, we could at least think of Him as a very welcome guest. Just as we would house an important guest in the best comfort, so too we felicitate the God's presence in our homes by having a prayer room or altar, which is, at all times, kept clean and well-decorated.

Also, the God is all-pervading. To remind us that He resides in our homes with us, we have prayer rooms. Without the grace of the God, no task can be successfully or easily accomplished. We invoke His grace by communing with Him in the prayer room each day and on special occasions.

Each room in a house is dedicated to a specific function like the bedroom for resting, the drawing room to receive guests, the kitchen for cooking etc. The furniture, decor and the atmosphere of each room are made conducive to the purpose it serves. So too for the purpose of meditation, worship and prayer, we should have a conducive atmosphere – hence the need for a prayer room.

Sacred thoughts and sound vibrations pervade the place and influence the minds of those who spend time there. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated through regular meditation, worship and chanting done there pervade the prayer room. Even when we are tired or agitated, by just sitting in the prayer room for a while, we feel calm, rejuvenated and spiritually uplifted.

Why do we do Namaste?

Hindus greet each other with namaste. The two palms are placed together in front of the chest and the head bows whilst saying the word namaste. This greeting is for all – people younger than us, of our own age, those older than us, friends and even strangers.

There are five forms of formal traditional greeting enjoined in the shastras of which namaskaram is one. This is understood as prostration but it actually refers to paying homage as we do today when we greet each other with a namaste.

Namaste could be just a casual or formal greeting, a cultural convention or an act of worship. However there is much more to it than meets the eye. In Sanskrit namah + te = namaste. It means – I bow to you – my greetings, salutations or prostration to you. Namaha can also be literally interpreted as “na ma” (not mine). It has a spiritual significance of negating or reducing one’s ego in the presence of another.

The real meeting between people is the meeting of their minds. When we greet another, we do so with namaste, which means, “may our minds meet,” indicated by the folded palms placed before the chest. The bowing down of the head is a gracious form of extending friendship in love and humility.

The spiritual meaning is even deeper. The life force, the divinity, the Self or the God in me is the same in all. Recognising this oneness with the meeting of the palms, we salute with head bowed the Divinity in the person we meet. That is why sometimes, we close our eyes as we do namaste to a revered person or the God – as if to look within. The gesture is often accompanied by words like “Ram Ram”, “Jai Shri Krishna”, “Namo Narayana”, “Jai Siya Ram”, “Om Shanti” etc – indicating the recognition of this divinity.

When we know this significance, our greeting does not remain just a superficial gesture or word but paves the way for a deeper communion with another in an atmosphere of love and respect.

Why do we wear marks (like tilak, pottu) on the forehead?

The tilak or pottu invokes a feeling of sanctity in the wearer and others. It is recognized as a religious mark. Its form and color vary according to one’s caste, religious sect or the form of the God worshipped.

The tilak cover the spot between the eyebrows, which is the seat of memory and thinking. It is known as the Ajna Chakra in the language of Yoga. The tilak is applied with the prayer – “May I remember the God. May this pious feeling pervade all my activities. May I be righteous in my deeds.” Even when we temporarily forget this prayerful attitude the mark on another reminds us of our resolve. The tilak is thus a blessing of the God and a protection against wrong tendencies and forces.

The entire body emanates energy in the form of electromagnetic waves – the forehead and the subtle spot between the eyebrows especially so. That is why worry generates heat and causes a headache. The tilak and pottu cools the forehead, protects us and prevents energy loss. Some times the entire forehead is covered with chandan or bhasma. Using plastic reusable “stick bindis” is not very beneficial, even though it serves the purpose of decoration.

Why do we apply the holy ash?

The ash of any burnt object is not regarded as holy ash. Bhasma (the holy ash) is the ash from the homa (sacrificial fire) where special wood along with ghee and other herbs is offered as worship of the God. Or the deity is worshipped by pouring ash as abhisheka and is then distributed as bhasma.

Bhasma is generally applied on the forehead. Some apply it on certain parts of the body like the upper arms, chest etc. Some ascetics rub it all over the body. Many consume a pinch of it each time they receive it.

Homa (offering of oblations into the fire with sacred chants) signifies the offering or surrender of the ego and egocentric desires into the flame of knowledge or a noble and selfless cause. The consequent ash signifies the purity of the mind, which results from such actions. Also the fire of knowledge burns the oblation and wood signifying ignorance and inertia respectively. The ash we apply indicates that we should burn false identification with the body and become free of the limitations of birth and death. This is not to be misconstrued as a morose reminder of death but as a powerful pointer towards the fact that time and tide wait for none.

Bhasma is specially associated with Sri Shiva who applies it all over His body. Shiva devotees apply bhasma as a tripundra (the form of “o”). When applied with a red spot at the centre, the mark symbolises Shiva-Shakti (the unity of energy and matter that creates the entire seen and unseen universe).

Bhasma has medicinal value and is used in many ayurvedic medicines. It absorbs excess moisture from the body and prevents colds and headaches. The Upanishads say that the famous Mrityunjaya mantra should be chanted whilst applying ash on the forehead.

Tryambakam yajamahe, Sugandhim pushtivardhanam

Urvaarukamiva bhandhanaan, Mrityor muksheeyamaa amrutaat

“We worship the three-eyed Sri Shiva who nourishes and spread fragrance in our lives. May He free us from the shackles of sorrow, change and death - effortlessly, like the fall of a ripe brinjal (eggplant) from its stem.”

Why do we fast?

Most devout Hindus fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food. Fasting in Sanskrit is called upavaasa. Upa means “near” + vaasa means “to stay”. Upavaasa therefore means staying near (the God), meaning the attainment of close mental proximity with the God. Then, what has upavaasa to do with food?

A lot of our time and energy is spent in procuring food items, cooking, eating and digesting food. Certain food types make our minds dull and agitated. Hence on certain days people decide to save time and conserve their energy by eating either simple, light food or totally abstaining from eating so that the mind becomes alert and pure. The mind, otherwise pre-occupied by the thought of food, now entertains noble thoughts and stays with the God. Since it is a self-imposed form of discipline it is usually adhered to with joy.

Also every system needs a break and an overhaul to work at its best. Rest and a change of diet during fasting is very good for the digestive system and the entire body. The more you indulge the senses, the more they make their demands. Fasting helps us to cultivate control over our senses, sublimate our desires. Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to indulge later. This happens when there is no noble goal behind fasting.

The Bhagavad Geeta urges us to eat appropriately - neither too less nor too much - yukta-aahaara and to eat simple, pure and healthy food (a saatvik diet) even when not fasting.

Why do we regard trees and plants as sacred?

The God, the life in us, pervades all living beings, be they plants or animals. Hence, they are all regarded as sacred. Human life on earth depends on plants and trees. They give us the vital factors that makes life possible on earth: food, oxygen, clothing, shelter, medicines etc.

Hence, in Bharat, we are taught to regard trees and plants as sacred. Hindu scriptures tell us to plant ten trees if, for any reason, we have to cut one. We are

advised to use parts of trees and plants only as much as is needed for food, fuel, shelter etc. we are also urged to apologize to a plant or tree before cutting it.

Certain trees and plants like tulasi, peepal etc. which have tremendous beneficial qualities, are worshipped till today. It is believed that divine beings manifest as trees and plants, and many people worship them to fulfill their desires or to please the God.

Why do we say shaanti thrice?

Shaanti, meaning “peace”, is a natural state of being. Disturbances are created either by us or others. For example, peace already exists in a place until someone makes noise. Therefore, peace underlies all our agitations. When agitations end, peace is naturally experienced since it was already there. Where there is peace, there is happiness. Therefore, every one without exception desires peace in his/her life.

However, peace within or without seems very hard to attain because it is covered by our own agitations. A rare few manage to remain peaceful within even in the midst of external agitation and troubles. To invoke peace, we chant prayers. By chanting prayers, troubles end and peace is experienced internally, irrespective of the external disturbances. All such prayers end by chanting shaanti thrice.

It is believed that trivaram satyam - that which is said thrice comes true. For emphasising a point we repeat a thing thrice. In the court of law also, one who takes the witness stands says, “I shall speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”.

The popular notion of peace today is ‘absence of war’. But Hindus think of peace at three levels. We chant shaanti thrice to emphasize our intense desire for peace. All obstacles, problems and sorrows originate from three sources.

Aadhidaivika: The unseen divine forces over which we have little or no control like earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions etc.

Aadhibhautika: The known factors around us like accidents, human contacts, pollution, crime etc.

Aadhyaatmika: We sincerely pray to the God that at least while we undertake special tasks or even in our daily lives, there are no problems or that, problems are minimized from the three sources written about above.

May peace alone prevail. Hence shaanti is chanted thrice.

Why do we do aarati?

Towards the end of every ritualistic worship of the God, we perform the aarati. It is usually performed by the ringing of the bell, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments. It is one of the sixteen steps (shodasha upachaara) of the pooja ritual. During aarati, a light is waved in a clockwise movement in front of the God. As the light is waved, we either do mental or loud chanting of prayers or simply behold the beautiful form of the God, illumined by the lamp. At the end of the aarati, we place our hands over the flame and then gently touch our eyes and the top of the head. We have seen and participated in this ritual since our childhood. Let us find out why we do that.

We see the beauty of the God in all His glory when we perform abhisheka, decorate the image and offer fruits. Our minds are focussed on each limb of the God as the lamp lights it up. The singing, clapping, and ringing of the bell denote the joy and auspiciousness which accompanies the vision of the God.

Aarati is often performed with camphor. It holds a spiritual significance. Camphor when lit, burns itself out completely without leaving a trace of it. It represents our inherent tendencies (vaasanas). When they are lit by the fire of knowledge, they are burnt out completely, not leaving a trace of ego or ignorance. Also, when a camphor burns, it emits a pleasant perfume even while it sacrifices itself. In our spiritual progress, even as we serve the guru and society, we should willingly sacrifice ourselves and all we have, to spread the "perfume" of love to all. When the aarati is actually performed, our eyes close automatically as if to look within. This is to signify that each of us is a temple of the God.

At the end of the aarati, we place our hands over the flame and then touch our eyes and the top of the head. It means - may the light, that illuminated the truth, light up my vision; may my vision be divine and my thoughts noble and beautiful.

The philosophical meaning of aarati extends further. The sun, moon, stars, lightning and fire are the natural sources of light. The God is the source of this wonderful phenomenon of the universe. It is due to Him alone that all else exist and shine. As we light the flame of the aarati, we turn our attention to the very source of all light, which symbolizes knowledge and life.

There are several other rituals that not described here. Try to learn them from other sources such as books or internet.



Hindu Values

We, the Hindu society are so diversified. We have different modes of worship, different names of gods, different languages, different religious practices, yet, we all have some common values to live by. Some of them are described below.

Respect for mother and mother Earth

We should respect our Mother, as she is The Creator. The first word the child learns to say is “amma”, “maa”, “maama”, which all mean Mother. Mother, is considered as the first Guru (teacher) for a child. This concept of respect and love for mother or creator is extended to other natural phenomena also which provide sustenance for life. For example rivers, cows which give us milk, Earth which provides us a place to live are all worshipped as mother. In general everything good, blissful, and protective is associated with a mother-image.

Respect for father and ancestors

We emphasize respect for parents and elders. Parents give their best to take care and bring up the children with values and provide them whatever they can. In turn, the parents should be divine for the children. Service to one’s parents is considered pious and divine duty. It’s a very common custom to bow down to touch the elders and parents feet. The story of Shravan Kumar, who was dedicated to serve his parents is often remembered in this context.

Respect for Teacher (Guru)

Like parents, the Guru is also worthy of worship. In Hindu society, Guru is worshiped as a God. A Guru is not just a teacher who gives us only education, but also inspires us and passes on his experience and knowledge. Guru can be a person, a symbol or a book. For example, in the Sikh tradition, the holy book “Guru Granth Sahib” is treated as the Guru. In Balagokulam, we treat ‘Bhagwa Dhvaj’ (Saffron flag) as the Guru.

Education

We need to study our scriptures. Hindu (Vedic) Dharma is the way of living (life). So we need to learn, understand and follow our customs, traditions from scriptures and not just be blind followers.

Devotion

We need to cultivate devotion through worship/meditation. Devotion leads to concentration. Once we learn to concentrate, we can achieve and succeed in many aspect of life.

Purity in body, mind and speech

We need to be pure in body, mind and speech. If we are not pure/clean physically, it leads to physical illness. Similarly if we are not pure in thoughts (honest), it leads to stress. Following are some of the values which will help us develop purity of mind and body.

1. **Truth:** 'Satyameva Jayate' (Truth alone triumphs), mentioned in our Scriptures and which also happens to appear in the national emblem of Bharat, is a value, we all should practice. The story of king Harishchandra illustrates the value of following the truth irrespective of any obstacles and difficulties.

2. **Honesty:** Keeping up with the promises, not betraying people and not telling a lie are the unique values of the Hindu Dharma. Character and integrity leads to success and is respected by all. Many have lost everything to keep up with the promises.

3. **Righteousness:** Righteousness is an essential part of Hindu way of life. The word 'Dharma' many times translated as righteousness. Our scriptures say, 'if you protect righteousness, the righteousness shall protect you.'

4. **Forgiveness, Non-Violence and Fearlessness:** Hindus believe that life is sacred, to be loved and revered. So, they practice non-violence. Development of qualities like non-violence and forgiveness requires fearlessness and strength. The story of Swami Dayananda is a very good example in this context. Once, a misguided man, Karansingh, approached him in anger and with a sword in his hand. Swamiji quickly grabbed his arm and wrenched the sword. He broke it by pressing its point to the ground. But, when Karansingh, felt ashamed and guilty, he forgave him without keeping anything in mind.

5. **Contentment and Generosity:** We should be satisfied with what we are and what we have. There is no use of being a part of the rat race or unnecessary competition. We should not be greedy but generous. Greediness normally leads to the evil thoughts in mind.

6. **Service and Sacrifice:** Hindus consider that the service to other is a virtue; giving pain to other is a sin. Giving and sharing is one of the values preached relentlessly in Hindu scriptures. We need to be prepared to make sacrifices and be patient. Serving the society is not optional but the duty of every hindu.

List of Hindu values is not completed here. Our sages have listed enormous "DO's" and "DONT's" for all individuals to lead proper, right and balanced life and to make all happy and satisfied. One of the best ways of practicing Hindu Dharma is to learn them and inculcate them in our life.



Gurukul and Guru-Shishya Parampara

Ancient Bharat (India) saw the pinnacle of glory. It was wealthy and healthy in all terms. Common people were happy and contented. Sahitya, Kala, Sangeet and Sanskriti had reached at their high. The two of the most significant factors of the Ancient Bharat during the Vedic period were – Medicine and Education were provided free of charge!! Nobody was denied for the treatment of health issues and taking education. Teachers and Doctors also used to do their job selflessly as a service (seva) to the mankind. They never looked at their profession as means of earning.

Education:

In today's world, spiritual development and materialistic development of an individual are separated. It is seen in most of the countries that their education system is more or completely focused towards materialistic development which makes an individual capable of earning money, but does not teach good values. In Hindus' ancient education system during Vedic period, the focus was equally given on materialistic as well as spiritual development of individuals or learners. Therefore they could also learn the values, purpose of living, their duties and priorities that would make them a good person or citizen. Guru has a significant role in all kinds of education.

Guru

The word "Guru" has a deep meaning. But in a simple definition, Guru means a teacher. Guru is often referred as Acharya or Shikshak. Guru is considered as an imparter of knowledge. He would teach his Shishyas everything what he knew. Guru is supposed to treat everyone equally no matter whether an individual was a poor or a rich or a royal or a common person. Guru is one who molds the student's personality. That is why someone not having a Guru was once looked down upon as being an orphan. Even Vishnu-avatars like Rama and Krishna subjected themselves to the tutelage of worthy gurus like Vashishta and Sandipani. A great Guru (shikshak) Chanakya used to say that the future of the next generation is dependant on a mother and a Guru. These two personalities have ability to make coming generation either good or bad!! That is why Guru is respected the same way father and mother are respected. One of the scriptures, Manu Smriti regards and respects the Guru along with the mother and father.

Upanishads also mention the five signs of Guru - In the presence of the Guru; Knowledge flourishes (Gyana raksha); Sorrow diminishes (Dukha kshaya); Joy wells up without any reason (Sukha aavirbhava); Abundance dawns (Samriddhi); All talents manifest (Sarva samvardhan).

Sometimes Guru is given more importance than God. There is an understanding that if the Guru and God both appeared together, then one should pay respect to the Guru first since Guru has been instrumental in leading him to God. Great saint Kabir once was asked, "If Guru and God both appear before you, whom should you prostrate?" Kabir replied, "I bow before Guru who introduced God to me!" One of our scriptures also compares Guru with the Trinity Gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.

Shishya

In a simple definition, Shishya means a student or a learner. Shishya is supposed to serve Guru and his family to the best of his ability and learn from him. He learns everything from the Guru and moves on to the next level. Shishya can have many Gurus. It is quite important for Shishya to find appropriate Guru because he is the one who gives direction to his life. The Bhagavad-Geeta says that - Acquire the transcendental knowledge from a Self-realized master(guru) by humble reverence, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise ones who have realized the Truth will impart the Knowledge to you.

In Vedic period, the knowledge was transferred from Guru to Shishya by the word of mouth. The knowledge was best conveyed through a strong human relationship based on ideals of the shishya's respect, commitment, devotion and obedience, and on Guru's personal instruction by which the shishya eventually masters the knowledge that the Guru embodies. Excellent communication between the two also develops a strong relationship and a bond of love between them.

Gurudakshina

Gurudakshina means the shishya giving a valuable to the guru as a token of gratitude apart from his services. Such tokens can be as simple as a fruit to as serious as a thumb as given by Ekalavya to his Guru Dronacharya. Though giving gurudakshina was completely optional, shishyas would give their Guru something according to their ability. Shishyas from royal families such as princess or kings used to give wealth or land as a gurudakshina. Sometimes Guru also expects (desires) something from his Shishyas as a gurudakshina. For example, Guru Dronacharya asked his Shishyas - Kauravas and Pandavas - to bring the king of Panchala Drupada bound in chains. The best gurudakshina is to adhere

to the Guru's worlds and make a best use of the knowledge and wisdom given by Guru.

Gurukul and Guru-Shishya Parampara (tradition):

Gurukul is a type of school which is residential in nature where both Guru and his Shishyas live together. Shishyas (including royal princess or kings) would stay there as a family members of Guru and get education. They would not only take education but also serve Guru and his family in their day-to-day life including washing clothes, cooking, massaging, etc. All shishyas irrespective of their social or economical status would get the equal treatment. Depending upon the type of education, shishyas would stay there from 16 years to 36 years.

The life of Shishyas in Gurukul would be completely disciplined. They would have to adhere to the all rules of Gurukul such as getting up early in the morning, physical exercise, giving up material things, complete their studies within a given time, etc. This type of disciplined life would help Shishyas to fully concentrate on education. It would also inculcate humility in the shishyas and respect and gratitude in him for the dispenser of knowledge. Other noble virtues like discipline, dedication, sense of duty, sacrifice, social equality and compassion also evolve with the Guru's help. Gurukul system existed in Bharat until the colonial era but gradually vanished in course of time.

Relevance of Guru-Shishya Relationship in Today's world:

Today, what we see is that an education system has become a business. No "Seva" or service aspect left there. The relationship between teacher and student is questionable. There is no purity, love and respect among them. Both act like professionals. Both don't care about each other. In this situation, student may get knowledge for living, but the character building of him will not happen. He or she will not inculcate values and wisdom which are more important than the knowledge. This is definitely not a good situation.

The solution to fix this situation is to revive the relationship between teacher and student. Here, Hindus can play an important role. They have had a very good past in terms of Guru-Shishya tradition. They can continue the similar tradition even today also. Although everything can not be implemented today as it was, they can realize the concept of Gurukul and Guru-Shishya relationship, mold it to suit current time and try to reimplement it. This is how they can set an example in front of everyone and contribute to the welfare of mankind!



Goddesses

In Hindu culture, all animals that are nurturing are given a feminine relation. For example, a cow in Hindu Dharma is considered like mother, for she gives us her milk, cheese and so many other edibles. Another example could be the Earth. Earth provides us with all basic needs of life like food and water. Therefore, Hindus call her Mother Earth.

Likewise, Hindus believe that gods have a gentle and nurturing side that can be portrayed by a feminine form, a Goddess. Hence, for every God there is an equal Goddess. One can see it as two sides to the same coin. These Goddesses are not wives of a God, but rather a part of him. In this way, one can say that Vishnu is Lakshmi and Lakshmi is Vishnu.

But just as a God represents certain virtues or characteristics, the Goddess, also, stands for complementary traits. This could be a way of making sure that every God is all rounded. For example, in order for you to have a 4.0 G.P.A, you must excel in all your classes. Not, just in those that are your personal favorites. In the same manner, Hindu Dharma makes sure that their Gods are well rounded by giving them both male and female sides. Let's take a look at some of these Goddesses.

Saraswati

Sitting elegantly on a lotus, is the fair-skinned eternally young and tall Goddess, Saraswati. She is usually shown playing a stringed instrument known as the veena, which is believed to be invented by Saraswati herself. In another hand, Saraswati is holding a book of palm leaves, which shows her love of learning.

She is considered mother of the language Sanskrit and originator of the Devnagri script in which most Indian languages are written. Saraswati symbolizes the power of knowledge. She is also the benefactor of arts, sciences and speech. There are mantras written in hopes that Saraswati will help to rid one of his laziness and ignorance.



Since Brahma's function is to create the universe, the worlds and everything within, Saraswati is representative of the knowledge he needs to complete his task. Suppose you are doing a project called Project Y, then you must first research about it. All the data you collect, you will label as Research X. Now, without Research X your project is impossible to finish. And Research X cannot be turned in on it's own, it has to be shown as a part of your entire Project Y. Therefore, when you finally show your teacher the entire project, he will only see your completed Project Y. But you will know that Project Y would not be complete if it wasn't supported by your Research X.

In this same way Brahma is representative of the creation of the entire universe and Saraswati is representative of the knowledge needed to do so. Without Saraswati, Brahma can not complete his job and without Brahma, Swaraswati can not be of use.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi is shown as young and beautiful, jewels and garments adorning her. Her four hands symbolize the four ends of human life - Dharma (righteousness), Kama (desires), Artha (wealth) and Moksha (liberation from cycle of birth and death). Through one of her four hands, falls a constant stream of gold coins. This represents the power of wealth, which Vishnu needs to pervade and maintain the universe. This is much like keeping a car maintained with the latest equipment or it will be of no use after a few years.

Many merchants and tradesman pray to Lakshmi on a daily basis, wishing for a prosperous day of sales. For Lakshmi does represent beauty, purity and fertility, as well as, power of wealth.

Lakshmi is also known as the universal female, for she has incarnated as many times a Vishnu, being his perfect equal. She was Kamla when Vishnu was the dwarf Vaman and she was Rukmani when Vishnu was Krishna. Though her most influential incarnation was that of Sita, the ideal woman.



Parvati

Many a times, a Goddess herself can manifest in to different forms to serve different purposes and so people know one goddess by various names. This is true for the Goddess Parvati, who can also be Durga or Kali. She can be both friendly, as Parvati, and powerful, as Kali and Durga.

In the form of Parvati, she is complementary to a meditating and peaceful Shiva. Parvati herself has done many penance from which she went from being a the daughter of the mountain king, Parvatraj to being the companion of Shiva by doing rigorous meditation and penance. Ganesh was also created by Paravati from her own body after doing much meditation. Hence, Parvati is representative of the power of meditation.



As Durga and Kali, the goddess becomes ever powerful, residing on a lion with eight arms. These arms stand for health, education, wealth, organization, unity, fame, courage and truth. She holds a weapon in each hand for the destruction of evil and the protection of good, represented by the lotus. Many times Kali is shown in a fierce form, with dark skin. This form resembles the extreme power of shakti (energy). Like Durga, the goddess Kali is worshiped as the devourer of all evil. It is said that Shiva is nothing but corpse without Kali. Hence Kali is an essential part of Shiva.

Now, anyone to see that the Goddesses in Hindu Dharma are just as powerful and important as the Gods themselves. They each bring knowledge, power and truth that helps to keep the circle of creation going. No other religion can pride themselves by saying that their God is both male and female, hence not partial to any one gender.

This belief can even be seen in Hindu culture, where one believes that their daughter is a form of Lakshmi and all mothers are treated with much respect and dignity.



Ideal Hindu Home

Background

We all spend a significant part of our lives at home. It is where individuals come together to form a family. The values (sanskars) that are practiced in a family greatly influence the character and quality of the family members, especially those of children. A cohesive, loving, and harmonious home helps create compassionate, caring and responsible individuals. A dysfunctional home tends to create individuals of undesirable qualities that become a burden on society.

In earlier times, most Hindus lived in joint or extended families. That is, it was not just parents and their young children under a roof, but grand parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, etc living together. The head of the family, as well as every member of the extended family considered the entire family their very own. For the well being of the entire unit, they learn to curtail their individual desires and to behave in a manner that brought harmony to the family, and happiness to every member. Older family members lead by example, the younger ones respected them, and looked up to them as role models. As children grew up, they were surrounded by good sanskars in a very natural way. Today, such extended families are becoming rare, and one has to consciously learn about what constitutes an Ideal Hindu Home.

There are certain external or physical characteristics and some internal or behavioral characteristics of an Ideal Hindu Home. Let us understand some of these in greater detail.

Physical characteristics of an Ideal Hindu Home

Cleanliness: A clean, organized house provides a healthy setting from which to grow and mature - physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A dirty and cluttered house is not conducive for a healthy and happy life. There is a saying that God lives in a clean house only. No matter how luxurious or simple your house is, keep it clean.

Place for worship / meditation: An Ideal Hindu Home should have a separate area for worship / meditation. Pictures of Gods, photos of ancestors, a lamp, incense sticks, religious books, etc are usually kept in this room. Each morning after shower, and once in the evening, spend a few minutes here, chant a few shlokas you know, and focus your mind on prayer. Learn to meditate.

Displaying Hindu symbols: Where appropriate throughout the house, display Hindu symbols such as Om, Swastika, Bhagwa Dhwaj, pictures of holy places, spiritual personalities, etc. These will constantly remind you of your hoary heritage, and serve as an inspiration to live as an ideal Hindu.

Celebrating festivals: Become educated on reading a Hindu calendar, and be aware of when festivals occur. Continue to celebrate festivals that are customary in your family. Learn why and how the festival is celebrated, including the rituals associated with it. These practices may have been passed on for several generations in your family, and you want to be sure to pass them on to your future generations. Share the happiness of the occasion by calling your friends and family to greet them, or visit them if possible. Contemplate the social aspect of the festival, and act (such as giving money for charity, doing social work, etc). Celebrate birthdays through Hindu traditions.

Language and Arts: Someone once said "If you want to destroy a culture, destroy the language". Language and arts are key things that form the basis of a civilization and culture. These too have been passed on through generations, so at home make every effort to preserve and practice them. Learn to speak, read and write in your mother tongue. Learn one or more Hindu arts (such as dancing, singing, rangoli, mehendi, etc), and when proficient, teach to others. The personal satisfaction in being good in language and arts, as well as the gratification in preserving and promoting them is invaluable.

Behavioral characteristics of an Ideal Hindu Home

Respect for parents and elders: Show respect to your parents and elders in deed and in words. If you have to disagree with them, do so in a way that is not hurtful or offensive. Remind yourself that your parent will never intentionally do or ask you do anything that would be detrimental to you. Also be reverential to your forefathers.

Doing things together: Doing things together truly bonds the family, and develops mutual understanding, love, and confidence among the family

members. Consider doing a collective evening prayer and Arti, having at least one meal together everyday, etc. Once a week, sit down together to discuss rituals, traditions, or just tell stories.

Getting up early: Early morning is called 'Brahma Muhurt' by Hindus and is considered a very auspicious time to do things. Modern science has also confirmed the varied benefits of getting up early (and consequently going to bed early) – both physically and emotionally. In practical terms, you will realize that you can get a lot more accomplished when your body and mind are rested and alert.

Avoiding waste: There's a Hindu saying: *"Mother Earth has enough to provide us with all our needs, but not all our greed"*. Be very mindful of what is consumed, and what is wasted. Water, food, all forms of energy, paper, etc are all precious resources that we should conserve as much as possible. By extension, try to avoid buying things on impulse; buy only what you have identified as truly needed after considerable thought. Avoid an ostentatious lifestyle – live frugally and learn to enjoy the pleasure in giving.

Being a role model: Practice the above, educate yourself on Hinduism, and resolve to be socially active. Try to do everything to the best of your ability. These will make you a role model for others to emulate. To create such individuals is the goal of an Ideal Hindu Home.



The Holy River Ganga

The river Ganga is one of the most sacred rivers for Hindus. It has a religious as well as historical importance. Many many temples and spiritual places are located at the banks of the river such as Haridwar, Prayag (Alahabad), Kashi. The source stream of the river Ganga is originated in the Himalayas which is called as Gangotri.

Legend:

According to Puranas, the river Ganga was in the heaven and it was brought down to the Earth. The legend is that the great King Bhagirath did severe penance to bring Ganga to the earth so that she can wash away his ancestors' sins and give them a salvation. Because of Bhagirath's relentless efforts, a small current of Ganga flowed to the earth. She followed him wherever he went. As Bhagirath was the reason behind Ganga's arrival to the earth, she is known as Bhagirathi. She is also known as other names such as Alaknanda, Mandakini, Jahnvi and Gandaki. She is also considered a daughter of Himalayas.

Religious importance:

The river Ganga is mentioned in several Hindu scriptures such as Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata. It is personified and worshipped as a Goddess by Hindus. They believe that if they take a bath in the river on certain occasions, their sins will be washed away and they will attain salvation. They travel from distant places to immerse the ashes of their loved ones (after they are dead) in the waters of the Ganga so that their soul will be purified.

Several sacred religious places including Haridwar, Prayag, and Kashi and hundreds of temples are situated on the banks of the Ganga. Hindus carry sacred water from the river Ganga that is sealed in copper pots after making the pilgrimage to such places. It is also believed that drinking Ganga's water also cures illness and cleanse a person's soul. It is a custom that whenever a person is dying, he is offered the water of Ganga so that his past sins will be washed away. That is why most Hindu families always keep a vial of water from the Ganga in their houses.

The ancient scriptures mention that the water of Ganga carries the blessings of Sri Vishnu's feet; hence Mother Ganga is also known as Vishnupadi, which means "Emanating from the Lotus feet of Supreme God Sri Vishnu." Also, her proximity with Sri Shiva and accomplished sages have made her more divine and pure.

Historical Importance:

The mighty Ganga, more than 1500 miles long, originates in the mountains of Himalayas and flows in south-eastern direction through the plains of North Bharat (India) and merges into the Ocean at the Bay of Bengal. It is because of that the Bay of Bengal is also called as 'GangaSagar'. At some places it is spread like a ocean where you can not see other end.

The land along the banks of the Ganga has been intensely cultivated. It is particularly fertile because of the sediment periodically deposited by the floodwaters of the river. There are hundreds of swamps and lakes on its banks. Water from the Ganga has the recursive property. Any other water mixed with even the minutest quantity of Ganga water becomes Ganga water, and inherits its healing and other holy properties. Also, despite its many impurities, Ganga water doesn't rot or stink if stored for several days.

Some of the most important festivals and religious congregations are celebrated on the banks of the river Ganga. Kumbh Mela, which is the biggest gathering of the people, is one of them.

Triveni Sangam

Saraswati and Yamuna are another most sacred rivers in Bharat. And Prayag (Alahabad) is a place where all three rivers - Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati - meet. It is called as triveni sangam, literally means junction of three rivers. Nowadays, Saraswati river is not visible. But the scriptures have lot of references about this river. Some say that is flowing underground.

All in all, the river Ganga is the most sacred river for Hindus. She is like a mother who embarasses her children evethough they are dirty and nourishes them. In your next trip to Bharat, try to visit few spiritual places on the banks of the Ganga and feel how Hindus have a lot of shraddha for this river.



The Great Poet Kalidasa

Whenever we think about a poetry, the first name comes into our mind is William Shakespeare. Yes! Indeed! William Shakespeare was an English poet and one of the greatest writers of the Western world. But, do you know that even long before Shakespeare, there lived a great poet of similar level, named Kalidasa, in Bharat (India)? Let us learn more about him.

In his earlier life, Kalidasa was a normal person without any extraordinary qualities. He married to a smart and beautiful princess. The princess, by mistake, took him as a smart and intellectual person. But, soon she realized that the Kalidasa was a stupid guy. Apparently, she left him. Humiliated Kalidasa went to the river to suicide. There, he saw a woman washing clothes, pounding them on the rock. The rock was smoothened because of scrubbing and pounding clothes on it. He thought, *"If a rock can be smoothened by constantly scrubbing clothes on it, I can also sharpen my mind by constant study and practice."* Then, he dropped the idea of suicide, studied hard and became a great poet and writer. It is said that he was blessed by the Goddess Kali. His original name was different, but since he was a devotee of Kali, he was called as Kalidasa. He was a great devotee of Sri Shiva too.

Kalidasa was one of the greatest poets, writers and dramatists of Bharat. His most of the literature is written in a classic language Sanskrit. There are no authentic details about his birth-place, but it is clear that he lived in a city of Ujjayini (today's Ujjain) located in central Bharat and he was at the court of the emperor Vikramaditya. He was considered as one of the navaratna (nine jewels - nine most accomplished or scholar men of that time). Even today also there is a Kalidasa academy in Ujjayini dedicated to Kalidasa and his works.

Kalidasa has made a distinct and glorious contribution to the Sanskrit literature. Just like our scriptures like Vedas and Puranas and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, his literature vividly describes the battle between the good and the evil and portray the virtues like devotion, selfless love, heroism, sacrifice, cultured living, wisdom, intelligence, sense of humanity, etc. He has pictured in his works the beauty in life and pondered upon how we can give pleasure to others by generous and graceful behavior. His portrayals are dramatic and heart-warming; his wordpower is unique. In a few words he was capable of bringing out the

entire meaning that he intended. His writings touchingly show up a noble, meaningful mode of life for the people to pursue. His works are an intellectual treat to thinkers and common readers alike.

Some of Kalidasa's famous plays are Malavikagnimitram (pertaining to the king Agnimitra and a lovely lady Malavika) and Abhijanashakuntalam (the recognition of shakuntala - pertaining to the king Dushyanta and a beautiful lady Shakuntala). These both plays are translated into various Bharatiya languages and other languages such as English and German.



In addition to his plays, Kalidasa wrote two epic poems Raghuvamsha (Dynasty of Raghu) and Kumarasambhava (Birth of Kumar Kartikeya), as well as the Ritusamhara (The Exposition on the Seasons) and lyrical Meghaduta (Cloud Messenger). Raghuvamsha describes the noble Raghu dynasty (Shri Ram and his ancestors). In Meghaduta, he has described various parts of the country Bharat including mountains, rivers, villages and prominent cities very beautifully. No doubt, before writing Meghaduta, he must have traveled widely across the length and breadth of the land, seen those places, talked to the people and studied their modes of living.

In addition to being a great poet, Kalidasa is believed to be a good astrologer too. "Uttara Kaalamritam" a work on astrology is attributed to him and it is said that as a result of his worship of goddess Kali, the predictions given in this book were absolutely correct.

Kalidasa, such a great scholar, who had an excellent combination of art-consciousness, unmatched wordpower and an unparalleled capacity for vivid portrayal in his works, was popularly known as kavikulguru (preceptor of all poets). Kavya and shastra will remain until the end of human-being and name and fame of Kalidasa will remain until the end of kavya and shastra.



The Concise Story of Mahabharata

The Mahābhārata, is the greatest, longest and one of the two major sanskrit epics of ancient India, the other being the Rāmāyana. With more than 74,000 verses, plus long prose passages, or some 1.8 million words in total, it is one of the longest epic poems in the world. It contains eighteen parvas or sections. This wonderful book was composed by sage Vyasa. The story revolves around two sets of paternal cousins (the princes of the Kuru dynasty), the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Long time ago, King Shantanu of the Kuru dynasty ruled over North central India from his capital city of Hastinapur. He had three sons Devavrata (from the river Goddess Ganga), Chitrangad, and Vichitravirya (from his second wife Satyawati). Devavrata is also known as Bheeshma for the terrible oath he took of being celibate all his life and so, he had no children. Chitrangad died at a young age in battle and he too had no children. Vichitravirya was married to Ambika and Ambalika (princesses of Kashi). Ambika gave birth to Dhritarashtra who was born blind. Ambalika gave birth to Pandu. Dhritarashtra was married to Gandhari (Princess of Gandhar). Pandu had two wives Kunti and Madri. Though Dhritarashtra was the elder son, he could not become king as he was blind and so, Pandu was made king.

The Pandavas and the Kauravas:

One day while hunting, Pandu killed one of two deers who were in a playful mood. The other deer (who was a sage) cursed Pandu that he would die if he tried to have children. Pandu became very sad. He handed over the kingdom to Dhritarashtra and went to the forest with both his wives. In the forest, Kunti told Pandu that she knew a secret mantra with the help of which she could get a son from any God that she calls upon. So Kunti used the mantra to get three sons, Yudhishtira the righteous (from the god Dharma), Bhima of prodigious strength (from the wind god), and Arjuna the warrior (from the king of the gods Indra). Kunti then taught the mantra to Madri who used it to get two sons Nakula and Sahdev, the twins who were known for their good looks (from the Ashwin kumars Gods). The five sons of Pandu were called the Pandavas. Back in the palace at Hastinapur, Dhritarashtra had hundred sons (the eldest of them was Duryodhana) and one daughter. The children of Dhritarashtra were called the Kauravas.

The house of Wax:

When the Pandavas were still very young, Pandu and Madri both died in the forest. So, Kunti came back to Hastinapur with the five princes. The Pandavas and Kauravas grew up together in the palace and got their education from Guru Dronacharya. The Kauravas (especially Duryodhana) were not happy about the Pandavas being in the palace as the Pandavas were righteous and loved by all. Yudhishtir, the eldest of the brothers, was made the crown prince of Hastinapur. This particularly displeased Duryodhana as he wanted to be the king after his father. Shakuni, the maternal uncle of the Kauravas, helped and advised Duryodhana in plotting to get rid of the Pandavas.

Once, the people of Hastinapur invited the crowned prince Yudhishtira, his brothers and mother Kunti to the annual city fair. At the site of the fair, Duryodhana had a palace of wax built for the Pandavas to stay. He had planned to set the palace on fire when the Pandavas were asleep in the palace. However, the Pandavas were warned by their uncle Vidur, who sent them a miner to dig a tunnel from the palace to the forest. Hence, the Pandavas were able to escape the fire and go into hiding in the forest. During their stay in hiding as Brahmins, the Pandavas met Krishna, their cousin, friend, advisor and guide.

Marriage with Draupadi and making of Indraprastha:

During the exile, the Pandavas were informed of a swayamwara, a marriage competition, which was arranged for the hand of the Panchala princess Draupadi. The Pandavas participated in the competition in disguise as Brahmins. The task was to string a mighty steel bow and shoot the eye of a rotating fish target on the ceiling while looking at its reflection in water below. Most of the princes failed, being unable to lift the bow. Arjuna, however, succeeded. When he returned with his bride, Arjuna went to his mother, saying, "*Mother, look what we have brought!*". Kunti, not noticing the princess, told Arjuna, "*Arjuna! whatever you have brought, share with your brothers.*" To ensure that their mother never utters a falsehood, the brothers considered Draupadi as a common wife.

After the wedding, on the request of the elders of the family, the Pandava brothers were invited back to Hastinapur. However, Duryodhana was not ready to give back the Pandavas their right to the kingdom. Hence, the kingdom was split and the Pandavas were given the area of Indraprastha (present Delhi) to rule. Indraprastha grew fabulously under the rule of Pandavas. The Pandavas built a new palace in Indraprastha.

Soon, Yudhishtir carried out a Rajasuya Yagna ceremony; he was thus recognized as the greatest among kings. They invited Kauravas to Indraprastha

for the Yagna. Duryodhana walked round the palace and by mistake took a glossy floor for water, and did not step in. Then, he saw a real pond. However, assuming that it was not a water, he stepped in and fell in the water. Draupadi laughed at him. He was humiliated. On returning to Hastinapur, he decided to teach the Pandavas a lesson for insulting him by taking Indraprastha from them.

The dice game and the Pandavas in exile:

Sakuni (Duryodhana's uncle) asked Duryodhana to invite Yudhishtir for a dice game. Shakuni had a boon that the dice he throws would always fall in his favour. Yudhishtira could not decline a royal invitation. He played a dice game with Duryodhana and lost all his wealth and his kingdom to Duryadhana. He then even gambled his brothers and his wife, and lost them. He finally gambled himself and lost himself too. All became the servants of Kauravas. The jubilant Kauravas insulted them in their helpless state. They even tried to disrobe Draupadi in front of the entire court. However, Sri Krishna appeared and saved her.

Dhritarashtra, Bhishma, Vidur, Dronacharya and other elders in the court were aghast at the situation, and negotiated a compromise. The Pandavas were required to go into exile for 12 years, and for one year more must remain hidden. If discovered by the Kauravas, they will be forced into exile for another 12 years. The Pandavas spend twelve years in exile. Many adventures occur during this time. They also prepare alliances for a possible future conflict. They spend their final year in disguise in the court of Virata, and are discovered after the end of the year. At the end of their exile, they try to negotiate a return to Indraprastha. However, this fails, as Duryodhana objects that they were discovered while in hiding, and that no return of their kingdom was agreed. War becomes inevitable.

THE BATTLE OF KURUKSHETRA

The two sides summon vast armies to their help, and line up at Kurukshetra for a war. Before the battle, Arjuna, seeing himself facing great-uncle Bheeshma and his teacher Drona on the other side, has doubts about the battle and he fails to lift his Gandiva bow. Krishna wakes him up to his call of duty in the famous Bhagvad Gita section of the epic. The Kurukshetra War lasted eighteen days. The war was fought only during daylight hours and fighting ceased at sunset. Bheeshma, Drona, Karna, and Shalya were the commanders in turn of the Kaurava army. Druthadyumna was the commander of the Pandava army. At the end of the 18th day, only ten warriors survived the war, the five Pandavas, Yuyutsu, Satyaki, Ashwattama, Kripacharya and Kritvarma.

Yudhishtira was crowned king of Hastinapur. He renounced the throne after ruling for more than 30 years, passing on the crown to Arjuna's grandson Parikshit. He then left for the Himalayas with Draupadi and his brothers in

what was to be their last journey. Draupadi and all four of the Pandavas, except Yudhisthira died during the journey. Yudhisthira however, being of pious heart, was invited by Dharma to enter the heavens as a mortal.

SECTIONS (PARVAS) OF THE MAHABHARATA WRITTEN BY VYASA

Parva Title	Contents
1 Adi-parva	Introduction, birth and upbringing of the princes.
2 Sabha-parva	Life at the court, the game of dice, and the exile of the Pandavas. Maya Danava erects the palace and court (sabha), at Indraprastha.
3 Vana-Parva	The twelve years in exile in the forest (aranya).
4 Virata-parva	The year in exile spent at the court of Virata.
5 Udyoga-parva	Preparations for war.
6 Bhishma-parva	The first part of the great battle, with Bhishma as commander for the Kauravas.
7 Drona-parva	The battle continues, with Drona as commander.
8 Karna-parva	The battle again, with Karna as commander.
9 Shalya-parva	The last part of the battle, with Shalya as commander.
10 Sauptika-parva	How Ashvattama and the remaining Kauravas killed the Pandava army in their sleep (Sauptika).
11 Stri-parva	Gandhari and the other women lament the dead.
12 Shanti-parva	The crowning of Yudhisthira, and his instructions from Bhishma
13 Anusasana-parva	The final instructions (anusasana) from Bhishma.
14 Ashvamedhika-parva	The royal ceremony of the ashvamedha conducted by Yudhisthira.
15 Ashramavasika-parva	Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti leave for an ashram, and eventual death in the forest.
16 Mausala-parva	The infighting between the Yadavas with maces (mausala).
17 Mahaprasthanika-parva	The first part of the path to death (mahaprasthana "great journey") of Yudhisthira and his brothers.
18 Svargarohana-parva	The Pandavas return to the spiritual world (svarga).



Bharatiya Languages

Language, music and arts are few of the key things that form the basis of a civilization and culture. These have been passed on through generations. Furthermore, language is one of the most visible factors of any culture or community. It is the medium through which people get close. You feel more propinquity with the people who speak your language.

Our spiritual land, Bharat, is truly a multi-linguistic land. There is hardly any other country that speaks so many languages. With more than 18 official languages and more than two thousand different dialects, Bharatiya languages can get a bit confusing. Yet, each dialect and language can be tracked back to the same mother language called Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is an ancient Bharatiya language that is still in use today. Many Hindu religious texts were written in Sanskrit such as the Vedas, Mahabharata, Ramayana and many other scriptures. These are still read in Sanskrit by many all around the world. It is still unknown how old the Sanskrit is. But it can surely be traced all the way back to earlier than 2500 B.C. Today, Sanskrit is no more a spoken language but it still exists like Latin in the western countries. Now people have again started taking interest to learn Sanskrit to understand the knowledge mentioned in old Sanskrit scriptures. One of our affiliates, Samskar Bharati, is engaged in promoting Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is the basis of almost all other Bharatiya languages. Most of the languages slowly developed from Sanskrit with few exceptions. Few languages are independently developed such as Tamil. "How did these languages come into existence?" There could be several reasons. As people started to move across Bharat and live in different areas, they began to form their own dialect or way of speaking. For example, people in Gujarat developed Gujarati, whereas the people of Calcutta began to speak Bengali. This exercise also might have been encouraged due to the complexity in ancient languages (Sanskrit).

Most of the languages are vibrant with long literary tradition. Not only they developed their own literature but also most of the ancient literature and religious scriptures also got translated into various different languages.

Shown below are regions in Bharat and their languages.

Regions	Language
Northern (most of the northern states)	Hindi, Panjabi, Kashmiri
Southern (Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh)	Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu
Eastern (North-East states such as Assam, W. Bengal)	Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Manipuri
Western (Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Goa)	Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani

Although variety of languages, due to their origin in Sanskrit, they are not all that different from each other. Most of the languages share the same script. They are all written in either Devanagari or Brahmi. There are also few languages which do not have any name or script. They are only spoken languages! Those languages are mainly practiced in the tribal areas of Bharat.

Not only is the script alike but many times even the pronunciation of the languages are similar. There are only a few differences in how some of the words might be said.

Hindi	Marathi	Gujarati
Ghar (Home)	Ghar	Gher
Lamba (Long)	Laamb	Lambu
Din (Day)	Divas	Divus

Regardless of each state having a state language of its own, Bharat (India) can still communicate over state boundaries without too much of a hassle. This is because they share a national language called Hindi. Hindi is also very similar to all other languages and is also written in Devanagari script.

Though many languages are in practice in Bharat, all stand for a homogeneous culture (Hindu Culture). No Bharatiya language try to eradicate or dominate any other language. They all live together in harmony. New generations not only learn their mother language, but also regional language as well as national language. This is the essence of the great Bharatiya languages.



Schools in Bharat teach more than 58 different languages. Bharat (India) has newspapers or periodicals in more than 87 languages, radio programmes in 71, and films in 15.

Bharatiya Languages and their literature

Bharat (India) is a land of diversity. In spite of diversity, there lies the eternal unity propounded by our Scriptures like Vedas, Upanishads and our Rishis. A very notable example of diversity of Bharat is various languages spoken by Bharatiya people. For Example, Hindi is widely spoken in Northern parts of Bharat, whereas the languages like Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu are spoken in Southern parts. We will see the speciality of some of these languages.

Hindi is the national language of Bharat. It is widely Spoken in Northern states of Bharat like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Uttaranchal, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Hindi language is written in Devanagiri Script and is rich in literature and religious texts. Some of the well known texts written in Hindi are “Ramcharit manas” written by Tulsidas, ‘Nirmala’ and “Godan” by Premchand and poetry by Kabir and Mira-bai.

Hindi is easy to learn and is derived from Sanskrit. And since it is also spoken by majority of people in Bharat, it is the national language of Bharat. Hindi has different dialects such as Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Marwari, Braj, etc.

Tamil is a language spoken in South Bharat. It is the state language of Tamilnadu (A state in southern part of Bharat) and one of the oldest languages of Bharat. Tamil, like Hindi, is also very rich in literature and grammar. It is also spoken in other countries like Srilanka, Mauritius, Singapore and Malaysia. One of the greatest literatures of Tamil is Thirukkural written by Tamil saint Thiruvallavur. The earliest literature in Tamil is the Sangam poetry - regarded by many Tamils as the voice of the Tamil in its origin. Tamil is written in the vaTTezuttu script.

Gujarati is another Bharatiya language spoken majorly in the state of Gujarat. Gujarati speakers also reside in many other countries, principally Pakistan, Singapore, Kenya, Fiji, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The Gujarati Script was adapted from Devanagari Script. The earliest known document in the Gujarati Script is a manuscript dating from 1592 and the Script first appeared in print in 1797. There were many poets in Gujarat who enriched the Gujarati language with their excellent literary works. Notable among them is Narsingh Mehta.

Bengali language is a spoken widely in the eastern state of Bharat called West Bengal. Bengali is the national language of present day country Bangladesh which once was a part of Bharat before 1947. Several famous poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Gupta, Sukumar Roy, are from Bengal. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a famous Bengali writer wrote 'Vande Mataram' which has inspired millions of Bharatiya during the freedom struggle and even after that. 'Vande mataram' is actually extracted from his Bengali literary work called "Aanand math". Bengali is written in the alphasyllabary(also called syllabic alphabet or abugida), a Brahmi Script similar to the Devanagari alphasyllabary used for Sanskrit and many Bharatiya languages.

Marathi is another prominent Bharatiya language widely spoken in the state of Maharashtra. Marathi is said to be a descendent of Maharashtri which was the Prakrit spoken by people residing in the region of Maharashtra. The Script used in Marathi is called 'balbodh' which is a modified version of Devnaagari Script. There are approximately ninety million speakers of Marathi in the Maharashtra state. Marathi's grammar and syntax is primarily based on Sanskrit. Marathi literature started with religious writings by the saint-poets belonging to Mahanubhava and Warkari sects. Mahanubhava saints used prose as their main medium, while Warkari saints preferred poetry as the medium. Social reformers like saint-poet Tukaram transformed Marathi into an enriched literary language. Sant Ramdas's Dasabodh and Manache Shlok are famous literary works of Marathi.

There are several other languages which are prominent in Bharat and rich in literature. Try to find more information about them.

In spite of all these diversities, most of the Bharatiya languages are derived from the ancient language Sanskrit, which can be considered as world's oldest and rich language in terms of Grammar, Vocabulary and all other aspects.





Great Personalities



Young Narendra

Narendra was born on 12th January 1863 in Calcutta city of Eastern India. His parents were Vishwanath Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. He had a great respect for both of them. He used to say to his friends, *"There is no one as ready to make sacrifices as the mother. She must have the highest place not only in the home but also in society."* On many occasions, he differed with his father's thoughts, but he never ever showed disrespect to him. Vishwanath Datta was a busy man, but whenever he found time, he advised Narendra: *Fear no one as long as you walk on the path of Truth and the Dharma (virtue).*

Narendra was very lively and naughty. When Narendra stepped into boyhood, his naughtiness grew. He was a natural fearless leader of the children in the neighborhood. His companions bowed to his decision always. He never fell into wrong beliefs and superstitions unlike his friends. From his childhood, he practiced meditation. For him it was a sport. As he meditated he became oblivious of the whole world. Not even a lizard or a snake moving near him could disturb his concentration.

Narendra respected sannyasis or ascetics. He would give away anything to anybody if asked for. Once on his birthday he gave away his new clothes. He would throw to passing by beggars anything he had. The spirit of sacrifice and renunciation was already blossoming in him.

Narendra's mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi would tell him the stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He would not sleep unless she told him a story. He had great reverence for Sri Hanuman and Sri Shiva. Once he sat before the image of Sri Shiva, with his body all smeared with ash. His perplexed mother asked him, *"Naren, what's all this?"* He smiled and said, *"Mother, I'm Sri Shiva."*

Young Narendra:

By 1880, Narendra passed his matriculation and joined a college. His thirst for knowledge had no limitations. He would read not only the books of prescribed courses but also anything he found in the library. In his young age, he read history, science, western philosophy, arts and all kinds of religious books. He had an amazing memory! He would remember everything by reading once.

As Narendra advanced in his studies, he developed several doubts about God's creation and His very existence!! He was searching for the Truth. He placed his doubts before eminent scholars and sought their guidance. These scholars excelled in debate. But their logic and philosophy did not convince him. Their line of thinking was stale. Narendra would ask them only one question: *"Have you seen God?"* And none of them could firmly say that they had seen the God.

Search for a Guru:

Once somebody told Narendra that there was a priest in the temple of Goddess Kali, named Sri. Ramakrishna. He was not a scholar. But he was a great devotee of Goddess Kali. It was being said of him that he had realized God. Scholars who went to him became his disciples. Once, Narendra also went there with his friends. He carefully listened to Sri Ramakrishna.

As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he was thrilled with joy. Indistinct thoughts came in his mind. He was extremely happy to see the attractive and charming personality of Narendra as if he was waiting his whole life to meet him! He patted Narendra on the back and said, *"My child, why are you so late? Do you know how much I have been craving for you?"* His behavior puzzled Narendra. He thought the elderly man was mad. But he did not express anything. One thing he surely realized that this man (Sri Ramakrishna) was different than others.

After a couple of meetings, Narendra directly asked Sri Ramakrishna, *"Have you seen God!?"* Sri. Ramakrishna replied, *"Of course I have. I have seen him just as I'm looking at you. I have even talked to Him. I can show Him to you. But who has a desire to see God nowadays?"* Narendra was surprised. He wasn't expecting this answer from him. He eagerly asked, *"Well then! Will you show me?"* Sri Ramakrishna said, *"Why not? Let the right time come. I will show you the God! To meet the God, you will have to give up all your desires and surrender to Him."*

Narendra accepted Sri Ramakrishna as a Guru. He started visiting the temple regularly to meet Sri. Ramakrishna. He learned a lot from his Guru. Earlier he had a strong objection on murti/image worship. But Sri Ramakrishna's teachings forced him to believe in murti



They alone LIVE, who live for OTHERS, the rest are more DEAD than alive.

- Swami Vivekananda

worship. Narendra served his Guru in all possible ways. Because of his charming personality and grasping power, soon he became dear to everyone. Needless to say that he was famous among Ramakrishna's disciples too.

In 1884, Narendra passed the BA degree examination. During that time his father passed away and poverty hit the family immediately after the father's death. In this difficult time, Narendra took care of his family. Many a day he fasted so that his mother and his brothers and sisters might have something to eat. To take care of family's financial needs, he accepted a profession of teaching at Vidyasagar School in Calcutta. Despite this difficult time, he never forgot to meet Ramakrishna regularly.

Sri Ramakrishna transferred all his spiritual knowledge and powers to Narendra. Now Narendra became "Swami Vivekananda". Ramakrishna advised him, "*Naren! I have given you everything what I had and become a pauper. Use his knowledge for the good and service of the mankind.*" At this time, Narendra was only 22 years of age. After a sad demise of Sri Ramkrishna, he took care of all his disciples.

Vivekananda did many great things in his life. He went to America and England to extend the spiritual knowledge of India to the western countries. He also attended the conference of religions in Chicago where he won audience in his maiden speech. He received overwhelmed response everywhere.

In Bharat (India), he preferred to help the poor and the needy in every possible way rather than giving a speech. For the service of mankind, he established Ramakrishna Ashram. Throughout his life, he travelled throughout Bharat (India) to spread the knowledge of the Vedanta and help his countrymen (Indians).

After the relentless efforts for his mission, on 4th July 1902, Vivekananda breathed his last and attained eternal bliss. Although Swami Vivekananda is no longer in this world, his legacy continues today. His writings, speeches, thoughts, and life have inspired millions of Hindus around the world and will continue to inspire coming generations.



Parivraajaka Swami Vivekananda

There was a Conference of Religions in Chicago on 11th September 1893. Thousands of delegates and scholars belonging to different countries and different religions of the world had gathered at the conference. A young valiant Hindu monk from Bharat (India) was also amongst them. Looking at his age, all other delegates were ignoring him assuming that he was immature and inexperienced. He was not even getting a chance to talk. He himself was little shy as it was his first time and tensed as he was not prepared unlike others.

At last, this young fellow Hindu monk got a chance to speak. He prayed fervently to his Guru and stood up to speak. Now he was confident and determined!! He began speaking in his pleasing voice: "*Brothers and Sisters of America,*" And what a wonder! There was a thunderous applause; it lasted for a full three minutes! With his short speech, he not only won the audience but also the newspapers (media) and common American people. Who was this young fellow? What was his name? His full name was **Narendra Vishwanath Datta**, profoundly known as **Swami Vivekananda**.

Swami Vivekananda was born on 12th January 1863 in Calcutta city of Eastern India. He had a thirst for knowledge since childhood. He would read anything that he found in the library which included history, science, western philosophy, arts and all kinds of religious books. He had an amazing memory! He would remember everything by reading once.

In search of a God, once Vivekananda met Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Realizing Ramakrishna's spiritual powers, he accepted Ramakrishna as a Guru. Ramakrishna transferred all his spiritual powers and knowledge to Vivekananda and advised him to use them for the service of mankind.

After a sad demise of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, Swami Vivekananda led the fellow disciples and formed the Baranagar monastery (Matha). In 1888, he left the monastery as a *parivraajaka* - a Hindu sanyasin life wandering mostly on foot, without fixed abode and without ties. He relentlessly travelled the length and breadth of Bharat (India) for five years, visiting important centers of learning, acquainting himself with the diverse religious traditions and different patterns

of social life. He visited many spiritual places such as Ayodhya, Kashi, Vrindavan, Himalayas. He also visited the great places of social and historical importance. And what did he see? He saw that the masses submerged in deep poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, and superstition. He questioned himself, *“How can I give the knowledge of Vedanta to those who are grasped with hunger and poverty. Religion can’t be taught on the empty stomach. I should feed them first. I should cover their half-naked bodies first and then teach spirituality.”*

In his journey to places, Swami Vivekananda met lot of intellectuals and eminent and noble persons such as Maharaja Khetri and Diwan (chief) of Porbandar city in western India. All advised him to go abroad to attend the Conference of Religions at Chicago in 1893. He thought it was a wonderful chance to extend the spiritual knowledge of India to the Western world.



Swami Vivekananda began planning to go to America. He managed to get all essentials and he was all set to go to concur the world! In the beginning, he had a very tough time as he lost his belongings and essential papers. He had to sleep on the roads and go on empty stomach for many days. But a few good Americans such as John Henry Wright and Mrs. George Hails helped him out. John Henry managed to get essential papers for him to attend the conference. Mrs. George Hails took care of his financial needs.

At last the day of the conference came. Thousands of delegates belonging to different religions and countries had gathered. Swami Vivekananda was the youngest amongst them. Everyone was well prepared with a written speech unlike Vivekananda. He got a last chance to speak. By his short speech, he not only won the audience but also newspapers (media) and common American people. In his speech he said, *“People born in different religions finally reach the same God, as river born in different places finally reaches the sea.”* He emphatically declared that no religion is superior and none is inferior. The delegates, every one of them, praised his speech. Newspapers carried his photographs as well as his speech. And he became a world famous Hindu monk in one night!

In later days people were eager to listen to his speech. He became the darling of the crowds. Whenever he rose to speak there was deafening applause. He was invited for speech by various clubs, organizations, and universities and even by rich people. On an invitation, he also went to England. In England also he received overwhelming response. Many became his disciples. Margaret Nivedita was one of them.

Swami Vivekananda spent four years in America and England. During this time, even though in abroad, he was constantly thinking about his countrymen; the poor people of Bharat (India). He spent many sleepless nights remembering them. He returned back to Bharat (India) in 1897.

By the time Swami Vivekananda arrived India, his fame was already spread far and wide. A grand welcome was awaiting him at Madras (today's Chennai city of Southern India). He was carried in a procession and numerous addresses and garlands were presented to him.

Swami Vivekananda was very well aware about the condition of Bharat (India). He said. *"My countrymen need food and clothes for living. How can I teach them while they are struggling with basic needs?"* He advised his fellow disciples to do the service. He repeatedly told them that it was mere selfishness to look for personal salvation as long as there is a single sorrow-stricken man in India. In 1897, he started an organization, Ramakrishna Mission, in Calcutta to achieve his mission and goal.

After the relentless efforts for his mission and goal, on 4th of July 1902, Swami Vivekananda breathed his last and attained eternal bliss. Although Vivekananda is no longer in this world, his words live. His teachings and message have continued to inspire millions of Hindus.



There is a rock on the sea-shore of Kanyakumari; Southern end of Bharat (India). It is around 500 yards away from mainland; inside the sea. On this rock, a Hindu Monk, Swami Vivekananda meditated about the past, present and future of the India and attained enlightenment. A thought of attending Conference of World Religions in America occurred to him while he was sitting on the rock. After delivering the speech at the conference, he became the world famous. In 1970, a beautiful temple (Vivekananda Rock Memorial) was constructed on the rock to honor Swami Vivekananda. It has become the most famous place in Kanyakumari.

Shree Guruji Golwalkar

A young man, just graduated from college, was surrounded by various questions about his future and career. One question was always bugging him, "What is the goal of my life? Should I do a job and get married just like everyone does?" His parents wanted him to do a job and get married. Doctorji was meticulously trying to bring him in the Sangh fold. He liked Doctorji and his Sangh as well; but he was more leaned towards spirituality. And at one fine morning, he disappeared! Quietly, without telling anybody, not even to his parents, he went to his Guru - Swami Akhandananda and expressed his desire of becoming a "Sannyasi". But Swamiji sent him back to work with Doctorji. Who was this young man? Yes! Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar! Our Guruji!

Childhood:

Madhav was born in 1906 at Ramtek near Nagpur city of Bharat (India). February 19th was his birth-day. To his parents, he was their beloved 'Madhu'. Whenever his parents sat for worship, little Madhav too sat beside them and learnt the Mantras by heart. Just like Swami Vivekananda, Madhu had a stupendous memory. He could recall whatever he once heard and read. He had a thirst to learn and understand everything that came on his way.

School years:

Madhav was rather mischievous, but always good in studies as well as in sports. He would read his textbook assignments at home, using his time at school to study other subjects. However, he never lagged behind in his school studies. In fact, he was always the first to reply to any question asked by the teachers. Madhu was an exceptional student in middle school and high school. In addition, Madhu's high school gym instructor was particularly proud because Madhu excelled in sports and athletics as well.

As Madhav grew older, his father was transferred to different places from time to time. As a result, Madhav lived in several different places, but he viewed these as fresh opportunities to enlarge his circle of friends. He would maintain contact through letters with friends after leaving a town. Naturally, he would always be surrounded by his friends. Though his mother tongue was Marathi,

he was well familiar with Samskrit, Hindi, and English too. He wrote letters to his friends in English!

College years:

In 1924, Madhav graduated from the college with a first-class ranking in intermediate science. He later went to Kashi (a city in Eastern Bharat) and joined Benares Hindu University for his bachelor degree. He studied extraneous subjects like sociology, zoology and economics. His room was full of books, and he was always reading. When he was not reading, Madhav would be engaged in discussions with friends, or swimming in the mornings and yogasanas in the evenings. He would also help his friends with their class assignments and studies. He also learned to play flute and sitar. During that time, he studied the literature of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. Despite his extracurricular activities, Madhav completed his Bachelor of Science degree in 1926 and Master of Science degree with distinction in 1928.



Later, Madhav went to Chennai (City in Southern Bharat) to continue his studies, enrolling in a doctoral program in fishery sciences. At about that time, Madhav's father retired and he did not have the income to support him in Madras. With a heavy heart, Madhav returned to Nagpur, without his doctorate.

Madhav came back to Nagpur. During this time, he also came in contact with Doctorji. Doctorji would attract any person towards him through his affability and magnetic personality. Naturally, Madhav liked Doctorji and his Sangh too. Madhavrao keenly observed activities which occurred in the daily Sangh shakha: prayer, exercises, sports, discussions and other intellectual activities conducive to nationalist thinking. These activities were dear to his heart and he became part of the Sangh. During this time, though Madhav shouldered many responsibilities, his mind was wandering somewhere else!

Prof. Golwalkar 'Guruji':

After a short time in Nagpur, Madhav received a letter in May, 1930: "Shri

M. S. Golwalkar is hereby appointed as professor of zoology in Kashi Hindu Vidyapeeth." His parents were overjoyed that their ambition had been fulfilled. Madhav again left for Kashi to become Professor Golwalkar.

As a professor, Madhav was a strict disciplinarian. With his sharp intellect and clarity of thought, he was a class apart from other professors there. Every single activity in his routine had an assigned place and schedule. Having himself experienced poverty in boyhood, he was ever eager to help the poor and needy students in all possible ways. Even though he was a professor of zoology, he tutored needy students in other subjects after hours with a view to helping them. Consequently, he came to be endearingly called as "Guruji."

Turning point:

It is natural for a young employed man in his early twenties to think of his future, whom he would marry, where he would work, and the like. But Guruji was different. On the contrary, he cherished a desire to take to sannyasa, and go to the Himalayas for penance. And at one fine morning, he disappeared! Quietly, without telling anybody, not even to his parents, he went to his Guru - Swami Akhandananda and expressed his desire of becoming a "Sannyasi".

Swami Akhandananda kept Guruji in his Ashram for a few days. But soon he realized that Guruji was made for a noble cause. After consulting with his associate Swami Amitabh Maharaj, he advised Guruji, "Madhav, Sannyasa is not your destiny. Another great cause awaits you." Swamiji thus ordained Guruji for the service of Bharat Mata (Mother India). Now Guruji was completely convinced. He found his goal of life. He gave up his desire of being a "sannyasi" and went back to Nagpur. Doctorji was the happiest person to see Guruji back in Nagpur.

Guruji, then, spent all his life in expanding the Sangh work throughout Bharat (India) as well as outside Bharat. After the sad demise of Doctorji, he assumed the office of Sarasanghachalak (chief) of the Sangh. After becoming a Sarasanghachalak, Guruji steered the Sangh for 33 years (1940-1973) as its guide and philosopher. Shree Guruji breathed his last on 5th June 1973. His life is summed up in these words: "*Mai Nahi, Tu Hi (Not I, but you only).*"



Shree Guruji's inner urge was for spiritual pursuit. Had he not become the Sarasanghachalak of the Sangh, he would have become a Sannyasi.

Shree Guruji - Pioneer of the Sangh

Shree Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (Shree Guruji) was a man of great personality. His inner urge was for spiritual pursuit. But after the advice by his spiritual Guru, Swami Akhandananda, he made up his mind that he would make some concrete contribution for the wellbeing of the country (Bharat), serving the society in a spirit of worship. This needed a specific field of activity. He had already seen Doctorji and experienced his Sangh. Now, he began to take more interest in the work begun by Doctorji. The patriotic instinct, which he had developed in his heart at Kashi, grew further as he came in contact with Sangh.

Doctorji assigned Guruji a responsibility of one shakha in Nagpur. However, he noticed Guruji's inexhaustible enthusiasm and devotion to the Sangh-work. He continued to assign him more and bigger responsibilities. For example, he asked Guruji to go to Mumbai (a city in Western India) as a 'Pracharak' (one who spreads the work). Soon, Guruji became one of the main pillars of Sangh-work.

Guruji - Sarasanghchalak (chief) of the Sangh:

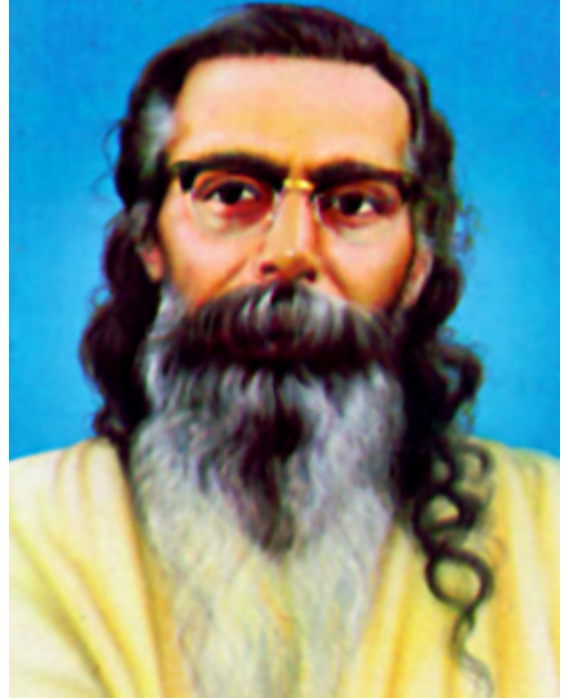
In early 1940, Doctorji suffered illness. His health seemed beyond recovery. Guruji remained with him like a shadow, nursed him, and served him till his end. Doctorji passed on the responsibility of Sangh work to the able shoulders of Guruji after he died on June 21, 1940.

Guruji assumed the office of Sarsanghchalak (Chief) of the Sangh after Doctorji's funeral rites were completed. Guruji was rather new in the Sangh as compared to other associates. He was not much recognized in the India also. This obviously raised doubts in the minds of many well-wishers and others. They were little doubtful about Guruji's capabilities. Someone questioned, "How can Doctorji give such a big responsibility to such a relatively new (junior) person like Guruji?". But soon everyone realized about Guruji's ability and capability and praised Doctorji that he did the right thing by giving leadership of the Sangh to

Shree Guruji has written thousands of letters to his fellow associates and others. He has given hundreds of press statements and delivered countless discourses in his lifetime. Isn't it great?

Guruji.

As Sarasanghchalak, Guruji gave the first message to karyakartas: "Let us not depend on any external instruments or sources of power. Let us draw inspiration from the memory of our beloved leader (Doctorji) and his burning patriotism. Let us fulfill our mission with firm faith and let us strive hard to achieve our objective of ensuring a pride of place to Hindu Rashtra on the world stage." Guruji pursued this goal tirelessly until the very end.



After becoming Sarasanghachalak, Guruji steered the organization for 33 years (1940-1973) as its guide and philosopher. He began the first of several countrywide, meticulously planned tours. During each journey, Guruji was like a wandering sannyasi, spending each night in a different city or village. He ceaselessly participated in camps, rallies, meetings, discussions, and training camps making contact with thousands of young men, educating them about the significance of the Sangh work and instilling in them a missionary zeal for their wholehearted involvement in the task of national rejuvenation. Indeed, in response, thousands of swayamsevaks all over Bharat (India) vowed to dedicate themselves entirely for the Sangh work, on a full-time basis. Thus Sangh Shakhas sprouted even in remote corners of the India.

Guruji had clarity in his thoughts, purposefulness in action, firm faith in mental and physical powers, and a fearless disposition developed through his intellectual integrity. Because of his inspiring personality, apart from the Sangh Shakha network, which spread far and wide, a number of affiliates (organizations) also began to sprout forth one after another spreading Sangh ideology. Few handful names are: Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Bharateeya Mazdoor Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and Bharateeya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram. To all these,

Shree Guruji's inspiring and attractive personality brought thousands of people for his lectures. In those days, only Pandit Nehru (Prime Minister of India) and Shri Guruji pulled such a huge crowd for their lectures.

Guruji was the source-figure and a guide.

In the meantime, Guruji also had to protect the growing Sangh from the hostile and evil elements. The Sangh went through some bitter experiences. During the year 1948, Indian Government put ban on the Sangh for some reasons. Courageous Shri Guruji advised all karyakartas to start Satyagraha (agitation within constitution). His cardinal faith was that "Ultimately Truth alone triumphs." At last, Government had to lift ban on the Sangh. After that, every now and then, evil elements kept trying to harm the Sangh with false accusations and propaganda. But under the able leadership of Shri Guruji, Sangh not only defended itself against them but also emerged as a strong force serving the society. During this time, Shree Guruji personally went through bitter experiences. Despite all these, he never harbored even the slightest bitterness in his minds about those responsible for causing him harm and injustice.

Shri Guruji was not a blind follower of the Hindu principles. He never supported rituals and traditions which were baseless or meaningless. With the pace of time, Hindu society adapted many unacceptable beliefs such as castism and untouchability. Shri Guruji tried to eradicate those things via Sangh and its affiliates.

Because of his intimate contact with the common people and the elite all over Bharat, he always had his finger on the pulse-beat of Bharat (India). He used to quickly analyze the situation and predict about likely dangers or issues or consequences of the current situation in future. Accordingly, he used to forewarn or advise the society and the Government authorities.

Due to relentless traveling for the Sangh work, Shri Guruji gradually developed bodily ailments. In 1969, Doctors identified a cancer in his chest. Though Guruji underwent dreaded operation, he knew that his days were coming to end. Guruji maintained his calm and poise. In spite of his illness, he never deviated but continued working. At the end, he passed on the stewardship to the shoulders of Shri Balasaheb Deoras (Madhukar Dattatreya Deoras).

Guruji breathed his last on 5th June 1973.

Guruji travelled throughout the Bharat at least twice a year for the Sangh work. In those days, he was the only person who used to travel so much.....



Stories of Dr. Hedgewar

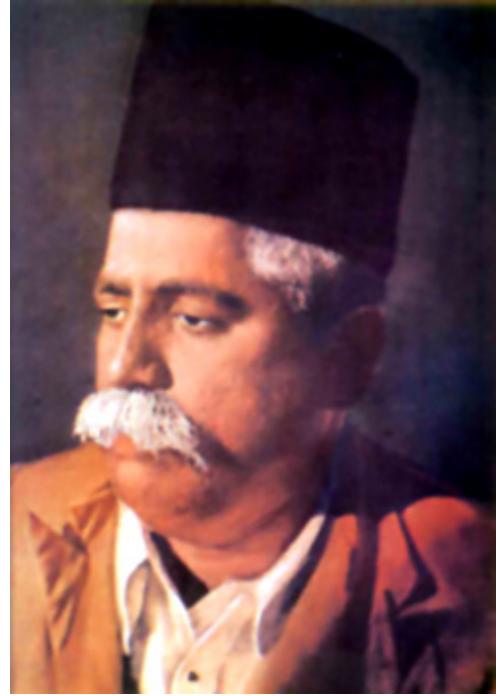
More than 100 years ago, Bharat (India) was under the British rule. On 22nd June of 1897, Queen Victoria of England completed 60 years of her ascent to the British throne. Naturally the British Government had arranged grand functions in all villages, towns and cities of Bharat. Especially in schools, they distributed sweets among the children and children were happily enjoyed them. But amidst all this, one young boy was not happy. He threw away the sweets given to him, and sat alone in a corner brooding.

His elder brother came and asked him, *“Why are you downcast? Didn't you get the sweets?”* *“What's there in that sweet?”* - the boy pointed to the sweets thrown away by him and added, *“But why should we celebrate the jubilee of the Queen who has snatched away our country's freedom?”*

The sweets, which were sweet to others, were bitter for this boy. He was barely eight at that time. Even at such a tender age, he was so patriotic. His name was **Keshav**! The boy was eventually to become famous as Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. He spent all his life in awakening self-respect and patriotism among the Hindus. Following passage describes few incidents of Keshav's life.

This incident indicates the leadership qualities of Keshav and how the idealism and unity that Keshav had inspired into his fellow students that no threats could unsettle their resolve. One day, another great patriot, Lokmanya Shri Tilak was sentenced to undergo 6 years of imprisonment for participating and leading the Freedom Movement of Bharat. This happened when Keshav was a student of Neil city High school at Nagpur. The principal had sternly warned the students from even uttering *“Vande Mataram”* [I bow to the Mother (land)] on the high school premises, and especially when British school inspectors were visiting. Taking this as an indirect blessing, Keshav organized the protest against Shri Tilak's arrest by shouting *“Vande Mataram”*. Accordingly, as soon as the British inspector entered the school, the whole premises resounded with *“Vande Mataram”*, shouted by the students. The British inspector was angered and humiliated. Such kind of

activism was banned in those days. Knowing fully well who had organized this, the principal and the staff members tried their best to persuade, cajole and threaten Keshav's fellow students to testify against Keshav. No one came forward and no one confessed. Angrily, the principal ordered the school to be shut down, threatening the students with the loss of their academic year. Finally, concerned parents negotiated a solution. Keshav was debarred from the school and the school was re-started. The Principal spoke highly of Keshav even after many years!



This incident goes back to the year 1932. Keshav was in his middle age. He was a doctor and people affectionately called him as "Doctorji". One day, Some Muslim fanatics rioted and beat up some Sangh *Swayamsevaks* (sangh attendees) in Nagpur city. The news came as a shock to Doctorji who was then in Wardha city. He immediately returned to Nagpur and began to walk towards the injured *Swayamsevaks'* homes. His path would have taken him through the worst of the rioting areas. His close friends warned him against going. When he did not listen, they implored him to take at least a "Lathi" (Stout Stick) with him for self-defense. Upon this, he said: "*How can such an inanimate stick protect me? Let me see who dares to come forward to attack me!*" Then he set forth, walking and went through the rioting areas. He reached the *swayamsevaks'* homes and arranged for their medical care. He then returned, walking again through the so called "dangerous" areas. Who could have dared to cross paths with such a Lion-like man of courage? Doctorji was not only courageous but also brave and determined and without thinking a bit about himself, he took care of his *swayamsevaks*.

On a Saturday evening, Doctorji and his associates went to another friend's (Shri. Shankar Rao Bharat) house at Adegaon vilage to attend some important ceremony. On the next day morning, back in Nagpur, a Sangh parade was scheduled. In the evening, after attending the ceremony, Doctorji decided to return to Nagpur because he wanted to attend the Sangh parade. He asked his companions, "*Now that the ceremony is over, let us go back to Nagpur*". His companions replied, "*Doctorji, we cannot go back today because there is no transportation. We will have to wait until tomorrow morning*". Doctorji said, "*Well! if there is no transportation,*

we can walk!!". Again his companions questioned, "Nagpur is 32 miles away from this place. How can we walk?" But Doctorji made it a point and his companions could not convince him. They began to walk towards the highway which was 10 miles away from that remote village. While walking in a pitch black night, stumbling on stones, rocks and dense overgrowth, accidentally Doctorji stepped on a sharp, needle-shaped wood fork that lodged itself deep inside his foot, causing intense pain. Steeling himself against it with iron determination, he kept going with his companions and somehow they made to the highway after midnight.

Without taking a rest, they kept walking along the highway towards Nagpur, which was still 22 miles away. After walking a few miles, a late night bus going towards Nagpur came by, and the driver, being from Nagpur, immediately stopped the bus, when he recognized the limping Doctorji in his headlight. He implored Doctorji to come on board along since the bus was extremely over crowded. Doctorji politely refused to board the bus also. He said, "I will come only if all of us in the group are allowed to come on board". In spite of his swollen, bleeding foot, intense pain and exhaustion, Doctorji did not forsake his companions, even when they wanted him to go. Finally, the driver allowed the whole group to come on board. Since there really was no room, some sat on the bus engine, while some others sat on its roof. Somehow they made it to Nagpur in the early morning and attended the Sangh parade.

These incidents indicate that Doctorji (Keshav) was a man of virtue. He possessed great qualities. He was a great patriot, revolutionary and true leader. He was determined and confident. He was strong in mind and in body as well. He was popular among the people. Despite all these, he never posed himself as a great person. On the contrary, he shunned publicity. His life was simple and austere. To inculcate awareness and self-respect among the Hindus and to organize them, he founded an organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) popularly known as Sangh. He sacrificed his entire life to expand the Sangh work. On the morning of 21st June 1940, at the age of 51, Doctorji breathed his last. His life always inspires us.



Sri Rama

Whenever evil prevails and the entire universe is terrified by wicked forces and when there is no way out for the common people, Sri Vishnu comes to the rescue. HE incarnates himself into an appropriate form for the up-liftment of the good and virtuous, destruction of evil and re-establishment the natural law (dharma).

Thousands of thousand years back, the demon king Ravana was challenging righteous. He was wealthy, powerful and the mightiest king at his time. He was very learned and accomplished person too. But he was evil and wicked. He used all his powers and knowledge for himself and his supporters. Naturally, he became a danger for all and Sri Vishnu had to incarnate himself to eliminate Ravana.

Sri Vishnu incarnated Himself as Rama; the oldest son of the King Dashrath – the King of Ayodhya. Dasharath had four sons – Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. All four brothers were learned and brave. Especially, Rama was dearest to all. Rama was married to Sita. To fulfill the desire of his mother Kaikeyi, Rama with his brother Lakshmana and wife Sita, went to the forest for 14 years. During that period, the demon king Ravana abducted Sita and took her to his kingdom Lanka. Rama with the help of another king Sugreev fought with wicked Ravana and his army, defeated them and rescued Sita. Thus, Sri Vishnu, in form of Sri Rama, eliminated the demon Ravana and established the Dharma (natural law) again.

Rama Navami

Rama was born on the 9th day of the Hindu month Chaitra (March-April) in Ayodhya which is situated on the banks of the holy river – sarayu. Navami means 9th day. Since Rama was born on this day, it is called as Rama Navami. Hindus celebrate Rama Navami as a festival. It is dedicated to the memory of Shri Rama. Celebrations begin with a prayer to the Sun early in the morning, chanting Vedic mantras dedicated to Sri Vishnu and offering flowers and fruits to Bhagawan. A special prayer is performed at noon as Rama was born at mid-day (noon). Hindus keep a fast throughout the day, breaking it only at midnight. Public gatherings



called satsang are organized and excerpts from the Ramacharitamanas, a book on Rama describing his powers, achievements, virtues and glory, are recited.

Hindus participate in a Rama Navami procession with a great zeal and passion. The main attraction of the procession is a nicely decorated chariot in which four persons are dressed up as Rama, his brother Lakshmana, his wife Sita and his disciple Hanuman. This chariot is accompanied by several other persons dressed up as Rama's soldiers. In Ayodhya, Rama's birth-place, almost all temples carry such processions. Rama leela (the play depicting the life events of Rama) are also organized at places.

The Ramayana

The Ramayana is one of the two Hindu itihisas (historical narratives loosely termed as epics) attributed to the great sage Valmiki. It consists of 24,000 verses categorized in seven parts (kandas) describing the life of Sri Rama. The name "Ramayana" is a compound of two words "rama" and "ayana (coming)". In short, The Ramayana means - Rama's coming i.e. his story of life. The Ramayana is not just an ordinary story, but contains the teachings of ancient Hindu sages. It was first written in Samskrit, but later poets narrated it in various Bharatiya (Indian) languages. It is popular not only in Bharat (India), but the entire Bharatiya (Indian) sub-continent including south-east countries, particularly Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Malasia, Philippines and Vietnam. It is not just restricted to Hindus only. For instance, Muslims in Indonesia read Ramayana with a great devotion. Lots of Buddhist countries have a profound impact of the Ramayana. It is said that Bhagawan Buddha was a descendent of Sri Rama's lineage.

Is it worth reading Ramayana today?

Today's world is a world of Science and Technology. Men have landed on the moon and now approaching Mars. Life styles and attitudes have changed completely. *Is it really worth reading Ramayana today which was written thousands and thousands of years back? Are teachings from Ramayana really relevant in these days?* These are often repeated questions. Answer is YES! Science may alter the life style of human being; it may bring the materialistic prosperity but what will remain permanent and worthy are "Nature's Laws", "Moral Values". Human nature, emotions, moral values, and problems will remain same today and in future. And the Ramayana and its hero Sri Rama teach the moral values. Sri Rama established the highest standards for the values and his personal and social conduct followed those values. One can look up the Sri Rama's character to identify the solution to any problem in the world. It is worth reading or listening to the Ramayana even now to foster good values/character and to be a good person.



Sri Rama – A Role Model

Rama was one of the most wonderful and charismatic personalities in the Bharatiya (Indian) history. He embodied all the virtues by practicing what he preached. *“Actions speak louder than Words”* was his chief motto. More than his divine powers, his popularity, bravery, courage in face of all adversities, kindness, sense of justice, obedience, intelligence, limitless patience, boundless compassion and steadfast following of dharma (duty) have made him not only popular but endeared him to countless generations of Hindus and non-Hindus.

A Man or God?

One may ask... was Rama a man or God? Well! He was both. He was a man as well as God. He was a God because he was an incarnation of Sri Vishnu. When Sri Vishnu took birth as a Rama, he could have skipped (avoided) the common man's sufferings and daily duties and hence breaking the nature's law. But he didn't break it. Instead he went through all the sixteen samskaras that Hindus have to go through. He enjoyed family life. And just like others, he also suffered in his life and died when his time came. That is why Rama was a man! He was full of virtues and extremely powerful with an ability of doing anything. Thus he was not just a man, but a super-man!

Man of Virtues

Rama was full of virtues. He was a perfect man. He was an ideal son of king Dasharatha, an ideal king, an ideal husband, an ideal brother and an ideal friend. Rama was the epitome of morality, truth, virtue and chivalry. Let us try to learn here some of his virtues.

An ideal son

Rama was an ideal son of his parents (Father – King Dasharath, Mother – Queen Kausalya). He never ever disobeyed his parents. He would do anything to keep his parents happy. He knew that his parents would always do the right thing for him. When his second mother, Kaikeyi, wanted him to give up kingdom and go to the forest, he readily agreed to do so without a moment's hesitation. He knew about the difficulties and dangers in the forest. But just to keep up his father's promises, and mother Kaikeyi's wish, he went to the forest. Besides, he

didn't even develop any bitterness about Kaikeyi. Without batting an eyelid, he sacrificed his palatial comforts, princely rights and all family happiness. He shed all material comforts as though they were dust. He smilingly endured the ardor of forest life for fourteen years but never swerved from his duty towards his parents.

An ideal brother

Rama was an ideal brother. He loved all his three brothers equally. While Rama was in the forest with Sita and brother Lakshmana, Bharata came to the forest to see him and possibly bring him back. When Lakshmana saw Bharata coming, he doubted him. He thought that Bharata's intentions were bad. But Rama was calm. He never ever doubted any of his brothers; neither raised questions about their intentions. He knew that Bharata's intentions were good and he was coming to see him.

Bharata was a son of Kaikeyi. Because of Kaikeyi, Rama had to go in to exile. In this case, any common person would have developed bitterness and anger against them after such experiences. But Rama was an exception. He never developed bitterness or anger against both of them. In contrary, after exile, when he came back to Ayodhya, he touched Kaikeyi's feet first out of three mothers.

In another incident, during the war with the demon Ravana and his army, Lakshmana fought with Indrajit (Ravana's son) and became unconscious. When Rama saw Lakshmana unconscious, he cried like a child and he was sitting by him until he became conscious. Even in exile, he gave preference to Sita and Lakshmana's likings.

An ideal friend

Rama had all qualities required for being an ideal friend. Kishkindha's king Sugreeva and Ravana's brother Vibhishana were his friends. He killed Vali and helped Sugreeva to get his lost kingdom back. During a war with Ravana, his brother Vibhishana came to Rama's sanctuary. Rama gave him not only a protection but also considered him as a friend. After winning the war with Ravana, he could have taken the control of Ravana's kingdom. But, instead of taking the control of Ravana's kingdom, he made Vibhishana a king and handed over Ravana's kingdom to him.

An ideal husband

Rama was an ideal husband of his beloved wife Sita. When he decided to

go in exile, he did not want Sita to follow him because she was not bonded with any promises and possibly she would not bear the hard-life in the forest. He tried to persuade her. But when Sita followed him to the forest, he tried to soothe her life there by giving preferences to her likings. When Sita was missing, he wept like a child. He couldn't hold his emotions and he started asking whereabouts of Sita to everyone including plants and trees. And when he learnt that Sita was abducted by mighty demon king Ravana of Lanka, he went all the way to Lanka, fought valiantly with the Ravana and his army, destroyed them and rescued her. Even though Sita was under Ravana's custody for a long time, he didn't have any doubt about her character.



An ideal king

The very first duty of an ideal king is to take care of his kingdom and people. He is supposed to give up everything for the sake of them. Rama was an ideal king of Ayodhya. While serving the people, he always considered his family secondary. Just because of a man from his kingdom doubted about Sita's character, he gave up her.

Rama was very popular. He achieved this by his innate charm, kindness, generosity and willingness to listen to others' issues and problems. Rama was known to find swift, realistic and just answers for every one. His aura, charm and charisma made everyone feel happy in his presence. Such is the glory of his memory that even now people invoke "Rama Rajya" as the ideal, utopian system. It is a society in which even the most humble may voice their opinions and be noticed. In Rama's kingdom, there were no criminals or oppressors and no one was ever oppressed. Everyone had equal rights, justice was available to all. Taxes were not excessive and everyone had work to occupy them. Rama had assured his people peace and plenty.

Maryada Purushottama

The entire universe is sustained by dharma. One definition of dharma is prescribed discipline or maryada (limitations). Having epitomized the highest

discipline expected of humans, Rama is called Maryada Purushottam (the finest specimen of a disciplined human being). He is an example of the highest of human values, never deviating from the virtuous path in thought and action. Unlike Krishna, Rama lived his life within limitations (maryada) of being a human by not performing any miracles. He was capable of destroying all the demons alone but, he still studied to acquire different powers to fight evil. He also took the help of the Vanaras to find Sita and fight Ravana. His life is an example that by living righteously, any human can do great things and become purushottam (the great among men).

A Warrior

No doubt! Rama was a great warrior. He was second to none in bravery. He stood his ground in all adversities and fought for the cause of righteousness. Rama took his exile as a great challenge to explore new frontiers. Even in the jungles he fought for the rights of the oppressed. Knowing his enemies strong points as well as the weaknesses, Rama sought to rid the society of those who threatened to undermine it.



Physical beauty wanes with time, money is soon spent, fame is soon forgotten but generous deeds, great character and boundless compassion endure for all time. Rama is a good example of that. He will never be forgotten. Because of his gigantic personality, Hindus have great regards for him. Even after thousands of thousand years past, Hindus worship Rama as God and they consider him as a role model for all humans.



Veer Savarkar

Born Leader and Nationalist

Those were the days when India was under the British rule and Indians were fighting for freedom. India - our spiritual land where our roots originated. It is our responsibility to learn more about India, her freedom struggle and Indian Heroes. We should learn the stories of Indian Heroes to appreciate their efforts and sacrifice. The foundation of our generation is based on their sacrifices. Their character and inspirational stories will motivate us to become like them.

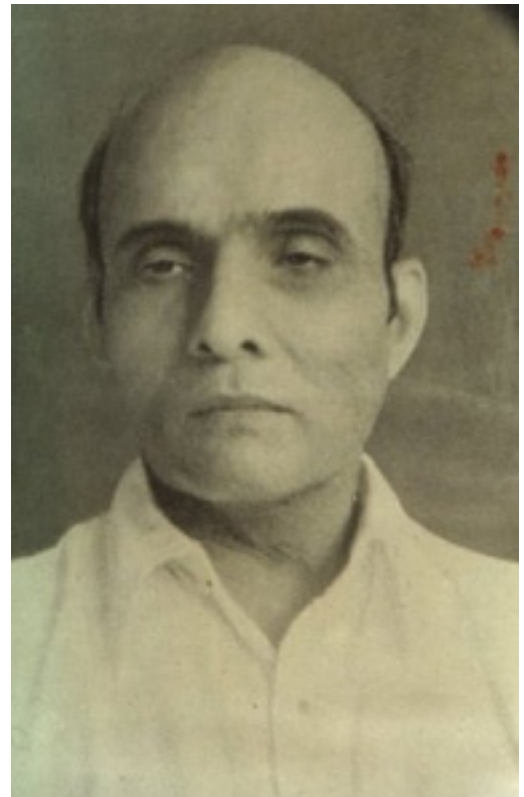
Vinayak Savarkar was such Indian hero during the freedom struggle. He was great orator, prolific writer, historian, poet, philosopher, social worker and revolutionary who devoted his entire life to the cause of the Indian independence movement. He is regarded as one of the greatest revolutionaries in the Indian freedom struggle. In this story we will learn more about Savarkar, the born leader and Nationalist.

Vinayak was born on May 28, 1883 in the village of Bhagur near Nasik city of India. He was influenced by the freedom struggle in British India and got drawn towards it. He lost his father during the plague that struck India in 1899. He married Yamunabai in 1901.

Born Leader

Vinayak could be called a born rebel. He organized a group of kids, Vanarsena, when he was just eleven. He wanted everybody around him to become physically strong and able to face any disasters - natural or man-made. He conducted long tours, hiking, swimming and mountaineering around Nasik.

During his high school days, he used to organize Shivaji Utsav and Ganesh Utsav, started by Lokmanya Tilak (whom Savarkar considered as his Guru) and used these occasions to put up plays on nationalistic themes. He started



writing poems, essays, and plays to inspire people, which he had developed as a passion.

Later Vinayak went to city of Pune for college education and founded the Abhinav Bharat Society. With growing youngsters, he bloomed as a leader as well. In those days, all political activities were banned by the British. He had to undertake all transactions and communications in secret. As a result, he was expelled from hostel and at one point from the college as well. But since he managed to get the prestigious Shivaji scholarship to study law at London, the college authorities had to make way for his scholastic journey!

Savarkar greatly nurtured the idea of bringing out authentic information about the first armed national revolt in 1857. At London, he undertook the task, his mission in life, to create awareness regarding the first Armed National Revolt in India in 1857. Through friends, he could get access to the much-needed first hand information regarding the personalities of the 1857 war. This earlier countrywide effort was a sincere one on the part of the leaders, princes, soldiers and commoners to drive away the British. It was the first national effort towards getting political independence and rightly called his book "First war of Indian Independence Movement: 1857" which later became the source of inspiration to freedom fighters such as Bhagat Singh, Subhash Chandra Bose, etc.

Fierce Nationalist

While in London, Savarkar organized festivals like Rakshabandhan and Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti and tried to create awareness among Indian students. During this time, he helped conceptual design the first Indian National Flag.

His view of post-independence India envisioned a militarily strong, cohesive and self-sufficient nation. As a great scholar full of originality and independent standing, he coined several new technical terms of parliamentary usage and of Indian parlance such as chhayachitra (photography), Sansad (Senate), Vyangyachitra (Cartoons) etc.

He earnestly believed that Indian independence was a reality not because of a few individuals, leaders or sections of society. It was possible because of the participation of a commoner who prayed to his family deity everyday. But the youngsters who went to gallows to see their motherland free, were the greatest (Veeradhiveers) - he said.

He founded the Hindu Mahasabha as a separate political party. He warned of the Muslim League's designs of partitioning the nation. In 1937, Savarkar was

elected President of the Hindu Mahasabha. He toured the nation widely and delivered the simple message that followers of Vedism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism were all Hindus. Through the Hindu Mahasabha, Savarkar worked hard to protect minority rights. During the celebration of Hindu festivals, Savarkar visited Muslim and Christian homes to promote good will. He encouraged inter-caste marriage and assisted Dr. Ambedkar in the liberation of the untouchables.

Hindutva

Savarkar articulated the Hindutva ideology for the first time and wrote extensively on the subject. Savarkar defined a Hindu as one “who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle of his religion.”

Savarkar is revered in India today as the “Brave Savarkar” (Veer Savarkar), and on the same level as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Tilak. Like Guruji, Savarkar was a far-sighted thinker. He too predicted the partition ideas of the Muslim league and Chinese attack on India.

As Savarkar aged, he saw his grim prophecies coming true. China invaded India in 1962 and Pakistan attacked India in 1965. When the Indian Army entered Lahore, Savarkar rejoiced saying that the “best way to win a war was to carry it into the enemy’s land. ”

The intellectuals as well as commoners in India continue to debate what would have happened if ideas of Savarkar were endorsed by the nation, especially after gaining independence in 1947. A famous general is said to have quoted Savarkar after the Indians conceded land to the Chinese in a military conflict in 1962.... Savarkar had advocated a militarily strong India.

“Veer” Savarkar died on February 27, 1966.



Veer Savarkar was sentenced to 50 years of imprisonment by British Government. He was only 27 years old at that time. He was kept in Andaman jail where he was tortured mentally and physically. Later, after 10 years of rigorous imprisonment, he was released.

The Life of the Buddha

Siddhartha (Gautama) was born in the sixth century BC in the country Nepal. In those days, Nepal was a part of Bharat (India). Siddhartha's father, Shuddhodana, was the ruler of the Saakya people, and Siddhartha grew up living the extravagant life of a young prince. But, looking at the behavior of his son, Shuddhodana felt that his son (the prince) might leave the palace to take up the life of a religious wanderer. So he arranged for him to be sheltered from all the harsh realities of life. When the prince reached the age of sixteen, Shuddhodana arranged for him to be married to his cousin, a charming princess named Yashodhara.

One day, however, Siddhartha ventured out into the world and was confronted with the inevitability of aging, illness, and death. Overcome by dismay, the young prince wondered if there might be a happiness that was not subject to change and decay. Then, seeing a forest wanderer, he decided that only by taking up the wilderness life could he find the answer to his question. That night, at the age of twenty-nine, he left his kingdom and newborn son and entered the wilderness.

For six years, Siddhartha submitted himself to rigorous ascetic practices. First he studied with different religious teachers, but, dissatisfied with what they saw as their highest goal, he set out to practice extreme physical austerities on his own. Yet even through the ultimate in self-denial, he did not reach his goal. Then one day he remembered a state of calm mental absorption he had experienced while sitting under a tree as a child, and realized that only through such a state of calm could liberation be found. And yet the strength of that calm could not be reached when the body was weak through austerities. The path to true happiness required balance—the middle way—rather than extremes of indulgence or self-denial. So on that day he ended his extreme austerities and accepted a gift of



milk-rice offered to him by a young woman.

That night Siddhartha sat under the bodhi tree and meditated until dawn. In the first watch of the night he remembered his past lives; in the second watch, around midnight, he saw how beings die and are reborn through the power of their karma, which in turn was shaped by the skillfulness of their intentions; in the third watch, toward dawn, he purified his mind of all cravings, attachments, and defilements, and finally of all intentions, both skillful and not. With that, he attained awakening at the age of thirty-five, thus earning the title Buddha, or “Awakened One.”

For the remainder of his life, the Buddha taught the dharma to others – men, women, and children; rich and poor; people from all walks of life and all levels of the society so that they, too, might attain awakening. He established a sangha, or community of monks and nuns, to maintain his teachings after his death.

What were the teachings of this great man? According to Buddha, there are four noble truths and they are of vital importance in life. They are the very pivots on which human life rests. These four truths are:

- 1) The world is full of misery and sorrow.
- 2) The main cause of misery is desire.
- 3) Misery and sorrow can be ended by killing desire and
- 4) Desire can be suppressed by following the Eight-fold Path
 - 1) Right Action
 - 2) Right Belief
 - 3) Right Effort
 - 4) Right Speech
 - 5) Right Thought
 - 6) Right Meditation
 - 7) Right Living and
 - 8) Right Recollection

Then, one full moon night, when he had reached the age of eighty, he lay down between two trees in a forest park and gave his last teachings to the assembled followers, counseling them to be heedful in completing their practice of dharma. With that, he entered total nirvana. He died in 487 BC.



Vandaneeya Mausiji

Vandaneeya Mausi ji was one of the great inspirational women of India. Even though she was born over a hundred years ago, she is still a role model for millions of people today. She was full of good qualities – bravery, determination, and kindness – and dedicated her entire life to serving the society.

Vandaneeya Mausi ji was born in 1905 in the state of Maharashtra in India. When she was born, she had a beautiful glow on her face like a lotus flower, so her parents decided to name her Kamal (which means “lotus”). Kamal’s mother’s name was Yashodabai and her father’s name was Bhaskarrao. As Kamal grew up, she had many friends and everyone loved her. Kamal liked going to the temple with her aunt, whom she called “Dai.” At the temple, she enjoyed singing bhajans and shlokas, and listening to stories about all the gods and goddesses. She grew up loving her culture.

Soon, it was time for Kamal to start school. But there was only one school near Kamal’s home, and that was a Christian Missionary School. All the teachers in this school made fun of the Hindu culture. Kamal did not like this at all, but she tried to ignore it for the sake of learning. Then one day, Kamal stood up to the teachers. When it was prayer time, the teacher said, “Class, close your eyes and pray.” Kamal was curious to see whether the teacher practiced what she preached. So after a few moments, Kamal opened her eyes and noticed that the teacher was not closing her eyes or praying. “Kamal!” yelled the teacher. “Why are your eyes opened? Close your eyes!”

Kamal was so brave that she replied, “But Madam, why aren’t you closing your eyes. If you’re asking us to close our eyes and pray, shouldn’t you be doing that yourself too?” The teacher became very angry and slapped Kamal across her cheek. When Kamal went home after school, she was very upset. Her mom noticed the imprint of the slap on



her cheek and asked, "Kamal, why is your cheek so red?" Kamal told her mom the whole story and said, "I will not go back to that school again! They make fun of my Ram and Krishna and look down upon the Hindu culture."

From then on, Kamal was taught at home by her mom and Dai. In addition to teaching her all the subjects like math, reading, language, and science, they taught Kamal about Hindu culture, good samskaars, and patriotism. Kamal grew up loving her country very much. At that time, India was ruled by Britain. The British rulers treated the Indian people very badly and unfairly. They treated Indian people almost like slaves in their own country. Kamal did not like this at all and wanted to do something about it.

Her mother, Yashodabai, also disliked the British rule. She used to gather all the ladies in the neighborhood and hold secret meetings with them. They would read Kesari, a patriotic magazine that was published by Lokamanya Tilak, a famous freedom fighter. They discussed about the problems of the British rule, and how to help their country. These discussions influenced Kamal and increased her feelings of patriotism.

Once, during one of the Kesari meetings, a British officer knocked on the door and interrupted the meeting. "Buying Kesari is illegal!" he said to Yashodabai. "Your husband is a government worker. You cannot use his money to buy Kesari." Some of the other ladies were frightened when the officer said this. But Yashodabai was so brave that she replied, "No! I buy Kesari with my own money, and I am not a government worker!" The British officer could not argue with this statement, and so he left. Kamal greatly admired her mother's bravery and boldness. She learned that you should always be strong in standing up for your beliefs.

Kamal loved playing outdoor games with her brothers, and she also enjoyed playing dolls with her friends. She was very good at sports and games. She was also very good at resolving arguments. When the kids were playing, if an argument or fight ever broke out, she would give an inspiring speech to patch things up and make everyone friends again. "Look here, let us forget our petty arguments. No one is better or worse. We are all important in our own way. We are all friends, so let us not waste our time arguing," she would say. Everyone was mesmerized by Kamal's speeches and they would immediately stop fighting. Kamal learned at a young age how to solve problems between people. This helped her later in life as well.

Kamal was also very kind to others. She enjoyed helping people in need.

Whenever someone was sick, she and Dai went to their homes to help them out and take care of them, without looking at how rich or poor they were. Kamal also helped in a campaign to save cows from being slaughtered. She and Dai used to go door-to-door to people's homes to ask them for their help in saving the cows. She learned that it is very important to spend time serving others, without asking for anything in return.

Soon it was time for Kamal to get married. During these days, there was a tradition called "dowry" in India. The bride's family would have to give a gift to the groom's family in order to get their daughter married. Kamal's family did not have much money, so they were having a hard time arranging for the dowry. Kamal did not agree with this tradition, so she told her parents that she refused to get married to any man who asked for a dowry. At first her parents disagreed, but Kamal replied, "No, it is my final and firm decision. I will not get married to any person who values money more than an individual." This was a brave and bold decision, especially in those days. But Kamal was determined to stand up against bad practices in society. She believed that we should not do bad things just because "everyone else is doing them too."

Kamal was eventually married to a man named Purushottamrao Kelkar, who lived in Wardha. After getting married, she changed her name to Lakshmibai Kelkar. She lived a happy life and eventually had seven children. But her life with her new family was very different from the one she was used to back home. Purushottamrao was not very patriotic. In fact, he liked the British rule and spent a lot of his free time playing cards and billiards in the evenings.

Purushottamrao encouraged Lakshmibai also to attend the ladies club, where they used to play cards in the evening. Lakshmibai started attending and soon inspired all the ladies with her thoughts. She told them, "Look, we should not waste our time playing cards while our country is ruled by foreigners. Our countrymen are giving up their lives for freedom. We should support them." The ladies agreed with Lakshmibai and soon started reading patriotic newspapers and discussing about national issues. In this way, Lakshmibai was able to inspire everyone she met.

During that time, the independence movement was going on to free India from Britain's rule. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the leaders of the independence movement. Once, Gandhi ji was visiting Wardha and there was a huge public rally organized with all the freedom fighters. Lakshmibai also wanted to attend, so she went there with one of her daughters. After the rally, a volunteer came around to

collect money from people for the independence movement. Lakshmibai was so inspired that, without thinking twice about it, she donated her very valuable gold necklace. She always cared more about the country than about her own personal happiness.

Unfortunately, Lakshmibai's husband soon became very sick and eventually died of a disease called tuberculosis. And just a little while after, her eldest daughter, Shanta, was also diagnosed with tuberculosis and also died. This was a very sad time in Lakshmibai's life, but she was able to overcome her sorrow and take care of the entire household. She took care of her seven children, managed the entire household, and still had time left over to spend on social work.

Lakshmibai noticed that women faced many hardships, and this bothered her a lot. During those days, many times, girls could not even attend school and they did not have equal opportunities as boys. Women were often not allowed to leave their homes. They also faced problems of safety and security. Lakshmibai wanted to do something about these problems. She helped start a school for girls in Wardha, which helped girls who before were unable to attend school and get an education. But she felt that this was not enough. She wanted to do something more.

The answer came to Lakshmibai from her own children. Two of Lakshmibai's sons attended the Sangh shakha every day. In the shakha, people would come together, play games, sing patriotic songs, and learn about their country and culture. Lakshmibai liked the shakha very much. She noticed that her sons learned a lot of good things from shakha, such as patriotism, discipline, confidence, and knowledge about their culture. But, at that time, only boys attended shakha, not girls. So Lakshmibai decided that she wanted to start shakhas for girls. She thought that if girls and women could also attend shakha and gain these same qualities, they would be able to fix many of the social problems that they were facing.

Lakshmibai met with Doctor ji, the founder of Sangh, and after discussing the idea with him, they decided to start Rashtra Sevika Samiti, an organization that would run shakhas for women and girls. The first shakha was held in 1936 on the day of Vijay Dashmi. Many girls and women started attending shakha and became known as "sevikas." During these days, women did not usually go out and take part in these kinds of social activities. So shakha was really something new and groundbreaking. Lakshmibai became like a mentor and role model for all the sevikas. They affectionately called her "Mausi ji," which means "Aunt."

Mausi ji traveled all over the country starting new shakhas and inspiring

women to work for the society. At first, she was very shy and nervous when speaking in front of a lot of people. But soon she realized that if she really wanted to inspire people, she would have to overcome her nervousness. She practiced public speaking and did not give up. She soon became a very good public speaker and inspired thousands of people through her speeches.

Soon, there were shakhas all over the country. Mausi ji inspired the sevikas to work not only for their own families, but also for the entire society. Many sevikas participated in the freedom movement and did community service, such as starting nursery schools for children and helping those in need. Mausi ji taught all the sevikas that they should develop good qualities in themselves. She said they should be strong like good leaders, efficient like good administrators, and caring like good mothers.

We can learn many different things from Mausi ji. One is determination, which means to never give up. Mausi ji faced a lot of hardships and challenges in her life. Her husband passed away at a young age, and she had to raise seven kids on her own. But she still raised her family wonderfully and also found time to work for the society. Another thing we can learn is to always stand up for your beliefs. Mausi ji was very proud of her Hindu culture, and stood up to anyone who tried to insult it. Mausi ji also taught us that we should give time for helping our community. Today, we remember Mausi ji as a brave, determined, and strong woman, who dedicated her entire life to serving the society.



Shivaji - A Legendary King

A young prince is seated on the throne. His soldiers have brought a handcuffed Patil (a village chief) before him. Patil, with a thick and long moustache, had dishonored a helpless widow. In a stern and majestic tone the young prince announced the judgment, *"cut off his both hands and feet! This is the least punishment for the crime he has committed"*. All were taken aback hearing the prince's justice. Not only were they wonder-struck but also pleased beyond measure. The village people began to say to one another: *'Ah! Look! How devoted to justice our young prince is!'* He is not afraid of the wicked people. He is ever determined to help people and protect them. What is more, he regards all women as mothers!

Don't you wish to know who this young prince was? He was none other than Shivaji. At the time of this incident he was just fourteen. In another incident: In Nachani village of Pune province, a ferocious and huge cheetah was creating nuisance. He used to attack villagers suddenly and run away into the jungle. Scared villagers ran to Shivaji for help. They cried, *"Save us from this wild animal. He attacks us especially in the night!"* After patiently listening to villagers, he said, *"don't worry! Calm down. I am here to help you."* Shivaji, with his chieftain Yesaji and few soldiers, went to the jungle. As soon as the cheetah appeared, Shivaji's soldiers frightened and backed off. But, Shivaji and Yesaji bravely confronted the Cheetah and killed it in no time. Villagers rejoiced and hailed, *"Jay Shivaji!"*

Shahaji was Shivaji's father. He was always away from home, fighting wars. How he became aware of this fearless and unique nature of his son is itself an interesting story. On one occasion, Shahaji took his son to the court of the Sultan of Bijapur. He touched the ground thrice and saluted the Sultan. He asked his son Shivaji to do the same thing. But.....! Shivaji stood firm with his head unbent. He seemed to be determined that he would not bow down to a foreign ruler. He walked back from the court with a lion-like gait.

How did Shivaji acquire all these noble virtues - courage, heroism, love of the motherland and Dharma? When he was a child, his mother Jijabai used to tell him stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. She taught him all about Hindu samskars and patriotism. As Shivaji listened to these tales of heroism and Dharmik deeds, he grew more and more eager to be like Rama or Krishna, Bheema or Arjuna. His teacher, Dadoji Kondadev was a great man. He not only taught Shivaji



about all kinds of warfare tactics but also about politics and good administration. Both, Dadoji kondadev and Jijabai, carved his personality.

Though Shivaji was a prince, he enjoyed playing with anyone of his age and easily mixed with the common people. Soon, he became the heart of all. At the age of twelve, he and his friends took the oath of defeating foreign rulers and establish *swarajya* where people can live happily and follow their dharma. At the young age of sixteen, he started raising his own army. In the same age, he captured one of the forts. It was the fort of Torana. Another meaning of Torana is garland. Jijabai proudly said, 'Look! Shivaji has brought us a garland of independence!'

Later, Shivaji fought many wars. He not only established his independent sovereign against all odds but also undertook reforms to make his people happy. He inspired and united the common man to fight against the tyranny of foreign rulers such as Aurangjeb, by inculcating a sense of pride and nationality in them. Isn't it great about Shivaji? Sage Ramadas was his spiritual guru. He sang in praise of Shivaji: *"The land and its Dharma have been uplifted. A kingdom of bliss has arisen."*

Warfare strategies and tactics

Shivaji was a great visionary and had lot of zeal to accomplish his mission. Shivaji seemed to be successful in reading the minds of enemies. He adopted guerilla warfare. He believed in sudden attack, make damage and run away before enemy gets alert. Speed was his mantra. He would leave the enemy miles behind after he carried out the strikes. His ultimate aim was absolute victory for which he would not mind a tactical retreat or to step back and run away from the battle whenever required.

Shivaji was a meticulous planner. He developed a well-oiled network of spies across Bharat to keep the track of all the activities of the power centers of enemies. His strong intelligence network was the basis of his victory. He conducted ambitious operations like joint attack using cavalry, army and navy. He was aggressive. He preferred to attack enemy rather than sitting defensive. As and when required, he took bold but safe decisions. Unlike other rulers, he discouraged use of slow animals like elephant and camels in his army. He preferred horses. His favorite quote was... *"yasya ashwah tasya medini"*. Shivaji developed new forts that were invincible. He built more than 140 forts in his lifetime. A unique record in itself!! These forts were his power.

Though Shivaji was a warrior, he was religious too. He visited spiritual places and sought the blessings of spiritual persons. Despite all these, he never mixed religion with politics. Neither did he allow anybody to bring the religion or castism in administration.

Unique King

In his private life, his moral virtues were exceptionally high. Shivaji did not spare the enemies when captured, neither did he show any kindness to them. He preferred to take active part in all battles rather than just sitting on the throne and ordering his generals and commanders. That is why all his ministers, commanders and soldiers truly loved him. They were even ready to sacrifice their lives for him. Immediately after coronation, he started his digvijaya by attacking inner pockets of Mughal kingdom instead of enjoying Aristocracy. He defended the honor of enemy's women. But when Shivaji captured a daughter-in-law of Subhedar of Kalyan, he not only saved her, but sent her back to her house with all respect.

Coronation

Shivaji coronated himself after insisting by his family members, people and a prominent Brahmin. As soon as Shivaji declared himself as a king, several aristocrats and warriors from various parts of Bharat joined him. As all kings do, Shivaji also regulated his own currency - Shivarai hon. To eradicate foreign words from the administration, he published a Rajvyavahar Kosh (a glossary for administration). He established the Ashta-Pradhan-Mandal (a council of 8 Ministers) to serve the people properly and effectively. Each minister was given the responsibility of major departments like administration, military affairs, etc.

A caretaker of Praja (people)

Shivaji always used to take care of his people. His people were his first concern. He introduced a new system of revenue collection. He regulated dual tax structure where different brackets of taxes were prevalent depending on the condition of soil/land. He never ever increased taxes on people. He provided all kinds of help to farmers. In the days of scarcity, he spent money from the govt's treasury and provided food and shelter to people. He dug wells, constructed water tanks and new temples. He gave several facilities to the families of soldiers who died in the battle. He had a good espionage system. He stopped the practice of slavery which was prevalent in Bharat. He imposed severe punishment for the trading of bonded labor. He gave full protection to women. Women fearlessly moved around in his tenure. He gave harsh punishment to criminals for their crimes and while giving justice he did not even spare his own relatives.

Shivaji lived around 50 years. He was born in the year 1630 and took his last breath in the year 1680. All his life, he cherished a dream of Hindavi Swarajya and brought it into reality. He has been a source of inspiration and pride to the past generations and will continue to inspire today and future generations too.



Unique features of Shivaji The Great

(Note: Some terms and examples from Shivaji's life are given briefly in this topic. They should be elaborated further by Shikshaks)

- ▶ Shivaji advocated the ideology of Hindawi Swaraj (Self-rule based on Hindu principles). He established his kingdom from scratch.
- ▶ Shivaji was the one who cared about entire Bharat (not just his kingdom!). When Aurangzeb (Mughal ruler) destroyed Hindu shrines, Kashi and Mathura, he thundered that he would take revenge even though those holy places were far away and not part of his kingdom.
- ▶ Shivaji was one of the most aggressive and front warriors. Most of the times, he confronted with his enemies on his own. He used "hit and run" strategy. Surprise attack was his favorite mechanism. He was more practical than imotional. He never hesitated to run away when he smelled the defeat. That is why, whenever he lost the battle, the damage on his side was minimal with an exception of a battle with Mirza-raje Jaysingh. On the other hand, he made maximum damage to enemies in most of the battles he won.
- ▶ Shivaji tried to unite all Hindu aristocrats and chieftains. He asked them to revolt against muslim invaders. He even wrote a letter to Mirza Raje Jayasingh, Aurangazeb's right-hand man, to join him.
- ▶ Shivaji believed in "fast moving army" like Alexandar. He, therefore, never carried "elephants". In Qutubshaha's court, he proudly said that his all commanders are as strong as elephants and he would not need elephants in his army. To test his commanders, Qutubshaha challenged one of his commanders, Yesaji Kank, to fight with a wild elephant. Yesaji fought with the elephant with merely a sword in his hands and killed it in no time.
- ▶ Shivaji did unbelievable things which no one would even dream about. For instance, escape from Agra prison, escape from Panhala fort, Afjal-vadh, Surat-loot. He introduced new military strategies, new weapons, new type of training to soldiers, building up new resources from scratch, new rules of administration and taxation. His personal heroism was matchless.



- ▶ Shivaji's Maratha army did not fight for 'bread and butter', but for the Hindawiswaraj. Even after Shivaji's death, Maratha-army fought and won many many great wars all over Bharat.
- ▶ Before Shivaji, history had not seen a 'Hindu' king in last 500 years. There was a general thought that a 'Hindu' could not become a king. Shivaji wanted to break this tradition. He, therefore, coroneted himself to make a point that a "Hindu" could also become a king. He didn't do it because he wanted to become a king
- ▶ Shivaji's spies used to bring information from all over places. After Chanakya, he is the one who made a good use of spies. His spies roamed around in disguise of beggars, saints, merchants, workers, and street-shoppers. Bahirji Naik was one of his excellent spies.
- ▶ Shivaji was the one who was well aware about foreign invaders including French, Portuguese, and British. In his regime, no one was able to stretch their legs. He established a military armor on the sea to keep British and Portuguese at bay. Sindhu-durg and Vijay-durg are two of his forts built on the sea. The mughal ruler, Aurangazeb, was extremely scared of him. He could not spread his kingdom in the Southern Bharat just because of Shivaji.
- ▶ Shivaji established his own currency. He established a new Marathi rajya-vyavahar-kosh (something like dictionary) in an attempt to use pure Marathi language in politics and administration. He regulated the tax system. He eliminated vatandari (landlord system).
- ▶ Shivaji never troubled common people even in enemies' areas. In his kingdom, women were able to roam around freely even in the mid-night. He gave harsh punishment to those who abused women. In those days, it was a trend to "mis-use" captured women (of enemies) for pleasure. However, Shivaji was an exception to this. On the contrary, he gave high esteem to women who belonged to the enemies. For example, when his soldiers captured a woman of chieftain of Kalyan province, he respected her and sent her back with lots of gifts.
- ▶ In those days, Muslims and Mughals used to convert many Hindus by force. Converted Hindus, then, used to get isolated from the Hindu society. Society wouldn't accept a person who want to come back in the Hindu fold. To change this situation, Shivaji advocated the efforts of re-conversion (bringing converted Hindus back to the Hindu dharma). He successfully convinced the prominent Hindu religious leaders and brought many Hindus back in to the Hindu fold.



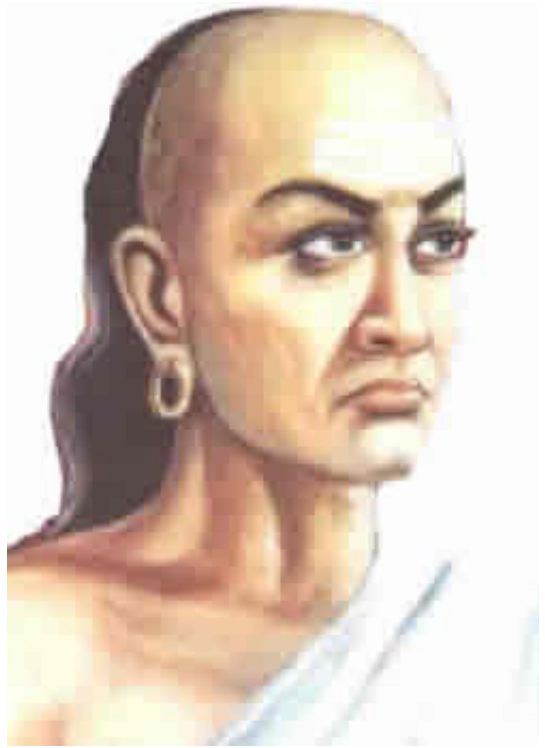
Chanakya

An average looking guy was walking on the streets of the Pataliputra (today's Patna city in Bharat) for routine work. In his hurried walk, he stumbled on a stump of a noxious grass and injured his foot. Grass was deeply rooted in the earth and it was not easy to uproot it out. Little upset he sat down right there in the burning sun. He poured a sugar-syrup on the grass and stood by as if he was waiting for something!! A passing by kid, named Chandragupta, was watching him curiously, but carefully. All of a sudden, from nowhere, several ants and other insects came and attracted towards sugar-syrup. They destroyed the grass completely. Chandragupta curiously asked him, *"It was just a grass. Why did you do it?"* Brahmin replied back, *"It was poisonous (evil) and fatal. And all evil things should be destroyed completely eventhough they are small. This is everybody's duty. I would remove even a king if the king adopted adharm."* This average looking guy was not merely a common guy, but a very smart, clever and learned brahmin. His name was Vishnugupta.

Vishnugupta lived in the capital city Pataliputra of an empire Magadha during the period 350-275 BC. His father, Chanak, was a learned brahmin and a teacher. He started teaching his son Vishnugupta in his early age. He was noble and self-esteemed brahmin. He would not tolerate any injustice or adharmik deeds. Naturally, the corrupt and arrogant Magadha King Dhanananda did not like him. Chanak's family was harrassed by the king on some false reasons. He was put in the prison where he died. Nobody raised a voice against the injustice caused with Chanak. Vishnuputa was a young boy at this time. He was extremely sad on his father's death and injustice happened with him. His life was also in danger. He left Pataliputra by taking an oath that he would come back and fight against injustice and a corrupt king Dhanananda.

Vishnugupta went to Takshashila, a world famous University for all kinds of education. There he studied Vedas and Uapanishadas. He was more interested in economics and politics. He gained proficiency in it. In politics, his acumen and shrewdness was visible right from childhood. Just like his father, he was disciplined, bold and fearless. He would debate with his fellow teachers on various subjects. Due to his intelligence and leadership qualities, he was dear to all including other students and teachers. After completing studies, he started teaching in the University. He was called by Acharya. Many kings and other aristocrats were his students. He not only taught various subjects, but also taught about values, attitude and patriotism to his students to make them good and responsible citizens.

During that time, Bharat (India) was divided in various kingdoms. Only handful of them were big such as Magadha. All others were small and most of them were engaged in fighting against each other. Vishnugupta worried about this situation as it would invite invaders to attack Bharat. He wanted to change it. He saw a dream of united Bharat ruled under one administration and by one king. Eventhough his profession was teaching, he had detailed information about various kings in Bharat and surrounding areas, and happenings in their kingdoms. He had established a spy-network and he kept himself uptodate through it.



During that time, a Greek king Alexandar was ruling in the country Greece in the middle-east. He had an ambition to win the entire world. He even won all the kingdoms in the middle-east and was ready to attack Bharat.

Alexandar's plan became clear to Vishnugupta. He also realized that Alexandar and his troops were brave and armed with arsenal and divided Bharat would not be able stand against his forces. He left the University to gather and unite all Bharatiya kings to be able to present a formidable defence to Alexandar. He travelled all the bordering kingdoms warning about the grave danger of invasion and tried to convince their kings for unity. He even sought help from king Dhanananda forgetting his personal enmity with him. But he was humiliated there. Few kings responded to his call though. In the beginning, Alexandar won few small kingdoms in the bordering areas with the help of self-indulgent Bharatiya king Ambhi who betrayed his own people and joined him. But Alexandar could not move further because of strong and dreadful retort from other Bharatiya kings. Finally, he had to return back to his country. Bharat was saved from the alien Alexandar!

Such an intelligent Vishnugupta was smart enough in turning tables into his favour irrespective of circumstances. He was also popularly known by Chanakya and Kautilya (based on his Gotra). Chanakya (Vishnugupta) was a great teacher (shikshak), statesman, philosopher, thinker and a born patriot. There was no branch of knowledge, which he had not mastered. There seemed to be nothing, which he did not know. He was, in other words, a conglomeration of all things

that make a genius. Although he was expertise in many subjects, his favourite subjects were politics and economics (artha-shastra). He was very much proud and confident about his profession of teaching. He used to say that – *the mother and a shikshak have the ability to bring about the revolution. If they desire, they can change the future of the current generations. They can play a bigger role in making the character based society that holds esteem values and principles. If they desire, they can even throw out the powerful kings.* And he proved it by defeating the arrogant king Dhanananda.

Although Chanakya was a teacher, he took lot of interest in politics. His spies kept him uptodate about what was going on in various kingdoms around Takshashila. He never budged to the pressure by the ruthless politicians. He was known for the meticulous planning to minute details including backup plans and it's perfect implementation. His calculations never went wrong. His brain was full of information, ideas and planning. But he would never disclose anything to anyone unless it was necessary. Nobody could make out what was going on in his mind. Because of his secretive and harsh nature, he could employ various methods carefully at the right time to destroy his enemies. He believed that everyone (kings) had their own weaknesses and they can be defeated by one way or another. Being known as a masterful political strategist, he discovered koot-yuddha (Guerilla Warfare).

Chanakya envisioned Bharat (India) as a united nation ruled under one administration. He knew that only united Bharat could protect herself and her culture from foreign invasions. His favourite student (pupil) was a brilliant and bright boy named Chandragupta. Since childhood Chandragupta was with him. For Chandragupta, he was not only a teacher but also a guardian. He carved Chandragupta's personality. A young boy Chandragupta turned into a patriot, brave and fearless warrior. Chanakya is not complete without Chandragupta and Chandragupta is not complete without Chanakya. Chandragupta was trustworthy. He would not even think about leaving or betraying or doing any harm to his guru Chanakya. Chanakya utilized him very well to fulfill his dream of uniting Bharat.

In those days, Magadha was the biggest empire in Bharat which was ruled by arrogant and ruthless king Dhanananda. As learnt in earlier chapter, Chanakya's father was tortured by the king and he himself was humiliated several times. Although he really didn't care about his personal enmity, he had taken an oath that he would teach Dhanananda a lesson for his arrogance and

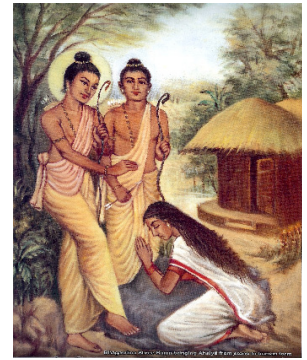
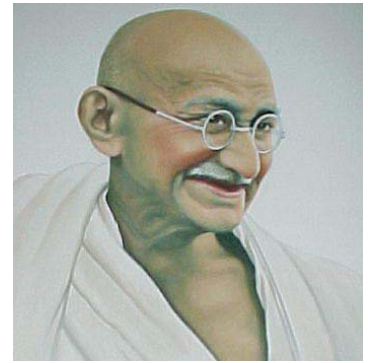
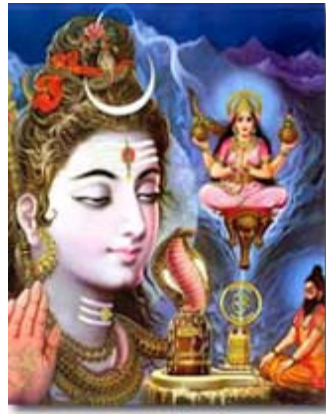
bad administration. He also felt that once the biggest empire Magadha comes under his control, he would easily bring the entire Bharat under one rule. At last, with excellent planning and Chandragupta's bravery, king Dhanananda was thrown out of the throne and killed later. After that, Chandraputa became a king of the mighty empire Magadha. Chandraputa became very popular because of his excellent administration and selfless love towards people of his kingdom.

After becoming Chandragupta a king of Maghadha, many small provinces and kingdoms happily agreed his leadership and joined him; thus already big Magadha kingdom grew further. Those who did not join technically, became friends of the Magadha because they were already influenced by Chanakya. Thus Chanakya fulfilled his dream of uniting Bharat. Chandragupta ruled Magadha for many years. Chanakya stayed with him in Magadha and became his prime-minister.

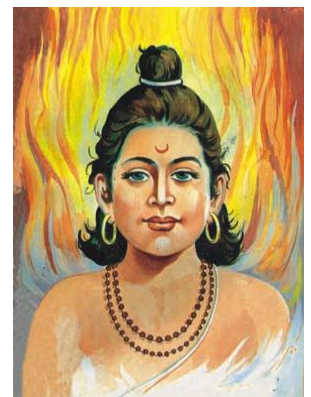
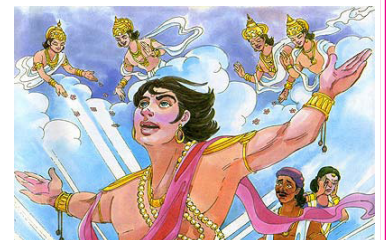
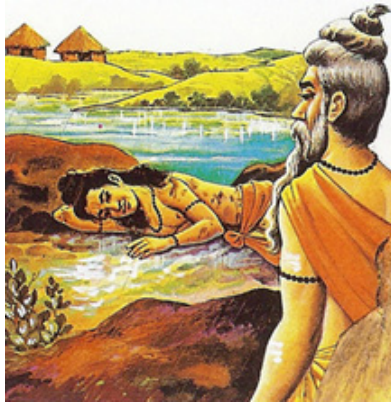
Chanakya continued teaching also. He also wrote many books on political ethics, nitishastra (thesis on the ideal way of life), and economics (kautiliya arthashastra). His books are translated into many other languages including English, French and German. His literature was unique because of its rational approach and an unabashed advocacy of real politics. It shows his in depth study of the Bharatiya way of life. In his literature, he has touched many topics including the duties of king at length such as - how a king should keep an eye on the things that are going on in his kingdom, how to make sure that his associates and ministers are honest to him, what good governance means, how to make people give taxes without feeling any burden, how to keep vigil on borders, how a king should make sure about his people's character, how to make use of spies and so on.... He was already impressed by the big and famous University Takshashila and he felt necessary to have similar University in Magadha also. So he established another big University at Nalanda city. Later, like Takshashila, Nalanda also became a world famous University.

Such an intelligent and visionary Chanakya lived selfless and aesthetic life. His life was mysterious but blot-free. Just like Sri Krishna, he would give up values and morals and do anything to uphold the Dharma. He had powers to turn over the kingdoms but he never thought of becoming a king. He would make impossible things possible. Indeed, Chanakya was an excellent personality. His life and teachings will continue to guide entire Hindu society.





Stories and General Information



Shibi, The Compassionate King

Once upon a time there lived a great king called Shibi. He was very kind, charitable and famous. His fame spread all over the earth and into the heavens too.

The God of heaven, Indra, wanted to test and see if king Shibi was really as great as his fame proclaimed him to be.

So, Indra and god Agni came up with a plan. Agni assumed the form of a dove and Indra, of a fierce hawk. Agni flew down first, fluttering its wings as though terrified and Indra followed at a distance as if in hot pursuit. They flew straight to the palace of the king.

Shibi was in the palace garden distributing charities to the poor. The frightened dove went and perched upon the wrist of Shibi looking at him with tearful eyes full of fear. Shibi immediately took her in his hands. Stroking her back kindly he said, "Fear not, O dove. I will save you from all harms."

Just as he was saying this, the hawk flew down angrily and haughtily and tried to snatch the dove away from the king's hands. But the king raised his hand in a flash and obstructed the hawk. The hawk looked at the king angrily and said, speaking like a human being, "This dove is my bird of prey. I had been pursuing it since the morning. Why do you obstruct me from having my food, O King?"

Surprised at hearing the hawk speak like a man, Shibi replied, "I do not know who you are, O hawk, who can thus speak like a man. This poor frightened dove has sought my shelter. It is my duty to protect her from all harm. I won't allow you to snatch her away from me and make her your prey."

The hawk then said, "Rajan, you are renowned as a kind one. Perhaps it is your duty to protect those in distress. But is your kindness limited only to the dove? What about me? Am I not equally entitled to claim your pity? I am a bird who can live only by preying on small birds. By depriving me of my food are you not condemning me to die? Is this your *dharma*?"

King Shibi was non-pulsed. The hawk could not only speak like a human being but also argue like one! Evidently, the King's duty was towards both the dove and the hawk. He was very thoughtful. At last he said, "Hawk, what you say is true. I won't deprive you of your food. But at the same time I cannot give up this poor frightened dove. Will you accept if I give you some other flesh as a substitute?"

The hawk replied, "Very well king. I have no objection as long as my hunger is satisfied. But you must give me flesh exactly equal to that of the dove. I won't accept less." And he further mockingly added, "But how will you get substitute flesh? Will you kill another life to save the life of this dove?"



Shibi hastily replied, "No, no, I won't think of harming another life, be sure. I will give you my own flesh in the place of the dove." He turned to his attendant and asked him to bring the balance. The attendant brought the balance and set it before the king.

Shibi placed the dove on one side of the balance. He took out his sword. He started cutting and placing small portions of his flesh on the other side of the balance. But something strange happened! The dove which looked so small and frail in the pan would not balance it! King Shibi went on cutting portion after portion from his body and placing it in the balance until no more flesh remained to cut. Wondering at the heaviness of the dove, Shibi then threw away the sword and sat on the balance. Lo! now the balance was equal. Rejoicing that he was at last able to give the hawk its due, Shibi turned to the hawk and said, "O hawk, my weight is equal to the weight of the dove. Please eat me and leave the dove."

As soon as he said these words, there were cheers from the gods who gathered in the sky to witness the test. They beat the heavenly drums and showered flowers on the king. The hawk and the dove shed their assumed forms and stood before him in their shining glorious forms. Shibi looked at them in amazement.

Indra said, "O king, I and Agni came down from heaven to test you. You have indeed proved yourself to be greater than your fame. You will be blessed with long life and vast riches. Your name will remain in the world as long as the sun and the moon remain."

So saying, Indra touched Shibi with his hand. Lo! All the cuts and wounds vanished from Shibi's body and he stood there as strong as ever. He bowed to the gods with great devotion, who blessed him and returned to their abodes.



Stories of Doctorji

Our inspiration, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, also known as Doctorji, was a man of virtues. He founded Sangh (RSS) to unite Hindus and spent his entire life to promote and spread the Sangh activities. Everyone has a weakness. In the beginning, Doctorji also used to be a high-tempered. But when he realized this, he moulded himself and became extremely calm and patient. Here are some events from Doctorji's life that focus on his virtues.

Strong In Mind And Body

Soon after joining the college, Keshav (Doctorji) developed intimate friendship with students coming from different provinces. He utilized his leisure in cultivating them. He soon became the most sought after friend of all. Hardly was there any one who was not drawn to him. Such was his friendly and amiable disposition.

Just like his strong mind, Doctorji had also developed strong body. He used to exercise consistently daily. Milk was taken in plenty to help cope with the exercises. Even in Jail, he did not give up daily exercise. Thereby his body became well built and shapely.

Intolerant Of Egoists; Friends Of Sufferers

Righteous indignation was a special trait of Doctorji. He was prompt to react to injustice or oppression of any kind. Once during the college vacation, he had gone to Yeotmal (a city in Bharat). He was on an evening stroll with his friends in the city area. It was the time when Bharat was under the control of British. On the way they saw that a British Deputy Commissioner (D.C.) was approaching them. The British officers in those days were full of arrogance. An unwritten code required that the local people were to move away to make way for the British officers and salute them. This was intimated to Doctorji by his friends. He, however, did not care and went ahead in the usual way without saluting. The Deputy Commissioner came close, but Doctorji remained passive. The former then had to move away him. But how could the high-strung D.C. swallow such an insult? He turned back and burst out, "Don't you know the etiquette here?" With his hands in his coat pockets, Doctorji retorted, "What have I to do with the manner here? I come from the capital city of Nagpur. Nothing like this is observed in Nagpur. And mind you, it's not proper to salute an unknown

person." Seething with anger, the D.C. departed helplessly.

Born Patriot and fearless Doctorji

Doctorji never tolerated any insult either to the nation or to national leaders. Once a public meeting was held under the chairmanship of Liyaqat Hussain. One of the speakers passed some disparaging remarks about Lokmanya Tilak who was a great patriot and freedom fighter. Doctorji could not tolerate such insulting remarks on him. Furious Doctorji rushed to the dais and slapped the errant speaker in full public view! Nobody dared to stop Doctorji.

Friend of sufferers

Doctorji was full of sympathy for those caught in any kind of distress. In 1913, the Damodar River in Bengal province of Bharat (India) was in a terrible state. People, animals, homes, and huts were inundated under the floods. Doctorji and friends swung into action. They rushed to the spot for protecting the sufferers and bringing succor in their hour of travail. Doctorji served food to the hungry and spoke words of courage and confidence as they had lost all hopes about their life. He busied himself day and night. No barriers of language or region stood in his way of service to the people.

Compassionate and caretaking Doctorji

In the early days of Sangh, a day-long picnic (outing) had been organized in the outskirts of Nagpur. Everyone was expected to bring his own lunch box. Some *swayamsevaks* were staying at hostels to attend school in Nagpur city. There was no "mom" to pack a lunch box for them! They did not eat dinner the previous night, poached the food into boxes and took it with them to the picnic next day.

The outing went off extremely well. They all hiked, played games rigorously, and eventually became extremely hungry. For hostel boys, the small quantity of previous night's dinner was nowhere enough - it disappeared, leaving them still hungry. Other *swayamsevaks* went home. They could eat at home again; and hostel boys had nothing. Only Doctorji sensed this. He brought extra food for them. Unknown to them, he also gave them his own food. Their stomachs were full and they enjoyed. Only years later, they realized what an affectionate gesture that was from Doctorji, who was so poor that he himself went hungry several times in a week.

Doctorji's life has always been an inspiration for all *swayamsevaks* and *sevikas* who are putting their efforts in uniting Hindus and making Hindu society strong.



Story of Bhageerath

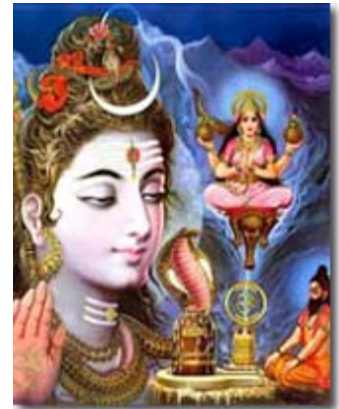
King Sagar was one of the greatest kings of Ancient Bharat (India). He was the ancestor of King Dasharath and Sri Rama (Incarnation of Sree Vishnu). In those days, kings used to perform the Ashwamedha Yajna to prove their supremacy over others. Once, King Sagar, too, performed a Ashwamedha Yajna to become the king of the entire world, as he deserved it anyway.

But, Sri Indra was jealous and fearful over the results of the Yajna. He decided to stop the Yajna by stealing the horse of the Yajna that was sent around the earth, as a symbol of victory. He kidnapped the horse and hid it in Kapil Muni's hermitage.

When learnt that the horse is kidnapped, King Sagar's hundreds of sons along with the entourage of warriors went to search. They found the horse of the Yajna in Kapil Muni's Ashram. They mistook Sage Kapil to be the abductor and attacked him. Kapil Muni became enraged that King Sagar's sons were attacking him for no apparent reason and so he burnt all of them to ashes.

King Sagar was worried about his sons' salvation. The pacified Kapil Muni advised that the holy river Ganga could give them salvation and would miraculously bring back the dead princes to life. It should be brought down to the Earth from the heaven. King Sagar's son Dilip tried his best, but could not succeed. His grandson Anshuman succeeded upto some limit but could not give them salvation.

Bhageerath was another grandson of King Sagar. He heard about the plight of his father and uncles. Bhageerath resolved to bring Ganga to the Earth from the Heaven to purify the ashes of his ancestors and bring them back to life.



He performed severe penance to please Sri Brahma who came to bless him and grant him the desired boon. Ganga was allowed to come down to Earth. The only problem was that the force of its current was too great for Earth to withstand. Fearing a catastrophe, Bhageerath prayed to Sri Shiva, who held out his matted hair to catch the river as she descended. From this point onward, Sri Shiva is also known as Gangadhara. River Ganga gently followed Bhageerath as he came to the hermitage of Sage Jahnu's ashram. Sage Jahnu, who was in a state of meditation inside the ashram, had been disrupted in his penance. He became enraged and swallowed Ganga in a single gulp.



Bhageerath offered his prayers to Sage Jahnu who finally released Ganga. As a result, Ganga is also known by the name of Jahnvi.

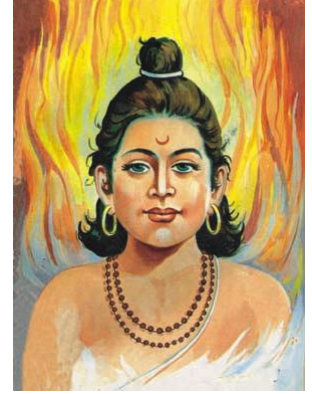
Finally, Bhageerath overcame all the obstacles in the process of releasing Ganga. He patiently led Ganga down to the sea where Kapil Muni was residing. Holy Ganga then bathed the remains of the King Sagar's sons, offered salvation to the souls of them and merged into the sea-water. Thus the sea where Ganga merges is called as "Ganga Sagar".

Ganga is also known as Bhageerathi because her coming to the Earth was by the continued sacrifices and efforts of Bhageerath.



Story of Nachiketa

A while ago, there once lived a little boy named Nachiketa. He was the son of Rishi Udalak. Once, Rishi Udalak organized a yagna (a type of puja) to please the gods and gain a heaven. It was a custom in those days to donate cows to Brahmins at the end of the yagna. Udalak was a miser and he donated old and weak cows to the Brahmins. Since the cows were old and weak, they hardly yielded any milk. Nachiketa was puzzled by his father's action. "What does he mean by all this?" he said to himself. "What happened to all the useful cows? What does my father gain by gifting such useless cows? This is no less than committing a sin. It is actually cheating. He should be gifting the things which are dear ones. He intends to gain heaven by performing the sacrifice, but his actions will go to vain."



Nachiketa asked his father about this, "Father, to whom will you give me to as charity or gift?" This made his father very angry, but he decided not to say anything and got engaged in preparation of gifting ceremony. When Nachiketa repeated the question, Udalak lost his temper and said, "Get away from here. I will give you to Yama, God of Death." Yama is the king of Yamapuri and also the God of Death. "I should fulfill his wish," thought Nachiketa, even if it means leaving home and embracing death. Obeying his father, Nachiketa went to Yama's kingdom. It would not be proper for him to disobey his father.

His father, however, realized his mistake, but it was too late. He muttered, "Shame upon my anger! I should never have uttered those words. What will befall me now? I have asked death for my son!" With a blank head and a heavy heart he sat down and tried to stop Nachiketa.

But Nachiketa did not stop. He said, "Father! I must see Yama to obey your order." He reached Yama's kingdom but was told by Yama's guards that he had gone out for three days. Nachiketa decided to wait at his doorstep until he returned. He waited for three days without any food or water. He basically fasted for three days!

Finally, Yama returned on the fourth day and saw little Nachiketa at his doorstep. He was saddened that he had kept a Brahmin waiting without welcoming him and not giving him food and water. It was very bad not to welcome an atithi (guest) at the doorstep. He yelled at his wife Yami for not welcoming him. Both of them rushed around the house to serve little Nachiketa. One of them went to fetch water while the other brought a mat for him to sit on.



Yama still did not feel completely satisfied in serving him, so he told Nachiketa, “Dear child, I have offended you by keeping you waiting for three days. To wash my sin, I request you to ask for three boons.”

Nachiketa answered to Yama by saying, “My first wish is that when I return home, may my father welcome me lovingly. My second wish is to grant me the knowledge so that I can be worthy of living in the heavens. My third and last wish is to grant me *atma-vidya* (knowledge of the *atma*).”

Yama granted Nachiketa the first two boons immediately but tried to convince Nachiketa to give up his third wish. He offered Nachiketa gold, pearls, coins, horses, elephants and even the happiness of Swarg (heaven) instead. But Nachiketa firmly said, “No, I do not wish for anything else.” Finally, Yama granted him the third boon too, and Nachiketa was enlightened with the knowledge of the atma (soul).

Nachiketa returned back to his parents. His father embraced his son with open arms and said, “My dear son, please forgive me.” Mother overwhelmed with joy, enquired, “Dear child! How did you acquire this luster on your face?” Nachiketa narrated the entire story to all those assembled. Praise was showered on Nachiketa for his achievement.

The story of little Nachiketa teaches us to be kind to all creatures, to respect one’s parents and to be strong willed to do something that has been decided. Even if it means facing difficulties and obstacles, one should stick to their decision. It always teaches to search for eternal happiness.



Valiant Abhimanyu



An epic battle, the Mahabharat war was fought for righteousness. In the eighteen-day Mahabharat war, the thirteenth day would be remembered because of a heroic sixteen year old boy, Abhimanyu, son of one of the Pandavs, Arjun. During the thirteenth day of the war, he fought courageously against mighty warriors. Despite his tender age, his mastery in warfare and phenomenal valor wrecked such havoc that it caused the enemy leaders to use the most treacherous and cowardly means to try to defeat him.

At dawn on the thirteenth day, Duryodhan smartly arranged the Kauravs in a battle formation known as chakravyuh, a circular formation. At the center Guru Dronarachya kept Duryodhan. To guard him, he arranged seven circular formations going outwards. In the outer circles, he placed terrifying warriors known as Maharathis, such as Dushasan, Karna, Guru Kripacharya, Ashwathama, Shakuni, Shalya, Bhurishrava and Jayadrath.

When the Pandavs and their leader Yuddhisthir saw the chakravyuh, their high spirits dropped. Nobody among them knew how to break the chakravyuh except Arjun and his son Abhimanyu. That day, the war was purposely set up so that Arjun would be tied up elsewhere. Yuddhisthir appointed the sixteen year old Abhimanyu to break the chakravyuh. However, Abhimanyu knew how to go in but did not know how to come out. They then formed a battle strategy. When Abhimanyu broke through, the Pandavs would follow him to create a wider opening and protect him. They would prevent the outer layer of the circle from closing in. Abhimanyu then climbed his chariot. In an instant he was streaking like a lightning bolt towards the chakravyuh. The mighty warriors of the Pandavs army followed.

Young Abhimanyu clashed with the Kauravs at the outer ring. He charged through. The chakravyuh was open! Like a mighty lion he entered under the nose of Drona, his 'grand guru'. A mere sixteen year old had managed to outwit the experienced Guru Dronarachya. Abhimanyu shot off arrows like flashes of lightning. The arrows smashed chariots and cut down soldiers. Those who dared fight him either died or went for a hasty retreat. He was a tornado, whirling

through and churning up the Kauravs army. Abhimanyu reached Duryodhan finally. The seventh layer of the circle had been broken. The Maharathis rushed to protect Duryodhan.

Meanwhile Yuddhisthir and the other Pandavs clashed with Jayadrath at the outer layer, just after Abhimanyu broken through. Jayadrath, however effectively stopped their progress with a wall of elephants. The Pandavs could not help Abhimanyu, who had sped in the circle so fast. He was crashing



through the ranks, deeper and deeper into the Chakravayuh. Abhimanyu did not know how to get out so he was basically on his own.

At the center, a gruesome battle took place. Abhimanyu fought valiantly. He smashed and destroyed the hundreds of arrows fired at him by Kripacharya, Ashwathama, Duryodhan, Shalya and Bruhadbal. On several occasions, all of them had to flee his tremendous volley of arrows. He cut down many other Maharathis. Karna then asked Drona how Abhimanyu could be defeated. Drona admired Abhimanyu's unexcelled valor and supreme archery. He had no other choice but to reveal the secret of defeating Abhimanyu. As the master of warfare, only he knew how. He said, "If you can, break his dense armor, kill his two charioteers and destroy his chariot. Then cut the string of his bow. So long as he sits in his chariot with his bow, nobody can defeat him!"

The six Kauravs Maharathis did just that. They attacked him mercilessly from all sides and all at once. They knew well enough that in war only two people can fight each other at a time, but they deliberately broke the rules of war. However the gallant young Kshatriya fought right until the end. The Pandavs had an intuition that their worst fears had come true. Soon the terrible news was confirmed. Yuddhisthir and Bhim fell down sadly. They had sent Abhimanyu to his death. The Pandavs had never sunk so deep in despair and sorrow, since the beginning of the war. They were unable to face Arjun on his return. Despite his death, he had fought for Dharma (righteousness). This is why a sixteen year old boy was the supreme hero of the thirteenth day and even perhaps the whole Mahabharat war.



Dhruv - The Pole Star

One time long, long ago, a while after the Earth was created, there was a kingdom ruled by King Uttanpad. The king had two wives, Suruchi and Suniti. The two queens each had a son. Queen Suruchi was the second wife of the king and had a son named Uttam. Queen Suniti was the first wife of the king and had the eldest son, Dhruv.

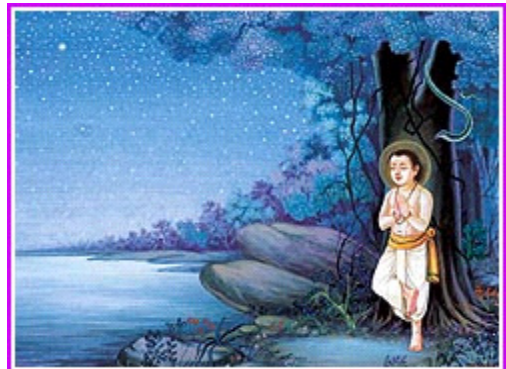
Queen Suruchi was the king's favorite queen. It is important to know what the name Suruchi means; it means to desire what the senses ask for, which could be a possible reason why the king had a weakness for her. The name Suniti however means that which is correct. While the king loved her and her son Uttam, he ignored his first queen Suniti and her son. Once, Uttam sat in his father's lap, Dhruv also sat beside his stepbrother. When queen Suruchi saw this, she shouted at him, "You cannot sit there. If you want to sit in the king's lap you shall have to prove your worthiness and undergo serious penance or be born from me."

Humiliated Dhruv ran to his mother, Queen Suniti, crying. He was trying to fight back the angry tears that were streaming down his eyes as he told his mother what had happened. She comforted him and told him, "Pray to Sri Vishnu, he will help you if you can pray long and hard enough." Dhruv couldn't bear this and went to the forest to please Sri Vishnu, just as his mother had said.

On the way he met Naradji, who tried to stop him. He said to Dhruv, "You are just a small child. How will you bear the winter's cold and the summer heat? Go back home." Dhruv replied to Naradji, "O learned sage! Even at the cost of my life and all the harsh conditions of the forest, I will prove myself worthy to sit in the lap of the king, my father, by undergoing great penance and pleasing God." Penance means to fast, to meditate and to live a very simple life.

Naradji was pleased with Dhruv's dedication and fearlessness and he showed Dhruv the place and the method to practice penance. Naradji taught Dhruv, the technique of prayer and asked him to chant the mantra: '*Om namo Bhagvate Vasudevaaya*'

Dhruv reached a place in the forest called Madhuvan. He stood on one leg and started



praying to God. Dhruv was so absorbed in his penance that the difficulties of forest life did not affect him at all. For the 1st month he subsisted on fruit and meditated for 3 days at a stretch. For the 2nd month, he meditated for 6 days at a stretch. For the 3rd month, Dhruv meditated for 9 days at a stretch and subsisted on only leaves. For the 4th month, he meditated for 12 days at a stretch and subsisted on only water from the Yamuna River. For the 5th month Dhruv meditated for 15 days at a stretch, and renounced water as well. By the 6th month Dhruv decided that he would stay put in the same position until Sri Vishnu appeared.



One day Sri Vishnu stood in front of Dhruv, he did not open his eyes as he was already seeing Sri Vishnu within his own heart. Sri Vishnu made the form that Dhruv was witnessing within himself, disappear! Dhruv became restless and opened his eyes and behold, Sri Vishnu was standing outside! Pleased with his devotion, Sri Vishnu appeared before Dhruv. "I am pleased with your devotion. Tell me, what do you wish?" Sri Vishnu asked Dhruv. Dhruv asked for that which the God wished to give him. Sri Vishnu's wish was that Dhruv should return to his kingdom.

In the meantime, King Uttanpad repented the injustice done to Dhruv. He was heartbroken and very worried that his son might be killed and eaten by wild beasts. Naradji consoled him, telling him that Dhruv's resolve was firm and that he had received Sri Vishnu's blessings and be protected by him.

When Dhruv finally returned home safely, King Uttanpad went personally to greet him. Queen Suniti was overjoyed at her son's safe return. As time went on, Dhruv became the king and ruled wisely for many years.

Sri Vishnu knew that Dhruv had started his penance because he had wanted to sit in his father's lap. Dhruv was transported to the highest point of heaven, where he sits on Sri Vishnu's lap as the North Pole Star. The Dhruv tara (star) is the brightest star which will guide the misguided to their final divine destination.

Dhruv's story shows us that at one point or another of our life we all encounter situations that are unfair. Instead of focusing on our misfortunes, sincere meditation on God can help us to overcome the obstacles of our daily lives through God's grace.



Story of Guru Nanak Devji

Whenever there is decline of righteousness, whenever there are oppression and chaos in the land, whenever the faith of the people in God wanes, great men or saints appear from time to time to enrich sacred literature, to protect Dharma, to destroy unrighteousness and reawaken the love of God in the minds of the people. It was the time when Bharatiya (Indian) continent was invaded and ruled by foreign invaders. There was wholesale massacre everywhere; the kings were cruel and tyrannical and the people were cunning, selfish and greed. There was religious persecution. The real spirit of dharma was crushed by ritualism. At such time, Guru Nanak came to the world with a message of peace, unity, love and devotion to God. Nanak was born in 1469 in the Punjab province of Bharat (India). His father, Kalu, was an agriculturist and accountant of the village.

Soon Nanak started going to school. But he was really not interested in gaining materialistic knowledge. His teacher, Gopal Pandha, insisted him to learn mathematics and accounts. He asked Gopal Pandha, "What is the extent of your knowledge? Does it help me to obtain salvation?" Gopal Pandha was struck with wonder. He could not give any satisfactory answer to Nanak's question. But Nanak learnt mathematics and accounts anyway.

Nanak would not chant anything without understanding it's meaning. Once his sanskrit teacher, Pandit Brij Nath, asked him to write and chant - OM. Nanak asked him first, "Guruji! What is the meaning of OM? You did not teach me the meaning yet. How can I chant it if I don't know the meaning?" Teacher Pandit Brij Nath was very astonished at his words and also little angry. He himself did not know the meaning of OM. Then Nanak replied, "Let me explain you the meaning" and



he himself explained to Pandit Brij Nath the meaning of OM.

Nanak had a mystic disposition since childhood. He had a contemplative mind and a pious nature. One day, when Nanak was fifteen years of age, his father Kalu gave him twenty rupees (Indian currency) and said, "Nanak, go to the market and purchase some profitable commodity". Kalu sent his servant Bala also to accompany Nanak. Nanak and Bala, while going to market, met a party of Sadhus (saints). Nanak thought: "Let me feed these Sadhus now. This is the most profitable bargain I can make". He purchased provisions immediately and fed them sumptuously. Then he came back to his house. The servant Bala informed his master of his son's bargain. Kalu was very much annoyed. He gave a slap on Nanak's face. The father thought that Nanak did not like sedentary work. Therefore he said to Nanak, "O dear son! Ride on a horse and do travelling business. This will suit you nicely". Nanak replied, "Revered father! My trade is divine knowledge. The profits are the purseful of good deeds with which I can certainly reach the domain of the God". This event indicates Nanak's divine nature and inclination towards god. Nanak began to spend his time in meditation and spiritual practices.

Nanak got married to Sulakhani. He had two sons. Nanak discharged his duties very satisfactorily. He spent a small portion of his earnings for his own maintenance and distributed the rest to the poor. Even after the marriage, he continued practicing severe austerities and intense meditation. He used to go to forest and lonely places for his meditation.

Nanak became a public preacher at the age of thirty-four. He began to preach his mission through his songs and bhajans. When Nanak sang songs, his faithful servant Mardana used to accompany him on the rebeck. Nanak and his servant Mardana wandered from place to



place to carry the message of peace and love for everybody. He preached the universal brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God to all people. He asked people to take God's name with every breath. Nanak was a reformer too. He attacked the corruptions in society. He strongly protested against formalism and ritualism. He said, "ritualism is not necessary while worshipping god". His preaching produced a deep impression on the minds of the public. Soon, he became known as - Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak's songs are collected and preserved in the Granth Sahib or Adi Granth—the sacred book of the Sikhs community. This book is in Gurumukhi language. Guru Nanak invented the Gurumukhi characters by simplifying the Sanskrit characters. The compositions of Guru Nanak are extensively described in this Granth Sahib Book. The Granth Sahib begins with the following: "There is but one God whose name is true—the Creator". It contains a code of high morals. Purity of life, obedience to Guru, mercy, charity, temperance, justice, straightforwardness, truthfulness, sacrifice, service, love and abstinence from animal food are among the virtues on which great emphasis is laid; while lust, anger, pride, hatred, egoism, greed, selfishness, cruelty, backbiting and falsehood are vehemently condemned.

Guru Nanak lived in this world for sixty nine years. He spent all his life in worshipping god and preaching people. Because of his rigorous meditation in order to realise God quickly, he became weak and sick. He felt that his time has come. He gave up food and became wholly absorbed in divine contemplation. He observed perfect silence and at the age of sixty nine, he took his last breath.



Stories of Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas alias Mahatma Gandhi was one of the tallest and greatest freedom fighters of India. He was full of virtues. He was a political leader as well as spiritual man like a saint. He held high moral and values all his life. He practiced all his beliefs and encouraged others to follow him. His entire life is an inspiration for all.

No cheating:

One day, the Inspector of Schools, Mr. Giles came to Mohan's school. He read out few English words to the class and asked boys to write them down. Everyone did. Mohan wrote all words correctly except one. He could not spell the last word 'Kettle'. Seeing Mohan's problem, the teacher made a sign behind the Inspector's back that he should copy the word from his neighbouring student. But Mohan ignored his signs. After the Inspector left, the teacher scolded him. "I told you to copy from your neighbor," he said angrily. "Couldn't you even do that correctly?" Everyone laughed. But Mohan was bold and brave enough to say that he couldn't cheat. He said, "I would not have any respect for myself if I cheated."

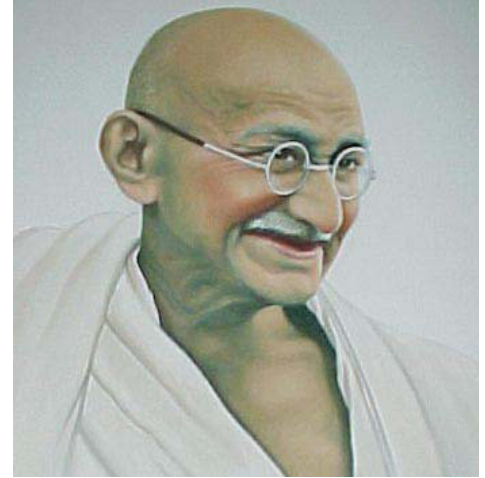
Father's death changed his behavior

When Mohan was 13 years old, he fell into bad company and picked up many bad habits. It was because of these bad habits, that unknown to his parents, he was once forced to sell a part of his gold bracelet. However, he soon realised his mistake, and amply repented his sinful behavior. He decided to make a clean breast of everything to his father, but he lacked the courage to face him. So instead, he wrote a letter to his father, mentioning all the sinful deeds he had done. He gave the letter to his father, and stood by his bedside, his face hanging down in shame. At that time his father was seriously ill. He felt miserable when he read the letter. Tears rolled down his cheeks, but he did not say a single word to his son. It was too much for him to bear. Right then, he resolved that he would always lead a truthful and honest life, and throughout his life he stuck to his resolution.

Simple living, high thinking:

Once, Mohandas Gandhi was invited for a tea at Buckingham Palace in London with King George V and Queen Mary. Everyone, including England's political figures and royal people, was well dressed. Someone knew about Gandhi's

simple lifestyle. He advised Gandhi to put on good and wealthy clothes while going to the palace. But, Gandhi ignored his advice and arrived at the palace wearing only a loincloth, sandals, and a shawl, which he had woven himself from the thread he had made on his own spinning wheel. King George met him dressed in fine clothing, with gold medals and ribbons on his chest. The king and the queen asked him, *“Why do you wear such clothes? Don’t you feel embarrassing amongst us?”* Gandhi confidently replied, *“I wear what common Indians wear. I came here as a representative of common Indian people.”* Then jokingly he said, *“In your country, you wear plus fours. But I prefer to wear minus fours.”*



When Gandhi ji was in South Africa, he had a German friend named Kallenbach. He was a rich man and had a great respect for Gandhi ji. Once Gandhi ji was put in a jail. When he was released, Kallenbach bought a new car and went to receive him. When Gandhi ji realized that his german friend bought a new car just to receive and take him home, he refused to enter the car. He painfully replied, *“It is stupid to spend so much money on a car when other people are suffering. You must return it to the seller before doing anything else.”*

Humiliation in South Africa changed his life:

One day in South Africa, Gandhi ji was travelling from Durban to Pretoria in the first class compartment of a train. Next station, a Britishman also boarded the compartment. On seeing Gandhi ji, a Britishman got furious. He called the Railway officer, and both ordered him to get out of the train. Since Gandhi ji had purchased a first class ticket, he refused to do so. However, they paid no heed to him. Gandhiji also did not budge. Finally the police were summoned. They pushed him out of the compartment and threw his luggage out of the window. Gandhiji had to spend the whole night on the platform. This was one of the many humiliating experiences Gandhi ji had to face. Gandhi ji made a resolve to fight against unjust, inhuman laws and discrimination.

Mohandas Gandhi was full of virtues. He held high moral and values in politics, personal life and social life. His simple living, high thinking, honesty, truthfulness and “walk the talk” behavior have made him one of the greatest sons of Bharat (India). His all life is inspiring for entire human being.



Dadhichi's Worthy Donation

King of Gods, Indra, himself was asking a saintly man, "We are in difficulty. We need your bones for our survival. You must make up your mind for such a sacrifice." The man, without hesitation or fear, calmly said, "All right. The man has to die one day or other. It is better to die in order to benefit of others. I shall give up my body in a few minutes. You can have my bones then!" Who was this man who readily sacrificed himself for the sake of others? His name was Sage Dadhichi. He did it as if it was not a big deal for him at all.

In many pauranik stories, we have heard a common man asking for a help from Gods. But in this story, God Indra Himself asks for a help from a man.

Once a demon named Vritra became very strong, terrible. He was very cruel. He was born as a brahmin, but because of his behavior and actions, he became a demon. Soon a battle between demons and gods broke out. Vrita was the leader of the demons. He soon gained the upper hand over gods. The gods could not bear their blows and were in despair.

The gods approached Sri Brahma for help. Sri Brahma took them to Sri Vishnu. Sri Vishnu, bearing the responsibility of protecting the world, consoled Indra saying, "Hey Indra! Don't be afraid. The demon Vrita is indeed powerful, but there is a way to defeat him. Go to sage Dadhichi's hermitage. His bones contain weapons potent enough to destroy Vrita."

As advised by Sri Vishnu, Indra approached sage Dadhichi. Dadhichi was living a pious life of penance and spirituality. Offering his courtesies, Indra said, "Hey rishivarya, Sri Vishnu has sent me to you. We need a favor!" Dadhichi replied, "Sri Vishnu has sent you? Then I don't have to think. Please tell me how can I help you?"

Indra told sage Dadhichi about the demon Vrita. He implored, "We are in a great trouble. Sri Vishnu has told us that your bones have enough power to kill Vrita. On behalf of all gods, I request you to give us your bones so that we can kill him." Sage Dadhichi knew that giving his bones means giving up his life. But he didn't hesitate even for a moment. Fearlessly he said, "Hey Indra, I am a man. And man has to die one day or other. It is better to die for others. I am ready

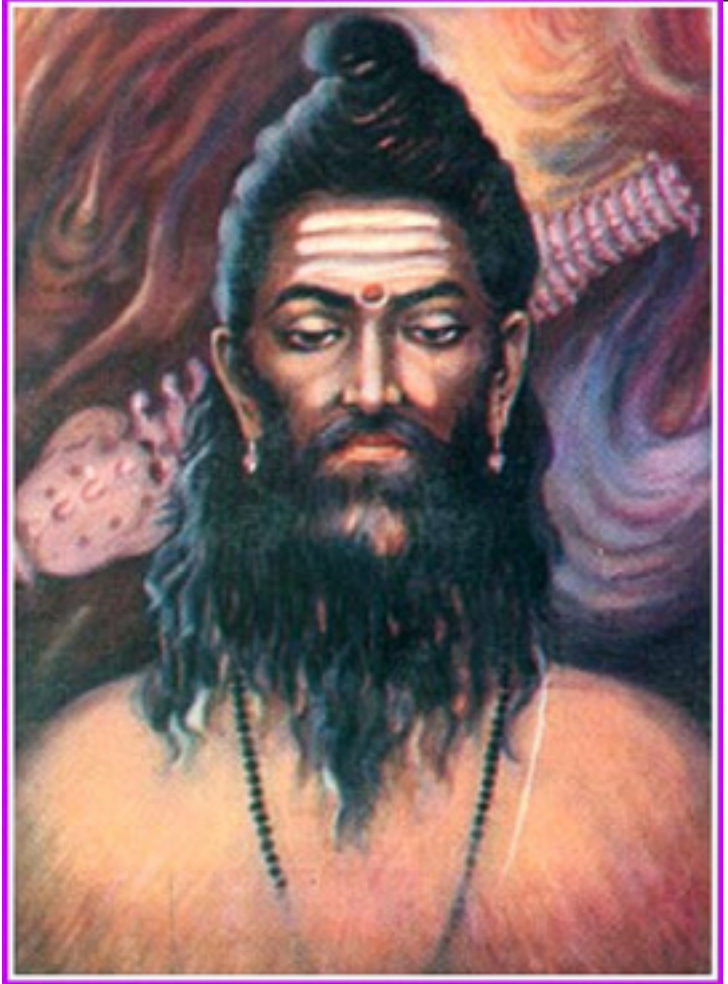
to give up my life. You can have my bones. May you be victorious!" By saying this, with his spiritual power, he gave up his life. Indra was extremely grateful to him.

Indra then took sage Dadhichi's bones to Vishwakarma. Vishwakarma made sharp and deadly weapons out of Dadhichi's bones. The gods took those weapons. They again went to the battlefield and challenged the demon Vrita. Vrita was little surprised. He thought how come gods can challenge him. He came out with his full capacity.

Now the gods had powerful weapons made out of sage Dadhichi's bones. They gained physical strength and confident. They valiantly fought against the Vrita and his demons army. Indra

specially got a fatal weapon Vajra (thunderbolt), the most powerful weapon with a hundred bulging knots. Indra, possessing Vajra, bravely fought against Vrita and destroyed him. The victorious gods shouted in joy "Hurrah!" At last good overcame evil.

The gods won the war because of sage Dadhichi's worthy donation. As Dadhichi gave up his life for the sake of others, he attained immortality and everlasting fame. His image of sacrifice will be cherished in everybody's heart. Considering sage Dadhichi as a role model, we should also try to make sacrifices for the sake of others.



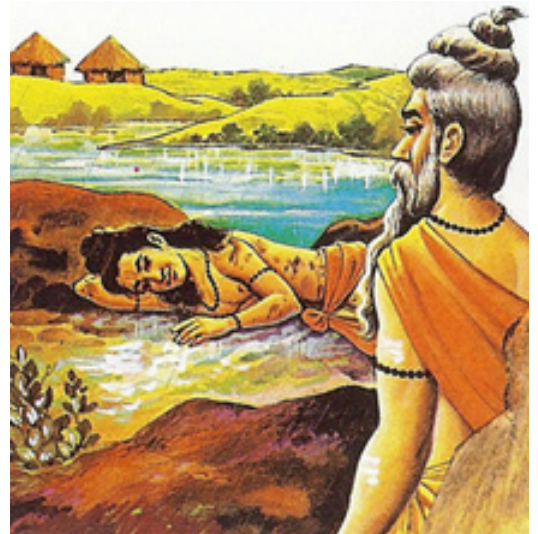
Guru-Shishya Story

Dhaumya Rishi (Sage) and his three disciples

The Guru is the form of the trinity gods - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Sri Shiva). If one has a Guru, then one must serve him or her ungrudgingly, selflessly and lovingly. Guru is the abode of all knowledge and wisdom and blesses his disciples with the same. Here is an anecdote from the Mahabharata which illustrates this truth.

Long time ago there was a Guru named Dhaumya Rishi. He had three disciples who came to him to learn the Vedas. They were Aruni Panchal, Baid and Upamanyu. One day Aruni was asked by the Guru to water his field so that the cereal crop would grow well. The water had to be brought into the field through a canal from a tank which was a little far away. The tank was shallow. Aruni dug the canal, and water started flowing into the field. Then unfortunately, a breach developed in one of the bunds of the canal and the water started draining out and escaping away through the breach, thus stopping the flow of water into the field. Aruni tried his best to fill up the breach by piling up stones and filling it with sand, but he could not succeed. The water was going waste and he was worried as to how to get the field filled with water. Then, he had an idea. He laid down at the side of the breach, thus blocking it. The water thereby, started flowing into the field. He remained there in the same position so that the field would get water fully.

It was quite late in the night and as the boy did not return home, the Guru was worried as to what would have happened to him, and he went to the field searching for him. He was surprised and felt glad to find the field full of water, which had never happened before, but at the same time, he was worried as Aruni was nowhere in sight. He called out loudly, "Aruni! Aruni!". From the waters of the canal Aruni replied in a feeble voice, "Gurudeo! I am here." The Guru reached to him and pulled him out.



Aruni fell prostrate at the Guru's feet and offered his obeisance to him. The Guru was touched by the boy's unselfish devotion to him and placing his hand on the boy's head, blessed him saying, "May you become proficient and gain mastery in all Vedas and the Shastra." No sooner than the Guru said this, Aruni became fully enlightened and all knowledge dawned on him in a flash.

Guru asked Baid to till the land, sow the seeds, raise the crop and take all care till harvesting was complete and the grains were safely brought home. Baid worked hard on the field, day in and day out, without wasting a single moment, and sparing no pains. Due to his relentless efforts, the crop came out very well and yielded a very rich harvest. Baid loaded the grains on the cart and started to drive the cart to the Guru's house. The load was too heavy and the bullock was unable to draw the cart. Baid was also trying to pull the cart along with the bullock. Unfortunately, the bullock got stuck up in the mire and the cart's wheels also sank deep down in the mud. Baid let the bullock free and started with all his strength to push the cartwheels and make the cart move. In the process, he almost lost his breath and was about to collapse. Dhaumya Rishi was coming to see how Baid was faring with the collection of the harvest. On the way, he saw the heavily loaded cart and Baid. But alas he found Baid tottering on his feet and collapsing almost on the verge of death. The Guru was very much moved with his selfless and steadfast devotion. He pulled Baid out of the mire and placed his right hand on his head, which immediately revived him. Not only that, Baid also received total enlightenment and knowledge with the blessed touch of the Guru.

Here's the account of Upamanyu's Guru Seva & Bhakti. Upamanyu was also a very devoted disciple, but he had an habit of over eating. The Guru wanted to curb this habit of his of over indulgence with food. The Guru gave Upamanyu the task of looking after his herd of cattle.

The grazing grounds were far away. Upamanyu used to leave home early in the morning along with the herd and used to come back late evening. During this time, he was supposed to eat a very little food that the Guru used to give him. However, being unable to control his hunger, he used to beg alms from the nearby houses. The Guru finding the boy still fat, asked him what he was eating in the afternoons. Upamanyu told him that he was begging alms and eat it. The Guru said he should not eat it, but bring it to him and eat only whatever he (the Guru) gave him. Upamanyu started doing what the Guru said. But, as he was feeling very hungry in the afternoon, he started drinking the remnants of the milk from the cows' udders. The Guru prohibited that too.

Upamanyu became very much emaciated for the lack of food. Unable to bear the hunger, one day, seeing some milk-like sap exude from the plant, he drank it. It was poisonous and it affected his eye nerves and made him blind. While driving the cattle home in the evening, he couldn't find the way due to his lost eyesight and he fell into a well. As he did not reach home, Dhaumya rishi



went searching for him calling out his name. When Upamanyu answered the Guru saw his disciple fallen into the well. He pulled him out. After hearing the entire story, the Guru moved by his truthful and implicit obedience. He asked him to chant the invocation-mantra to the Ashwini Devatas. After chanting the mantra, Upamanyu instantly regained his sight. He also received scriptural knowledge and wisdom with Guru's blessings. Later, he became a most renowned Rishi. He became guru to great shishya like Udanka who presided over the Great Serpent Sacrifice of King Janamejaya, which brought even Indra down from the Heaven, along with his throne towards the sacrificial fire. It is also said that Udanka, soon after completing his discipleship, obtained from Adishesha in Patala, the latter's ear kundalas, and brought and offered them as the Guru Dakshina to his Guru Upamanyu.

The three disciples in the above illustration represent the three graded Gunas - Tamas, Rajas and Satva. Devotion to Guru will unfailingly take us beyond the Gunas. Gunas transcended, Atma Jnana will shine forth in us. While the Guru's Grace helps us in finally transcending the Gunas, transcending of each one of the three Gunas will take time. Each aspirant progresses at his own pace, which is largely dependent upon the characteristics of nature of his predominant Guna. Upamanyu symbolises Tamo-guna predominantly, and the latter takes longer duration of time to get transcended and sublimated. Baid symbolises Rajo-guna, which could be transcended in a lesser time. Aruni symbolises Satva Guna and it could be transcended but in one day. With devotion, dedication and surrender to the Guru, one becomes Gunatheeta, i.e., one goes beyond the trammels of Maya which alone will enable him to experience his true inner Self.



Gargi - A renowned Philosopher

Gargi is very renowned in the Vedic literature. Her father's name was 'Vachaknu', and so she came to be known as 'Vachaknavi'. Because of being born in the Garga Gotra (community), she was also called Gargi, a name that became well known. Nowhere one finds mention of her real name - Vachaknavi. From the questions she asked Sage Yajnavalkya, as mentioned in the Vrihadaranyak- Upanishad, it is apparent that she was extremely thoughtful and a woman highly learned in the spiritual sciences.

Once a debate was organized to discuss spiritual scriptures in the court of King Janak. He wanted to know who had the most knowledge and wisdom in the world at the time. King Janak arranged to present one thousand cows, their horns covered with gold, and announced in the court, "Whoever has the most knowledge and wisdom amongst



you, can take these cows." None of the brahmans (scholars) dared to take the cows since everyone knew that he would have to prove his knowledge in the debate to establish himself as the best among the lot. Then the great sage Yajnavalkya asked his disciple, "You shepherd all these cows and take them away from here for me." This opened the debate. Many scholars asked many questions to Yajnavalkya, who patiently answered all their questions, allaying their concerns and doubts. Now it was Gargi's turn. She asked many difficult and complex questions to Yajnavalkya on spirituality, cosmology, elements of immortality, languages, etc. From these questions asked by Gargi, it was obvious that she was a great-learned lady and exponent of Vedic knowledge. Upon hearing from Yajnavalkya the answers of her last two questions, Gargi, the absolute soul, also bowed her head to the great sage Yajnavalkya. In the assembly of the scholars, Gargi pronounced the verdict, "There is no one superior to Sage Yajnavalkya; no one can defeat him." Gargi was not only very studious and profoundly learned in the Vedic scriptures; but she also respected others who were learned. She had no bias to prove herself about others. That's why Gargi generously praised Yajnavalkya. Gargi was an ascetic lady and a learned one of the highest order a luminous jewel among the women of India.



Bhakta (devotee) Prahlad

Prahlad's story begins during the time of Sri Vishnu's fourth avatar (incarnation) Varaha. In order to rescue the earth from the captivity of Hiranyaksha, Sri Vishnu had arrived in the avatar (incarnation) Varaha (boar) form and killed him. Hiranyaksha's elder brother Hiranyakashipu was very angry about this. He resolved to take revenge of his brother's death. He went to the Himalayas and began to perform severe penance for many, many years. Sri Brahma was pleased by his penance and asked him for a boon. Hiranyakashipu asked that "May I never be killed neither by any weapon nor any creature made by you, neither in the day nor in the night, and neither on earth nor in the sky". Sri Brahma agreed to Hiranyakashipu's boon and gave it to him.

While Hiranyakashipu was away, the gods had attacked his kingdom and killed his nephews. Sri Indra had even abducted his wife, Queen Kayadhu, who was expecting a child. Devarishi Narad stopped Indra on his way back to heaven. Indra declared to Devarishi Narad that Kayadhu was pregnant; he would destroy her unborn baby and so he should release her. Devarishi Narad however, assured Indra that the unborn baby was a supreme devotee of Sri Vishnu and that he should not fear him. Sri Indra was convinced and released Queen Kayadhu, who then began to stay at Devarishi Narad's hermitage. Addressing the unborn baby, Narad daily used to preach Queen Kayadhu about the devotion one should have for God. This was the way the baby would never forget the preaching it received in the pre-natal stage.

At the appropriate time, Queen Kayadhu gave birth to a son, Prahlad. Prahlad was the youngest among Hiranyakashipu's four sons. He appeared to be the eldest in virtues. He did not have any desires. He was content like the hermits, truthful and always wished well for everyone. He had full control over his senses, mind and body. He was also completely untouched by the demonic virtues of his father and brothers. Since childhood, he remained submerged in devotion to Sri Vishnu.

The demons even tried to use their illusionary powers on Prahlad but none of their powers could stand before him. Two sages, Shand and Amark produced an ogress, Kritya to kill Prahlad if he didn't follow their ways, but she killed them instead of killing Prahlad. But Prahlad was kind hearted and prayed to Sri Vishnu and brought them back to life.



Hiranyakashipu tried another way to kill Prahlad. He had a sister, Holika who had a boon that she would not die by fire. King Hiranyakashipu asked her to sit on a bonfire with Prahlad on her lap in the hope that this would kill Prahlad. Prahlad was not at all worried and chanted Sri Vishnu's name and was not hurt, but Holika was burned to her death. All the measures taken by the demons to kill Prahlad proved to be fruitless.

Because of this, Hiranyakashipu began to feel afraid. Once more, he forcibly sent Prahlad to the hermitage of Shand and Amark. Once there, Prahlad did take the education they offered but had no interest in their teachings. When his teachers used to get engaged in minor activities, Prahlad would assemble his fellow disciples around him and preach to them that, "Brothers, this human incarnation is not meant to be wasted. If we don't find God in this birth, it would be a great loss. We can achieve the means to find God right in our childhood, for when we grow old, we are caught by the material wealth and nothing can be done in old age. It is very easy to find God. He is present in everyone's hearts. He is in every living being. Hence, we should not torture any creature. We should concentrate our mind in the God".

At the age of five years, Prahlad was preaching to the demon boys. The demon boys followed him faithfully. His teachers saw that Prahlad's teachings were against demonic traditions, Prahlad was sent back to Hiranyakashipu. Hiranyakashipu decided to kill Prahlad with his own hands. He tied Prahlad to a pillar. Hiranyakashipu asked in a loud voice: "O fool, with whose powers you have been humiliating me with? Now, I am going to kill you, call your God to save you."

Prahlad was unconcerned replied humbly: "Father, don't be angry. Sri Vishnu is the protector of us all. I am not dishonoring you. One's own mind is his biggest enemy in the world. Sri Vishnu is everywhere. He is in me, in you, in your sword and is also present in that pillar".

Little Prahlad could not even finish his words when his angry father hit the pillar with his mace. As soon as the mace touched the pillar, it broke with a thundering sound. Everyone who was present in the court panicked. They saw a creature emerging from the pillar. It had the face of a lion and a human body. Emerging from the broken pillar was the avatar (incarnation) of Sri Vishnu as Narsimha. Narsimha roared angrily. The demon king Hiranyakashipu tried his best to escape from Narsimha. But at last, Narsimha caught hold of him and dragged him towards the threshold. There, he put Hiranyakashipu on thighs and tore his belly with his terrifying nails.

Narsimha did not calm down even after killing Hiranyakashipu. He was still roaring repeatedly. Sri Brahma, Sri Shankar and even Goddess Lakshmi prayed to Sri Narsimha from a distance but no one had the courage to go near him. Finally, Brahma sent Prahlad near Narsimha to calm him down. Fearlessly, Prahlad went near Narsimha and laid himself flat at his feet. Affectionately, the Sri in Narsimha form raised Prahlad and embraced him and said: "O son Prahlad, you had to bear the sufferings for so long. Please forgive me."

Prahlad felt overwhelmed. The god of the universe was standing before him and was stroking his head in assuring way. Prahlad bowed his head faithfully. Sri Narsimha then asked Prahlad to seek some boon. Prahlad said: "You are my true God. If you wish to grant me a boon, kindly bless me that no desire may arise in my mind for anything."

Prahlad also prayed to Sri Narsimha for his father, asking him, "O God, my father had always criticized you. Please free him from the sins he has committed." Sri Narsimha replied saying, "Prahlad, your father has now become holy." Sri Narsimha promised Prahlad that he would never kill any of his descendents. Sri Narsimha then escorted Prahlad to the throne of his father and made him sit on it, instructing him to follow good conduct and do his duties. Saying those words Sri Narsimha disappeared.



Stories of Swami Vivekananda

Most of us at some time in our life have heard about incidents from the life of Swami Vivekananda (Narendra). He is one of the most important figures in shaping concepts of Hindu Dharma. He was full of virtues. Fearlessness, yogi, brave, kindness, strong, steady, great devotee, great poet, well versed with Vedanta and Upanishada, sacrifice and service were some of his virtues. Following are some incidents from his life that reflect some of his virtues.

Where is the ghost?

Generally, children get easily frightened. Sometimes in order to keep them in control, elders talk to them about ghosts. Narendra was courageous and very intelligent. Could such a trick work with him?

There was a huge tree. Narendra and his friends used to climb on the tree and play on its branches boisterously. The owner of the tree was tired of the noisy children. So, he decided to put an end to the nuisance by frightening them. One day he went to them and said: "Look here! There is a ghost haunting that tree. If you don't leave the place, the ghost will appear and devour you all." Except Narendra, all other children were scared and started slipping away. But Narendra remained unperturbed. Instead of getting frightened, he became more curious about the ghost. He became more playful. Swinging himself vigorously from the branches, he asked the owner of the tree, "Where is the ghost? I am curious to see him." Narendra understood that there wasn't any ghost and the owner just wanted to scare them away. Narendra then called his friends and told them not to believe in such silly things.



Helped an English Sailor

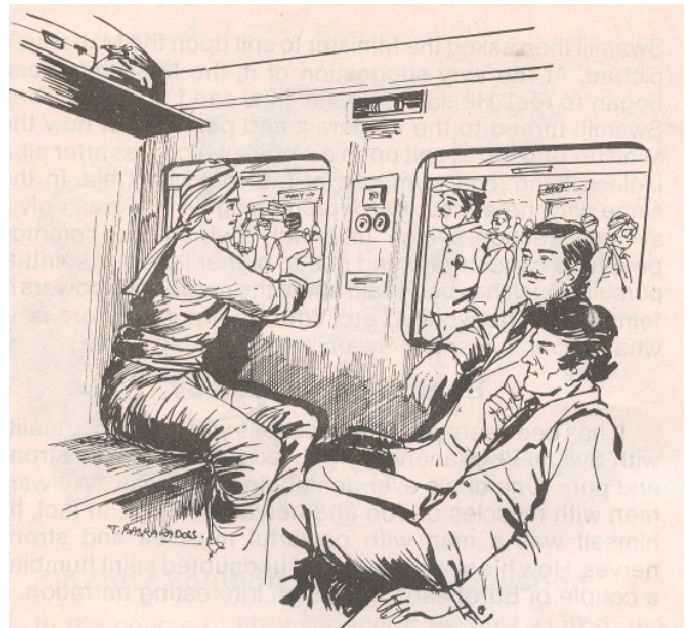
Narendra loved gymnastics. Not far from his house, there was a gymnasium. He used to go there with his friends. One day, at the gymnasium, there were setting up a swing. An English sailor went to help them. Accidentally, a pole fell on his head causing bleeding and wound. He fell on the ground. The sight of blood frightened and confused the boys around. They did not know what should be done next. But, Narendra did not lose his presence of mind. Tearing off his shirt, he bandaged the sailor's head. Then, sitting by his side, fanned him. Very soon, the sailor came to consciousness. Narendra then collected some money from his friends and gave it to the sailor as a further help.



Strong and Steady

Once Swamiji was travelling somewhere by train. Two Europeans were seated near him. These two foreigners did not like the Indian co-traveller. They hated Swamiji's simple saffron clothing. They presumed that he must be illiterate. So, they freely indulged in loose talks about the Swamiji in English. They thought that he would not understand their talk. Swamiji also did not seem to take notice of their talk or mocking remarks.

After some time, Swamiji called the station-master and asked him for a glass of water, in English. The foreigners were shocked to discover that Swamiji was speaking English. They sensed that the Swamiji must have understood all they had talked about him. So, as if to apologize, they asked him, "We were pulling your legs. Why did you remain silent all this time?" Swamiji immediately replied, "My friends, this is not the first time in my life that I've met fools." The



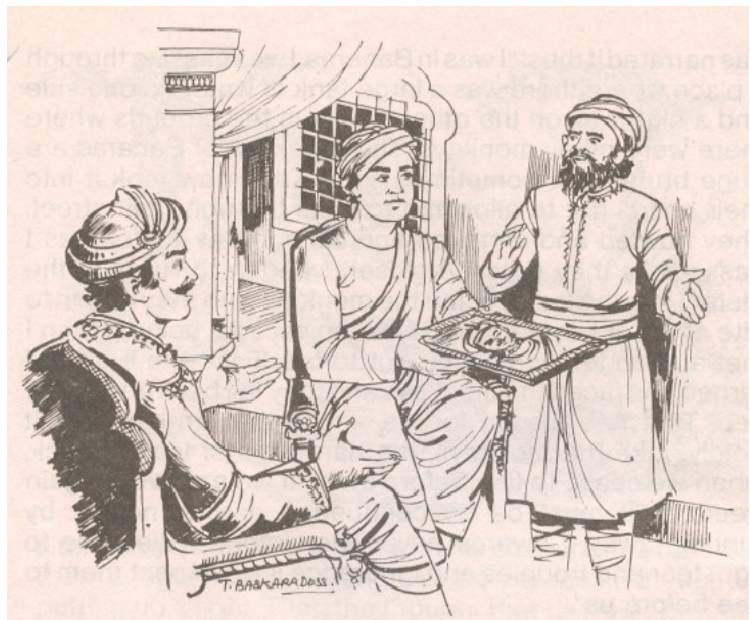
two foreigners were annoyed at his answer but could not do anything looking at strong and iron body of Swamiji.

What is God?

Once some students from the Christian College went to see Swami Vivekananda. They wanted to corner him and have some fun. One of them asked him, "Sir, What is God? Can you show me?" Swamiji remained silent for a moment. He understood the mischievous plot. Suddenly he asked students, "Boys, what is energy? Can you show me?" Students were speechless. They could not give any answer. Swamiji then explained them energy as well as God with simple and small day-to-day examples.

Knotty solution to a knotty question

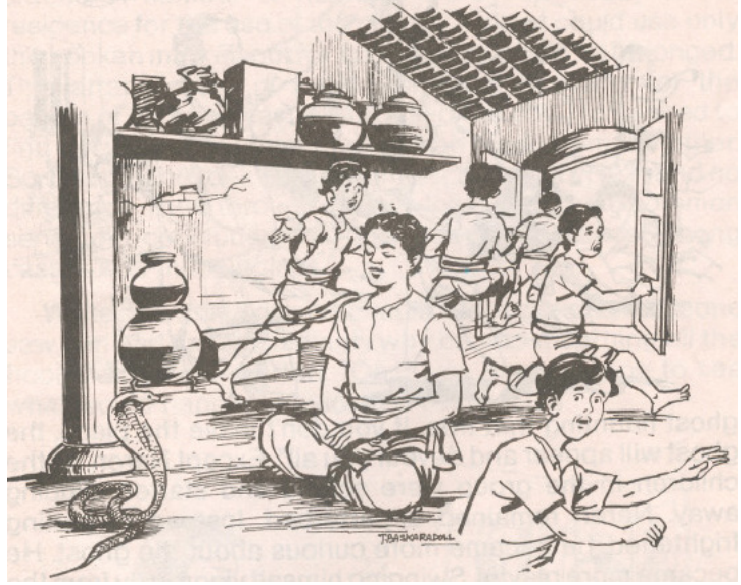
Once Swami Vivekananda went to the Alwar province of Bharat. He was received by the king with all royal honors. The king was young and was not a believer of icon/image worship. While talking to Swamiji, he asked skeptically about the stone images being worshipped in the temples. Swamiji answered the king, "Worshipping through image is also a mode of worshipping God. People need something visible to concentrate and worship. There is no harm in it." But the king would not agree. To demonstrate the spirit behind his approach, Swamiji turned to the Minister present there and asked him to bring to him to portrait of the king hanging on the wall. The Minister brought the picture and handed it over to Swamiji. Swamiji then asked him to spit upon the king's portrait. At the very suggestion of it, the Minister's head began to reel. He said, "Oh, no. I can't do that." Swamiji then asked king to do the same. The somewhat angry king also refused to do so. Swamiji then told them, "See! This portrait is merely a lifeless picture. You still refused to spit on it because it is a symbol of king himself." In the same line, he added, "Worshipping image is only a symbolic action. That helps people to concentrate." At last, king and Minister were convinced. In such a simple manner, Swamiji



explained the act of image-worship.

Yogi Vivekananda

In a way, Narendra was a born yogi. He was an expert at meditation. His power of concentration was very high. One day, Narendra was immersed in meditation. Suddenly, there appeared a cobra. It crawled over his body and slid down and went away. It was a moment full of fear and excitement to his little companions who ran off and watched the shocking and frightful scene from a safe distance. But Narendra was totally unaware of all that. His concentration was so deep that even the crawling of a cobra over his body did not disturb him.



Swami Vivekananda's legacy continues today. His writings, speeches, thoughts, and life have inspired millions of Hindus around the world and will continue to inspire coming generations.



Story of Ahalya

Ahalya was the wife of Sage Gautam. Of the five glorious women who are regarded as worthy of being remembered every morning, the name of Ahalya comes first. The other four jewels of women are Sita, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodari.

Brahma caused the origin of a beautiful baby girl who was called 'Ahalya' for being free of 'Hala' (sin). Brahma kept this girl with Sage Gautam as a caretaker. After some time, when Ahalya grew to be a beautiful young woman, Gautam went to Brahma to return her to him. Brahma, pleased with the sense of pious duty and self-control on part of Gautam, got Ahalya married with him. They had a son named Shatanand, who became the royal priest of King Janak.

One episode that is famous is as follows. Indra, the king of gods, in cooperation with the Moon god, assumed the form of Sage Gautam and committed a sin with Ahalya. Ahalya, though she was devoted to her husband, could not recognize Indra. On learning about this incident, Gautam became incensed with anger and cursed Indra to become 'Sahasrabhang' and Ahalya to turn into a stone. Later, becoming pleased with Ahalya's entreaty, he said to Ahalya that she would resume her original human form when, in the Treta-Yug, Sri Ram would touch her with his feet. Due to the curse, Ahalya continued lying in the form of a stone. When the time came, Shree Ram, traveling to Janakpuri with his guru Sage Vishwamitra, emancipated Ahalya, bringing her to resume human form.



The reason for Indra's transgression was the fear the gods had of Sage Gautam and his severe austerities, which made him capable of setting the whole earth ablaze. The gods wanted to disrupt Gautam's tapasya (austerities), which was possible only by raising fumes of rage in his mind. To disrupt Sage Gautam's tapasya and to set his mind on extreme rage, Indra committed this sin under permission from the Devas. The enraged sage uttered the curse, and this damaged the effect of his penance and austerities.

Devoted to her husband, always absorbed in serving him, Ahalya became a stone due to her husband's curse; and Sri Ram himself brought her back to human life. Ahalya is most certainly one of the greatest women of Bharat (India).



Story of Shравan Kumar

Once upon a time, when king Dashrath (Shri Ram's father) ruled Ayodya, there lived a boy named Shравan Kumar. His parents were old and blind. He had to do all the work for them, since they couldn't see. Shравan Kumar took great care and did everything for his mother and father with earnestness and love. He fulfilled all their wishes.

One day, Shравan Kumar's parents expressed their desire to go on a pilgrimage. As an obedient son, he wanted to fulfill their wish. But, how was he going to do that? He couldn't afford any transportation since he did not have money. He found another way. He took a strong bamboo-stick, tied baskets at its two ends, and placed his parents in those baskets. He, then, started on a pilgrimage carrying a bamboo-stick with baskets on his shoulder. His parents were very pleased looking at their son's devotion.



During the journey, Shравan Kumar managed to get some roots and fruits from the forest to eat. They filled their stomach by eating them, and never accepted any food offered by anyone else. They were on a pilgrimage and wanted to eat simple food offered only by their son.

After visiting a few sacred places, Shравan Kumar and his parents arrived in a forest near Ayodhya at the banks of sacred river Sharayu. Pleased with the beautiful scenery around them, they decided to take a rest. His parents were thirsty. They asked him to get some water. Shравan Kumar placed his parents under the shadow of a tree and went to the river Sharayu.

Dashrath, the king of Ayodhya, was fond of hunting. At the same time, he had also come to the forest alone for hunting. He had a unique skill of shooting an arrow to the precise target by merely hearing a sound made at the target. Shравan Kumar dipped the vessel into the water. Dashrath heard a sound while vessel was getting filled with water. He thought it was the sound of a deer drinking water. He stood steadily and shot the arrow

precisely aiming at the place from where the sound came from. The arrow pierced into Shraavan Kumar's chest. Fatally injured, he cried painfully and fell on the ground.

King Dashrath was taken aback by the moaning sound of a human instead of a deer. He hurriedly rushed to the place to see who it was. He saw an innocent boy crying in pain. His body was all splashed with blood and mud. The vessel was lying on the ground. King Dashrath realized his mistake that he shot a boy instead of deer. He became very sad and started cursing himself.

Even in the painful and dying condition, Shraavan Kumar was thinking about his parents. When he saw the king repenting for his hasty action, he told him, "O, King! Don't worry about me. I came here to take some water for my thirsty parents. I am in severe pain and can't move. Please take some water and give it to my parents." By saying this, he took his last breath.

Sad and embarrassed king took some water and went to Shraavan Kumar's parents. He silently gave them water. However, he didn't utter a word fearing that he would reveal his identity if he opened his mouth. Shraavan Kumar's blind parents couldn't see him. They also didn't hear their son's familiar voice. They, therefore, refused to accept the water unless the carrier revealed his identity. Their intuition warned them that the carrier was not their son. They asked the king, "Who are you? Why are you giving us water? Why aren't you talking? Where is our son?"

At last, the king had to open his mouth. He told Shraavan Kumar's old and blind parents everything about what happened. Hearing the sad news of their dead son, they were shocked and were in utter grief. They cried out loud and told the king to take them to their dead son. The king carried them on his shoulders to the place where their son's dead body was lying.

Shraavan Kumar's parents couldn't bear the shock of the tragic death of their beloved son. They soon died by his side. Before dying, they cursed the king, "O King! Just as we are dying because of our son's loss, you would also die one day for the same reason." Their curse came true and King Dashrath died when Shri Ram was sent out in exile for fourteen years to the forest and he couldn't bear the shock of his son's separation from him. Shraavan Kumar is remembered as an obedient and devoted son to his parents.



The Story of Krishna and Narakasura

Deepavali is one of the most important festivals celebrated by Hindus all over world. It is generally a five day festival of which Naraka Chaturdasi is a fourth day. On this day, Sri Krishna slayed the wicked demon Narakasura. That is why it is called Naraka Chaturdarsi. Chaturdasi means “fourth day” according to Hindu calendar. The story of killing of the demon Narakasura is exciting.

Bhoomi Devi (mother Earth) had a son named Naraka. Even though Naraka was the son of a divine mother, he had the nature of a demon. Naraka was powerful and he took pleasure in terrorizing the inhabitants of the three worlds. He would raid and plunder the kingdoms of the earth. He didn't even leave the women and would kidnap them for his own pleasure. He heard that Sri Indra had thousands of divine elephants. The greedy Narakasura wanted to possess everything, so he attacked the heaven. Now he was being known as Narakasura.

Indra was helpless. Narakasura destroyed the heaven. He himself began the pursuit of the devas. While pursuing the devas, a glimmering object in the distance caught his eye. Upon inspection, he realized that the glimmering object was mother Aditi's (the mother of the devas) earrings. He assaulted mother Aditi and grabbed her earrings. Indra felt humiliated. His mother was assaulted, so he wanted revenge. He knew that there was only one person who was a match for Narakasura. It was Sri Krishna.

Indra reached Krishna's palace when Krishna was spending quality time with his wife Satyabhama. He told Krishna about the happenings and begged him for his help. Krishna was enraged that Narakasura might lay his hands on mother Aditi and many other women. He said that Narakasura must die for his insolence and a 'woman' should be a reason for his death. So Krishna decided to take Satyabhama also with him into battle with Naraka.

Krishna, alongwith Satyabhama, rode Garuda (a giant eagle) and travelled all the way from Dwaraka to Aasam (East side of India) to punish Narakasura. He made way towards Narakasura's fortress. An impenetrable barrier of magical mountains surrounded Narakasura's fortress. The mountains were such that a barrier would come up from any side that Krishna tried to enter the fortress.

Krishna, unperturbed, hurled his mace at the barrier and shattered the entire mountain range in one blow. A downpour of magical weapons rained down on them. Krishna fired multiple arrows and destroyed all the weapons. In this manner Krishna destroyed countless other magical barriers and finally reached Narakasura's fortress.



Narakasura's palace was guarded by the five-headed demon Mura. Mura hurled countless weapons at Krishna including his favourite weapon sataghini (a thunderbolt), but Krishna shot each one down with his bow and arrow. Then Krishna picked up his flying discus and hurled it towards Mura dislocating Mura's five heads. Mura fell to the ground, dead. Since Krishna killed the demon Mura, he is also known by the name Murari (killer of Mura).

Now Krishna and Satyabhama challenged Narakasura to battle. The battle was furiously fought between them. Since Krishna wanted a woman to be a reason for Narakasura's death, he fainted in a pre-ordained divinely plan adopted to empower Satyabhama. Thus together they killed the wicked Narakasura.

Bhoomi Devi, Narakasura's mother, was extremely happy after the death of his own wicked son. She sang hymns in praise of Krishna and begged him to take Narakasura's son Bhagdatta under his protection. Krishna placed Bhagdatta on the throne and then freed all of Narakasura's prisoners including 16,000 women prisoners. The devas showered Krishna with flowers from the heavens.

Krishna freed all 16,000 Narakasura's prisoners, but nobody from the society came forward to accept them. They pleaded Krishna, "You are the protector of the Universe. Can't you protect us?" Thus Krishna pledged that he would bear the responsibility of them and he gave them a shelter and protection.





Stories on Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is the second festival that comes in the month of Shravan (August/September). It is observed on the full moon day, Purnima. Raksha means protection and bandhan means tie. Raksha Bandhan symbolizes all aspects of protection of the good from evil forces. This is the festival in which there is a chaste bond of love between a brother and a sister.

There are many stories linked to Raksha Bandhan. One of them is the bond between Krishna and Draupadi. During the time of the Mahabharata, Sri Krishna threw his sudarshan chakra at Shishupala in order to punish him for his numerous sins. However, as Sri Krishna hurled the chakra at Shishupala, Krishna cut his own finger. Draupadi immediately tore off a piece from her sari and wrapped it around Sri Krishna's finger, stopping the bleeding. From that moment forth, Sri Krishna promised Draupadi that He would always be with her and that she needed only to call upon Krishna in the time of need. Draupadi gave Sri Krishna one small strand from her sari. In return, Sri Krishna protected Draupadi when she needed it.

Thus, on this day, sisters tie the sacred rakhi on their brother's right wrists. By extending his wrist forward, he in fact extends the hand of his protection over her.

Bali, the grandson of Prahlad, was a mighty demon king. Sri Vishnu was impressed by his devotion and promised him divine protection and immortality till the next eon, when he would be crowned as Indra and left Vaikunth (Sri Vishnu's home) to protect him in person! With time, Goddess Lakshmi became restless and came to look for Sri Vishnu. Disguised as a Brahmin woman, she arrived at Bali's palace asked Bali for his protection till her husband returns. The king was happy to oblige and welcomed her into his palace. One day, during the

Shravan Purnima celebrations, Goddess Lakshmi tied a thread of colored cotton on Bali's hand, accepted him as her brother and prayed with a pure heart for his protection. Touched by her sincerity, Bali asked her for a boon as a gift from him. Goddess Lakshmi then revealed herself and asked for Sri Vishnu's return. Bali requested Sri Vishnu to go with Lakshmi, but return later to be near him again. From that day on, each year, during the monsoon, at Purnima, brothers invite their sisters to come home and have a meal with them. The sister prays for his long life, health and prosperity. As a token of this, she ties a rakhi on his wrist.

When a rakhi is tied on the hands of close friends and neighbors it shows signs of happy social life, where every person co-exists peacefully as brother and sister. All members of the community commit to protect each other and the society. A story is told of Alexander's wife approaching his mighty Hindu rival Porus and tying rakhi on his hand, seeking assurance from him for saving the life of her husband on the battlefield. The great Hindu king, as a true kshatriya (those who belonged to the brave warrior class), responded; as the legend goes, when Porus raised his hand to deliver a mortal blow to Alexander, he saw the Rakhi on his own hand and restrained from striking. This ritual not only strengthens the bond of love between brothers and sisters, but also transcends the confines of the family.

During the middle ages, if a woman tied a Rakhi on the hand of any man, then it became imperative for him, as his religious duty of the highest order, to protect that woman. That man would put his life at stake to protect the honor of that woman. Once, Sri Indra was almost vanquished in a long-drawn battle against the demons. Full of remorse, he sought the advice of Guru Brihaspati, who suggested for his raid the auspicious day of Shravan Purnima (full moon day of the month of Shravan). On that day, Indra's wife, Sachi and Brihaspati tied a sacred thread on the wrist of Indra, who then attacked the demon with renewed force and routed him.

On Raksha Bandhan day, number of women may tie a rakhi around the Prime Minister of India's wrist (unless the Prime Minister is a woman), and similarly soldiers can also expect to have women tie rakhis around their wrists. A rakhi is the sacred verse of unity. It also acts as a symbol of life's advancement and a leading messenger of togetherness.



Devavrata's terrible vows

Devavrata, also known as Bheeshma, was one of the most legendary characters of the Mahabharata. He was a man known for wisdom and great renunciation (sacrificing everything). Like Sri Rama, he made great sacrifices for his father's sake. He gave up marriage and the royal throne for the happiness of his father.

Birth of Devavrata:

King Shantanu was ruling over his kingdom of Hastinapur efficiently. One evening, when he was strolling on the banks of the Ganga river, he saw a heavenly beautiful lady staring at him intently. Shantanu asked her: *"O beautiful lady, who are you? Where are you from? Who are your parents. Will you marry me?"* The divine lady's name was Ganga. She said: *"I can marry you and fulfill your desire on one condition that whatever I do, you will not stop me. If you ever break your promise, I will at once leave you."* Shantanu agreed to it. Thereafter, they married and returned to the kingdom. In course of time, Ganga gave birth to 7 kids but killed them immediately by throwing them in the water.

When their 8th son was born, Ganga took him up and was just about to throw him in the river. Anguished king resisted her in doing so. Ganga then revealed her identity: *"I am Ganga. The 7 sons, I killed, were in fact the 7 Vasus. I killed them because they had requested me to free them from a curse. This is the 8th Vasu. You will not be able to raise him properly, so I am taking him with me. At the appropriate time I will hand him over to you."* Saying this Ganga disappeared.

One day king Shantanu was strolling along the banks of the Ganga. There he saw a boy who blocked the flow of the river with one arrow only. With the next arrow the river began to flow again. Shantanu was amazed. When Ganga came there, she introduced the boy to him and upon handing him to the king, she disappeared again. That boy was the 8th Vasu who became Devavrata, the son of Shantanu and later came to be known as Bheeshma. Appointing Devavrata as prince that is heir to the throne, king Shantanu became free of worries.

Devavrata's vows:

One day Shantanu was strolling on the banks of the Yamuna river. Suddenly he felt a strong, divine scent. He saw an extremely pretty girl who was the source of that divine scent. Her name was Satyavati; the daughter of Nishadaraja, a boatman. King Shantanu fell in love with her. He went to her father Nishadaraja and requested him to give his daughter in marriage. But the witty boatman put forth a condition to accept the king's proposal that only the son born to

his daughter would be king in the future. King Shantanu didn't accept it and returned to his kingdom. He could not forget Satyawati though. He missed her so much that he fell ill. Devavrata came to know about it and he felt very bad. He decided to convince Satyawati and her father and do whatever it takes to make them agree.



Devavrata went to Nishadaraja and begged him to give his daughter Satyawati to his father in marriage. Nishadaraja uttered the same condition: "O prince, I will agree on one condition. My condition is that only the son born to Satyawati shall become the king in future." Devavrata knew that accepting Nishadaraja's condition means giving up his birth rights to the throne. He was little surprised but determined to do the sacrifice. In front of everybody he swore, *"I am Devavrat. I take a vow that I will not claim my rights on the throne of the Hastinapur. I will not become a king. Instead, I will give my services to whoever sits on the throne."* Everyone mesmerized but Nishadaraja still was not convinced. He again asked his doubt: *"O prince, I can believe your words. But there is no guarantee that your sons and Satyawati's sons will not fight for the throne."* Hearing Nishadaraja's words, Devavrata took another vow, *"Hey Nishadaraja! To avoid that situation I swear that I will not marry and remain a true celibate as long as I live."* Now Nishadaraja got convinced and agreed to give his daughter to king Shantanu.

King Shantanu and all ministers witnessed these two awful vows of Devavrata. Gods from the heaven showered flowers on him hearing his terrible oaths. This gave him immediate recognition among the Gods. It was extremely difficult to keep up such promises. But Devavrata kept up these two promises until the end of his life. Because of his *bheeshan pratigya* (terrible oaths), he was known as Bheeshma. Everyone started calling him Bheeshma.

Taking two terrible vows, Bheeshma sacrificed almost everything for the happiness of his father, king Shantanu. The king felt obligated. He granted Bheeshma the boon of *Ichha Mrityu* (control over his own death – he could choose the date and time of his death). Later Bheeshma became a great archer and a warrior of peerless valour and courage. He considered protecting the king and his kingdom his Dharma. He served the king and kingdom until the end of his life.



Slaying of the demon Kamsa

Once upon a time, the demon Kamsa was the prince of the Vrishni kingdom (Northern part of Bharat) with its capital at Mathura. He was a wicked. He even overthrew his own father from the throne, put him into the prison and became a king. People were very fearful of him. Nobody was happy in his kingdom.

At that time, Krishna was living in Gokul (a place near Mathura). Though he was a boy, cruel Kamsa was very much afraid of him. He knew that Krishna would be a danger to him in future. He made many attempts to kill him in Gokul. However, all attempts were failed. As a last chance, Kamsa invited Krishna to a wrestling contest in Mathura.

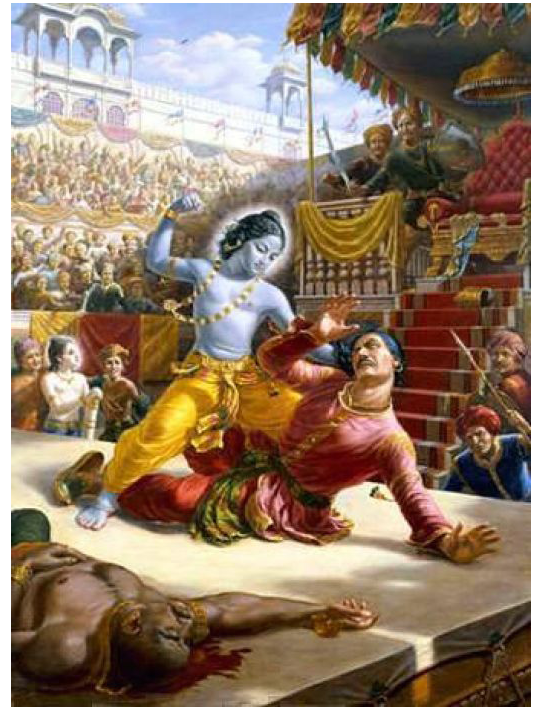
Krishna knew about the evil mind of Kamsa, but he did not reject his invitation because he was also looking for an opportunity to punish him. Mother Yashoda earlier resisted and tried to persuade him not to go. However, as always, Krishna managed to convince her. He and his older brother Balarama were ready to go to Mathura. The people of Gokul came out to wish them good luck and to see them off.

Krishna and Balarama reached the capital Mathura. The people of Mathura had already heard many adventurous stories about Krishna. They were excited to meet him. When Krishna and Balarama entered Mathura, people welcomed them by showering them with flowers. They wandered around the beautiful Mathura and enjoyed it. Balarama particularly enjoyed watching the royal elephants mingling in the crowd.

The palace courtyard, where the contest was held, was already crowded. Kamsa came and sat on the throne. As soon as he came, there was a pin-drop silence. He was dangerous-looking but ugly because of his big moustache. He firmly looked at the crowd and challenged, *"Which brave man can fight with my wrestlers? The fight will end only after one dies."* One voice came from the crowd, *"I can! I can do it!"* Of course, that was Krishna's voice.

Krishna and Balarama challenged the wrestlers Chanur and Mushtik respectively. *"Come on, boys! We will crush you like a lemon!"* The mountainous wrestlers thundered. Krishna and Balarama were just boys but they were powerful and spirited. The most important – righteousness was on their side. The wrestlers

tried to thrash them out, but the boys failed their every move. Everyone was watching the fight holding their breath. Suddenly, Krishna came into action. He jumped up and pulled down the Chanur by the hair. He twisted his hairs round and round. Chanur cried painfully. Krishna, then, reached at his chest and punched him hard on his heart. Chanur instantly died because of heart breakdown. On the other hand, Balarama also killed Mushtik.



The entire crowd was taken aback. For a moment, they couldn't believe that the two boys killed the giant wrestlers. Then, suddenly, they started shouting, clapping and praising the two boys. Kamsa himself couldn't believe it. He was panic, pale and puzzled. Krishna seized the opportunity. All the people, including Kamsa's soldiers, were on his side. He took a long jump to come out of the wrestling area and rushed towards Kamsa. Kamsa saw it, but he was so frightened that he couldn't move an inch. Krishna attacked Kamsa and pulled him down from his throne (exactly the same how Kamsa did to his father!). He then lifted him above his head and threw him down with a thud. Kamsa never opened his eyes again.

When the people of Mathura saw that Kamsa was dead, they began cheering. They shouted, "*At last, we are free from Kamsa's shackles. Long Live Krishna!*" There was jubilation. Krishna freed his true parents - Vasudev and Devaki - and Kamsa's father Ugrasen from the prison. Krishna's parents were delighted to see him after long years of gap. Then, Krishna respectfully asked Ugrasen to sit on the throne. Ugrasen again became a king. Krishna and Balarama stayed their few days to protect the kingdom from outsiders. Krishna's one mission was over!



Sri Krishna had two parents - Nanda-Yashoda and Vasudev-Devaki. Vasudev-Devaki gave him a birth in Mathura and Nanda-Yashoda raised him for 12 years in Gokul.

Maharana Pratap - A Model of Valor

Your dreams come true and you become successful if you have determination and a strong will. God helps those who help themselves. There is nothing impossible in the world for those with will power and unyielding determination. Although, Bharat's history is full of such examples that convey this message, Maharana Pratap's example is the unique one.

The Rajputs (a community in Northern Bharat) are brave, chivalrous and gallant people. They were the first to resist the Mughal invaders. Many wars were fought between the Rajputs and the Mughals. Rajputs of Mewar (a province in Northern Bharat) surpassed all in deeds of bravery and personal sacrifice.

Maharana Udai Singh II ruled the kingdom of Mewar (province of Northern Bharat), with his capital at Chittor. Maharana Pratap was his eldest son who was given the title of Crown Prince.

Those days, Mughal King Akbar wanted to rule the whole of Bharat and used forces to over come the Rajput kings. As a result, almost all major Rajput Kings surrendered to Akbar, but Maharana Pratap didn't! In fact, Maharana Pratap and his few loyal Rajput chieftains took a pledge in front of Goddess Kali, "Hey Kali!! We take a pledge that we will not sleep on a bed but on the ground. We will not wear any fancy clothes until we defeat our enemies!!"

Mughal King Akbar sent his associate ManaSingh to convince Maharana Pratap. In his meeting with Maharana, ManaSingh asked, "Why don't you join Akbar?" Maharana replied back, "I have not sold my honor to Akbar! Rajputs like their honor most. You are not a true Rajput!". ManaSingh furiously said, "I came as a friend and you have insulted me. You shall pay for this". Maharana bravely replied, "Very well then! we shall meet in the battle!" At last Akbar and ManaSingh decided to use force against Maharana Pratap.

The great battle between Maharana Pratap and ManaSingh was fought in the valley of Haldi-Ghati on June 21 1576. Maharana had only twenty thousand soldiers where as ManaSingh and his associate Salim had eighty thousand soldiers. There wasn't any possibility of winning the battle. Maharana thought, "If I somehow manage to kill ManaSingh, I have a slight chance of winning the battle."



Maharana Pratap advanced towards ManaSingh without any support or backup. ManaSingh was riding an elephant. Pratap, riding a horse Chetak, attacked him like a fierce lion. He threw his spear aiming at ManaSingh, but elephant moved and the spear missed its target. Soon Maharana was surrounded from all sides by enemy soldiers. But he was saved by his wise horse Chetak, who took him in an unconscious state away from the battle scene. Chetak was also badly wounded, but he did not stop until he took his master to a safe place.

Maharana fought bravely. In this battle he lost almost all of his army. After the battle, he and his family lived in exile. But he didn't give up. He again started raising army with the help of his

friend Bhama Shah and Bhil Tribals. Bhama Shah helped him raise the money and weapons. Bhil Tribals provided him with man-power.

Maharana Pratap fought relentlessly for fifteen years to get his kingdom back. By the end of 1584, he managed to liberate his most of the lost territories. But he could not get his Chittor (Capital of Mewar) back. It was still occupied by the enemies. His dream was partially fulfilled. After the relentless efforts, he died in 1597.

“Where there is a will, there is a way” is a familiar and well-known saying. This saying underlines a very vital fact of the life. Very few truly understand and practice it. Maharana Pratap practiced it. He did not give up until his last breath.



Story of the great king Bharat

There lived a great King Bharat in ancient times. He belonged to Puru dynasty. He was an ancestor of the Kauravas and Pandavas. India's original and true name, Bharat (which is pronounced as Bhaarat), is named after him.

Story of Bharat's birth:

Bharat was a son of Shakuntala and Dushyant. Dushyant was the king of Hastinapur and Shakuntala had been found and raised by Kanva rishi and his wife. Once while hunting in the forest, Dushyant came to Kanva's ashram and saw Shakuntala. He fell in love with her. Shakuntala too fell in love with the king and they got married. Dushyant had to leave for his kingdom. He gave Shakuntala a royal ring as a sign of their love and promised her that he would come later and take her to Hastinapur. Shakuntala missed him very much.

Time passed by. Shakuntala waited for the king Dushyant for a very long time. Wondering why did he not return, she then finally set out to go to the Hastinapur and meet Dushyant. She also took the royal ring with her so that Dushyant could recognize her. On her way to Hastinapur, she crossed a river. Unfortunately while crossing a river, her ring slipped off her finger without her realizing it.

Shakuntala reached Hastinapur to see the king. But king Dushyant, being engaged in his duties, completely forgot her. He did not even recognize her when she came to see him. Humiliated Shakuntala had no place to go. She did not want to return to her father's ashram. So she started living in sage Marich's ashram. Here, unknown to Dushyant, Shakuntala gave birth to a son named Bharat.

Bharat was a very brave child. He was not afraid of anyone or anything. He played with wild animals every day. Opening a lion's mouth and counting its teeth was his favourite game.

Meanwhile, a fisherman found the royal ring lost by Shakuntala. He

returned it to the King Dushyant. Upon seeing the ring, his memories came back to him. He remembered about his relationship with Shakuntala. He immediately set out to find her but could not.

Once, Dushyant happened to pass by the ashram. He watched a little boy playing with a lion. The boy opened the lion's jaws by his hands and said, "O king of the jungle! Open your mouth wide, so I can count your teeth." Dushyant was very astonished by the child's bravery. Later Shakuntala came out of the ashram and saw Dushyant. Both overjoyed seeing each other. Shakuntala told him that Bharat is nobody but his son. Extremely happy Dushyant hugged Bharat. Dushyant then took Shakuntala and Bharat along with him to Hastinapur.



After Dushyant, Bharat was crowned as a king of Hastinapur. He was unquestionably the greatest king of this land. As mentioned earlier, after him the country came to be known as Bhaarat. He was Chakravarti, literally meaning "turner of the wheel". This term used for a successful or imperial ruler of all. Being the most illustrious king of the dynasty, he expanded the empire greatly and was widely respected by everyone.

King Bharat had three wives and nine sons. But none of his sons seemed fit to rule after him. Bharat was worried about the future of his kingdom. So, he adopted a capable child, Bharadwaja and declared him as his heir. Bharadwaja later succeeded the king Bharat.

King Bharat's time has been one of the greatest and golden times in Indian history. He has been remembered and will be remembered generations to generations for his greatness.



Story of Adi Shankaracharya

Birth and childhood

Adi Shankaracharya was born in a village called Kalady in Kerala. His parents (Sivaguru and Aryamba) were childless for many years. They prayed at the Vadakkunnathan temple (also known as Vrishachala) in Thrissur, Kerala, for a child. Legend is that Sri Shiva appeared in their dreams and offered them a choice: they could have an ordinary son who would live a long life, or an extraordinary son who would not live long. Both the parents chose the latter; thus a son was born to them. He was named Shankara in honour of Sri Shiva.

The father of Shankara was a regular worshiper of Devi Rajarajeshwari for many years. He used to offer milk everyday to the Goddess. Everyday after finishing puja and offering milk to the Goddess, he used to distribute remaining milk to his wife, son and others as *prasadam*.

One day when Sankara was barely 5 years old, his father had to visit a neighbouring village. He told the boy, *"Son! Your mother cannot perform the worship which I do. You better do the worship today."* After his father left, Shankara filled a tumbler with milk, placed it before the image of the Goddess Rajarajeshwari and prayed: *"Mother! Accept this offering of milk."* He kept on praying to the Goddess. When he found that the milk remained untouched, he became very sad. He cried: *"Mother! What crime I have committed? When my father offered the milk you took it. But when I am offering, you are not taking."* He was in a deep distress. He was thinking whether there was any lapse on his part, he became desperate. He declared in agony: *"Mother! If You do not take the milk I shall end my life. I would have dishonoured my father. If I cannot please my parents, what is the use in my living?"*

Shankara prayed intensely to the Goddess in great agony. Moved by the naive prayers of the boy, Rajarajeshwari appeared before Him. She told him: *"Child, Be happy. I am immensely pleased with your devotion. I shall drink the milk."* So saying, she drank all the milk in the tumbler. The boy was aghast to see that the whole tumbler empty. He again cried: *"O! Mother! If You drink all the milk, what is left for distributing as prasadam? My mother will think that I have drunk all the milk, I have to give her prasadam. My father used to give some milk as prasadam also. So, please*

restore some of the milk in the tumbler.”
 “How can the milk once consumed be brought back?” the Goddess told the boy that it is impossible to bring back the milk that has been consumed. The boy was in deep distress again. He thought within himself: *“I will get a bad name from my mother.”* He prayed, *“Mother please give at least a little quantity of milk.”* Responding to the prayers of the young boy the Goddess drew milk from her breast and gave it to the boy. It was the sacred power of the milk which enabled Shankara in later years to master all the scriptures and earn lasting fame as a great spiritual leader revered by all.



Shankara’s father died while Shankara was very young. Shankara’s upanayana, the initiation into student-life, was performed at the age of five. As a child, Shankara showed remarkable scholarship, mastering the four Vedas by the age of eight. Following the customs of those days, Shankara studied and lived at the home of his teacher. It was customary for students and men of learning to receive bhiksha (alms) from the laity. On one occasion while accepting bhiksha, Shankara came upon a woman who had only a single dried amalaka fruit to eat. Rather than consuming this last bit of food herself, the lady gave away the fruit to Shankara as bhiksha. Moved by her piety, Shankara composed the Kanakadhārā Stotram on the spot. Legend has it that on completion of this stotra, golden amalaka fruits were showered upon the woman by Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth.

Sannyasa

From a young age, Shankara was attracted to sannyasa (monastic life). His mother was against it and refused him formal permission. However, once when Shankara was bathing in the Purna River near his house, a crocodile gripped his leg and began to drag him into the water. Only his mother was nearby and it proved impossible for her to rescue him. Shankara asked his mother to give him permission to renounce the world then and there, so that he could be a sannyāsin at the moment of death. This mode of entering the renunciatory stage is called

Āpat Sannyāsa. At the end of her wits, his mother agreed. Shankara immediately recited the mantras to make a renunciate of himself. Miraculously, the crocodile released him and swam away. Shankara emerged unscathed from the water.

With the permission of his mother, Shankara left Kerala and travelled towards North India in search of a Guru. On the banks of the Narmada River, he met Govinda Bhagavatpada, the disciple of Gaudapada. When Govinda Bhagavatpada asked Shankara's identity, he replied with an extempore verse that brought out the Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Govinda Bhagavatpada was impressed and took Shankara as his disciple. Adi Shankara was commissioned by his Guru to write a commentary on the Brahma Sutras and propagate Advaita Vedanta. The Mādhavīya Shankaravijaya states that Adi Shankara calmed a flood from the Reva River by placing his kamandula (water pot) in the path of the raging water, thus saving his Guru, Govinda Bhagavatpada, who was absorbed in Samādhi ("meditation") in a cave nearby.

Shankara lived a very short life of 32 years. But in these years he did great things. Shankara travelled throughout India to spread his Advaita Vedanta philosophy. He established four Mathas on the four sides of India. He was then known as Adi Shankaracharya. At the age of 32, he disappeared in the Himalayas. It is believed that Shankara attained heavenly abode in Kedarnath (in Himalayas).



The Hindu Calendar (Panchang)

The Calendar (Panchang or Kalaganana) is a system of timekeeping that defines the beginning, length and divisions of the year. In other words, it is a table showing the beginning and length of the years, months, weeks, and days. Though the time is immeasurable, efforts were made to measure time and design a perfect calendar in different parts of world. Most of the calendars are influenced by the motion of Sun, Moon and other planets.

The Hindus, Our seers (rishis), also have had a comprehensive study of time. They had a correct knowledge of the motion of planets and their paths. They developed the necessary tools like Mathematics and calculated the time with utmost accuracy. The minute details covered by those fantastic minds in reckoning time is outstanding. The calendars designed by them are lunar calendars, based on the natural cycles of the moon. They are practical to use because they follow the phases of the moon which can be visually be seen. Those calendars are widely being used for the religious customs and ceremonies. Following passage explains few characteristics of the Hindu Calendar.

Diwas or Din (Day)

According to the Hindu Calendar, the smallest unit of time is called *Nimesha*, the duration taken to bat an eyelid, which is equal to 0.1778 seconds. One day including night is a practical unit of time. Following chart describes different units of time and their equivalent seconds or minutes.

1 Nimesha	Smallest Unit	0.1778 seconds
1 Kashta	18 Nimeshas	3.2 seconds
1 Kala	30 Kashtas	96 seconds
1 Muhurta	30 Kalas	48 minutes
2 Ghatikas	1 Muhurta	48 minutes
1 Diwas (Day)	60 Ghatikas	24 hours

Saptah (week)

7 diwas (days) make 1 saptah (week). Each day is named after a planet. The moon, though a satellite of the earth, is also included. They are as follows.

Name of Diwas (Planet)	Name of Day (Planet)
Ravivar (Ravi)	Sunday (Sun)
Somvar (Moon)	Monday (Moon)
Mangalvar (Mangala)	Tuesday (Mars)
Budhvar (Budha)	Wednesday (Mercury)
Guruvar (Guru)	Thursday (Jupiter)
Shukravar (Shukra)	Friday (Venus)
Shanivar (Shani)	Saturday (Saturn)

Mas (Month)

Mas, which is derived from the word Chandrama (the moon), is equivalent to the month. There are 12 months in a year. Each month has two halves - Shukla Paksha (brighter half) and Krishna Paksha (darker half). These 12 months make up the six seasons (Ritu). Following table describes the months and seasons of the Hindu Calendar and their corresponding months of the English Calendar.

	Months of the Hindu Calendar	Months of the English Calendar	Seasons
1)	Chaitra	Mar / April	Vasanta (Spring)
2)	Vaishaakha	April / May	Vasanta (Spring)
3)	Jyeshtha	May / June	Greeshma (Summer)
4)	Aashaadha	June / July	Greeshma (Summer)
5)	Sraavana	July / August	Varsha (Rainy)
6)	Bhaadrapada	August / September	Varsha (Rainy)
7)	Ashwin	September / October	Sharad (Autumn)
8)	Kaartika	October / November	Sharad (Autumn)
9)	Maargashirsha	November / December	Hemanta (Winter)
10)	Pushya	December / January	Hemanta (Winter)

11)	Maagha	January / February	Shishira (Winter)
12)	Phaalguna	February / March	Shishira (Winter)

Varsha (Year)

12 Mas make one varsha (year). Varsha is the time taken by the earth to go round the Sun once.

Eras

Just as there is the Christian Era in which the years are supposed to be counted from the birth of Jesus Christ, Hindus have their own Eras. They are many in numbers. The most important names are :

- 1) Yugabda: The Yugabda tells us what year is passing after the commencement of Kaliyuga. It is also called as Yugadi.
- 2) Shalivahana Shaka: The Shalivahana Shaka was started in commemoration of Samrat (King) Shalivahana. It is based on lunar calendar and the new year starts with Chaitra Mas.
- 3) Vikram Samvat: The Vikram Era started with Samrat (King) Vikramaditya of Ujjain, following his victory over the Shaka in 56 B.C. It is also based on the lunar calendar and the new year begins with the Kaartika Mas that is 4th day of Deepavali.

Note that there are numerous features of the Hindu Calendar which are not mentioned here. You are encouraged to get more information on Hindu Panchang from other sources such as books or internet.



Krishna Devaraya

During 1336 AD, there used to be a big and glorious empire in South India, namely Vijayanagara. Krishna Devaraya was a very famous king of Vijayanagara empire. Krishna Devaraya brought Vijayanagara Empire to the zenith of its glory. Under his rule, Vijayanagara empire flourished in all aspects of the life such as the law and order, arts, spiritualism, and secularism.

Hampi was the capital of Vijayanagara empire. It was chosen as capital because of its strategic location bounded by torrential Tungabhadra River on one side and defensible hills on other three sides. Hampi with its marvelous architecture has always been a subject of awe for historians as well as those who are interested in ancient architecture. The city was formed by Harihara-Bukka who were predecessors of the Krishna Devaraya.

Krishna Devaraya - A Warrior

Krishna Devaraya was a very clever and strategist. In warfare strategies, he was second to none! While fighting wars he led his army to success everywhere. There are many incidents where losing battles turned into a great victory under his leadership. During battles, he not only led from the front, but also attended the wounded in the battlefield. This shows how astute and caring he was for his own countrymen.

During his time, some parts of Southern India were under the control of Islamic rulers. They used to attack the villages of Vijayanagara. They used to loot and plunder these villages, break Hindu temples and run away with the wealth and money. Krishna Devaraya put an end to this. His army attacked and defeated the Commander (namely Sultan Mahmud) of Bijapur province of Southern India. He captured Golconda (a prestigious fort) which was under Islamic rulers. He also captured the fortress of Raichur from the Islamic Sultan of Bijapur. Even though 16,000 soldiers of Krishna Devaraya's army were killed in the battle, as a result of this campaign, aggression of Islamic Sultans of Deccan region was put to an end.

It is said that the bloody Islamic invasion which swept Northern part of Bharat couldn't make any inroads in the Southern region until the Vijayanagara

Empire was standing. As a result of which Hindutva strived and flourished in the South without any hindrance for a very long duration.

Art loving Krishnadevaraya

Krishna Devaraya's period is also considered as a golden period for literature. Many poets of Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Tamil enjoyed the patronage in his Kingdom. Vyasatirtha, a Saint from Mysore was Krishna Devaraya's guide. Krishna Devaraya, himself was a great scholar and has compiled, many literary works such as Madalasa Charita and Rasamanjari.

There were 8 famous poets in Krishna Devaraya's court who were called as Ashta Diggajas. (relates to 8 cardinal corners or directions). Paintings, Sculpture, dance and music were greatly encouraged by him and his Successors.

Ideal King

Krishna Devaraya endeared himself to the people by his personal charm, kindness and an ideal administration. Under his rule, even the foreign visitors wandered freely. He himself followed a personal discipline in the form of daily exercises and rituals. He encouraged trade with the Western Countries. He had cordial relationship with Portuguese who had at that time established trade centres on the West Coast of India.

Like all other Hindu Kings, he also respected all the sects of Hinduism. He himself was a great devotee of Sri Balaji. He offered objects of priceless value to world famous Tirupati temple of Sri Balaji ranging from diamonds to golden swords.

Last Days of the Vijayanagara

Unfortunately, because of constant Islamic invasions, Vijayanagara fell down to muslim invaders in the battle of Talikota in the year 1565. Muslims looted Hampi for five months systematically. The fall of Vijayanagara and Hampi opened doors for the Muslim invasions in Southern India.



The great dynasty - Raja Raja Chola

Raja Raja Chola was a great king of Chola Dynasty who ruled between 985 AD to 1014 AD. Raja Raja was a clever ruler and able administrator. It was under his rule that Chola Kingdom grew in to a great Empire. The boundaries of Chola Empire under his reign extended from Sri-Lanka in the South to Kalinga (today's Orissa state) in the north India. Raja Raja Chola is considered as the ambitious king the world has ever seen.

Raja Raja Chola divided his kingdom into several provinces and standardized the revenue system through systematic land surveys. Villages were given autonomy in administrative affairs and at the same time made accountable by the system of audit and control. During the final days of his reign, he carried out a revenue and settlement. Inscriptions found in the temples explain the accuracy of this operation.

Raja Raja Chola gave significant prominence to his army and treated them with great spirit. His army was well structured and disciplined. This has been mentioned in the inscriptions found in the temples. The army was divided into number of regiments. There were elephant troops, cavalry and foot soldiers among these regiments. Some of the regiments were also asked to look after administration such as the maintenance of temples.

Raja Raja Chola built a magnificent Brihadishwara temple in Thanjavur. The temple stands as a finest monument of a glorious period of Hindu History and a specimen of Hindu architecture at its best. It is still a mystery for modern architects as well as historians about how the huge blocks of granites were transported over great distances and how these granites were raised to their positions in the construction of temple. The temple was taller than any structure which was built before that. Once the temple was built, it had close business relations with the rest of country.

Villages from all over the country supplied men and supplies for the maintenance of the temple. It is said that 4000 cows, 7000 sheeps, 30 buffalos were required to supply the butter which was used to light the lamps of the temple. Shivalingam, the main deity of the temple was one of the largest with 12 feet in height and 5 feet in diameters. This grand temple is considered equivalent to 200

TajMahals, which is considered as one of the wonders of the world. The 40 ton block of granite at the top of the temple has baffled the historians for years about how it was transported to that height in the ancient period.

It was during Raja Raja Cholas time that maritime trade routes were established with South East Asian countries. Also along with trade, Hindu art and architecture reached these countries. Vishnu temple in Cambodia proves this fact which stands as world's biggest Hindu temple.

Raja Raja Chola was also a great patron of the arts. In 1965, archeologists found thousands of bronze statues, precious idols in Thanjavur which are considered to be of his time. The discovery of these statues is termed as greatest archeological discovery of the century.

Raja Raja Chola's achievements helped his successors and especially his son Rajendra Chola under whom the empire reached its zenith. It is said that during the first eight years of his rule, Raja Raja Chola never initiated any military campaign. He was in the process of recruiting an efficient army and preparing himself for struggle so that he can expand his empire.

It was Raja Raja Chola who started the trend of writing his military and other achievements in stone inscriptions, which was later followed by his successors. He was not only interested in recording his achievements, but was also keen on preserving the records of his predecessors. The grants that he made to the Thanjavur temple are also recorded with the help of stone inscriptions. In spite of all these inscriptions, no eye witness has left a portrait of the king, nor there is a authentic statue or painting of Raja Raja Chola.

Raja Raja Chola was an ardent follower of Sri Shiva, but respected all the other sects of Hindu Dharma. Not only had that he built many temples of Sri Vishnu for Vaisnavites, he also built Buddhist Viharas (temples), and made arrangements for maintaining it.

For all these deeds and achievements, Raja Raja Chola is considered as one of the greatest rulers of Hindu History.



Qualities of a Swayamsevak or Sevika

A Swayamsevak or a Sevika stands for a person who is self-motivated to do good for others and be a role model. Below are some of the qualities that we have to imbibe in us to become an ideal Swayamsevak/Sevika. Balagokulam's weekly and occasional activities help us to cultivate such qualities in us.

One should respect to Parents, Guru (Teacher) and all living and non-living entities. One should show love towards self, family, friends, society and country. Remember the story of Sravana Kumar, who took care of his blind parents. He is an example of an ideal role model.

Be good and helpful to others. Can you remember the best and ideal Swayamsevak? Yes, Sri Hanuman. He had all the good qualities like being the best of the learned, being helpful without expecting anything in return. There are a lot of such examples. Can you think of one more person whom you know was very helpful to others?

Be punctual: Always be punctual to Balagokulam, at Home, School and outside also. The Sun God never ever felt tired of rising in the morning or setting in the evening. Just imagine what will happen if the Sun or Wind God wanted to take a break.

Be Disciplined - From morning till evening, one should be organized. Plan your activities and follow them. Getting up early morning and chanting any shloka such as '*Karaagre vasate Lakshmi*' is a good habit. Try to finish scheduled tasks in time. A simple habit of keeping our shoes in line wherever we leave them, whether at Home, Shakha, Temple or any place reflects your discipline. King Shivaji's soldiers, though less in number, could easily overcome Afzal Khan just because they were disciplined. Maintain hygiene and be polite in speech and actions, etc. Can you think of some examples in our history who were role models in good habits like this?

Be strong and healthy; physically and emotionally. A swayamsevak/sevika should be physically healthy. A strong mind can exist only in healthy body. Weak body leads to a weak mind which leads to the negative thoughts.

Good Character - Non-violence, speaking truth, no stealing, non-indulgence and being selfless are some examples of good *Samskar* (character). Sri Rama had all these good qualities and many more. Read Ramayana - the story of Sri Rama.

It has a lot to offer this world. Did you know Ramayana was translated into lot of European and Asian languages? Sri Rama is considered an ideal person born on this Earth.

Sharing and Caring - It is said, by sharing one's wealth (knowledge, money or anything) with others, the value of the wealth increases. Whatever you possess is not yours, but God's so always share with others.

Seva/Service: A swayamsevak should always be ready to serve others. Serving others makes one humble. One should always try to uplift others to bring them on your level. Remember the story of King Shibi who gave his everything to fulfill Brahman's demand.

Respect for other's feelings and thoughts: Swayamsevak/Sevika should always respect other's feelings and thoughts even though they are contradictory or conflicting with your thoughts.

Self-confidence - This is the most important for a Swayamsevak/Sevika. Doctorji, the founder of Sangh, was a person of self-confidence. The incidents from his childhood teach us, what a single individual can achieve. Once a person was being chased by a monkey. A person standing by shouted at this running person. "Stop running and chase the monkey". You can guess what happened next. The monkey started running.... Chatrapati Shivaji did not have anything with him when he took the oath of establishing a Hindu kingdom. With his mother and teacher's blessing, he could bring together thousands of Hindus and build a strong Hindu kingdom.

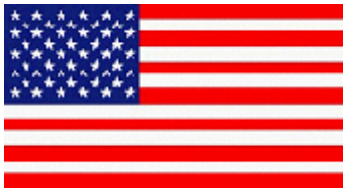
Walk the Talk - Always practice what you preach. The world respects those who can show in practice what they speak. A vessel half filled with stones makes more noise than the same vessel filled completely. A very familiar saying by Swami Ramdas in Marathi reflects the same. He says - *Bole Taisa Chale, Tyachi Vandavi Pavule* (one who practices what he/she speaks is respectful).

Friendly and Influential: A Swayamsevak/Sevika should have many friends and the friends should be influenced by our character and behavior.

Devotion or Shraddha - This is the basis for all good work in the world. Without devotion, how much ever a person might achieve, it is useless. One should believe in what he/she is doing.

We should participate in regular balagokulam activities and try to inculcate these good qualities.





Freedom Struggle



As we walk through the world history, we can easily conclude that the most of the countries were under the control of foreign invaders/rulers either for a small time (30-40 years) or for a long time (100 to 300 years). The main purpose of the foreign invaders was to bring as much area as possible under their control. They not only looted local people but also destroyed their cultural heritage such as buildings, religious/sacred places, books, etc. They captured other countries either by force or by diplomacy. There are very few countries in the world that have never invaded any other countries. Bharat (India) is one of them.

In the 18th century, America was also invaded and ruled by British. America struggled a lot for her freedom. The great heroes of America fought back, defeated British and made her free from the shackles of them. Isn't it great! People of America are always thankful to them. They celebrate 4th of July as America's Independence Day. You may ask, "*What is Independence Day?*" It is the day when America got freedom and independent sovereign of their own people. This glorious and memorable day is celebrated throughout America as an Independence Day.

Bharat (India), too, was under the control of foreign people. During the beginning of Christian era, she was invaded and looted by so many foreigners. Do you know why so many foreign invaders invaded Bharat? It is because Bharat is the oldest civilization with glorious past. She was rich in culture, diverse but still united. She was a beautiful country spiritually and geographically. Bharat was wealthy too. No one was poor. Bharat had enormous of knowledge in terms of science, mathematics and spirituality. The Bharatiya people's behavior and character was extremely high. In those days, there was no other country but Bharat, which was so big, beautiful and advanced in all fields. It's no wonder that invaders from the middle-east had their lustful eyes on Bharat. Around three thousand years ago, they started attacking Bharat to concur her. But great heroes of

Bharat such as the King Harshavardhan, King Chandragupta, King Shalivahana, King Vikramaditya and many more fought back and defeated the invaders. We do remember them when we chant our ekatmata (Bharat-Bhakti) stotra.

Just like America, Bharat too was ruled by British. Around 300 years back British came to Bharat as traders. Gradually they started taking interest in politics. Unfortunately Bharat, though culturally united, did not have one rule and administration by that time. It was divided in several small kingdoms. British took the advantage of this situation and applied divide-and-rule formula. Sometimes using political tactics and sometimes winning battles, they took control of entire Bharat and soon they became of the rulers of Bharat.

During the independence, broadly there were two major movements fighting for the independence; non-revolutionaries and revolutionaries. Non-revolutionaries adapted a way of non-violence. They applied peaceful and legitimate means such as protest against British, non-cooperation with them and constitutional agitation. Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabh-bhai Patel were the first row leaders of this movement. On the other side, revolutionaries wanted to attain freedom by hook or by crook. They would do anything to make Bharat independent. They would not hesitate to kill British whenever required. They were ready to sacrifice their own lives. Some handful names of the revolutionaries are Swa. Savarkar, Subhash Chandra Bose, Lok. Tilak, Bhagat Singh, ChandraShekhar Azad. **Though the path of these movements was different, objective was same - freedom!**

There was one person who was not happy with both the revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements. He participated in both movements. However, he was not happy with the leaders, their thoughts and their paths. His name was Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Yes! Our Doctorji. He wondered, *"Why the land of Ram, Sita, Krishna, Rana Pratap and Shivaji became so weak. How could a handful of British (25000 in number) control such a huge nation (Bharat), with a population of 300 million."* He concluded that British's dedication, loyalty to their country and excellent organizational skills were the secrets of their success. This is where Bharat lacked. For a living nation, organized people and good administration are essential.

Doctorji thought more than just a freedom for Bharat. Once talking to his associates he asked, *“Even if we are successful to kick the British out, what is the guarantee that they won’t come back? And even after the freedom, can we get our country to the pinnacle of glory?”*.

Then he adapted a different way! He started an organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to organize the people and fill them up with patriotism, make them realize their true identity, make them dedicated and ready for sacrifice, make them proud of their glorious culture and make them think more about society and country than self. Such organized people will ensure not only freedom but also glorious future. Doctorji started Sangh around 80 years back. Sangh’s work rapidly increased in all parts of the country and now it has been proved a major force in the progress of Bharat.

At last, the day came when Bharat got freedom. With everybody’s efforts and after the sacrifices of thousands, Bharat attained her freedom on the August 15th of 1947. Now, she is governed and ruled by her own people, Bharatiya. Having a breakthrough in all major fields, she is progressing by leaps and bounds and climbing towards the pinnacle of glory.

This is the brief story of Independence of Bharat. But what was the purpose of presenting it before us? Why do we care about Bharat? It is because she is our forefather’s country. Our roots are originated in Bharat. She is our spiritual country too. The most important, Bharat is the first country where our Hindu culture, our Hindu Dharma, is flourished. Isn’t it? Having this special relationship with Bharat, it becomes our responsibility to care for her. The way we care for America, we should also care for Bharat.



Shabari - A Devoted Woman

In the forest called Panchavati, there lived a Bheelani named Shramani in the ashram of Sage Matanga, and she also used to be absorbed in devotional activities. As she belonged to the Shabara community, she was also known by another name - Shabari. She remained busy serving the sages who came to the ashram. Sage Matanga had blessed Shabari that Sri Ram would appear before her in that very ashram. Her waiting was long and patience enduring.

Shree Ram, with his brother Lakshman, was wondering in the forest Panchavati in search of his wife Sita. He was going places asking about Sita. He also went to Sage Matanga's ashram. When Shabari came to know that Sri Ram was due to come there, she went to the forest and started gathering sweet fruits so that she could welcome Shree Ram.

When Shree Ram came to that ashram, she welcomed Ram and Lakshman with utmost love. Her voice became choked due to her intense emotion. She washed the feet of both the brothers, and had them sit on the cushions. Then she offered fruits to Shree Ram. Shabari, all ecstatic, would taste the berries, give sweet berries to the Sri, and throw away other ones. After all, how could she determine which berry is sweet and which one sour unless she tasted them herself?



On account of her deep love, great reverence and intense devotion to the God, Shabari did not even realize that she was feeding him, and therefore defiled berries. Sri Ram too, recognizing the honest, pious and pure heart of Shabari and her feeling of devotion, ate those half-eaten berries with great relish. God cares for only true feelings.

Sri Ram was very pleased with Shabari's reverence and devotion. Upon Shabari's request, he preached to her about the Nawadha (Nine Branched) Devotion. It was Shabari who suggested to Ram to go to the Pampa Lake and to cultivate friendship with Sugreev, and told him that he would be successful in the search of Sita with the help of Sugreev. Thereafter Shabari, enveloped in Ram's devotion, breathed her last, offering herself in the sacrificial fire. As soon as she entered the fire, her body became radiant with a divine light. She became immersed in the God forever.



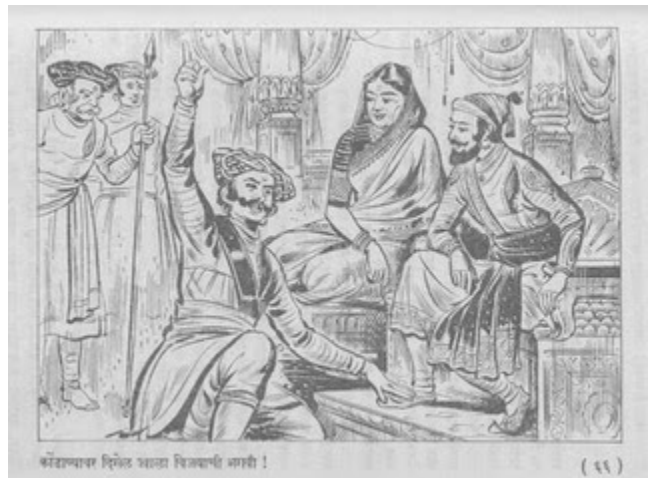
Narvir Tanaji

The conqueror of Sinhagad

350 years back, there was an impregnable fort named Kondana located near the city of Pune in Bharat. At that time, Shivaji and his mother Jijabai used to live in Pune. Fort Kondana was clearly visible from where they lived. In fact, Jijabai used to look at the fort through her bedroom window all the time. Every time she looked at the fort, she used to get gloomy because that fort was ruled by Mughal invaders. Udai-Bhan, a brave Mughal warrior, was guarding it along with his 5000 staunch Mughal soldiers. Jijabai desperately wanted to capture the fort. Capturing fort was essential to establish the de facto control over the region. So, Jijabai advised Shivaji to look into it.

Shivaji called in a meeting of all his commanders. He put forward the idea of capturing the fort and asked them, *"Who will take the challenge? Who will go and capture the fort?"* However, nobody came forward because it was an extremely difficult task and nobody wanted to risk their lives. Worried Shivaji decided to go by himself. At the same time, another commander, Tanaji Malusare, who was away and busy with his son's wedding, came there to invite Shivaji for the wedding.

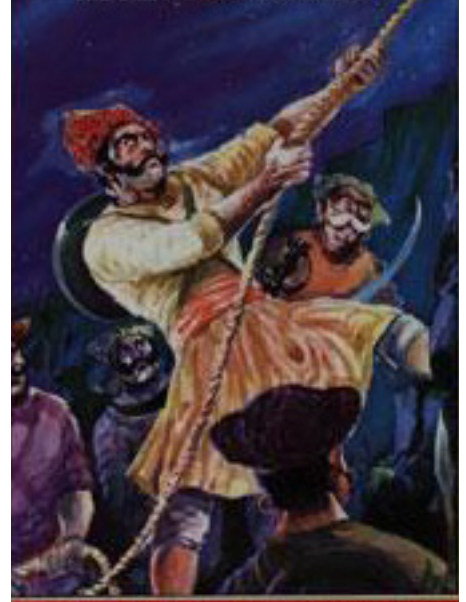
Tanaji was Shivaji's fast friend since childhood. He was also a brave warrior. When he learnt about the idea of capturing the fort, he instantaneously volunteered. He said, *"O King! You don't have to risk your life. I will do it."* Shivaji said, *"Tanaji! You came here to invite me for your son's wedding. How can I let you go on the mission?"* Tanaji replied, *"My son's wedding is not as important as the mission. Furthermore, wedding can wait, but the mission cannot. Give me this opportunity and I will not let you down."* Moved by Tanaji's firmness, Shivaji gave him the permission. Tanaji vowed to capture the fort. He took his uncle Shelar-mama, his brother Suryaji and 300 brave soldiers on



the mission.

Dangerous plan of entering the fort

Tanaji carried out a careful surveillance of the fort. The fort was surrounded by hills and dense forest. There was only one easy way to go up to the fort, but that path was heavily guarded. The other sides of the fort were nothing but steep cliffs. There was no vigilance on those sides because it was virtually impossible to climb those cliffs. Tanaji and Shelar-mama came up with a strategy. In one dark midnight, they all dressed up like 'Gondhali' (devotee of Goddess) and hid in the bushes near the gates of the fort in the midnight. The plan was that Tanaji and few soldiers would somehow enter the fort from the back side, kill the guards and open the gates so that Shelar-mama, Suryaji and other soldiers can come in and all together can make a surprise attack.



Tanaji, along with few soldiers, approached to the fort from the back side. Since, there was no vigilance, they were easily able to reach to the bottom of the cliff. However, they had a big problem that how they were going to climb it and go up to the fort. Tanaji got an idea. He had a giant lizard, called Yashwanti. He tied a rope to lizard's tail. Because of lizard's ability to cling onto the surface of the cliff, it easily climbed up and stuck firmly to the rock. Silently, Tanaji and his soldiers slunk up to the top of the cliff with the help of the rope that was tied to the Yashwanti's tail.

Encounter with the enemies

Udai-bhan and his army were sleeping fast after a big cocktail party. Even the guards at the gates had drunk lot of alcohol and thus were partially unconscious. Tanaji carefully reached at the gates. He killed all the guards in no time and opened the gates from inside. Shelar-mama, Suryaji and their soldiers were already waiting for the right moment. As soon as the gates were opened, they all entered the fort without making a noise. Then, they made a surprise attack on the Mughal enemies.

Soon, Udai-bhan got alerted. However, by the time Udai-bhan got alerted, Tanaji and his soldiers had already killed hundreds of Mughal soldiers. Udai-bhan alerted his army. Then, there was a fierce battle between the two forces -

300 of Tanaji's soldiers and 5000 of Udai-bhan's soldiers! Obviously, Udai-bhan's side was a lot stronger than Tanaji's.

Narvir Tanaji

Tanaji directly attacked Udai-bhan. They fought each other for hours. They looked terrifying because of all the blood coming out of their wounds. At one point, Tanaji lost his left arm that was holding a shield. But, undaunted Tanaji used his turban to cover his arm and continued the fight with just one hand. At last, they both got exhausted and fell down. Tanaji died instantly. Udai-bhan was alive but soon he was throttled by Shelar-mama and thus lost his life.

Tanaji's soldiers started running back

As soon as Tanaji fell down, his soldiers got scared and started running away. They reached to the ropes to climb down. Shelar-mama saw them. He was little disappointed, but never gave up. He immediately cut all the ropes and told the soldiers, *"I have cut the rope. You cannot go down now. If you don't fight, they will come and kill you. However, if you fight, then we have a chance of winning. So you better fight back with me."* Everybody got thrilled with Shelar-mama's speech. They shouted, *"Jay Shivaji, Jay Bhavani, Jay Tanaji."* Everybody then fought back bravely. Mughal enemies were also already weakened after their commander Udai-bhan died. Soon, they got either killed or captured. Shelar-mama put a saffron-flag on top of the fort and declared the victory. Everybody shouted, *"Hurray!!"*

I won the fort, but I lost my lion!

Here in Pune, Shivaji was anxiously waiting to hear from Tanaji and Shelar-mama. As soon as he got the news of the victory, he was extremely delighted. He was eager to meet and congratulate them. He rode on the horse and rushed to the fort. However, after reaching there, he saw a completely different scene. He saw everyone dejected. Shelar-mama welcomed him and gave him the bad news of Tanaji's demise. Shivaji was shocked, but recovered soon. Sadly he murmured, *"I won the fort, but I lost my lion (Tanaji)."* He then renamed the fort's name from "Kondana" to "Sinha-gad" (fort of the lion). Everybody then regarded Tanaji as "NarVir" (brave amongst men). He will forever be remembered for his bravery, willingness and trustworthiness.

After few days, Shivaji met Tanaji's family and he personally managed and navigated his son's wedding. That reflects how Shivaji cared about his army and people.



Story of Markandeya

Mrikandu was a great rishi. Marudvati was his wife. For a long time they had no children. The rishi prayed to God Shiva. God Shiva appeared to him, and said, *"I am pleased with you, Mrikandu. Do you want a hundred foolish sons, who will live for a long time? Or, do you want only one very intelligent son, who will live for only sixteen years?"* The rishi at once said, *"God, give me the intelligent son."* God Shiva said, *"Good! You shall have him."*

Soon the rishi got a son. He named him Markandeya. The boy grew to be very intelligent and handsome. He learnt the Vedas and Shastras. As the boy was growing, Rishi was becoming more sad. One day Markandeya asked his father: *"Father, why do you look so sad?"* The rishi said, *"Son! What shall I say? When God Shiva gave you to me, he said you would live only sixteen years. You are now about to reach that age."*

Markandeya said, *"Father! Is that the reason you are sad? God Shiva is very kind to His devotees. He has saved many from death before. I have read about it in the Puranas. I shall therefore worship Him day and night. I am sure, He will save me too!"* Rishi Mrikandu saw some signs of hope. He blessed his son.

Markandeya built a Shiva-Linga at a spot on the sea-shore. He started worshipping Shiva morning, noon and night. He sang bhajans and often danced in joy. On the last day, he was about to sing bhajan, Yama, the God of Death, appeared. He was riding on a buffalo. He held a noose in his hand and said to Markandeya, *"Stop your bhajan! you boy! Your life in this world is over. Be ready to die."* Markandeya was not afraid. He clung to the Shiva-Linga as one clings to one's mother. Yama threw his noose round the boy's neck and pulled him along with the Shiva-Linga. Suddenly, the Shiva-Linga burst and God Shiva came out of it. He said, *"Yama, go away! Don't touch this boy. He is my beloved devotee. He will live forever!"*

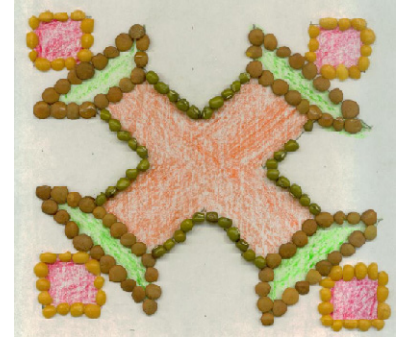


Yama went away crest-fallen. Markandeya came home and touched his parents' feet. They embraced him, and wept with joy. He then prayed to God Shiva more fervently than ever. He became a great rishi, and lived very long.

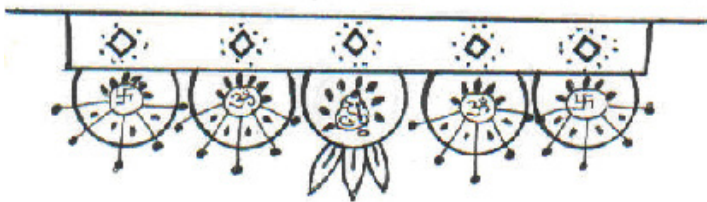




Projects:



Arts & Crafts, skits, and charcha



CD Wind Chime/Bell

Material Required:

2 CDs gone waste (shiny on both sides or printed on side), OM sticker, unfinished wind chime or a small bell (from the craft store or dollar store), beads, sequins etc for decoration, hot glue gun or any good bonding glue, thin golden lace about 15 inches.

Procedure:

Remove the upper show piece part of the wind chime. Keep the rods attached to its disc. Tie the two ends of the golden lace to the wind chime. Now you have the chime hanging on a 7 inch loop of the lace. Put OM stickers on the shiny side of the CD so as to cover the centre.

Take the 2 CDs with OM sides facing out and the printed side (if it has one) held facing each other. Lay one CD down with the golden lace on it in such a way that the chime is at the bottom and some part of the loop showing on top for hanging. Now put strong glue over it and place the other CD on top in the manner explained above. After it has dried, decorate around the OM. Our project is now ready to be hung any where you want.

Variation:

If you have a CD that is glossy on both sides take an adult's help to make 2 holes diagonally opposite near its edges. Make holes by heating a slim nail on a burner and piercing it thru the CD. Stick OM stickers to cover the centre of the CD on both sides. From one end you hang a chime or a bell and the other end to put some loop for hanging the project. Decorate around the OM.



Make your own Shiva-linga

(This project may be little difficult. Take adult's help if needed. But this one becomes very strong once dried and is waterproof.)

Material Required:

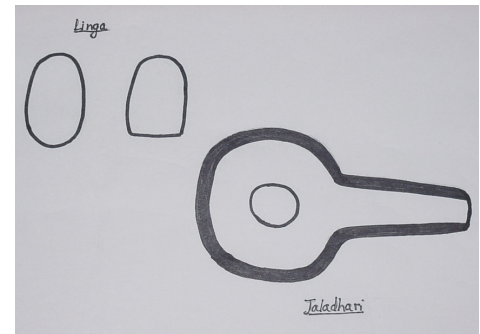
White bread, Elmer's glue, black acrylic paint, small flowers, yellow color, etc for decoration.

Procedure:

Take off the crusts from 4 slices of bread and tear into very small pieces. Add 3 tsp of glue and 2 to 3 tsp of black paint and keep mixing until the dough has the consistency of chappati dough. Add a little more of glue or paint if required. Remove dough stuck to your hands and take little of oil to knead it (like in chappati dough). Do not take more than 2-3 tsp of oil. Once the dough is kneaded smooth wrap it up in plastic wrap and wash your hands clean.

Now take 2-3 drops of oil and smear on your hands. Take 1/3 rd of the dough and roll into an egg shape, flatten one end. This is the Linga. Take little more about 1 inch dough and keep aside. The rest flatten with rolling pin and cut the shape of the Jaladhari as seen in the picture.

With the leftovers from the cut knead and roll into a rope so as to make the border of the Jaladhari. Place the Linga in the centre of the Jaladhari with some glue and set it firm. The Shiva-linga is ready. After this dries draw the gandha (yellow) and place some decorative flowers and a leaf cut as a bilwapatra. This project dries hard and is waterproof. A good keepsake!



Sri Ganesha Wall Hanging

- Material:**
1. Jute fabric cut 9" /12" , rice bag jute is OK,
 2. Felt fabric piece big enough for the image (not bigger than 6" /8")
 3. Dowel 12" , or a bamboo skewer
 4. String, twine or the same jute thread
 5. Sequins, beads, glitter glue for decoration
 6. Tacky glue or hot glue (seek an adult help for this)

Procedure:

1. Trace the image of Sri Ganesha on the felt and cut it out.
2. Take off the weave on the two 12" sides of the jute fabric for about 1" and from the 9" side for 1.5"
3. Fold the other 9" side for about 1" and glue the tip so that you can slide the dowel through it later.
4. Apply a line of tacky glue on the last weave so as to seal it and more threads won't come apart. You have to wait until it dries and then proceed further. Hot glue in this case works faster.
5. Stick the felt Ganesha on the right side (length wise where the fold and the sealing doesn't show) at about the centre and decorate !
6. Now pass the dowel/skewer through the folded end and tie a string to its two ends and the project is ready to be displayed on the wall !

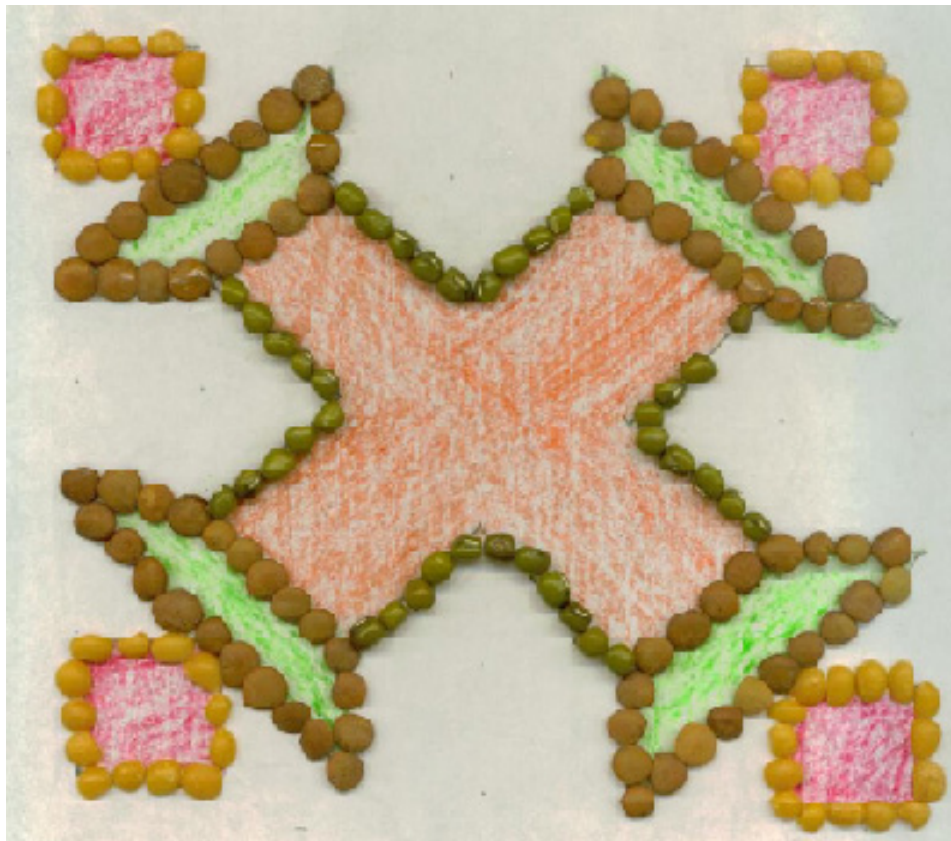


Variation: A kalash or any other Hindu symbol can be used for this project.

Rangoli

Rangoli is one of the arts of Bharat. It is a traditional way of decorating courtyards and walls of houses, places of worship and sometimes eating places as well. Traditionally the powder of white stone, lime, rice flour and other cheap paste is used to draw intricate. But if powder is not available, markers can also be used to draw different patterns of Rangoli. Let us try to learn here a simple design (pattern) of Rangoli.

- a) Draw a rangoli pattern with markers onto a construction paper (see below for one type of idea).
- b) Put the construction paper onto a cardboard (for better support when decorating).
- c) Decorate the patterns with different types of colored dals: moong dal, mag, tuar dal, whatever dried beans we have at home.



Guru Dakshina Hundi

Material:

Disposable cup 5oz or more, any color foam sheet, permanent markers, (waterproof paint optional), Tackt glue or hot glue, scissors, cutter and anything more for decoration...

Procedure:

Trace the mouth of the cup on the foam sheet so as to draw a good circle, Cut about 1mm outside the circle. Draw a rectangle 4cm/7mm at the centre of the foam disc. Using adult help cut the rectangle out.using a cutter Now you have a slot to put your coins/bills! Decorate using markers.

Decorate the cup with permanent markers or with paints or by sticking cutouts or stickers. Put lots of Tacky glue or hot glue around the rim of the cup and stick the foam disc so as to cover the cup. Your Hundi or savings bank is ready for Guru Dakshina Utsav!!

Variation:

You can reuse any jar or container for this project like snack containers, food cans (those safely cut) etc



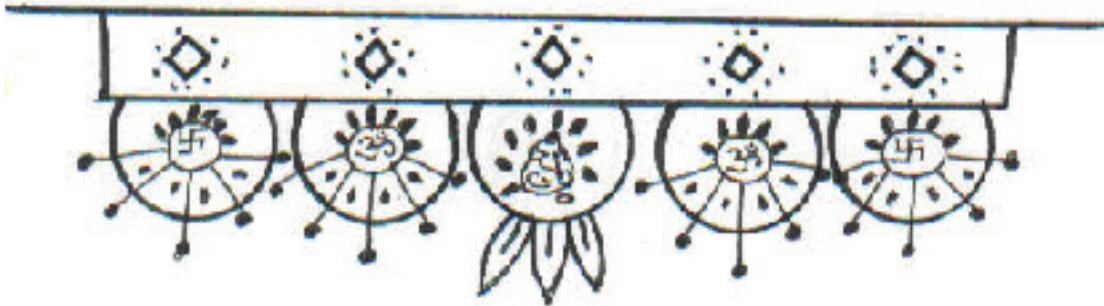
CD Toran

Material:

- 1) 5 discarded CDs
- 2) Green felt (36" by 36") , yellow or orange (12" by 9")
- 3) cantalope / watermelon seeds / pistachio shells or any seeds.
- 4) beads, small mirrors, toothpicks or popcicle sticks,
- 5) 3D paint (silver, copper), nail polish. Lace or satin ribbon
- 6) Picture or small light icon of Sri Ganesha.
- 7) jute rope, hot glue gun, tacky glue

Procedure:

- 1) Cut the green felt sheet 7" by 36" and fold it half lengthwise press and keep aside.
- 2) On one CD, stick Sri Ganesha picture or icon on the lower half and decorate with felt cutouts and seeds



- 3) Color Ganesha icon with 3D paint on brush or with similar metallic nail polish.
- 4) Glue a bead on one end of the tooth pick and stick it on the CD from center to outwards using hot glue gun.
- 5) Cut 9 small yellow/orange felt circles about 2" diameter and stick one on the back of Ganesha CD and on both sides of the remaining 4 Cds.
- 6) Decorate the circles with 3D paint with 'Om' on two of them and 'Swastika' on other two. Arrange the 5 CDs in symmetry with Ganesha CD in the centre.
- 8) Glue 1/3 of one side of CDs into the fold of the green felt with hot glue.
- 9) Pass a jute or similar rope across the felt for support for hanging. Now glue the other side of the CD into the fold. Decorate the green felt with mirrors and 3D paint.

OM-kar Hanging

Material:

Index paper or any thick paper, glue, 8 popsicle sticks, small string to tie, flowers, glitter glue etc for decoration.

Procedure:

Trim the index card (if required) about 2 inches smaller than the popsicle stick on all the four sides. This depends on the size of the popsicle stick you choose.

Stick two popsicle sticks each on the top and bottom side of the cut index card holding it in between. Then put two sticks each on the sides.

Now tie string on the two top ends of the stick.

With the glitter pen write OM on the paper/index card. Decorate with flowers, glitter etc. Use your creativity here.

Your OM is ready to be hung in your car or in 'pooja ghar' or on the wall of your room.



Make Dandiya Sticks for Navaratri

Material: A pair of 5/8" dowels cut to 18" length , acrylic paint, satin ribbons(about 1.5m), Tacky glue, flat small sequins, brush-on varnish, 2 pom-poms, 2 small round hooks, bells(ghungroo), wire or 2 small metallic rings to attach ghungroo, flat golden lace(optional), hair dryer to expedite drying.

Procedure:

Slightly smoothen the two ends of the dowels with sand paper or any rough rock!

Screw in the small round hooks on one end of each dowel and hang the ghungroos using wire or small rings. You can also tie it with thread if you do not have rings.

Paint the dowels with one or more colors of your choice.

Stick one end of the ribbon at one end of the dowel in slant and begin to wind it around but not too close. See the picture. Apply glue in between.

Cut it at the end of the dowel. You can wind another ribbon beside it and the golden in the center.

Stick flat small sequins on the non ribbon space in between. Stick a pom-pom on the other end of each dowel. Let the project dry completely.

Apply 1 or 2 coats of varnish on the dowel. Let dry between coats. This will secure the ribbons, lace and the sequins. Let it stand diagonally against the wall for drying. Use hair dryer if possible.



Pooja Thali Making

Material: 3 thick paper plates, Tacky glue, any strong bonding glue (like E6000) any dark acrylic paint (not black), sequins, 1CD, small glass mirrors or large sequins, silk flowers, lace. (Deco color paint pens & varnish spray-optional).

Procedure:

Step 1: Stick the 3 paper plates together with Tacky glue to make one sturdy plate..

Step 2: Paint the plate with your favorite acrylic color on top and the same or contrast color underneath and let dry.

Step 3: If you have varnish spray use it on the plate and let dry

Step 4: Stick the CD on the center of the plate with the strong bonding glue. Stick a big silk flower to cover the center of the CD. Develop a pattern around the CD using sequins, small flowers etc

Step 5: Use paint pens or use paint brush to decorate the plate for a festive look!

Step 6: Glue lace around the rim of the plate.

Step 7: The plate is ready!! You can place small 'haldi-kumkum-akshta' containers on the CD while doing your 'Pooja' !!

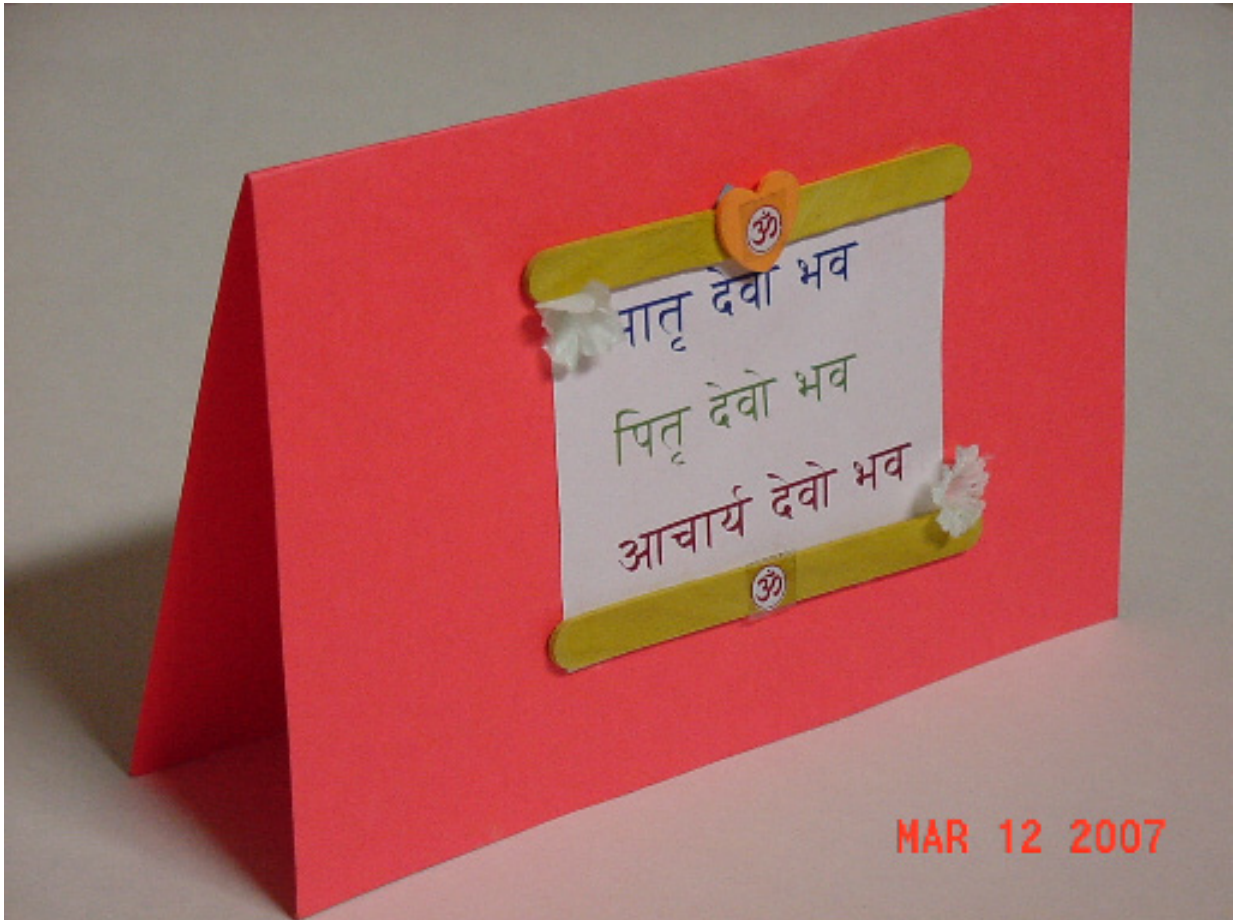


Greeting Card for Mothers Day

॥ मातृ देवो भव ॥	Matru Devo Bhava	Mother is God
॥ पितृ देवो भव ॥	Pitru Devo Bhava	Father is God
॥ आचार्य देवो भव ॥	Aacharya Devo Bhava	Teacher is God

Material: Greeting card paper (or index card), 2 popsicle sticks, glue and silk flowers etc for decoration.

Procedure: 1) Fold the card paper into half. Write the above message on a plain paper. Cut the message and glue it on the centre of the greeting card. 2) Stick popsicle sticks on the top and bottom of the message. 3) Decorate it with plastic flowers or any other decorative material. User your creativity here. 4) Your greeting card is done. Give it your mother on mother's day. This is good enough for Father's day too! **Note:** Adjust the message size according to the greeting card or the popsicle sticks for hanging.



Public Speaking

This is a bauddhik game to improve our public speaking or oratory skills. Shikshak should conduct this game. Friendly competition could be useful for motivation.

Self Introduction:

Everyone will get one or two minutes to introduce himself/herself. Apply few criteria such as body language, eye contact, on what information he/she focusses on and its sequence, etc and give points. Shikshak is to determine who did the best job.

Talk Talk Talk.....

Everyone will get one or two minutes (depending upon sankhya). He or she has to talk continuously for a given time. Talking should be relavant. Shikshak is to determine who did the best job.

Talk the talk (remember the talk):

This is something like self introduction. This game can be played in the pairs of two. First one will tell about himself/herself such as hobbies, likes, dislikes, movies, food, etc. for one minute. Other person has to remember everything the first person said and repeat it.

Truth or lie:

This is all about persuading your audience. One person will stand before the gana/group. He/She will tell a short story. After the story is told, the gana/group has to guess if it was the truth or lie.

Impromptu/charades:

Everyone will be given impromptu topics and he/she has to speak about for 2 minutes on that topic

Skit

Shiva, Parvathi Ganesh, Karthikeya, Peacock, Mouse

This is the play to exhibit that there is no match for parents love.

Scene: Shiva and Parvathi are relaxing in Kailash. Ganesh and his brother Karthikeya (Subrhamanya) enter the stage together.

Ganesh and Karthikeya: Pranam Matha, Pranama Pith (they both do namaskar to Shiva and Parvathi)

Shiv and Parvathi: Chiranjeev Bhava putra Did have fun playing together?

Ganesh: Yes Matha we did, but we are hungry. Do you have something for us to eat?

Karthikeya: Matha - we want to play some more games.

Parvathi: Oh...yes. I do here you go. (She gives them Modakas. Karthikeya takes only one, and Ganesh takes the whole plate) I think I have a game for both of you

Ganesh: If I win - do I get something?

Karthikeya: Is that right? What is it?

Shiva: What do we have for the winner?

Parvathi: (Showing her necklace) - here it is: the beautiful the Hara for winner

Karthikeya: That's wonderful, then why wait! Let start.

Shiva: Let your Matha me explain the game rule.

Parvathi: That's right! The game is to go around the most important and the largest thing I the world 3 times. Whoever completes 3 rounds first they will get the Hara.

Karthikeya: That's easy! The Brahmanda (Universe) is the most important and the largest. I will go around the Brahmanda and finish 3 rounds - at the speed of the light

Ganesh are you ready?

Ganesh: (Eating is modaka) ..Yes....

Karthikeya: (laughing).. Ha....ha.. Ganesh how can you win this race with your bigg tummy and little mouse.

Ganesh: I will try my best..

Partvathi: OK - ready 1, 2, 3. let the race begin.

(Karthikeya Sits on his peacock and goes around the universe (go behind the stage) Ganesh is eating modakas - not bothered about the race)

Shiva: Parvathi, look at Ganesh.. so lazy. He does not want to win the race.

Parvathi: No.. I think Ganesh has something in his mind . Let's wait and see.

(Karthikeya (enters the stage and looks at Ganesh): Ganesh .. why are you lazy. I am done with my first round..)

Ganesh: That good.. (busy eating his modakas)

Karthikeya: goes for the second round (exit the stage)

(Ganesh is still eating, Parvathi and Shiva are smiling at Ganesh)

Karthikeya: (enters the stage).. Matha, Pitha I am done with my 2 rounds. Ganesh - you did not start yet! How can that be! You are so lazy! Matha - don't you think - I should get the hara? I will go for my last round (He exits the stage)

Ganesh: Gets up and goes around shiva and Parvathi 3 times.

Parvathi: Ganesh - here you go (Gives her necklace)

Ganesh: Dhanyavad matha.

Karthikeya: (Enters the stage and looks at Ganesh) No .. this is not right. How can he get the hara. I am the winner. Something is wrong here.

Shiva: Karthikeya, Nothing is wrong. Ganesh considered parents are the most important and their love is the largest in the whole wide world, so he did went around his parents 3 times. There is nothing bigger than parents love. So he is the winner in this race. But - we love you too. Here you go you take my hara (necklace).

Karthikeya: I agree with you pitha. I learned a lesson. I do see the most the important and largest thing parents love is right here.

Both Ganesh and Karthikeya: Mathrudevo Bhava Pithru Devo Bhava.

Skit - Arjuna and Dronacharya

Characters: Dronacharya - a sage, Drupad - A king, Arjuna - One of the Pandavas, Duryodhan - One of the Kauravas, Narrator. (Bhim, Dushasan if we get more kids)

Narrator: During the Mahabharat period there was a sage named Dronacharya who was also a good archer and an expert in other warfare skills. He was appointed by the Royal family of Hastinapur to teach the young Pandavas and Kauravas the fine skills of archery as well as other warfare skills. Kauravas and Pandavas have finished their education and now it is the time of examination. Dronacharya tries everybody's skill. Now it is Duryodhan and Arjuna's turn.

Scene 1

(**Narrator** - Dronacharya asks Duryodhana to aim at the bird's eye only)

Dronacharya to Duryodhana – (orders) Duryodhana, try to concentrate and aim at the eye of the bird.

Duryodhana - (overconfident!!, garvani) Hu... Guruvarya !, it is a piece of cake for me. You should give me a little difficult task. (Duryodhana tries and fails).

Dronacharya to Arjuna – (orders) Now, Arjuna, try to concentrate and aim at the eye of the bird.

Arjuna – (calmly and with all respect) Yes. Guruvarya!!

(All other students keenly observing Arjuna. Arjuna touches the feet of Dronacharya. Then few seconds he stares at the bird's eye and aims at it successfully).

Other Pandavas - (excitedly !!) Hurray !! Well done Arjuna.

Dronacharya – (happy but not excited) Well done, Arjuna. I was confident that only you could have done this.

Arjuna – (with all respect) This is all because of you, Guruji. I could become such a good archer only with your teaching and ashirwad. (bending to touch dronacharya's feet)

Dronacharya – Arjuna, you have been my best student always. I am proud of you.

Duryodhana - (angrily !!) Hu... Guruji always take Arjuna's side. I could not aim at the eye of bird, but I am still as brave as Arjuna.

Dronacharya – OK Duryodhana ! I will give you a chance to prove your warfare skills.

Arjuna to Dronacharya - Guruji ! Now it is the time to offer you a Dakshina. What do you expect from us as a Dakshina?

Dronacharya to Everyone – My dear Students !, I did not teach you to get any Dakshina. But if you still want to give me something, go and get (capture) king Drupada. He is a king but a bad guy. He has humiliated me as well as other sages.

Duryodhana to Dronacharya - Guruji, give me a chance. I will fight Drupada and capture him.

Dronacharya to Duryodhana – (annoyingly !!) OK Duryodhana, As I promised, I give you first chance to prove your warfare skills. Go and get Drupada. He is also a great warrior... so be careful.

(**Narrator** - Duryodhana and his brothers take their army and fight Drupada... but Drupada defeats them and makes them prisoners. Everyone is shocked. Now Dronacharya tells Arjuna to capture Drupada and rescue Duryodhana)

Dronacharya to Arjuna - (worrying !!) Arjuna, Drupada has captured Duryodhana. This isn't good. I am worrying for Duryodhana and his brothers.

Arjuna - (calmly!) Don't worry Guruji!! (confidently!) With your blessings, I will fight Drupada and teach him a lesson.

Scene 2

(**Narrator** - Arjuna, with his brothers, go to Drupada's kingdom and request Drupada to come with them. Drupada is arrogant).

Arjuna to Drupada - Drupad !!! be a nice guy and come with me !!

Drupada - (arrogant !!) Hu... Who are you? How dare you to enter my kingdom without my permission. Go away.... otherwise I will kill you.

(**Narrator** - Arjuna, with his brothers, fights Drupada. Drupada is on the run. Arjuna is chasing and trying to capture him).

Drupada - (scared !! running!! Murmuring) Oh my god ! Arjuna is going to kill me. Save me from him.

Scene 3

(At last, Arjuna captures Drupada and presents him before his Guru, Dronacharya)

Arjuna to Dronacharya - (brings Drupada before Dronacharya) Guruji !, here is my Guru-Dakshina. As you said... I have captured Drupada.

Dronacharya - (overwhelmed !!) Well done !! Arjuna. You did a great job. You will be the world's best Archer. May god be with you always.

(Everybody, including Duryodhana, hails Arjuna).

Skit - Shivaji's justice

Characters:

Shivaji Raje - a King, Yesaji - Commander of Shivaji Raje, Jijabai - Shivaji's Mother, Patil - Chief of a village Ranze, Farmers - 2 or 3 Farmers, Soldiers - 2 or 3 Soldiers

(Frequently Shivaji Raje along with his men used to go around in his province. People used to shout excitedly "SHIVAJI RAJE!!!" as they see their king. Whenever Shivaji Raje visits any province, he inquires about the problems of villagers.)

Scene 1

(In this event, Shivaji Raje is affectionately inquiring about people's problems.)

Farmers to Shivaji - Raje ! we are facing a severe problem of water scarcity. It is been too hot this year. Our crops are getting dried. We are really worried about our crops.

Shivaji - Yes, I am aware of this problem and I have talked to yesaji about it.

Shivaji to Yesaji - Yesaji ! Make the arrangements and give them some help.

Farmers - (together raising their hands) Shivaji Raje Ki Jay ! (Farmers turn back and go away)

Shivaji - (Murmuring!!) I am really worried, monsoon should be good or else we are going to face many serious problems. This is the second consecutive year of water scarcity.

Yesaji - Don't worry, Raje. It is not as worse as last year.

Shivaji - let's turn back, MaSaheb is waiting for us.

(Shivaji and his soldiers are about to leave. Suddenly a man comes in their way. He is disgusted and frustated)

Man - (in a shrill voice) Raje !! Please help me. I am doomed. Give me justice.

Shivaji - What happened? Why are you so agitated and worried?

Man - (crying, in a sad tone) Raje !! my daughter was dishonoured.

Shivaji - (shocked!!) What? How could this happen in my kingdom? Are you telling truth? Who did that?

Man - (scared !!!) I am scared of him ! I can not take his name.

Shivaji - (consoling, convincing) Don't be scared! I will protect you. Tell me his name.

Man - (still scared, in... voice) Raje ! he is no other, but Patil of my village.

Shivaji to Yesaji - (turns to Yesaji) Yesaji !!! Ask patil to see me at once. If he refuses, arrest him.

(Yesaji goes away to Patil's village)

Scene 2

Yesaji to Patil - (orders...) Patil ! Come with me at once. Raje wants to see you.

Patil - (arrongtly !!) Who Raje? What Raje? I do not recognize any Raje.

Yesaji - Patil ! This is my last warning!! If you do not come, I will have to arrest you.

Patil - Go to hell!! I am not going with you.

(Yesaji forcefully grabs him and cuffs him. Patil is shouting and trying to escape)

Scene 3

(Shivaji, sitting on his throne, discussing politics with his ministers and his mother Jijabai. Yesaji comes in)

Yesaji - Raje! I have brought Patil with me. I had to forcefully arrest him.

Shivaji - Bring him in front of me.

(Yesaji brings Patil in. Patil hand-cuffed, tired, angry and agitated)

Shivaji - (high pitch) Patil ! What am I hearing? Is it true? Did you dishonour farmer's daughter?

Patil - (arrongtly !! shameless!!) So what? I am Patil. I can and I will do anything I like.

Shivaji - This is my kingdom. I can not tolerate this. You must be punished.

Shivaji to Yesaji - (Orders) Yesaji !! Take this man away. Cut both his hands and legs. That is what his punishment. Do... it ! right away....

Yesaji - Ji Raje !!

Patil - (now scared!!, starts crying) Raje ! Please forgive me this time. I won't do it again. Do not punish me so hard.

(Patil is crying continuously. Yesaji drags him away and cut his hands and legs. Patil shouting.. AH.AH...). (Ministers and Jijabai are shaken by this incident. They disagree with Shivaji's decision. They think punishment was too harsh.)

Jijabai to Shivaji - Shivaba !! Don't you think this was too harsh punishment for him? You should have spared him giving mild punishment?

Shivaji - (respectfully) No..... No MaSaheb !! I did the right thing. In my kingdom, women are most respected. I can not tolerate anyone hurting them. Otherwise ...what will be the difference between my reign and Muslims reign?? Now no one will dare to do such a thing.

(Jijabai and other ministers are convinced and happy).

Jijabai - Shabbas, Shivaba !! I am so proud of you.

Other Ministers - (hails Shivaji) Shivaji Raje Ki Jay !! Hara Hara Mahedev !!! Jay Bhavani, Jay Shivaji !!

Charcha - Diversity and Unity in Diversity

Try to discuss Diversity in Hindu Dharma. Some points are given below for a quick start. Discuss them and Explore more.....

What is Diversity? Is it good?

- > Diversity means variety, multiformity
- > Variety in life is always good. For example, when you see one color, you are happy. But when you see more colors, you are more happy.
- > It means you have a choice. For example, if you are hungry and you have only pizza to eat, then you have no choice. But if you have pizza as well as samosa, then you have choice to eat.
- > No rigidness. Nothing like "You must follow this and that"

Our Hindu culture is diverse. How?

- > Many Languages
- > Many customs
- > Many faiths and believes. Many Gods
- > Different food habits. Different attire
- > Freedom of thoughts

What keeps diverse Hindu culture united?

- > We learn that diversity is outwardly or superficial. From inside, it is one and same

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Advantages of Diversity

- > We learn to respect others' thoughts
- > We learn to respect others' beliefs though we do not believe.
- > We learn that there could be various ways to achieve the same goal.
- > Diversity makes Hindu Dharma a universal Dharma

What is our responsibility?

- > Be proud and keep it up.
- > Explain others what makes Hindus tolerant