

Hinduism



Now

Issue 5 Vol. 1, July 2016

**Varanasi—
A Most Ancient City**

**Understanding the
Mystique of the Aghoris**

**Vedic Society—Was the
Caste System Discriminatory?**

**Shakuntala—
The Progenitor of Bharat**

Hindu Calendar—July 2016

01 July	Vaishnava Yogini Ekadashi, Masik Karthigai, Jamat UI-Vida
02 July	Pradosh Vrat, Shani Trayodashi, Masik Shivaratri, Rohini Vrat
04 July	Ashadha Amavasya, Darsha Amavasya, Somvati Amavas
05 July	Chandra Darshan, Gupta Navratri Begins
06 July	Jagannath Rath Yatra
08 July	Vinayaka Chaturthi
09 July	Skanda Sashti
11 July	Ashtahnika Vidhan Begins
12 July	Masik Durgashtami
15 July	Devshayani Ekadashi, Gauri Vrat Begins *Gujarat
16 July	Vasudeva Dwadashi, Karka Sankranti
17 July	Pradosh Vrat, Jayaparvati Vrat Begins
18 July	Chaumasi Chaudas
19 July	Kokila Vrat *Gujarat, Vyasa Puja, Ashadha Purnima, Guru Purnima, Gauri Vrat Ends *Gujarat, Purnima Upavas, Ashtahnika Vidhan Ends
20 July	Sawan Begins *North
22 July	Jayaparvati Vrat Ends
23 July	Sankashti Chaturthi
25 July	Shravan Somwar Vrat *North
26 July	Mangala Gauri Vrat *North, Kalashtami
29 July	Rohini Vrat
30 July	Kamika Ekadashi
31 July	Pradosh Vrat

Reference
<http://www.drikpanchang.com/festivals/month/festivals-july.html?year=2016>



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Message from the Avatar

My Dear Ones,

It has been a month since I initiated participants at Shuddhadvaitam into not just powers but with seeds that can manifest into innumerable extraordinary powers. Already, I have seen reports of various powers such as telepathy, remote vision, aura reading, body scanning, mind reading etc being manifested by people across the world.

I would like to now give you the key to manifesting powers. Know that powers are a function of you feeling 'oneness' with the element or object or person you are connecting with. Oneness comes from expressing 'friendliness'. Powers are never a function of you having power over them. That will only lead to arrogance which is not supported by the cosmos.

For example, if you would like to stop the wind, create a breeze etc., you need to have deep friendliness with Vayu (the wind god). If you think you can overpower him, once or twice he might allow it, but at an opportune moment he will not allow it and teach you a lesson. But, if you are established in friendliness with him, he will sit with you and talk to you. He will reveal more and more of himself to you. He will tell you that "See, my child is Hanuman. He was such an active and naughty child, that he thought the Sun was a fruit and went to eat him. I had to intervene to protect the Sun", and so on.

Understand, 'friendliness' is the key. That means that you have no resistance towards any of the expressions (gentle or fierce) of the element that you are working with.

My job as a Guru was to make your acquaintance with the elements. This is what I did when I initiated you into the powers in Ujjain. It is now up to you to sit with your new friends and know more and more about them. If you are lazy about it and not want to interact with them, you will only have a superficial relationship with them. But, when you take the time to get to know them deeply, they will reveal more and more of themselves to you. You will be in advaita with them. Then, they allow you to request what you want of them. That expresses as powers.

See, even when I awaken your Kundalini during the process, I do not command the Kundalini. I address her with deep friendliness and call out to her in a sweet voice and tone "Pranapriye... Wake up in every body here Ma."

The import of Vedanta is 'tat tvam asi'. I tell you, the import of Agama is 'Shiva tvam asi'. The Brahmanical traditions are way too mild and take a long time to bear a simple fruit. I am here to give you a rude awakening to your ultimate reality. Shaivaite tradition is like that.

We will re-establish Shuddhadvaitam. Enjoy the journey with Mahadeva.

He will be expressing in all His glory at His home in Varanasi during the June-July Inner Awakening. Do not miss being in His presence. Enjoy Him in His Achalamurthi and Sachalamurthi form at a place where He resides forever—Varanasi.

Be blissful!

His Holiness Paramahansa Nithyananda



Inner Awakening

for Adults and Children

The Ultimate Yoga Spiritual Program
with enlightened master
His Holiness

PARAMAHAMSA
NITHYANANDA

The only program that truly works on all
parts of you to discover & awaken the
Ultimate YOU:



June 26th – July 16th
Varanasi, India

Inner Awakening[®] is a 21-day spiritual transformation program through yoga at all levels of body and mind. Deriving various techniques and processes from the Vedic scriptures and teachings like Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Hatha Yoga, Gheranda Samhita, Inner Awakening[®] offers a powerful awakening of the Kundalini Shakti, one's inner potential, through meditation, spiritual processes, yoga, pranayama, kriyas, and the powerful Shivoaham process.

Rewrite Your Future

From the Editor's Desk



After a month of high heat (literally and figuratively), storms, manifestations of mystical powers, humongous crowds and being in the enthralling vibrations of an avatar, returning to mundanity was in fact disquietening! Particularly because it was a challenge publishing the June issue, what with the virtual non-availability of can't-do-without internet at Ujjain. My resolute decision to return home immediately after the Kumbh to ensure a timely release of the magazine misfired badly. Even as I rued over the missed opportunity to be with Paramahansa Nithyananda at Omkareshwar while he playfully rollicked in the lap of river Narmada, Ma Nithya Gurupriya gracefully stepped in last minute, to take over designing the June issue. The result was a quick, smart, neat, and vibrant magazine, now available on the Hinduism Now website.

With another Inner Awakening scheduled in Varanasi, is it surprising that we decided to focus this issue on a city "older than legends and older than history itself." Who better to give us an authentic insight into her sacred depths than the very living incarnation of He who established the city. Dr. Ma Devaroopananda summarizes for us never-before-known details about the city from the talks of Paramahansa Nithyananda.

Writing for the first time for *Hinduism Now*, 16-year old Ehan Kamat gives us a serious, incisive look into why cleaning India's most sacred river Ganges is necessary for the ecology of India, for the spiritual life of the Hindus, and for millions of people for whom her 2,529 kilometers fertile banks is their lifeline. Continuing in the same vein are Trisha Singh with her interesting insights into the burning ghats of Varanasi and Veena Nagaraj's fascinating details into the beyond-fear mystique of the Aghoris.

Following through on the Sangam Age in the lost continent of Kumari Kandam (June 2016 issue), Charuyan Srikumaran reveals to us the longest ruling dynasty of kings in history—the Tamil Pandiyas, whose lineage lasted more than 1500 years, at the very least!

We also meet two fascinating people who reflect the resilience, dignity and strength of the women of their times—the incredibly beautiful Shakuntala, the progenitor of Bharata-varsha, and the 15th century poetess saint Meera Bai, whose expressions of pure bhakti continues to fascinate dramatists and filmmakers in 21st century India. Sanskrit poet Kalidasa has fascinated writers, dramatists, academicians and the like, for generations. Shubhangi Deshpande takes us on a succinct journey of his works, giving us insights into the poetry and rhythm of his inner and outer worlds.

And finally, we journey into Buddhists stupas, Sarnath and Talakaveri—each of them intensely unique sacred places for Buddhists and Hindus.

The fascination to explore Hinduism is vast and limitless. We are happy to give you a glimpse of it each month. Enjoy the journey.

Nithyanandam.

Usha K Kent



REVELATIONS ON YOGA THAT PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW

Speaking on the occasion of International Day of Yoga on June 21, 2016 at the holy city of Varanasi, Paramahansa Nithyananda revealed three powerful truths about Yoga that he said people should know but haven't been told.

The First truth he revealed was that yoga did not originate from Patanjali. With all respects to Patanjali and his work, he said "Patanjali is the organizer of Yoga but not the originator." The originator, is Adi Guru Sadashiva! And that Yoga originated at least 10 to 15 thousand years before Patanjali. In his complete works—the Agamas—Sadashiva has presented a detailed, elaborate manual with complete descriptions for Yoga. "I have enough materials—linguistic, archaeological and so on—to substantiate the claims I am making. Any decent unbiased researcher seeking the truth will be convinced about what I am presenting," he said.

"Knowing the originator, the founding father, and his intentions is very important to learn any

branch of knowledge. Yoga was promoted by people who were more interested in digestion and adoption of Hinduism but not to promote the original source. Patanjali is digestible while Mahadeva cannot be digested," he added.

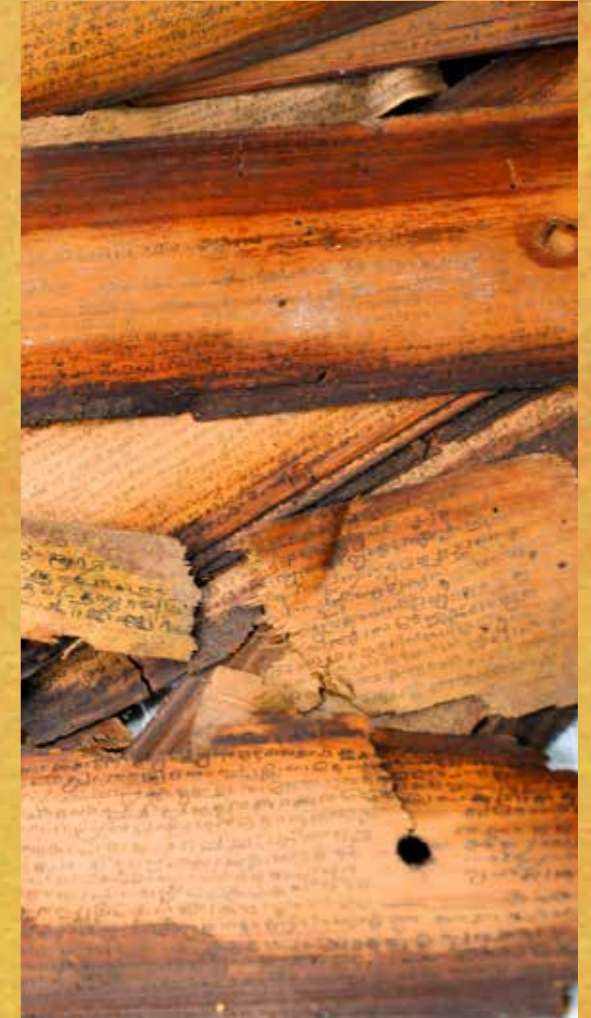
The Second important truth Paramahansa Nithyananda revealed was that vYoga cannot be developed. "You cannot develop on Sadashiva," he said. "Yoga is a complete science that had taken into account all types of bodies past, present and yet to come in the future. Altering Yoga is not development but dilution." He urged everyone to always ask their teachers for the original source. He also added that Yoga cannot be separated from Hinduism. The teacher's personal experience should align with the scriptural references. Otherwise it could be dangerous since the techniques which worked for the teacher may not work for all students. He urged the teachers of Yoga to ensure that their teachings are aligned to the original scriptures and then restart teaching. That, he said, is the best thing they could do to themselves and to the students in front of them.

To support this, He announced a huge project to collect and release all the Agamas of Mahadeva—the original authentic sources—from the original palm leaves in a translated and usable form, on the internet to humanity. As a step towards this, he announced the release of the first set palm leaf digitization of books on Yoga and other topics by Mahadeva. He said more than 3 Terabytes of manuscripts had been collected so far and are being processed and more is being acquired, researched and published.

And the Final revelation that Paramahansa Nithyananda made was that Yoga is not just the science of keeping you healthy; not just the ability to stretch your body. But, he said, it is the science of radiating enlightenment; the ability to manifest whatever you want. "It is not all about making you a better man, but about making you a superman. Yoga is a powerful alchemy system that gives result as soon as you start. It should give results on day one and by one month you should be manifesting powers," he said.

Concluding his talk Paramahansa Nithyananda conducted a powerful Kundalini awakening process called the Trinetra Kumbhaka from the yogapada of the Agamas for all the participants at Varanasi and those watching worldwide from more than 40 countries. 🕉

Reproduced from Hinduism Now Website

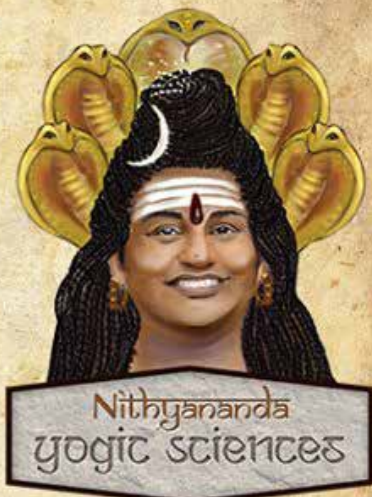


technique to awaken kundalini

"Initiation into kundalini awakening as revealed by Sadashiva in Agamanta. The process is to make you experience 'Shivattvamasi' - you are Sadashiva. It is a very powerful pranayama. It's called **trinetra kumbhaka**, revealed directly by Sadashiva, it can awaken your kundalini immediately.

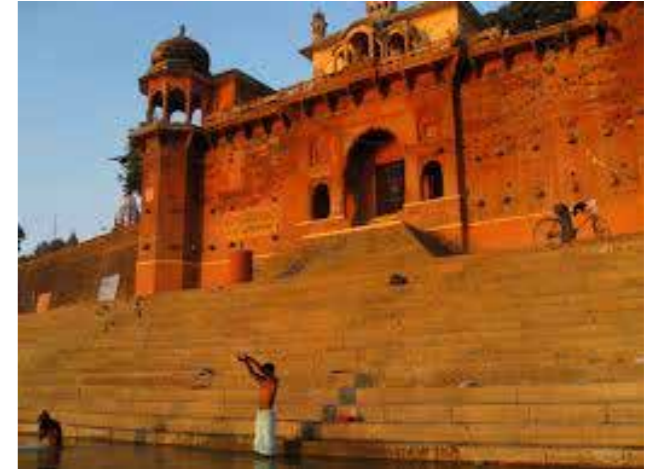
- * Do it as slowly as possible, as deeply as possible.
- * First, block the right nostril through the right hand thumb. Inhale through left nostril without exhaling, just block both nostrils. Hold as long as you are comfortable.
- * Then, don't exhale, again, inhale through right nostril. After inhaling, hold as long as you are comfortable.
- * Again, don't exhale, inhale through both nostrils, and hold as long as you are comfortable and then slowly exhale through the right nostril.

Do it without straining yourself. You will see, the whole kundalini wakes up and raises to the third eye." - H. H. Paramahansa Nithyananda



VARANASI

A MOST ANCIENT CITY



DR. MA NITHYA DEVAROOPANANDA

Summary of Paramahansa Nithyananda's Talks

Traditional etymology links “Varanasi” to the names of two Ganges tributaries forming the city’s borders: Varuna, still flowing in northern Varanasi, and Assi, a small stream in the southern part of the city, near Assi Ghat. Throughout the ages, Varanasi has been known by many names including Kasi or Kashi (used by pilgrims dating from Buddha’s days), Kasika (“the shining one”), Avimukta (“never forsaken” by Shiva), Anandavana (the forest of bliss), and Rudravasa (the place where Rudra/Siva resides).

Varanasi—A City Older than History Itself

In Rigveda, the city is referred to as Kasi or Kashi, the “luminous city as an eminent seat of learning.” The name Kasi is also mentioned in the *Skanda Purana*. In one verse, Shiva says, “The three worlds form one city of mine, and Kasi is my royal palace therein.” The name Kashi may be translated as the “City of Light.”

It is regarded as one of seven holy cities which can provide *Moksha* to a human being; Ayodhya,

Mathura, Gaya, Kasi, Kanchi, Avantika, and Dwaravati are the seven cities known as the givers of Liberation.

Paramahansa Nithyananda elaborates on Varanasi from his enlightened insights, “This place was originally called Anandavana as Mahadeva settled here. This is the first city Mahadeva created for himself and His *ganas*. **The city is older than legends itself, the city is older than history itself.**”

The Never Forsaken City

Varanasi is called Avimuktakshetra—‘never forsaken’. Even during the Pralaya (Great Flood), Mahadeva holds the city at the tip of His trishul (trident), which is why this city is called Urdhvaamnaya! Shankara divides the world in four parts—southern part, northern part, eastern part and western part, but says that Kasi is none of these. Kashi is Urdhvaamnaya, in the upward direction.



The First Sarvjnapetha

Mahadeva settled here when in the human form. Here He established the first **Sarvajnapetha—seat of learning**. From Mahadeva the knowledge was passed onto the Rishis, and then started the tradition of Narayana. Narayana was initiated here in the form of Kapila Maharshi, lived here, became enlightened here and also left his body when in Varanasi. He was the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, and his samadhi is in Varanasi. From Narayana, Padmabhava, Vasishtha, Shakti, Parashara, Vyaasa, Shuka, Gaudapaada, Govindapada, Shankarabhagavadpada, all lived here, and thus the *sampradaya* continued! This is the place where life started, this is the place where science of living started, this is the place where science of enlightenment was shared for the first time on planet earth.

All the aspects of enlightenment—*yoga, hatha yoga, siddha yoga, tantra, aghora, natha*, all the great *sampradayas*, traditions of enlightenment, started overflowing from Mahadeva in this very

Anandavana. Originally Mahadeva named the place Anandavana. In all puja mantras, the place is addressed as Anandavana. Later on when Ganga came here to have darshan of Mahadeva, two streams, Varuna and Assi, appeared. The place between the two streams was renamed Varanasi.

Mahadeva as Nithyananda

Every city has a spiritual name and every deity has a spiritual name in Hindu tradition. Here, the city's spiritual name is Anandavana, and the deity is called Nithyananda. In the sankalpa mantra in the Kashi Vishwanatha temple, the priests chant "Anandavane, Anandagandha madhye, Nithyanandaya idam na mama." "Idam nama" means "I don't exist" and the statement means, "In the Anandavana, in the center of Ananda gandha, Nithyananda is offered all these."

City for Flights!

Paramahamsa Nithyananda says, "This city is literally the Cosmos! If you understand, you will find such a great order in the chaos. If you

don't, you will find chaos, so much of chaos in everything! If you go to the original Anandavana, there is no street which is more than three feet. Actually I was contemplating, why? I read some history books. They are saying that the city was planned and built before even the bullock-cart was invented! But I was not ready to believe that. I consciously scanned the *Akashic Records*. Kaalabhairava revealed very clearly that now whatever we are using as road is just drainage! This city was created for the people who had naturally the ability of flying! So, we never bothered to create roads."

"Originally, when the city was planned, it was not planned for the people who were walking on the ground; it was planned for the *rishis, gandharvas, kinnaras, kimpurushas, ganas, ganadhyas*, who had the powers of levitation and flying. So there never was any need for roads. The buildings are just the places where they assumed the human body and taught this science or learned this science—earned from the Masters taught to disciples!"

The City of Celebration, Death and Liberation

"Varanasi was the oldest city, the oldest university, oldest hospital, and oldest monastery, and what not! This is the place where all the spiritual freaks gathered from time immemorial. From time immemorial, *sadhus, nagas, siddhas, Paramahamsas*, gathered to celebrate life and celebrate death! Here, life is liberation, death is celebration!

This city is built out of our scared sentiments. That is why, every king of Bharat, from Gandhara-

Afghanistan, to Bali-Indonesia, every king had their palace here. All the great *Jagatgurus, Peethadeeshwars, Masters*, had their ashram or monastery here. This whole city is built not just with mud, stone, wood, mortar; it is built with our sacred sentiments! That is why, Ramakrishna says, this city is a Golden City; because all our sacred sentiments are filled and this city is built.

If I have to introduce this place, I have to introduce through Hinduism, Sanatana Hindu Dharma. I have to introduce the whole science of enlightenment. Kashi itself is worshipped as Kashyadevi, just like how in Tiruvannamalai, the hill itself is worshipped as Arunachala, in Kailash Manas Sarovar itself is worshipped as Devi, here the city itself is worshipped as Goddess Kashyadevi."

It's the foremost among the *Jeevanmukti kshetras* where even now Mahadeva relaxes and enjoys his own inner space and glory, does *ananda thandava*, celebrates his own existence. Just like how when you are in high mood you take a selfie and put it on Facebook, same way Varanasi and Kalabhairava are selfie of Mahadeva.

Varanasi, undisputedly the most ancient city, continues to be the spiritual capital of the country. 🕉

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 1. Varanasi—wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
 2. Inner awakening inauguration and celebration in Anandavana, 1st May 2014, <https://youtube/tt3BiJQMSs0>
 3. Kasi—Mahadeva's Own City 30th April 2014, Satsang by Paramahamsa Nithyananda



SARNATH

IN THE LIFE OF BUDDHISTS

USHA K KENT

Sarnath is one of the most holy sites for Buddhists, as it is here that the stream of the enlightened master Gautam Buddha's teachings first flowed. Sarnath is located about 12 kilometers from the city of Varanasi and is one of four most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites, along with Lumbini-Nepal (Buddha's birthplace), Bodh Gaya-Bihar (where he got Enlightenment), and Kushinagar-Uttar Pradesh (where Buddha left his body).¹

Gautama Buddha, known simply as Buddha, was an Enlightened Master whose teachings became the foundations of the faith called Buddhism. Born a prince of the Shakya clan, astrological predictions indicated that he would either be a great emperor (cakravartin) or a great sage. Determined to ensure that his son would not take up a spiritual path and should succeed him to the throne, his father King Suddhodana sheltered him from the world outside the palace, giving him a life of royal sensuality, luxury and domestic bliss. But all this did not appeal to Gautama.

Out in the World to Search the Truth

At the age of 29, Siddhartha left the palace along with his charioteer Channa to meet his subjects and explore the world outside. For the first time he saw suffering, old age and death, all of which depressed him greatly. He initially strove to overcome each of these by living the life of an ascetic or shramana, which was the dominating movement at the time in the regions of Eastern India.

During this stage of self-search Gautama was joined by five companions—Kaundinya, Bashpa, Bhadraka, Mahanama, and Ashvajit. He abandoned the palace life and became a roving mendicant, begging for alms, practiced severe austerities and denied food to his body, until he one day collapsed in a river from starvation. He was rescued from near death and drowning by a village woman named Sujata who offered him payasam (sweet porridge).

Becoming Buddha—Abandoned by Companions

As he recuperated and got back his energy, Gautama began to reconsider his path. He was seated under a peepal tree, now called the Bodhi tree, and vowed he would not budge from that place until he had found the Truth. His five companions became disillusioned, felt he had abandoned his search, and left him.

Gautama remembered a moment in childhood in which he had been watching his father start the season's ploughing. He attained a concentrated and focused state that was blissful and refreshing, called dhyana. It dawned on him that this meditateness was the right path to awakening and not the one of extreme asceticism

fun of his well-nourished appearance. When they reminded him of his former vows, the Buddha replied, "Austerities only confuse the mind. In the exhaustion and mental stupor to which they lead, one can no longer understand the ordinary things of life, still less the Truth that lies beyond the senses. I have given up extremes of either luxury or asceticism. I have discovered the Middle Way."²

Turning of the Wheel of Dharma—First Sangha

Hearing this, the five ascetics became the Buddha's first disciples. Buddha taught them what he had learned, and they also became enlightened. This event is referred to as "the turning of the wheel of the Dharma" and also marks the founding of the Sangha, or the



he had practiced till then. Buddhists refer to this as the Middle Way—a path of moderation, away from the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. After about 49 days of meditation, at the age of 35, he attained enlightenment and became known as *The Buddha* or "The Awakened One" or "The Enlightened One".

Mocking Companions at the First Sermon

After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha went to Sarnath. It was here that he preached his first discourse in a deer park to set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dharma'.

While in Sarnath, the Buddha encountered the five men who had been his companions of earlier austerities. On meeting the enlightened Buddha, all they saw was an ordinary man; they made

community of monks. Gautama Buddha taught not to debate but to speak for the advantage of and out of compassion for human beings. He explained the middle way which avoids extremes, called the Four Noble Truths, and prescribed the Eightfold Path. (For details, read articles under column head Offshoots of Hinduism)

Buddha's first discourse, delivered here at Sarnath, is known in Pali as the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Other Suttas include the *Anattalakhana Sutta* and the *Sacca Vibhanga Sutta*.

Emperor Ashoka Monumentalizes Buddha

A monastic tradition flourished for over 1,500 years on the site of the deer park at Sarnath. In the third century BCE Ashoka erected a column

15.24 meters in height which had four lions as its capital which is now treasured in the archaeology museum and is also the emblem of the Republic of India. The lions symbolized both Ashoka's imperial rule and the kingship of the Buddha.

Sarnath—A Flourishing Center of Buddhism

Buddhism flourished in Sarnath in part because of the support of kings and wealthy merchants based in nearby Varanasi. By the 3rd century Sarnath had become an important center for the arts, which reached its zenith during the Gupta period (4th-6th century CE). When Huan Tsang visited from China in the 7th century, he found 30 monasteries and 3,000 monks living at Sarnath. Sarnath became a major center of the Sammatiya school of Buddhism, one of the Nikaya or Hinayana schools. The presence of images of Heruka and Tara indicate that Vajrayana Buddhism was also practiced here.

A Debris Until the 19th Century CE

In 1194 CE, Qutubuddin Aibak, the Islamic-Turkish conqueror and army general of the Delhi Sultanate ruler Iltutmish, leveled the city to the ground. Sarnath became a forest of debris below which the historical ruins remained buried. That is until British archaeologist Colonel Cunningham re-discovered it in 1836. From then on a series of excavation and restoration work were carried out here.

The most important structure at Sarnath is the Dhameka Stupa. The original stupa was constructed by Ashoka. Colonel Cunningham discovered a stone tablet on which an inscription was written with the word Dhamekha, and mentions that this is the spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. Dhamekha seems to be a distorted form of Dharma Chakra or Turning the Wheel of the Dharma. This is the spot where the Buddha's five companions who became the first Sangha lived in huts.

Many dignitaries of Buddhist countries visit this place for circumambulation of this sacred stupa and to worship the Buddha. The first discourse of the Buddha was on the 'Wheel of Law'. The wheel symbolizes samsara (world), the eternal circle of existence which goes on and on, life after life because of ceaseless cravings and desire.

Relics and Legends of Sarnath

In ancient Buddhist literature the place finds mention as Rishipatna and Mrigdava or Mrigadaya. The place was called Rishi Patna, as it was here that the bodies of five hundred Pratyeka Buddhas or rishis (sages) fell after their attainment of Nirvana (Salvation).

According to the Jataka Tales, in one of his previous births, Buddha as a leader of a herd of deer, appeared before the king of Benaras (Varanasi) to save the life of a doe. The king, who relished on the flesh of a deer everyday, was moved by his sacrificial zeal and made the place a free roaming ground, which came to be known as Mrigadaya (deer park). The inscriptions of early medieval period found from Sarnath referred to this place as Dharmachakra or Sadhamacharka Pravartana Vihar.

There is also a Bodhi tree planted by Anagarika Dharmapala (a early 20th century Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist and writer), grown from a cutting of the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. Six national temples have been built by various Asian communities at Sarnath since the site's restoration.

Another important remains at Sarnath is the Mulagandhakuti Vihara, which marks the place where the Buddha spent his first rainy season in meditation which is also described by the 7th century CE Chinese traveler Huen Tsang.

Sarnath is also sacred to the Jains because they look upon it as the site of asceticism and death of Shreyamshanath, the 11th Tirthankara. The modern name Sarnath seems to be a contraction of Saranganath (Lord of Deer) still borne by the Lord Shiva enshrined in a temple nearby! ☸

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UNRAVELING THE MYSTIQUE BEHIND THE AGHORIS

VEENA NAGARAJ



The land of Varanasi, the most ancient holy city of India has been the ultimate pilgrimage spot for the Hindus. Situated on the banks of the sacred river Ganga it has been a centre for Hindu Renaissance. For thousands of years it's been home for flourishing culture, knowledge, philosophy, religions, Sanskrit, languages, yoga, Indian philosophy, spiritualism, mysticism belonging to different ancient sects of Hinduism, Indian arts and craft. It has produced great mystical saints and personalities. One such ancient mystical sect of Hinduism existing in Varanasi are the Aghoris.

Fearless, Dreadless Monks

The Aghoris are an ancient mystical sect of Hinduism and are Monists (monks). They are Shaivites (worshippers of Lord Shiva). A + ghor= Aghor means absence of fear, dread, difficulty. Aghor is a state that can be achieved through the practices of discipline known as Aghor Sadhana. It is a state beyond waking, dream and deep sleep. The person who is instructed and initiated into this practice is called an Aghor, Aghori or an Aughar (au+ghar= aghar, means other house).

Origin of Aghoris

The origin of Aghoris is as old as Hinduism itself. Their lineage originates from Avadhuta Siddhas of Varanasi which in turn originated from Lord Shiva Himself. Lord Dattatreya is the patron and the ideal Master of the Aghoris and Aghori tradition. He is the Adiguru of Aghori tradition. Lord Dattatreya is an incarnation of all the three gods, Bramha (God

of creation), Vishnu (God of preservation) and Shiva (God of rejuvenation and transformation) in a single human form. The first Aghoreshwaracharya was Bhairavacharya of 5th- 6th century. Later his lineage was revived by the great mystical Aghori saint Kinaram Baba in the 16th century.

Aghoreshwaracharya Kinaram Baba

The period before Aghoreshwaracharya Kinaram Baba is completely shrouded in mystery. There are no texts or chronicles. The Aghoris did not have residences as they wandered in forests, mountains and lived in cremation grounds and visited sacred places. Aghoracharya Kinaram Baba revived the ancient tradition of Aghoris in the 16th century. He was an incarnation of Lord Shiva Himself. He was born at Ramgarh in Chandauli district of Varanasi.

A Wandering Monk

As a young Baba he wandered throughout the country. One of the places he went to is the Girnar mountain, a holy place in Gujarat and performed tapasya (penance) for some time. There he was initiated by Lord Dattatreya. From there he left for Mata Hinglaj Devi's Shakthi Peetha in Baluchistan (now Pakistan). Mata Hinglaj Devi is the goddess of the Aghoris. Baba performed penance there for some time, received her blessings and left for the Himalayas.

Ashram at Varanasi

After practicing for some time in the Himalayas he came to Varanasi. Finally on the bank of the river Ganges in Varanasi as per the guidance of Hinglaj Mata Devi he established his Dhuni (the

sacred fire) and continued to serve humanity by starting a mutt (monastery). He lived for a very long time, about 150 years!

The Legacies of Kinaram Baba

The Akhand Dhuni of Kinaram Baba and the samadhis of all the siddhas of Aghori lineage in the place called Krimkund are a witness to the lineage of *avadhuta siddhas* (mystical saints). There is also a record of history of siddhas who headed this Aghor mutt after Baba Kinaram at Krimkund.

The traditions of the Aghoris survived, were absorbed by and flourished in Varanasi due to the extraordinary deeds of Baba Kinaram. Baba was famous for his fights with Rajas and Nawabs of those times. He fought in favour of sadhus and poor people. He revived the Aghori tradition and promoted dialogue among main Hindu currents and other religions existent during his time.

The only original Aghori literary works are those left by Kinaram Baba. Baba has mentioned the principles of Aghor in his books *Viveksar*, *Ramgita*, *Ramsal* and *Unmuniram*. The book called *Viveksar* is said to be the most authentic treatise on the principles of Aghor.

Baba Kinaram's Flying Cot:

In the article on *Varanasi—A Most Ancient City*, we have observed how Varanasi with its three feet narrow streets was so because they were not made for walking. The streets were meant for highly evolved souls and other worldly beings—it was planned for *rishis*, *gandharvas*, *kinnaras*, *kimpurushas*, *ganas*, *ganadhyas*, who had the powers of levitation and flying. Baba Kinaram was a living proof of this in the 16th century.

Preserved at his ashram is a cot on which Baba Kinaram sat, slept, moved, flew about! The cot moved by simply his order and his elevated pure siddha energy. During the July 2015 Inner Awakening program Paramahansa Nithyananda shared how, when in a deep state of samadhi that morning, he was visited by Baba Kinaram swooshing in on his flying cot, to seek his blessings!

What Happened to Kinaram Baba's Body?

In modern times the members of this mystical sect can be found mostly alongside of river Ganga in Varanasi where their most sacred temple is found. The holiest temple of Aghoris holds the remains of Kinaram Baba—or more precisely, his skull!



According to Paramahansa Nithyananda, due to the immense siddhis, penance and fearlessness the Aghoris gain over their years of practice of living Aghoratva, they radiate it from every fibre of their being. Therefore, when Kinaram Baba attained samadhi, his followers ate the flesh of the body so that no part of him would go wasted and they themselves could imbibe some of his powers. The only part of the body that remained is the skull, and this is preserved in his Samadhi at his ashram in Varanasi.

The Aghoris' Universe—Abhorred and Awed by Society

The Aghoris believe that the universe is non-dualistic. For them all opposites are indistinguishable from one another. Everything is a manifestation of God. To deny anything is to deny the Supreme Being. The true Aghori is a human symbol of Lord Shiva himself.

According to Aghoris every human is a shava (dead body) with emotions and has to rise to the state of Shiva or Aghor. Some of their practices are terrifying to the common man. The Aghoris overcome this terror by going through these practices. All their practices are centred around the removal of bonds of sense pleasures, fear, greed, anger, possession, hatred, shame and obsessions.

Most of the Aghoris roam around with a loin cloth or naked. They wear jewels made of bones. They carry a kapala (human skull) as their begging bowl. They live in cremation grounds. They follow the simple rule that the universe resides in them. They perform rites and rituals

regularly to allow the highest level of Aghoratva (enlightenment) in them. The part of their ritual requires a minimum of one eating putrid human flesh and also meditating on a dead corpse. This is a symbol of rising from shava to Shiva.

As the Aghori advances in his practices he attains many siddhis (powers). They start manifesting powers like altering the environment. But they don't use these powers for any vested interests because the basic rule of the Aghori is to deny human pleasure. For example, change in climate is an event that should happen on its own and not be manipulated by anyone.

Though Aghoris are feared and opposed by some segments of population in their own home land, yet there are others who revere them for their amazing healing powers. They do not inflict violence on others to further their religious practices and are highly non violent by nature. This is the true nature of an Aghori. One who has gone beyond fear cannot carry any violence in his inner space. The human society would benefit a lot from revering these beings for their high level of courage, simplicity and authenticity towards their spiritual path, rather than merely tolerating them as an ostracised part of the society. ☸

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THE BURNING GHATS OF VARANASI

TRISHA SINGH

The ancient city of Varanasi is where thousands upon thousands go every year to have darshan of Kashi Vishwanatha, and to liberate their deceased loved ones from the cycle of birth and death. To be liberated from this body in the holy city of Kashi is the surest way to be free of the karmic cycle of birth and death.

Keeper of the Sacred Fire—The Dom Raja

Picture this: fires rising high into the night on the ancient banks of river Ganga, as several men hustle around the various pyres strewn on the ghat. These are the Doms, an ancient caste that handle the cremation process at Harishchandra and Manikarnika ghats in Varanasi. Of them, the Dom Raja is the keeper of the sacred fire at Manikarnika ghat, a fire that has not been extinguished for centuries. Not a single match is lit to light the pyres; this sacred fire is the source of all fires at the ghats. These cremation ghats run 24/7, burning hundreds of bodies every day in plain sight.

The Legends behind Manikarnika

There are several incidents that mark the significance of these ghats. It is known that Sati, an incarnation of Devi, set herself ablaze after her father tried to humiliate Lord Shiva. After this, Lord Shiva out of immense grief, carries her body around the whole cosmos. At this time, parts of her ended up scattered in many places, one of which was Manikarnika Ghat. Her earrings fell at the ghat. On finding this, a Brahmin man decided to keep it to himself. Lord Shiva discovered this and cursed the man and decreed that his family be brought down to the lowest of the untouchables—a Dom. The man pleaded for mercy, but Lord Shiva could not recant his curse. Nonetheless, he gifted the ghat to the man's family and gave him a sacred fire, cremation by which would give Mukti or liberation to all. This is the fire that remains burning to this day.

Another legend says that Lord Shiva granted a boon to Lord Vishnu that when he destroys the world, he will not destroy Varanasi. To celebrate

this boon, Lord Vishnu digs a well (Manikarnika Kund) for Lord Shiva and Parvati to bathe in, when they visit Varanasi. At this time, Devi Parvati's earring fall into the well. The Manikarnika ghat is celebrated as a Shakti Peetha, a sacred place of worship for all who revere Devi.

Making of a Raja-rishi and Emergence of the Dom Raja

The Harishchandra ghat, the other cremation ghat at Varanasi, earns its name from Raja Harishchandra, a famous king mentioned in the *Markandeya Purana*. In order to pay Dakshina, a donation, to the sage Vishwamitra, Harishchandra gave his kingdom and all his possessions to the sage. When this was insufficient, the king finally sold himself to the sage. Vishwamitra then sold Harishchandra to a Chandala, who worked at the cremation ghats in Varanasi. There, Harishchandra worked hard and paid his earnings to Vishwamitra. During his time there, he realised that all his suffering was due to his sins in a past life. Soon, Harishchandra's wife arrived there with their dead son, who was bitten by a snake. However, even upon seeing this, Harishchandra insisted that she would have to pay the funeral fees in order to have him cremated. Seeing his honesty, all the deities along with Vishwamitra, appeared before him and told him that he would be able to ascend into heaven, and that he had passed the tests that Vishwamitra had put him through. Harishchandra was thus the only king to have a place among gods, a raja-rishi. To thank the Chandala who employed him, he named him Dom Raja. The Dom Raja would henceforth be the keeper of the ancient fire at the ghats, as would all his sons for centuries to come.

Dom Raja—the Yamdoot on Earth

The Dom Raja is known as Yamdoot on earth, the one who is responsible for setting free the dead. The Harishchandra Ghat and Manikarnika Ghats in Varanasi are the sacred places where Lord Shiva himself appears to liberate the souls cremated there. The Dom Raja is the supplier of the holy flame that has remained unextinguished for centuries. According to the customs of the Doms, everybody must pay something to cremate their dead, but only as much as they wish to.

Hindu Cremation Process at the Burning Ghats

Once the payment is received, the following is observed:

- The body is doused in Ganga water before cremation.
- Bodies of elderly men who have lived a good life are wrapped in a gold shroud. Women who die before their husbands are wrapped in red. Men are wrapped in white.
- Five members of the deceased's family stand around the pyre
- The men circle the pyre five times for each element: fire, water, air, earth and ether. Then, they circle it in the opposite direction, as in death, everything is reversed.
- Their pyres are set with coconuts and other offering by the Pujaris and set ablaze.

According to the Doms who work there, a body can take anywhere between two to twelve hours to burn completely, depending on the karma of the individual.

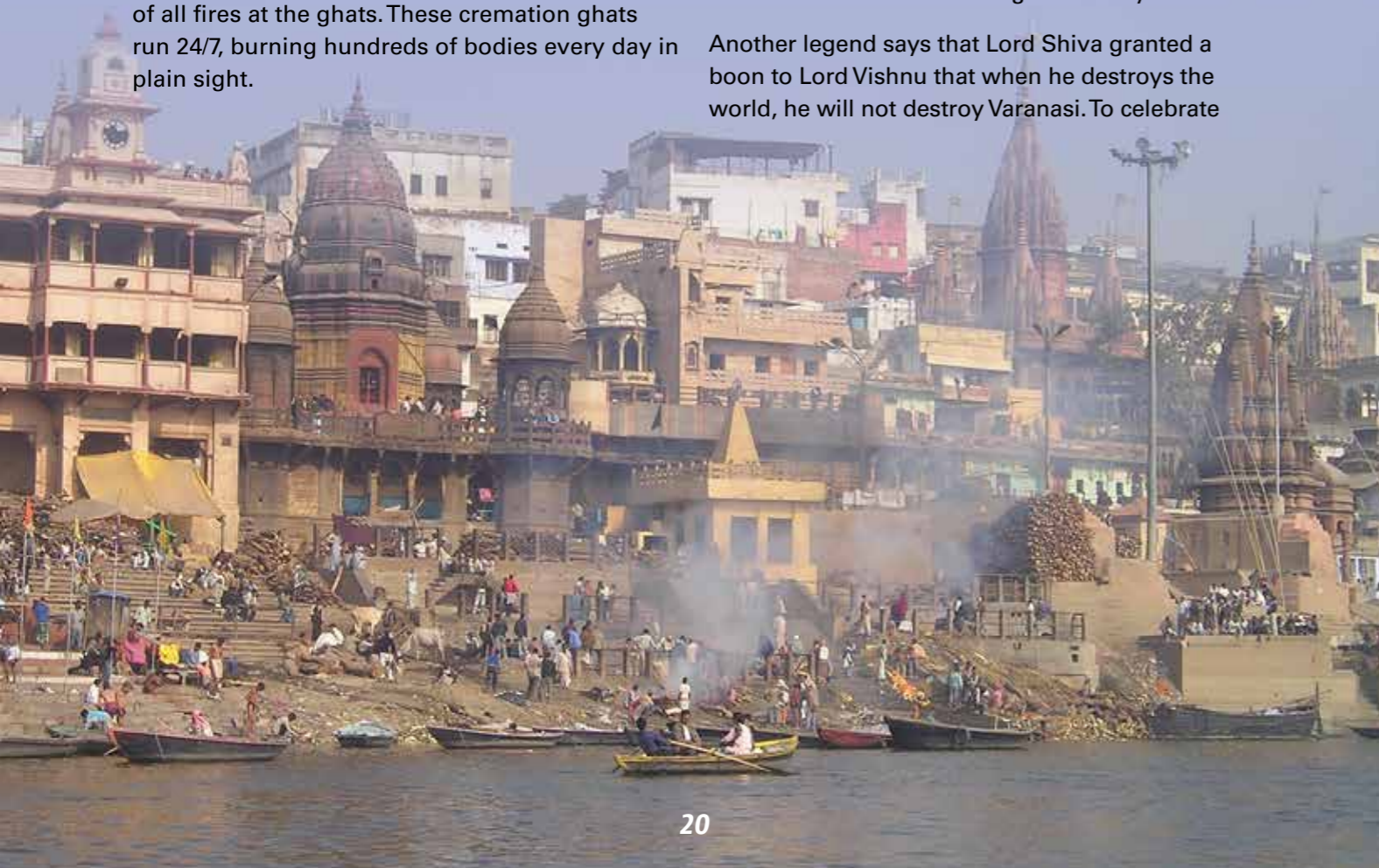
The 'chief mourner', generally the eldest son of the family, then approaches the pyre and splits open the skull of the body. This is the moment that the soul is officially freed from the body and can attain liberation.

The unburnt portion of the bodies are immersed into Ganga, as a final act of purification.

Exceptions in Cremation at the Ghats

Children below the age of five, pregnant women, Sadhus and Sanyasis, those bitten by a cobra or that died of smallpox and lepers cannot be burnt at the ghat. They are directly immersed in Ganga. The first three of this category are already considered pure; they do not need fire to purify them. Those with smallpox or bitten by a cobra are said to release toxins into the air upon burning, and so directly immersed. Lepers are already retained with god and so do not need burning.

In sum, the burning ghats of Varanasi are the ultimate place for all Hindus to reach in order to be liberated from the repeated cycle of birth and death. And in it, the Dom Raja, although a chandala, has the most important role in society, to enable the dead to make the journey into liberation. ☯



CLEANING UP THE GANGA IS IT NECESSARY?

EHAN KAMAT

Brief Facts about the Ganga

Originating in the Himalayas, the Ganga winds from Rishikesh through Haridwar, then East to Bangladesh until it empties into the Bay of Bengal some 2,529 Kilometers (1,569 miles) later.

A little over one third of India's population relies on her for drinking water or irrigation. In essence, 10% of the world's population relies for sustainability of the Ganga. Equally importantly, Hindus believe in the holy living spirit of the Ganga as a purifier of sins.

The holiest of Hindu rivers—The Ganga (Ganges) has been the recent recipient of much discussion in India. Successive governments have had plans to clean up the Ganga. Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi's election campaign was partly built on the same platform.

"Ma Ganga has called me," he told the crowd at his victory celebration, when he swept to power in a landslide victory two years ago. "She has decided some responsibilities for me. Ma Ganga is screaming for help, she is saying I hope one of my sons gets me out of this filth. It is possible it has been decided by God for me to serve Ma Ganga."¹

In 2014, his government announced the allocation of Rs. 2,037 Crore or \$334 Million, on a project named "Namami Ganga," an Integrated Ganges Development Project, and cleaning of the Ganga under this plan is clearly visible at Varanasi at least.²

Polluting the Holiest of Rivers

The Ganga suffers from three main offenders regarding its pollution: sewage, industrial waste and human and animal corpses. Much has been written about the lethal fecal coliform counts of the Ganga. As she exits in Varanasi (Benares), the count is reportedly between 1-2 million/ppm, which is deemed toxic for drinking, bathing, and irrigation.³

Sewage from the fifty odd cities that line the Ganga are said to be responsible for an average of raw sewage. It is assumed that 32,000 human corpses are cremated in Varanasi yearly releasing 300 tons into the Ganga.

Industrial complexes such as tanneries and pulp/paper mills generate wastewater as well. More than 760 polluting industries reside on the banks of the Ganga, mostly in Uttar Pradesh. Industries include tanneries, paper and pulp industries, sugar mills, dyeing factories, distilleries, and cement plants. Despite these regulations enforcement has been lacking.⁴

Adding to the pollution issue is the concomitant decrease in water flow that does not allow her to satisfactorily dilute

the pollutants. Brahma Dutt Tripathi, professor of environmental engineering at the Banaras Hindu University and an expert member of the National Ganges River Basin Authority (NGRBA) states that increasing water flow can be done by desiltation, removing all mid-stream constructions, and halting construction activity along the river's banks.⁵

History of Ganges Clean up Attempts— Repeating History?

Failed attempts in the past have dotted the history of the Ganga. In 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi set up a \$226 million Ganges Action Plan. Later, India's courts ordered the closure of tanneries polluting the river's waters. In 2009, Mission Clean Ganges was announced and the NGRBA headed by Prime Minister Singh was created focusing on the Ganges river basin. Critical to these plans was sewage treatment plans which, though built, were subject to damaging power shortages.

An op-ed by Sunita Narain, director-general of the Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment says, "A comprehensive solution to the Ganges pollution lies in dealing with three problem areas: one, finding water to dilute and assimilate waste; two, finding innovative ways to check the growing amount of untreated sewage discharged into the river; and three, fixing the enforcement to stop industries from discharging waste into the river."⁶

Prime Minister Modi's latest call through a press release was: specific action plans to unite the strength of various sections of society dedicated to "Ganga Seva." He called for "teams of volunteers from various parts of the country could be involved in generating public awareness and perform Ganga seva by maintaining specific stretches of the river."⁷

A Multipronged Approach

The Ganga has shown her fortitude through thousands of years of Indian history. She has physically, financially and spiritually sustained a good portion of the population of India and continues to do so without expectation. For these qualities she is known as Ma Ganga or Mother Ganges.

Jawaharlal Nehru, requested that a handful of his ashes to be thrown into the Ganga. "The Ganga," he wrote in his will, "is the river of India, beloved

of her people, round which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age-long culture and civilization, ever-changing, ever-flowing, and yet ever the same Ganga."⁸

Politicians have campaigned, and even won elections, speaking on her behalf.

Consensus among experts both scientific and spiritual is that the Ganga needs the loving attention of her children at this critical juncture. A multipronged approach must be taken.

- Hindu pilgrims must be re-educated in disposing of plastic, refuse and non-biodegradables.
- Industrial plants such as tanneries and paper mills must be held accountable for their atrocities on her banks or be shut down with power and authority.
- Reliable, efficient and power stingy sewage treatment plants must not only be built but by operational.
- Cremation facilities must be updated to reflect the new spirit of a cleaned Ganga.

The vitality of the Ganga and her power to sustain are reflected in the continued existence of the Ganges River Dolphin. Despite the stretches of severely polluted river, the dolphin population is estimated at some 2,000. This rare breed, like the Ganga itself, sustains itself despite the difficult circumstances that surround it.

With optimism, India, the world's most rapidly growing economy, hopes to realize a change in culture, industry and human waste to effect a lasting reversal to its waning mother river—Ma Ganga. ☪

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THE SENTINAL OF VARANASI KALABHAIRAVA



KASHI VISHWANATH TEMPLE VARANASI

THERE IS A SMALL WELL IN THE TEMPLE CALLED THE JNANA VAPI (THE WISDOM WELL). THE MAIN PRIESTS OF THE TEMPLE JUMPED INTO THE WELL WITH THE SHIVA LINGA IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE JYOTIRLINGA FROM THE INVADERS, AND REMAINED IN JALA SAMADHI.

Reproduced from Nithyananda Times, April-May 2014

In the heart of the city, the center of the cosmic mandala, is the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Varanasi is one of the holiest places and the center of earth in Hindu cosmology. It is an important pilgrimage site where people pour the remains (ashes) of cremated ancestors on the River Ganges, for liberation of their souls.

The temple stands on the western bank of the holy river Ganges, and enshrines one of the twelve sacred Jyotirlingas of Shiva, making it one of the holiest of Shiva temples. The Jyotirlingas are sacred sites of worship of Lord Shiva where Lord Shiva appeared as a shaft of light and where Lord Shiva's divine presence is alive eternally. The main deity of the temple is known by the name of "Vishwanatha" or "Vishweshwara", meaning the ruler of the universe.

The temple town that is the oldest living city in the world, with 3,500 years of documented history, is also called Kashi and hence the temple is popularly known as the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Due to its 15.5m high golden spire, the temple is also called the Golden Temple.

The temple complex consists of a series of smaller shrines, located in a small lane called the "Vishwanatha Gali", near the River Ganga. The main deity at the shrine is the Shiva linga, which is 60 cm tall and 90 cm in circumference, housed in a silver altar. There are temples for Kalabhairava, Dhandapani, Avimukteshwara, Vishnu, Vinayaka, Shanishwara, Virupaksha and Virupaksh Gauri in the complex. There is a small well in the temple called the Jnana Vapi (the wisdom well).

Historical accounts say that upon invasion by the Moghul king Aurangzeb on 2nd September, 1669, the main priests of the temple jumped into the well with the Shiva linga in order to protect the Jyotirlinga from the invaders and remained in jala samadhi. When the Jyotirlinga was discovered again after centuries, even the lamp was burning at the altar and the flowers were fresh! ☸

Reference Link:
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KASHI

A CITY BUILT WITH DEVOTION

Reproduced from Nithyananda Times, April-May 2014

Kashi or Varanasi started seeing a decline in its glory during the Muslim invasions starting from the 12th century for the next 500 years. Being a city of great antiquity, where deity worship was the regular tradition and where Buddhism and Jainism also thrived alongside Hinduism, Kashi represented everything the Muslim rulers wanted to destroy.

The troubles of Varanasi began in 1194 with the founding of the Delhi Sultanate under Qutub-ud-din Aibak. He destroyed nearly a thousand temples and erected several mosques on top of them. He plundered the temples and carried away about 1,400 camel loads of gold, silver and precious stones. The sacking broke the economic status of the city and ruined its temple traditions but did not dampen its religious spirit. Many temples were rebuilt and the city got back to its routine.

In 1490, Sikanander Lodi, another ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, ordered his generals to destroy all the temples in Varanasi and build mosques over them. His orders were promptly carried out and the city was renamed as "Mohammadabad".

The early Mughal rulers indulged in religious persecution and destruction of Hindu temples. Akbar set a new example by initiating a policy of religious tolerance. He allowed Hindus to practise their religion and build temples without fear of punishment. During his reign, Varanasi witnessed the construction of the Visveswara temple and Bindu Madhava temple. Aurangzeb, his successor, however reversed the policy of Akbar with an aim to establish Islam in the subcontinent. The empire was thrown into political and religious turmoil because of his extreme measures. In 1659, under his direct

orders, the Krittivasevara temple was destroyed and in its place a large mosque was erected. He also simultaneously undid the goodwill earned during the reign of Akbar by giving orders to destroy the Hindu temples.

The Muslim rulers managed to destroy several Hindu temples in Varanasi, but they could not destroy the spirit and the religious fervor of the city. They could not tarnish the sanctity of the city of Kashi, which was not built of stone and brick, but rather with the devotion of people. Varanasi continued to thrive as a city of Hindu learning and an important center of Hindu pilgrimage even during the trying times.

In the midst of these repeated invasions, Goswami Tulasidas, a great devotee of Lord Rama and a resident of Varanasi composed the "Ramacharitmanas", a monumental rendering of the epic Ramayana into Hindi. Narayan Bhatt who migrated from Maharashtra to Varanasi organized the reconstruction of Kashi Vishweshwara temple. He also composed a work on the importance of Kashi, Prayag and Gaya entitled "Tristhali" (the three places).

After Aurangzeb, Varanasi came under the rule of Maharaja Balwant Singh. As the Mughal power ebbed, there was a resurgence of Hindu rulers in various parts of the country. Varanasi witnessed a revival of religious activity, supported by the Rajput and Maratha nobles. Many new temples were built in the place of the old and Hinduism received a new impetus. ☸

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VARANASI

A GUIDE TO MAJOR SIGHTS FOR THE WESTERN PILGRIM

STEPHEN KNAPP (NANDANANDANA DASA)

Varanasi—A Many Splendored City

Varanasi is a city of many legends and numerous temples. Tourists and pilgrims from around the world come here to see the culture, the ghats along the Ganges River, and to experience various aspects of the living religion which has gone on for thousands of years. Varanasi is known for its silver, copper, brassware, and art work, as well as the excellent textiles, such as carpets, saris, and especially silks that are made here. The Bharat Kala Bhavan in the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and an old palace at Ramnagar showcase some of these crafts.

Varanasi has been a center for learning and spiritual pilgrimages for thousands of years and still attracts many students and scholars on religion, philosophy, and music, and has some of the world's best astrologers. The great poet Tulsidas, who wrote the *Ram Charit Manas* lived here in the 16th century. The great Vaishnava saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu preached, sang, and danced here too. Many noted Indian musicians also have homes here.

Not Always Shiva's City!

Varanasi is often referred to as the city of Shiva, but it was not always Shiva's city. The *Kashi Khanda*, a text that explains some of the glories of Varanasi (or Kashi, "the city of light"), explains that at one time many, many years ago, all the gods lived here. However, the rule of the city was given over to King Divodasa who made all the demigods leave. After a while Lord Shiva wanted to come back, but everything he tried in order to return failed. Finally he asked Lord Vishnu to help him. So Lord Vishnu went to Varanasi and first arrived at the confluence of the Varana and Ganges Rivers where He bathed. Now there is the Adi Keshava ("original Keshava" or Vishnu) temple at that location to commemorate the incident, which is now an important *tirtha* or holy place. Sri Vishnu then made His way into the city and again bathed at the Panchaganga Ghat. Then by His trickery He caused the departure of King Divodasa and gave Varanasi back to Lord Shiva, and Lord Vishnu and Shiva, along with other gods and goddesses, have manifested themselves here in many ways ever since.

Therefore, Varanasi (the city between the Varana and Asi Rivers) has always been a center for pilgrimage. More legends of Varanasi could be explained, but there are so many that they easily could fill an entire volume. We will relate only a few here.

A Place from Another Realm

You can find temples dedicated to any personality of the Vedic pantheon in this city. Thus, they still say that all the gods reside here. And it is said that all of the holy places of India can be found in certain portions of the town. Mathura is found in one part of the town, Ayodhya in another, as well as Badrinatha, Dwaraka, and so on. In fact, some of the ancient texts say that Varanasi is not of this earth, but is a holy place and part of the spiritual realm. Therefore, dying in this city brings liberation from future material existence. So there is a strong atmosphere of devotion here as many pilgrims come from all over to spend their last days living in this city, bathing in the sacred Ganges, visiting temples, and having *darshan* of the deities, all for spiritual purification.

Rickshaw Your Way Around!

The best way to get to know Varanasi is to take a little tour of the important temples near the river ghats. The easiest way to find them is to have your motor or cycle rickshaw driver take you. But some of the temples in the old section of town can only be reached by foot because the lanes are too narrow even for cycle rickshaws. The real adventure of finding these temples is not only seeing what they are like, but simply wandering around the town to experience the place and observe how the people live. The tour will take you to some delightful places.

New Vishwanath Temple—BHU

We start our tour by getting to the New Vishwanatha temple in the BHU at the southern end of the city. This was established by the Birla family, thus anyone is welcome. This is the temple that all Western tourists should visit if they want to see an authentic Shiva temple. It is well kept, clean, and surrounded by fountains, pools, and nice grounds. It was made in the architectural style of the original Vishwanatha temple that was in the heart of the old section

of town before the Muslims invaded and tore it down. This new temple has a large central room for a Shiva *lingam* that is attended by a priest. There are also two shrines in separate rooms, one for Parvati and Ganesh, and the other for a five-faced Shiva *lingam*, Mahadeva. It is a very interesting temple and is easily reached. And the BHU is like a spacious park that is pleasant to walk or drive through.

Sankat Mochan

From here move on to the Sankat Mochan on the south side of town, one of the most important Hanuman temples in the city. The architecture of this temple is not very elaborate, but it is a lively place and many people visit and offer respects to the deities of Sita-Rama, Hanuman, Ganesh, etc. This is not far from Durga Kund Road where, heading farther north, one can walk to the Tulsi Manas Mandir; a large temple that has beautiful Sita-Rama deities and the complete *Ram Charit Manas* by Tulsidas written on the inside walls. This is the temple where Tulsidas wrote this work.

Durga Temple

About a block or two farther down the road is the Durga temple beside the Durga Kund. Many pilgrims go to this temple, which is commonly called the Monkey temple because of the many monkeys here. Open to all, this temple houses a small deity of goddess Durga in the center of the courtyard, which becomes most crowded during the Durga Puja festival.

Asi Ghat

From here we take the road that leads toward the Ganges until you reach Asi Ghat, where the small Asi River joins the Ganges. Leave your rickshaw behind and simply walk along the ghats. The Asi Ghat is busy in the morning with bathers, women collecting water for worship and washing, and others worshipping the Hanuman deity and the Shiva *lingams* under the nearby pipal tree. Some men will be practicing yoga, sitting in meditation, eyes closed, facing the morning sun. Others sit near the river chanting the Hare Krishna mantra on beads, or will be doing other morning rituals. In fact, one old renunciant, seeing my own bead bag hanging from my neck, came up in a most friendly manner to tell me the glories of chanting



the holy names of Krishna. In essence, he stated that to always be chanting the names of God means that one is liberated from material life. But mostly he was expressing his happiness to see a Westerner taking to the process since he had obviously attained his own experiences of enlightenment through the chanting process.

Kedara Ghat

The next important ghat is Kedara Ghat where pilgrims bathe in the Ganga before climbing the steps to the Kedareshvara temple, with the red and white stripes on the outside of the building, which is one of the most important Shiva temples in Varanasi. The *Kashi Khanda* states that just deciding to come here destroys the sins accumulated in this lifetime, while seeing the temple destroys the sins of seven lifetimes. Bathing in the Ganga River and then worshipping the Kedareshvara *lingam* is said to destroy the sins of 10 million lifetimes. The temple also has deities of Durga, Ganesh, Shiva, etc., and Westerners are allowed inside for *darshan*.

Dashashvamedha Ghat

A short walk farther up is the busy Dashashvamedha Ghat where the bather gets the results of ten *ashvamedha* sacrifices or special rituals for spiritual power and advancement. It was here that Lord Brahma performed ten

ashvamedhas millenias ago in order to attain the purity to see Lord Shiva at Varanasi. At this ghat people gather from all over the world, from all walks of life. Here they take their holy bath, or perform rituals to the Ganga, or consult with local priests found sitting under the rattan umbrellas, and discuss their lives, horoscopes, and their spiritual progress. It is by far the busiest ghat in Varanasi and the most easily reached. In the morning you can see group tours or individuals climbing into the boats to float past the ghats and to watch the activities of the local people who use the ghats each morning along the riverside. A boat ride down the Ganga at Varanasi can be a very relaxing and interesting experience that should not be missed.

Ganga Puja at Dashashvamedha

In the evening the elaborate Ganga *puja* is performed, where five priests on five platforms simultaneously perform the worship of the Ganga River. They offer incense, large camphor lamps, large ghee lamps, and yak tail fans. It is a great sight to see and makes for good photography or video to take back with you. Many people also come here in the evening to merely sit on the steps, socialize, watch other people, and enjoy the cool breeze. Others take evening boat rides, which often gather on the river near the ghats to watch the Ganga

worship. Some people also come to worship in the nearby temples. You can hear the bells ringing as this happens. Popular temples along the ghat include one to Shitala and the Dashashvamedheshvara Shiva *lingam*. Another temple is the Shulatankeshvara, and one of Brahmeshvara, which is a Shiva *lingam* said to have been installed by Brahma himself during his stay here.

Observatory at Man Mandir

The next *ghat* is Man Mandir, above which we find the small but unique observatory of Jai Singh. Jai Singh was known for being a great king, musician, and astronomer. He built more elaborate observatories in New Delhi, Jaipur, and two smaller ones in Mathura and Ujjain.

Amidst the Chaos lies Kashi Viswanatha

Not far from here is the Godaulia area or the old part of the city which is a maze of narrow and crowded alleyways through decaying buildings that lead past many little shops, temples, guest houses or hotels, and homes of the local people. The sights and smells of this place could be a little overwhelming for a westerner, especially in the heat of summer. But, nonetheless, there are new discoveries and experiences to have amongst these alleys if one is open to them.

In the middle of this area is the temple of Vishwanatha, Shiva as Lord of the Universe. The present temple was built in 1776 by Ahalya Bai Holkar of Indore after the original temple was torn down by the fanatic Muslim Aurangzeb who built the mosque in its place. The mosque on the other side of the courtyard is separated from the temple by the Jnana Vapi well (Well of Wisdom) where the original Shiva *linga* was hid in order to keep the Muslim invaders from harming it. Some people say the original *linga* was never recovered from the well and is still at the bottom. Needless to say, with the temple and mosque so close, police patrol the mosque continually to prevent disturbances. The courtyard and temple are situated behind a large wall making it difficult to see from the outside, and the south entrance into the courtyard is for Hindus only, while the Muslims enter from the north entrance. But the towers of the temple that are plated with three-quarters of a ton of gold can be seen from a



rooftop across the street, or from the rooftop of a hotel near the courtyard.

Inside the temple is the Vishwanatha *linga*, a smooth black stone sitting about a foot tall on a silver altar on the floor. Many other *lingas* are clustered around it. There are several other shrines around the temple, including one of Vishnu that must be worshiped as one enters the temple. The temple interior is not very ornate, but it can be quite crowded and filled with an intense mood of devotion. On the street just outside the courtyard entrance are many shops selling all kinds of religious paraphernalia, such as beads, flowers, incense, pictures of Shiva, etc. The street, Vishwanatha Lane, has seen millions of pilgrims from all walks of life. And when they leave Vishwanatha they stop at the small temple of Annapurna (Goddess of Plenty) across the street. She is considered the Queen of Varanasi, another aspect of the wife of Lord Shiva.

Sights along the Burning Ghats of Varanasi Jalasai Ghat

Farther upstream we come to the Jalasai cremation *ghat*, which is often referred to as

part of Manikarnika Ghat. You can see piles of logs stacked on the steps ready for cremations, and sometimes there can be as many as five or six cremations taking place at once. The fires can easily be seen at night from a long distance away, and the smoke can fill the air of the *ghat* by day. Anyone can watch, but this is no place for photography which you will soon discover if you try taking photos. The fact that death is ever-present is obvious in India. Disease and death are not hidden away like in America, but are a fact of life that is dealt with on a daily basis; a reminder of the reasons why people are more spiritually inclined in India.

There is a reason for the cremations at this location. The deceased are brought to the cremation ground by family members, and the eldest son shaves his head and dresses in a white cloth and, when everything is ready, lights the funeral pyre. The family stays until the body of the deceased has burned, and then the son throws the part of the body that does not burn into the Ganga, and douses the last embers with a pot of Ganga water, thus purifying whatever is left of their relative. Then they turn and leave. An



excessive display of sorrow by family members at this time is said to be inauspicious for the dead, who is entering a new realm of existence.

Why Cremation?

The Doms are the people who manage the cremation grounds and collect fees for tending the fires and supplying the wood. They gather the ashes of the deceased to be put into the Ganges. By cremating the body of the deceased, it is believed that the disembodied spirit will be more likely to go on to the next realm of existence. If the person had been very attached to life in the material body, the spirit may want to cling to the body in some way. If the body is cremated, then the spirit will be forced to move on. Furthermore, by pouring Ganga water on the body and the ashes, it is believed to help spiritually purify the deceased from past karma. It is said in *shastra* (the Vedic texts), such as the *Kashi Khanda*, that people who leave their bodies here will attain liberation and will receive spiritual existence. This is why it is the desire of many people to die and be cremated in Varanasi. It is also said that Lord Shiva whispers the mantra of liberation into the ear of those who die here, thus assuring them of a higher existence in their next life.

Manikarnika Ghat

The next *ghat* is the Manikarnika, the most auspicious of all the ghats. Here Lord Vishnu's footprints are set in a circular marble slab in a little shrine, the holiest spot in Varanasi. It is said that here is where the process of universal creation and annihilation begins. The little 20 foot square spring-fed pond or *kund* that is also found here above the ghat, which used to be a lake many years ago, is said to have been dug out by Lord Vishnu with His disc near the beginning of creation and was filled with the water of His perspiration. Inside on the north steps is a small shrine with little deities of Vishnu. It was also here that Devi Parvati's jeweled-earring (Manikarnika) fell into the pool. But the *Shiva Purana* explains that it was Vishnu's earring that fell into the pool when the water expanded, upon which Lord Vishnu floated while bringing forth the cosmic egg or universe and the process of universal creation. It is also said that all the gods and goddesses come here to bathe in their subtle

forms on a daily basis. Also on the *ghat* is the Tarakeshvara *linga* temple, which represents Shiva who whispers the mantra of liberation into the ears of those who die here.

Panchaganga Ghat

The next important *ghat* is Panchaganga Ghat, a most holy confluence of the five (*pancha*) rivers, which include the Ganges, Yamuna, Sarasvati (which joined in Allahabad), and the Dhutpapa and Kirana, which are but trickling streams. Here we find many little niches on the steps housing various deities, one with a reclining Vishnu. It was here that the famous poet Kabir was initiated by Ramananda.

Bindu Madhava Temple

Above the steep and narrow steps leading through the buildings is the Bindu Madhava temple, one of the most significant Krishna temples in Varanasi. On the altar is a beautiful Krishna deity that stands about two feet tall, and smaller Sita-Rama and Lakshmi-Narayana deities. The temple room is somewhat small, with walls interspersed with windows and prints of Krishna's pastimes. The present Bindu Madhava temple is in a quaint building but still visited by many pilgrims. It is known to have been rebuilt several times from the 12th to 16th centuries, and used to be a marvelous structure and a very rich temple in which the deity, that had been quite large at that time, was dressed in a wide array of jewels. But the Muslim ruler Aurangzeb tore it down and built a mosque in its place. This is the huge mosque which dominates the skyline, but is now unused and locked up. You can, however, get the guard from the nearby house to unlock the door to the mosque for you for a small donation. After climbing the steep stairs inside, you reach the rooftop for a good view of the Ganga River as it flows past the city. In the back of the mosque you can still see remnants of the old Bindu Madhava temple that the Muslims used for building the mosque.

Adi Keshava Temple

The Adi Keshava temple, next to the confluence of the Varana and Ganga Rivers, has a very ancient significance. As mentioned earlier, Lord Vishnu first appeared here when He came to get



the city back from King Divodasa for Lord Shiva. Unfortunately, because of its distance from the other temples, and due to people forgetting its importance, few pilgrims from outside Varanasi visit, so they are glad to see anyone. The Sangameshvara *linga* in a shrine next to Adi Keshava is said to have been installed by Lord Brahma, as was the four-faced Brahmeshvara deity next to it. The *Linga Purana* states that those who bathe in the confluence of the rivers here and then worship Sangameshvara need never fear taking rebirth.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Was Here!

The Bindu Madhava temple, along with the Adi Keshava temple, was where Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed and preached to the

residents by chanting and dancing during His visit to Varanasi. When He first arrived He bathed at the Manikarnika Ghat and visited and preached at the Vishwanatha temple where people lined up to see Him. He also held huge kirtanas (congregational singing) at ghats such as the Panchaganga.

After having *darshan* and offering our respects to the deities at this temple, we can take the long walk back to Dashashvamedha Ghat. Or if we want, we can begin walking along the river until we find a boat for hire and just ride a boat back.

After touring the many *ghats* and temples along the river and elsewhere, and after seeing the Vishwanatha temple, our pilgrim's tour of Varanasi is complete. ☪



JIZYAH—TAXING HINDUS

PRERNA DUSIJA

Tracing its origin in the Koran, Jizya or 'Jizyah' according to Prophet Muhammad, was a per capita tax or a poll tax levied by Islamic states on non-Muslim individuals to remind them of their inferior status. Rooted in barbarism, the Koran states the following about how Jizyah should be extorted:

"Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor the Last day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

There are many places in the *Hadith* (collection of traditions containing the sayings of Prophet Muhammad) and *Sira* (Biography of Prophet Muhammad) where Muhammad lays down the rule that the Jizyah be extracted by force: "If they refuse to accept Islam, demand from them the Jizyah. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them."¹

Jizyah was imposed in India, soon after the first Arab invasion of Sind, by the 19-year old Muhammad Bin Qasim in 712 AD. Hindus and Buddhists, unwilling to convert to Islam, were imposed with the Jizyah. In its initial stage, brahmins and ascetics were exempt from this tax. But this reprieve lasted for only a couple of centuries. During the rule of the Delhi Sultanate, the tax was imposed on all non-Muslims, with varying degrees of emphasis, depending on a

person's economic position in the society. In due course, in different parts of the country, which came under Islamic rule, the Jizyah, along with other taxes was imposed on non-Muslims. The first ruler who attempted to abolish Jizyah was Akbar, which was in general followed by his successors, Jehangir and Shah Jahan.

"In 1679, Aurangzeb reintroduced Jizyah at the usual rates of forty eight dirhams on the rich, twenty four on the middle class, and twelve on the poor, the rich being those earning ten thousand dirhams or more a year, the middle class earning that over two hundred and the poor those earning less."²

Well into the times of Aurangzeb, Muslim tax collectors would take wives and children of Hindus and sell them into slavery if impoverished Hindus failed to pay the tax. According to tradition, it was only fitting, that a Muslim tax collector remind non-Muslims of their inferior status (of not being Muslims) by humiliating them. There are instances where these tax collectors would spit into the mouths of a Hindu after collecting the tax, making Muhammad's words, of making the non-Muslim feel 'subdued,' ring true.

Though Jizyah as we now know, does not exist, there are efforts by radical Islamic organizations such as the Taliban and ISIS to resurrect it in parts of the world they dominate. ☪

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THE PANDIYAS

LONGEST DYNASTIC LINEAGE OF
KINGS IN HISTORY

CHARUYAN SRIKUMARAN

Bharat has seen its line of kings. However Southern India saw the rule of three major lineages of Kings, namely the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandiyas.

Etymological Origins of Pandiya

The first recorded Pandiya king was named Kulashekharan. He started the legacy of the Pandiya name, which stems from the word *Pandi*, the Tamil word for bull. It is said that he was as strong as a bull, leading the nation that he served. According to the epic *Mahabharata*, the legendary Malayadwaja Pandiya, who sided with the Pandavas and took part in the Kurukshetra War of the *Mahabharata*, is described as follows in *Karna Parva* (verse 20.25):

“Although knowing that the shafts (arrows) of the high souled son of Drona employed in shooting were really inexhaustible, yet Pandya, that bull among men, cut them all into pieces”

Malayadwaja Pandya and his queen Kanchanamala had one daughter Thataathagai known popularly as Meenakshi who succeeded her father and reigned the kingdom successfully. The Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple was built after her and the city of Madurai was built around this temple.

First Mention—Sangam Ages

The Pandiya kings ruled over a Tamil region located at the southern tip of India (including what is now Tamil Nadu), extending into what is Sri Lanka and surrounding landmasses. It is described that the Pandiya kings had ruled the land of Kumari Kandam, a lost land in the Indian Ocean that surrounds Sri Lanka and extends south from the southern tip of India, through the majority (if not all) of the three Tamil Sangams.

A Sangam is a historic era in South Indian history marked by the assemblage of scholars, poets, theologians, philosophers and people of power for the purpose of sharing information and strengthening the Tamil culture. Each of the three Sangams has happened in different cities, such as Old Madurai, in succession and has been in effect up to a few thousand years. The Pandiya lineage has ruled on and off Southern India up until the 15th century, proving to be a very long

reign indeed. (To know more about the Sangam Age and Kumari Kandam read the June 2016 issue of *Hinduism Now*)

Three Prominent Dynasties of South India

Of the three main ruling families of Southern India—the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandiyas, the Cholas and Pandiyas had an unstable relationship, constantly bickering and fighting with each other throughout the centuries. They managed to seize their own land to set up their kingdoms, but through the centuries each of these families rose to power, having more land under their name than the other two.

Losing to Prakriti's Forces

From the early Sangam days, a lot of the resistance the Pandiyas faced were natural calamities. Kumari Kandam sinking is one such example. They reigned in power for a few thousand years, their beginnings currently traceable to the First Sangam Age. After the invasion by the Kalabhras the Pandiya empire suffered for some time. They recovered under the reign of Kandugon in the 6th century who ruled out of Madurai.

Chera Allies to Oust Cholas

During the 9th century CE, the Cholas gained powers and effectively drove off the Pandiya stronghold and establish supremacy. The Cholas maintained their power and expanded their territories to rule supreme until the 12th century CE. During this time the Pandiyas' resources dwindled.

They allied with the Cheras in order to have a stronger fighting chance against the Cholas. They overturned the power of the Chola empire and re-established the reigns of the Pandiya empire in the 13th century. From hereon began the golden age for the Pandiya nation. Pandiya Nadu, under the guidance of Maravman Sundara Pandyan and Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan, expanded its boundaries to include the Telugu country, Kalinga and Sri Lanka.

Weakened by Repeated Islamic Invasions

Eventually, at the end of their reign, they suffered greatly after the repeated attacks of the Muslim rulers (under Allaudin Khilji) of the north. The

Islamic rulers had heard of the vast riches and treasures, especially hidden in the temples and decided to usurp them. At the time of the Islamic invasions, the Pandiya armies were not as well equipped and were not at peak performance due to shortages of water and food.

A Brethren to Protect Madurai Meenakshi Temple

During the invasions, the Muslim rulers heard about the treasures of the Meenakshi temple. Being Shaivites, the brethren Vira Pandiya and Sundara Pandiya were distraught and enraged about the sheer destruction of the Shiva temples and the deities in the neighboring kingdoms such as the Hoysalas. Sundara Pandiya decided to act aggressively, to stop the plundering invaders from the temples while Vira Pandiya decided to play defensive in Madurai. Sundara Pandiya and his infantry quickly fell to the heavily armored infantry of the Islamic invaders. A few of the temples got plundered because of this.

Only Vira Pandiya and his walled Madurai city and Meenakshi Temple remained. The Muslim invaders under the leadership of Malikafur tried breaking through the Madurai fortress but slowly their army dwindled down due to the expertise of the Pandiya archers. Eventually, with a weakened army, the Muslim invaders got through but they were not strong enough to take down Vira Pandiya's defenses. So Vira Pandiya and Malikafur came to an agreement—the invaders got to take the treasures and jewelry stored in the Madurai temple but agreed to leave the deities intact and released Vira's brother Sundara.

Economy and Religious Following

Since the land the Pandiyas ruled were coastal and harbor areas, the people of the Pandiya empire were great sailors and hence their flag bore the symbol of the fish. Many of the people were into agriculture, proving to be a major asset to the nation when it came to trading. Since a good population of the people of the Pandiya empire were farmers, it made sense that they worshipped Indra, the God of Rain, honoring him when it came to harvest time.

The Pandiya kings themselves became Shaivites. Many Hindu temples, especially Shaivite ones

were built and owned by the Pandiya kings during their rule. These included the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai and the Nellaipar Temple in Tirunelveli on the banks of Thamirabarani.

During their golden age, having controlled the southern tip of India as well as the northern coast of Sri Lanka, the Pandiya empire flourished in marine businesses. They successfully monopolized the pearl industry, since all the great pearls were found in their region. The Pandiyas became masters of literature and trade, securing major trade deals. Even the Western civilization situated around the Mediterranean heard of the great kings of the Pandiya empire.

Declining Power

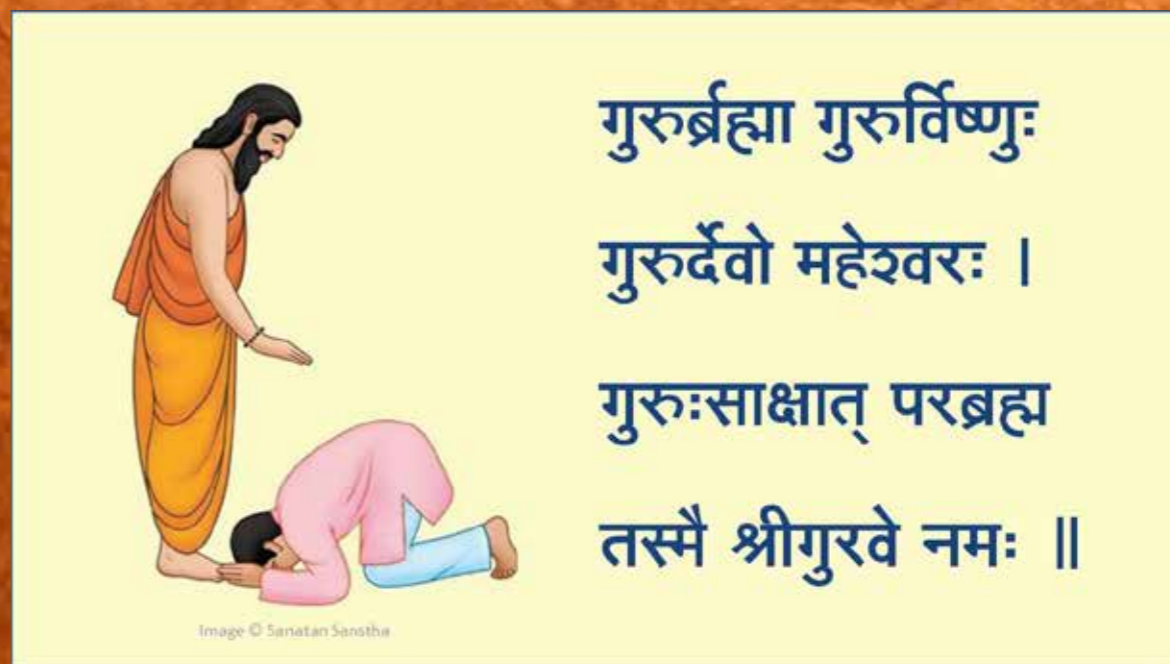
In the 1300s the remnants of the Pandiya power started to diminish. Region by region, people started to declare their own sovereignty disavowing the Pandiya empire. This started with Sri Lanka declaring its independence. Later in Madurai and the rest of southern India, the citizens followed suit and defected from their allegiance to the Pandiya king in the 14th century. The Pandiyas shifted their capital to Thirunelveli. With the annexure of Madurai to the Vijaynagara empire in the 14th century, the Pandiyas' influence disappeared completely.

But the Pandiya lineage, beginning in the BCE era of the 1st Sangam Age in Kumari Kandam and continued through 1,300 years of the CE, makes this dynastic rule the longest ever the world has known in recorded history. ☸

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GURU PURNIMA—JULY 19, 2016



Gurur-Brahmaa Gurur-Vishnnur-Gururdevo Maheshvarah |
Gurure[-l]va Param Brahma Tasmai Shrii-Gurave Namah ||1||

Meaning:

1.1: The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru Deva is Maheswara (Shiva),
1.2: The Guru is Verily the Para-Brahman (Supreme Brahman); Salutations to that Guru.

THE ROOTS OF VISHISHTADVAITA

MA NITHYA TRIPURANANDA

In the Hindu Tradition, once enlightened masters experience the Ultimate Truth, they express it in their own way and later guide the entire humanity to experience that same truth through their experience. An example of that would be the truth of Advaita. It is one of the oldest teachings of Vedanta—one of the 6 orthodox philosophical schools of Hinduism. The basic truth of Advaita is to have the space of non-duality; experiencing that everyone and everything around you is a part of the Brahman (the ultimate reality) and vice-versa. Under the Advaita Vedanta are three major branches through which Advaita's fundamental truth can be experienced. They are:

Advaita—Living the fundamental truth of everything and everyone is a part of Brahman and vice-versa

Dvaita—Living the truth that the ultimate reality, Brahman and the individual consciousness are separate and is the exact opposite of Advaita.

Vishishtadvaita—Living the truth that the Brahman and the individual consciousness

are one and the same, but characterized by multiplicity.

Out of these three branches, Vishishtadvaita is the most famous way that many Hindu seekers practice to reach Advaita. It is also a popular way of using Bhakti (devotion towards the ultimate reality) as a tool towards achieving Mukti (enlightenment)

Ramanujacharya—The Pioneer of Vishishtadvaita

Vishishtadvaita started spreading in the world by one of the greatest enlightened masters, Ramanujacharya, who greatly popularized this branch of Advaita philosophy. He is also known as an intellectual Pundit who was very good at interpreting the Vedic Scriptures. This is the story of how Vishishtadvaita went from a secret spiritual practice to an explosive experience:

Ramanujacharya went to Thirukottiyur, Tamil Nadu to take initiation from his master, Periya Nambi of the sacred eight letter Mantra '*Om Namō Narayanaya*'. Somehow, Periya Nambi

was not willing to initiate Ramanujacharya easily. He made Ramanujacharya travel all the way from Srirangam to Madurai nearly eighteen times, and only after exacting many promises of secrecy, he made up his mind to initiate him.

When Periya Nambi initiated Ramanujacharya, he said: "Keep this Powerful Mantra a secret. Those who repeat this Mantra will attain salvation. Give it only to a worthy and sincere disciple." But Ramanujacharya's extreme compassion and love for humanity was unbounded and he wanted every man to enjoy the eternal bliss of Lord Narayana.

The moment he got initiated, he couldn't handle the intensity of his new experience of Vishishtadvaita and immediately called everyone, irrespective of caste and creed, to assemble before the temple. He stood on top of the tower in front of the temple and shouted out the sacred Mantra to all of them at the top of his voice.

Periya Nambi came to know of this and became furious. Ramanujacharya then said: "O my Guru! Please punish me for my wrong action. I will gladly suffer the tortures of hell myself if millions of people could get salvation by hearing the Mantra through me." Periya Nambi was shaken and humbled by Ramanujacharya's compassion and instead of cursing him, Periya Nambi embraced Ramanujacharya and blessed him.

Ramanujacharya then travelled throughout the length and breadth of India to spread the path of devotion.

The Beauty of Vishishtadvaita

According to the core experience of Ramanujacharya (Vishishtadvaita), Brahman is the One Blissful Ultimate Reality, who is the all-pervasive ground and sustenance of the universe—the string upon whom all pearls are threaded. The "pearls" depict as individual beings and matter, which are inseparable attributes of the Brahman, modes of Its existence according to Vishishtadvaita.

Vishishtadvaita also emphasizes on Saguna Brahman—Brahman with all qualities in their peak glory. The moment anyone visualizes the ultimate with all qualities, it's natural to surrender oneself to it, hence Sharanagati—surrender

also became one of the basic dimension of Vishishtadvaita. Hence, surrendering and serving the master or the deity is considered as the highest action anyone can do and is a main component of the truth of Vishishtadvaita.

Vishishtadvaita can be simplified as Surrender and Devotion towards the Ultimate Reality that is expressing its glory in all dimensions. With the inner space of gratitude towards the Brahman, one can easily achieve and experience oneness with the ultimate. Ramanujacharya, being the only strong enlightened master to bring this science out, has literally changed the way we see Vishishtadvaita today and because of him, many Hindus have experienced this to be the most joyful, blissful and happiest way to merge with the Divine. 🙏

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MEERA BAI: POETESS SAINT OF THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

SATHISH SELVAKUMAR

Paramahansa Nithyananda says, “those who have experienced and lived around a Poornavatar, happen on planet earth again just to show by example what it looks like and feels like to have Bhakthi (devotion) in its purest form.” Meera Bai (born in late 15th century in Rajasthan, India) reflects this beautifully in her bhakti for Krishna. Meera Bai was the incarnation of Radha who is eternally in love with Poornavatar Krishna.

Falling in Love with Krishna

Meera was born to a royal couple of Kudki district of Pali (a small kingdom) around 1498. Her life’s purpose was playfully revealed to her when she was four. She was witnessing a marriage ceremony and asked her mother as to who her bridegroom would be. Her mother pointed to a Krishna deity and said that Krishna is her bridegroom. She literally lived with Krishna from that day onwards. She would talk to him, play with him, sing to him and sleep with him.

Marriage and Domestic Life

Against her wishes, her parents got her married to the king of Mewar. She would be chanting

Gopal’s (Krishna) name all the time within herself. She would dutifully do what was expected out of her in her in-law’s place. The rest of the time, she would be immersed in Bhakthi for Krishna. She would sing and talk for hours on end to Krishna.

She lost her husband and father-in-law in quick succession to wars with the Mughals. The rest of the household in her in-law’s place were wary of her actions and could not relate to her devotion. They hatched schemes to have her killed by snake bite and giving poison. But every time, Krishna intervened and miraculously she survived these attempts on her life.

Songs of Meera

Thousands of songs of devotion on Krishna are attributed to Meera. Even those few hundreds that have been agreed upon by historians as her compositions can move even an atheist to see the glory of Krishna. One has to pay attention to the verses to understand the inner space that she carried.

Living a life full of devotion is the best thing that

can happen in the human form. In spite of the difficulties that she faced, Meera’s inner space of devotion to Krishna was unshakeable. She lived a life that was absorbed in Krishna dhyaan (thought) and always sang his glory and expressed her longing to be in communion with Him in her songs. She sang of surrender and love for Krishna. She was bestowed with the cosmic vision in which she saw Krishna in everything around her.

Saying ‘No’ to Society

Meera would sing and dance on the streets lost in devotion. She had no qualms about what others thought of her. She would be absorbed in devotion and loose body consciousness and was oblivious to her surroundings. She knew that her devotion to Krishna was the only thing that mattered in her life. Meera would freely mingle with sadhus (renunciates) who were Krishna devotees. She did not see them as separate from her.

“Mira was fearless in her nature, simple in her habits, joyous in her disposition, amiable in her deportment, graceful in her behaviour and elegant in her demeanour. She immersed herself in the love of Giridhar Gopal. The name of Giridhar Gopal was always on her lips. Even in her dreams, she lived and had her being in Sri Krishna.”

Move to Brindavan

When Meera was tortured by her husband’s relatives, she sent a letter to Tulsidasji and asked the advice of the saint. She wrote thus: “All my relatives trouble me, because I move amongst Sadhus. I cannot carry on my devotional practices in the house. I have made Giridhar Gopal my friend from my very childhood. I am strongly attached to Him. I cannot break that attachment now.”

Tulsidasji sent a reply: “Abandon those who do not worship Rama and Sita as if they are your enemies, even though they are your dearest relatives. Prahlad abandoned his father; Vibhishana left his brother Ravana; Bharata deserted his mother; Bali forsook even his Guru; the Gopis, the women of Vraja, disowned their husbands in order to attain the Lord. Their lives were all the happier for having done so. The opinion of holy saints is that the relation with God and love of God alone is true and eternal; all other relationships are unreal and temporary.”

The Mughal emperor Akbar had heard so much about Meera’s songs that he came in disguise to hear her sing. Before he left, he left a pearl necklace at her feet as a token of his appreciation. This was seen as an insult to the king’s family. They asked her to drown herself in the river. She was on her way to the river when Krishna appeared to her and asked her to go to Vrindavan where she will find him again. She adhered to this call from Krishna and walked her way through the desert conditions of Rajasthan and reached Brindavan.

Merging with the Divine

Meera’s physical body merged with the divine at temple of Ranchod in Dwarka.

The so called ‘rationalists’ question many of the historic proofs that are attributed to the life of Meera. One thing is for sure, and that is the Bhakthi she had for Krishna was pure, tangible and real. Her life transformed the life of many who lived in her time. Her songs have left an indelible mark on the Bhakthi movement in India.

Blessed are those who acquire the inner space that Meera carried. Connect with her songs to connect to that space. Get a taste of devotion.

A Guru helps you to get to the space of devotion on a fast track. Seek a Guru. Seek a Master. Find and immerse yourself in devotion. Live life to the fullest as Cosmos wants us to spend time on this planet. ☸



SHAKUNTALA: PROGENITOR OF BHARAT

VARSHA SINGH



Shakuntala is considered one among the many women in Hinduism for their extraordinary powers and roles. Her story is told in the epic story of the *Mahabharata*. Shakuntala is also the protagonist of the Sanskrit play *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (The Sign of Shakuntala), the 5th century classic by the great scholar Kalidasa.

Shakuntala's story begins with a great King named Vishwamitra. After facing a conflict with Rishi Vashishta, he decided to undertake severe penance for thousands of years. As the years went by, the Devas began to notice how powerful he was becoming and sent the *apsara* (heavenly nymph) Menaka, to break his penance. Menaka succeeded in doing so, and gave birth to a girl child (Shakuntala). Vishwamitra later realized what Menaka had done and abandoned his family. Menaka in turn abandoned her child in a forest, knowing that she could neither be reunited with her husband nor take care of her daughter alone.

Shakuntala's Childhood

Shakuntala was found by Rishi Kanva. He named her Shakuntala after seeing her surrounded and protected by a flock of Shakunta birds. She was brought up in Rishi Kanva's ashram as his adopted daughter on the banks of River Malini. She had the constant company of her pet deer and her two friends, Anasuya and Priyamvada. She enjoyed roaming around the hills and the Malini river and grew up into an extremely beautiful, elegant and kind young woman. She was considered so graceful that even all the animals in the forest enjoyed being around her.

Meeting of Shakuntala and Dushyanta

King Dushyanta was the great ruler of Hastinapur. He was travelling through the forest with his army while on a hunt. During the hunt, he wounded Shankuntala's male deer. On discovering whose it was, he immediately apologised to her. On spending time with each

other, they both fell in love and got married as per the Gandharva marriage system. He could not stay with her as he had to take care of matters in the capital. Before returning to his kingdom, Dushyanta gave his ring to Shakuntala and promised to return to her one day. He begged her not to lose it and to present it to him in his palace in case he could not return, after which she would be his queen.

The Curse of Rishi Durvasa

After her meeting with Dushyanta, Shakuntala was lost in her fantasies. She constantly dreamt of what her life with her new husband would be like later on and desperately waited for his return. One day, the great sage named Rishi Durvasa arrived at Rishi Kanva's ashram. He was ill-tempered and often cursed those who disrespected him. He noticed that Shakuntala did not attend to any of his needs or even pay him basic respect or courtesy. Rishi Durvasa cursed Shakuntala that whoever she was dreaming about would forget her existence. Shakuntala felt miserable and immediately went and apologised to Rishi Durvasa. She explained her situation to him and told him what she was going through. Upon seeing Shakuntala repentant, he forgave her and mended his curse in a way that Dushyanta would remember Shakuntala only if she presents a token of his love to him.

Shakuntala's Humiliation

Shakuntala soon realized that she was pregnant with Dushyanta's child. She started to feel upset about the fact that Dushyanta had still not returned to her. On Rishi Kanva's advice, she went to Hastinapur to reunite with her husband. On the way, she had to cross a river. While playfully feeling the river waters, Dushyanta's ring slipped off her hand. Due to this, Dushyanta did not recognise her on her arrival and humiliated her in front of his entire court. Shakuntala's companions also betrayed her and abandoned her by returning to the hermitage. On being humiliated, she decided to return to the forest.

Birth and Upbringing of Bharata

In the forest Shakuntala gave birth to a baby boy who she decided to raise all by herself. She named him Bharata, meaning the one who is

devoted to light or knowledge. Bharata grew up to be a brave and strong child who was also kind and moral. He was fond of playing with the animals of the forest and had a great passion for learning. When the time came, Shakuntala taught him the art of archery and also the use of other weapons, which he mastered with ease. She also acquainted him with the knowledge of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, all of which added to the qualities for him to become a great ruler.

Reunion of the Family

Meanwhile, in Hastinapur, a fisherman miraculously found the royal ring of Dushyanta in the belly of a fish he had caught. He took the ring to the king as soon as he discovered whose it was. Upon seeing his ring, Rishi Durvasa's curse was lifted and Dushyanta's memory of Shakuntala returned. He felt extremely guilty for the way he treated her and humiliated her in front of the whole kingdom. Unsure of whether Shakuntala would forgive him, he immediately set out to find her. He relocated Rishi Kanva's ashram but to his disappointment, discovered that she was no longer there. He refused to give up and continued to look for his wife. On his way, he discovered a young boy who had opened a lion's mouth and was joyfully counting all of its teeth. After observing this brilliant scene, the king greeted the boy, and asked him who he was. Shockingly, the boy answered that he was the son of King Dushyanta. He then took Dushyanta to Shakuntala, having discovered that he was his father. Dushyanta apologised to Shakuntala for the way he treated her and she forgave him. The family was reunited thereon.

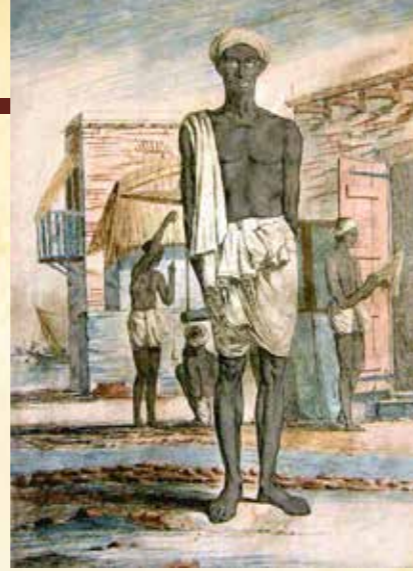
Bharata's Lineage

Bharata was made the new ruler of Hastinapur. He soon conquered the whole of India, which was later named Bharatavarsha after him, meaning 'Country of Bharata'. It was Bharata's lineage which led to the advent of the Pandavas and Kauravas, who were responsible for the whole Mahabharata war, and the future lineage of Bharat. 🕉️

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WAS THE CASTE SYSTEM DISCRIMINATORY?



The straight answer to this question is no, it was not. There are many examples in Vedic texts where people born unto parents of certain castes were able to exist in different castes. But before going into the examples let's explore what is meant by the caste system.

Caste—Definition

Let us first define the word caste, from a lay person's perspective. Here is a definition taken from Dictionary.com of the word "Caste."

noun

1. *Sociology.*

a. an endogamous and hereditary social group limited to persons of the same rank, occupation, economic position, etc., and having more, distinguishing it from other such groups.

b. any rigid system of social distinctions.

The following is a definition more specific towards Hinduism, again from Dictionary.com..

2. *Hinduism.* any of the social divisions into which Hindu society is traditionally divided, each caste having its own privileges and limitations, transferred by inheritance from one generation to the next; also known as 'jaati.'

From all this let's pick up the elements that describe the word 'caste.' Caste is a social classification system that divides a group based on how you interact with the group at large. The most distinct attribute is that caste is hereditary, the caste you belong to is the caste that your parents belong to.

From this point we can see that caste as seen from the public eye is not limited to Hinduism. All societies have a caste system at play based on the role taken, be it occupation, service, intellectual achievements or one's contributions to society.

Sons naturally chose to take on the occupation of the father since the father had mastery in that art and that mastery took years of practice and experience to develop. The sons would spend time from an early age as an apprentice to the father and the whole society benefitted from this model. Rulers were usually determined by the bloodline (kings, queens) and were immersed in political affairs at a very young age.

It is natural for people to mix with people of similar tastes. This has been apparent in all social situations across time. Students like to mingle with other students who have similar interests. Doctors like to mingle with doctors, businessmen with businessmen, and so on.

Caste System and Hinduism

We will now relate this to Hinduism. The fact that a caste system, especially with regard to the above, that it was associated to Hinduism is just deceiving the public who think that this idea was only present in India. It is present all over the world. But even associating the caste system with Hinduism is misinformation.

In Sanskrit there is no word for caste. There are two words that comes close to the idea of caste. The words are "Jaati" and "Varna."

'Jaati,' (when used as per the classification), alludes to that of having a similar birth source. Jaati itself means Creation of God. The four classifications of Jaati are:

1. Andaja—those that sprouted from the ground (vegetation)
2. Udbhija—those that are born out of eggs (fish, birds, reptiles, etc.)
3. Pindaja—those born out of physical bodies; live-births (mammals)
4. Swedaja—those that reproduce in favourable

seasons (flies, bacteria, etc.)

Varna (when used as per the classification), means being adopted by choice. The four main Varnas are:

1. Shudra—working class
2. Vaishya—business class
3. Kshatriya—ruling class
4. Brahmin—knowledge (teaching) class

The Varnas In Vedic Times

Each Varna was just as important as the others for the society. The *Mahabharata* clearly stated that all creations are God's creation. There is no being who is higher or lower based on birth.

The balance of the society was ensured by each of the Varnas. Each of these Varnas had a distinct quality of power. For example, Kshatriyas had people power, Brahmins had knowledge power, Vaishyas had wealth power, and Shudras had land power. Everyone knew they needed everybody else. There was no concentration of power in any individual Varna.

How Varna Was Applied

During the Vedic period, everyone became a Shudra from birth. Depending on their education they could establish themselves in each of the other Varnas, or remain a Shudra by choice. The students were carefully monitored to see which path would be suitable for them, depending on their personality and interests. For example, if one was to have spiritual experiences at a young age, they would be a prime candidate to become a Brahmin. If they showed physical prowess, they would be a prime candidate to be a Shudra. If they are martially spirited, they became prime candidates for Kshatriya. If they showed business capabilities, they would be great for Vaishya.

It was natural for the students to follow in their father's' footsteps, because their own genetics supported that Varna. This was the science of the Gotras that were mastered by the ancient Rishis. Each of the Gotras were encoded with the traits that would help them flourish in that specific field.

Varna System—A Fluid System

However, there were many cases where different children followed a different path than their father. This proved that people were not bound to a

specific Varna. For instance, Satyakama Jabala, a character whose story is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad, was born to a dancer. His teacher asked him what his father did for a living. When he went home to ask his mother, she said that she did not know who his father was since she had multiple partners.

He said this to his teacher and the teacher inducted him to his gurukul stating that because of his honesty and sincerity, he determined the child must be a Brahmin. Like this there are many stories of different children joining different Varnas.

This story shows that eventually, it was the character and quality of the individual that determined their Varna.

Brahmins Are Superior?—Not True!

There is a notion that the Brahmin is higher than all else. But this is all just about perspective. Brahmins didn't have many material possessions or political powers. According to some individuals, material possessions serve for a more enjoyable life than a life of renunciation. Many people choose to be a part of a different class, material or otherwise.

Brahmins only had knowledge. They came to this level of being through purification of their Samskaras (engraved memories), that refined their being. In Sanatana Hindu Dharma, it is believed that coming to a level of refinement requires lifetime after lifetime of spiritual practice. So there are some beings that have an appeal towards the Brahmin Varna. But in the end it is their current qualities and character, defined by the choices they make in their current lifetime that makes them a Brahmin.

Conclusion

It is clear to see the distortion of information. It is true that India has strayed away from its roots. With the different invasions and an amalgamation of different ideals, a system that brought tremendous peace and unity has been crushed. All that is left is confusion about the system that once was in a state of order. ☸

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PANCHAKARMA KRIYAS FOR GLOWING HEALTH

DR. SHUBHAMANGALA ACHARYA

Panchakarma literally means five actions—five procedures by which the body is detoxified from the toxins accumulated by the food and medicines consumed and the lifestyle of the person. Human body has the ability to remove the toxins naturally, but repeated consumption of unhealthy food habits, wrong lifestyle and mental disturbances like stress, anger etc. create more toxins in the body. These cause different diseases. To cure the disease and bring back the doshas to a balanced form, *Shodhana* (detoxification) of the body is necessary. To conduct shodhana, Ayurvedic scriptures have prescribed five procedures called Panchakarma in Sanskrit.

When are they Conducted?

The main aim of Ayurveda is primarily to maintain the health of the human beings and to treat any diseases that may still affect the person from time to time.

To cure any disease, two lines of treatments are advised.

- When the *doshas* are in moderate imbalance, *shamana* line is followed, which is the administration of medicines to treat the disease.
- When the doshas are severely imbalanced and symptoms of chronic disorders are observed,

then *shodhana* or detoxification of the body is done followed by the *shaman* procedure.

A healthy person can also undergo different panchakarma procedures at different seasons to stay healthy.

According to Ayurveda, human body is constituted by three *doshas*. *Tridoshas* are the vital energy forces that control the activities and govern the physical, mental, intellectual structure and function in an individual. These are present all around us. *Vaata*, *pitta* and *kapha* are the *tridoshas*. These are not substances and we cannot see or feel them through our senses. (to know more about Tridosha read the May 2016 issue *Hinduism Now*)

What are Panchakarmas?

There are two different schools followed by *Ayurveda acharyas*. One is the school of Medicine where Acharya *Charaka* was the prominent scholar.

- *Vamana* (emesis)
- *Virechana* (purgation)
- *Astapana vasti* (medicated decoction enema)
- *Anuvasana vasti* (medicated oil enema)
- *Nasya* (nasal infusion of medicines)

These are *panchakarmas* according to this school of thought.

The second school was School of Surgery, which was led by Acharya *Sushruta* and according to them *panchakarmas* are:

- *Vamana* (emesis)
- *Virechana* (purgation)
- *Vasti* (both oil and decoction enema)
- *Nasya* (Nasal infusion of medicines)
- *Rakta mokshana* (Bloodletting)

Brief Description of the Panchakarmas

These procedures are conducted one after another in patients who are suffering from chronic illness, persons who want rejuvenation (*Rasayana*) and before starting aphrodisiac therapy. Mostly, a single therapy is advised according to the disease.

Vamana is conducted to cure diseases of chest and upper abdomen and mostly in *Kapha* imbalance.

Virechana, is performed in case of lower abdomen and skin related disorders. *Virechana* is used to mainly treat the *pitta dosha* imbalance. Here toxins from the intestinal canal are cleared.

Vasti line of treatment is conducted for treating pelvic and diseases related to nervous system. In this, imbalanced *vata* is corrected using medicated oil and decoctions by nourishing the colon.

Nasya is followed in the treatment of head and neck related problems.

Raktamokshana or bloodletting is advised for treatment of non healing ulcers, abscess and other skin diseases. This procedure is considered as a surgical procedure. Vaidyas use different surgical instruments or leeches to suck the blood according to the disease.

Pre and Post PanchAkarma Procedures

Pre Operative or Poorva Karma

To get the toxins out of the body using the *Panchakarma* procedures, a person should be prepared physically and mentally with different *poorvakarmas* (pre operative procedures). This should start by administering digestive drugs to improve the metabolism. About 3 to 4 days

before the actual treatment, medicated ghee or oil should be administered. In parallel, body massage (*Abhyanga*) with medicated oil and steam bath should be given. These procedures remove toxins from the blood, tissues, nervous system and also from the mind. When the toxins enter the abdomen, the actual procedure of *panchkarma* is to be performed. These pre operative procedures are followed before every *panchakarma* treatment.

Post operative or pashchaat karma

The post operative or *pashchaat karma* consists of bringing back the metabolism and energy lost during the detoxification. The person undergoing the treatment is administered gruels and soups on the next day of actual procedure, followed by semisolid food before the person gets back to normal diet. This procedure is followed for 3 to 4 days according to the patient's recovery from the *shodhana*.

Importance of Panchakarma

The *Charaka samhita chikitsa stana 2nd* chapter, 40th verse states that "One should wash the cloth before coloring since color can't be applied to dirty clothes. In a similar way, the body should be cleansed before starting the treatment"

When a person under goes *panchakarma* therapy, the digestive energy (*agni*) improves, body and mind become clear of toxins, immunity power increases and the disease, for which the therapy is advised will be cured.

Persons Unfit for Panchakarma

When a person is ready to undergo *panchakarma*, he or she should have free time to relax during the therapy. Very old or a very young person are unfit for treatment. Physical and mentally very weak persons cannot withstand the detoxification procedure.

When a person follows all the restrictions advised by *vaidyas* during the *panchakarma* procedure, he or she will be blessed with pleasant mind and glowing health. ☯

References: (Awaited)

REVEALING THE REVEALED YOGA SCRIPTURES TO THE WORLD

SRI NITHYA MITRANANDA

In the course of time, whether it is history, science or religion, information gets transformed, altered, diluted; facts are forgotten or altered, perceptions are taken as facts and myths are believed as truth. But truth is the truth and remains truth forever.

In the yogic tradition, it is widely accepted and taught that Patanjali, who wrote the Yoga Sutras 2,500 years ago, is the Father of Yoga. Others say it is Bhagavan Sri Krishna who revealed Yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita* 5,000 years ago.

On the occasion of the International Day of Yoga, June 21, 2016, His Holiness Paramahansa Nithyananda, revealed the truth about the authentic Source of Yoga. "With all respects to Patanjali and his work, Patanjali is the organizer of Yoga but not the originator. The originator," he said, "is Adi Guru Sadashiva himself." Sada Shiva Himself walked as a Living Master on Planet Earth 10 to 15 thousand years before Patanjali, and He revealed the original instructions on yoga.

This may be shocking to some, but the pure spiritual science, the *Srutis* on Yoga, are recorded in ancient authentic scriptures from the Vedic Tradition, known as *Agamas*, far preceding any other yogic scriptures in the world.

Paramahansa Nithyananda now takes the responsibility to revive and reveal this knowledge

again to the world. He brings back the true context of Yoga as a direct path to achieve Oneness with the Cosmic Consciousness, with the direct instructions of Sada Shiva.

The result, Nithya Yoga, is this unaltered expression of Yoga, undiluted from its original Source.

On the occasion of the International Yoga Day, June 21, 2016, Paramahansa Nithyananda inaugurated a great work, where the world will take a completely new look at the ancient practice of Yoga. A team of Nithya Yoga Acharyas and Sanyasis of the Nithyananda Order are going back to the original scriptures, presented in Grantha or Sanskrit and translated to English, and taking these original verses as the basis for Yoga practice.

From yogic cleansing techniques, to asana sequences, to breathing techniques, Nithya Yoga will soon present a complete comprehensive system aligned to these original scriptures, and make it available to the whole world through Nithyananda University.

This is only the beginning of a great revelation and contribution to the world and Hinduism: revealing the scriptures originally revealed by Lord Sada Shiva and allowing the world to align their practice to the original instructions on yoga. ☸

NITHYA YOGA Vidhunananasana Traditional Yoga Asana Hatharatnavalli HR III. 13, 71



अथ विधुनानसम् -
गुल्फस्थितौ पादमेकं प्रसार्य
तत्पादागं संसृजेत्कणेन ॥
गुल्फं चान्यं धारयेत्कणेन
धूनं पीठं चाम्यसेच्योभयत्र ॥ 71 ॥

- Rest on one heel
- Stretch other leg & hold toes with respective hand
- Hold other heel with other hand
- Engage abdominals
- Keep spine straight & lifted
- Strengthens the thighs, glutes, calves, feet & abdominals
- Stretches hamstrings, calves & back
- Opens the chest, ribcage and increases lung capacity
- Develops balance, grounding, concentration & determination

- Creates a complete energy circuit in the body
- Revitalizes the lower chakras & reproductive organs

NITHYA YOGA Jalandharipavasana Traditional Yoga Asana JP 267 - 269



"It removes diseases like edema"
Jogapradipyaka 267-269

- Sit with knees open, heels together & feet forward
- Tuck arms under legs, palms up
- Place your face on your heels
- Chin tucked & gaze at tip of nose
- Opens & stretches hips, groin, hamstrings, low back, shoulders
- Relaxes & lengthens the neck & spine, releasing stress & tension
- Relieves swelling in legs & feet
- Jalandhara bandha stimulates the thyroid & parathyroid glands
- Improves digestion, elimination & health of reproductive organs
- Encourages introspection & stillness

*Contraindication - avoid with low back or hip injury

Matsyendrasana Traditional Yoga Asana Hatharatnavalli HR III. 12, 57- 58



अथ मत्स्येन्द्रासनम् -
कुलेभ्योनिःसारणं कान्धोर्ध्वोपरिःसारणम् ।
पुण्यं तिष्ठेत्कीर्तितम् । श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासहितं भाग्य 4 57 ।

"Enhances gastric fire and works like a weapon to destroy hosts of severe diseases"
HR III. 58

- Sit with legs stretched in front
- Right leg is bent with foot at top of left thigh
- Left foot outside right knee
- Left hand is supporting on ground (or over back to hold left thigh)
- Keep spine erect & abdominals engaged
- Twisting from waist, right hand passes left knee to hold left foot
- Neck then head turns to back
- Repeat on other side

- Releases tension and stiffness in the hips, back, shoulders, neck & arms
- Improves flexibility of the spine and functioning of the spinal cord
- Massages, stimulates the internal organs of digestion & elimination
- Opens the chest and increases lung capacity
- Corrects the postural alignment
- Calms the mind and relieves stress, anxiety & depression
- Beneficial for constipation, digestive disorders, menstrual issues, diabetes, anorexia & urinary tract disorders
- Opens the lower 3 chakras & awakens the kundalini

Aghorasasana Traditional Yoga Asana Jogapradipyaka JP 205 - 209



Yoga-asanamala Sacitra YMS 39

"As a result of daily practise of this asana, the body is purified. Kundalini pierces the prana and body attains lustre."
JP 205 - 209

- Sit with feet together and keep knees apart and on the ground
- Turn tongue and place it on the palate
- Place right palm over mouth
- Inhale through right nostril & hold breath, exhale left... inhale left nostril & hold breath, exhale right... repeatedly
- Keep body upright
- Opens the hips, groin & low back
- Strengthens the abdominals & back while lengthening spine
- Tones reproductive organs & helps relieve menstrual symptoms

- Feet together is grounding & stimulates the heart
- Meditative, creates stillness & tranquility
- Reduces stress, depression & anxiety

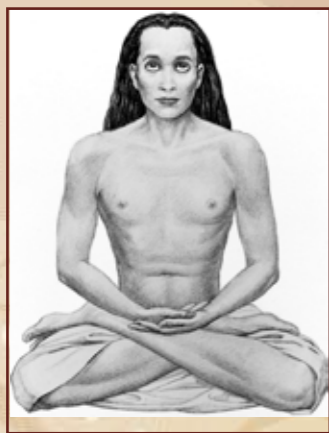
NITHYA KRIYA—CURE FOR DEPRESSION

What is Nithya Kriya?

Nithya Kriya are a series of unique yogic healing processes revealed by Paramahansa Nithyananda. While the knowledge and techniques are drawn from the most authentic and sacred yogic scriptures of India, the specific combinations are expressed from the personal experiences, research and development of Paramahansa Nithyananda, with the objective of curing various ailments. Here we discuss the Nithya Kriya to Cure Depression.

Steps to be followed:

1. Padma Asana
2. Sheethalee Kumbhaka
3. Bhastrika



1. Padma Asana

Gheranda Samhita, Upadesha 2, Verse 8
*Vaamoropari Dakshinam Hi Charanam
 Samsthaapy Vaamam Tathaa
 Dakshoropari Pashchimena Vidhinaa Krutvaa
 Karaabhyaam Drudham |
 Angushtau Hrudaye Nidhaaya Chibukam
 Naasaagram Aalokayet
 Etat-Vyaadhi-vinaashanakaram Padmaasanam
 Prochyate || 2.8 ||*

Translation

1. Place the right foot on the left thigh and similarly the left one on the right
2. Cross the hands behind the back and firmly catch hold of the great toes of the feet so crossed
3. Place the chin on the chest and fix the gaze on the tip of the nose (this posture is called the Padma Asana (or lotus posture). This posture destroys all diseases)
4. Settle in this posture for 30 seconds

2. Sheethalee Kumbhaka

Gheranda Samhita, Upadesha 5, Verse 73-74
*Jihvayaa Vaayum Aakrushya Udare Poorayet
 Shanaihi |
 Kshanam Cha Kumbhakam Krutvaa
 Naasaabhyaam Rechayet Punaha || 5.73 ||
 Sarvadaa Saadhayet Yogee Sheethalee-
 kumbhakam Shubham |
 Ajeernam Kapha-Pittam Cha Naiva Tasya
 Prajaayathe || 5.74 ||*

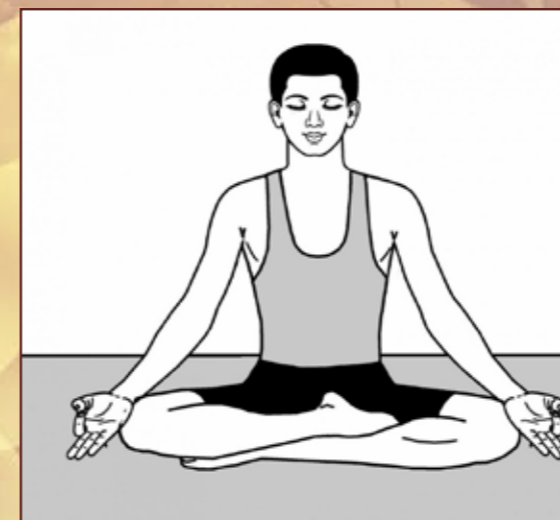
Translation

Draw in the air through the mouth (with lips contracted and tongue thrown out), and fill the stomach slowly. Retain it there for a short time. Then exhale through both the nostrils. Let the Yogi always practice this Sheethalee Khumbhaka, giver of bliss; by so doing, he will be free from digestion, phlegm and bilious disorders.

Technique

1. Continue to sit in Padma Asana.
2. Close the eyes and relax the whole body
3. Extend the tongue outside the mouth and roll the sides of the tongue up so that it forms a tube
4. Inhale slowly through the tongue
5. At the end of inhalation, roll the tongue in, close the mouth
6. Retain it there for a short time
7. Then exhale slowly through the nose
8. Do this 21 times

3. Bhastrika



Gheranda Samhita, Upadesha 5, Verses 75 and 77
*Bhastraiva lohakaaraanaam Yathaa-kramena
 sambhramet |
 Tathaa vaayum cha naasaabhyaam
 Ubhaabhyaam Chaalayet shanaihi || 5.75 ||
 vam Vimshati-vaaram Cha Krutvaa Kuryaachcha
 Kumbhakam |
 adante Chaalayet Vaayum Poorvoktam Cha
 Yathaavidhi || 5.76 ||
 Trivaaram Saadhayet Enam Bhastrikaa-
 Kumbhakam Sudheehi |
 Na Cha Rogo Na Cha Kleshaha Aarogyam Cha
 Dine Dine || 5.77 ||*

Translation

As the bellows of the ironsmith constantly dilate and contract, similarly let him slowly draw in the

air by both the nostrils and expand the stomach; then exhale slowly (the wind making sound like bellows) (5.75). Having thus inspired and expired twenty times, let him perform Kumbhaka; then let him expel it by the previous method. Let the wise one perform this Bhastrika (Bellows-like) Kumbhaka thrice; he will never suffer any disease and will be always healthy (5.76 and 5.77).

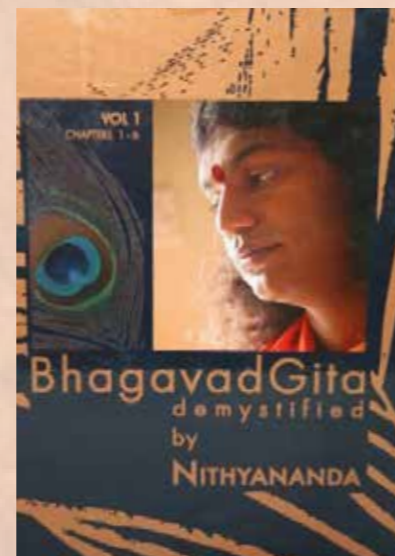
Technique

1. Continue to sit in Padma Asana
2. Inhale slowly expanding the stomach
3. Exhale slowly
4. Do this 21 times
5. After 21 times, Now, inhale slowly
6. Hold the breath as long as you can
7. When you feel you can't hold quickly expel the air with the sound of bellows. At this moment the stomach should contract to touch the back (This is one Bhastrika)
8. Do this complete sequence three times

SURRENDER TO THE MASTER

About this column—

This column shares excerpts from the commentary on Bhagavad Gita by Enlightened Master and rare living incarnation Paramahansa Nithyananda. The intention is to highlight the eternal relevance of Bhagavad Gita in addressing challenges, issues and dilemmas faced by human beings in the present day.



Verses 1.23 to 1.24 of the Bhagavad Gita describe the scene where following the sounding of conches, Arjuna requests Krishna to position his chariot between the two armies.

Surrender to the Master

Arjuna is referred to as *Gudakesa* in these verses. *Gudakesa* is one who has transcended sleep, or the need to sleep. Sleep, here, refers to the unconscious mind. All our embedded memories and beliefs reside in our unconscious mind. Arjuna is being referred to here as one who has conquered his *samskaras*, as a result of his total surrender to Krishna.

Krishna has been called as *Hrsikesa*, one who controls the senses. The relationship between Krishna and Arjuna is the highest form of interaction between the Divine and the human.

You see, for one who is caught in the sleep of unconscious living, this world of illusion appears utterly real and permanent. But the enlightened master has awakened to the level of pure consciousness and knows that this world is just another dream. When the disciple is able to completely trust the master's senses that this world is an illusion and not his own senses that give the idea that this world is real and is the source of his happiness, then the surrender is total. Krishna's senses were controlled. He knew that what He experienced through them was not

the source of His happiness and therefore He did not run after sensual pleasures for His fulfilment.

Stages of Surrender

When approaching the Divine or one's master, the ultimate step is one of complete surrender. This surrender happens in three stages.

Intellectual Surrender

First, the intellectual acceptance of what the master represents and what he means to you. A true seeker reaches this stage when he encounters the real master destined for him/her. At this stage, when the disciple meets the master, questions start dying down. It is as if answers come to one's mind even before the questions happen. Questions are a reflection of one's internal violence wishing to prove one's control over another person. We ask questions only to tell the other person that we know something. Rarely are our questions like that of a child, who asks out of curiosity.

Intellectual surrender to the master, replaces questions with doubts. Doubts are not violent like questions. They arise from a genuine need to know to understand. Doubt and faith are two sides of the same coin. One cannot develop faith

in one's master without having doubts about him. Despite his high level of surrender, one does see Arjuna initially in this state of questioning as well, perhaps as a lesson to us.

Emotional Surrender

At the next level, one reaches the state of emotional surrender. The person feels a deep connection with the master. It is impossible to forget Him. His memory brings tears to one's eyes; tears of gratitude that are impossible to hide. Ramakrishna Paramahansa says so beautifully, "When thinking of the Divine or the Master, if you have tears streaming down your cheeks, be very sure that this is your last birth." Emotional surrender leads one close to liberation.

Surrender of the Senses

At the final level, there is surrender of the senses. One truly realizes *Hrsikesa* (the master as the one who controls the senses) and gives up one's distorted sense of reality and embraces the truth of absolute reality. Arjuna is at that level of surrender and through the progression of the Gita, we see Arjuna's transformation taking place.

Mind based on Instinct

Arjuna calls Duryodhana evil-minded. When one's mind is filled with greed, lust, envy and fear, there is single-minded focus on the potential material benefits of these negative and evil emotions. Duryodhana's objectives were very clear—do away with Pandava princes and usurp the entire kingdom. Duryodhana was like an animal, operating out of instinct. He was not an intelligent man and did not suffer from doubts and guilt. He needed power, and whatever was the means to achieve that power, he employed without any reservation.

A human being has a level of consciousness higher than that of animals. He can discriminate between right and wrong and has the free will to act based on such awareness. When a human behaves the way Duryodhana does, he is in the unconscious and unaware state. Mired totally in unawareness, the Kaurava warriors followed Duryodhana blindly. Arjuna, on the other hand, is in turmoil. As Krishna brings the chariot to a stop between the two armies, in a metaphoric sense He brings Arjuna's mind to a steady state.

Twilight Zone

Duryodhana is operating out of his lower animal instincts. His moves are driven completely by his *samskaras* (latent unconscious tendencies). So strong is his delusion that the wise counsel of the few who told him the path he is following is a self-destructive one, falls on deaf ears. Arjuna, on the other hand, is in a twilight zone. Unlike Duryodhana, Arjuna has become aware of his *samskaras*, and is working to free himself from their bondage. However, he is not in the zone of light yet.

The conflict between Duryodhana and Arjuna is the conflict that all humans face within themselves. It is a conflict between their deep unconscious desires driven by their *samskaras* and the potential awareness of their consciousness. Which part wins depends on one's ability to surrender to the superconscious Divine or the master.

A person who is born blind has no idea what sight is, what light is, and what he is missing. Whatever he may think he is missing is based on what others tell him, not any experience of his own. However, someone who has been born with sight and subsequently loses it will miss it. He would be afraid of that darkness, which a person born blind would never fear because that would always have been his/her experience.

Arjuna is in the state of a person who has had sight and has now lost it. He was an intelligent man but suddenly wondered whether what he was doing might be wrong and evil. So he is disturbed.

Duryodhana on the other hand has a mind that has always been in darkness. He has never experienced true intelligence or awareness. Therefore, words such as 'immoral' or 'unethical' would make no sense to him.

Make a conscious choice. Surrender to the Divine or the master. Be aware of the level of surrender you are at now. Expand towards surrendering your senses. Seeing the *Hrsikesa* is easier in the form of the master. 🕉️

Source :
Bhagavad Gita Demystified by Paramahansa Nithyananda; p.
35 – 38
ISBN 13: 978-1-60607-132-8

ASTEYA IS A MANY SPLENDURED THING

BARBARA LIPPMAN

Yamas come from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and represent a series of "right living" or ethical rules within Hinduism and Yoga. Asteya is one of the Yamas.

Asteya—What does it Encompass

Asteya is the path of non-stealing. It is mentioned in the Sutras, *Mahabharata*, Upanishads and Vedas. To quote from the title of a well known novel by Han Suyi, asteya is a "many splendored thing". That is, it has many wonderful aspects to it. It not only consists of not stealing objects, but covers the subtle facet of such habits acquired in the breathing cycle wherein a person might be consistently taking deeper inhaled than exhaled.

On a metaphorical level there is an understanding that it is a way of taking more than is necessary and of taking more than the fair share of what

existence is providing. This is true also concerning humankind's exploitation of nature. Taking too much oil from the ground is a way of stealing from the very foundations of mother earth. Making more money than we need, may hurt others. This has consequences. As someone says, "Wealth that is not redistributed will stagnate and poison us."

Asteya also entails not stealing other people's ideas, not demanding more attention from another person than what the situation requires. Practicing asteya also involves not intruding on other people's time. That too is a form of robbing. If a person comes late to class he/she may very well be interrupting the others as he/she settles in, and ask questions that have already been answered. Tardy people are using up others' precious time without asking permission. It is a kind of abuse.

Asteya—The Ohlone Way

There is a fundamental question inherent in non-stealing as to whether the notion of "mine" should really exist. Because if we truly practice asteya the idea of possession of yours versus mine is dissolved. Certainly the Native American tribe called the Ohlone (who flourished more than 200 years ago in what is now the state of California) did not live as if there were such a thing as "mine". They were a true example of the art and practice of asteya as described by Hannah Hemingway:

"The Ohlone..... paid a good deal of respect to their fellow tribe members. Sharing (was) a fundamental precept in the Ohlone philosophy, and so there was rarely a broad division of wealthy and poor. After a hunt, meat was distributed to friends, extended family members, and those members in the community who were in need. The hunter rarely kept any of the fruits of his hunt for himself, and women often gave their finest baskets or flour to another woman. They did not place value on the acquisition of physical wealth, but rather the esteem and friendship brought about by generosity. Sharing with others ensured a strong position in the tribal structure that guaranteed a man and his family security should anything bad befall them. Other members would care for them just as they had cared for others. Behaving generously was the only way they could conceive of acting appropriately. Living in moderation went hand in hand with the concept of sharing.

It demonstrated that you were not greedy in accumulating wealth."

Benefits of Asteya

As understood within the context of the Ohlone people's way of life, asteya is the sense of what should and could be the natural give and take of life. It is the sense that we are here for everyone and that we should act with the understanding that if we live as a community, sharing instead of inappropriately and aggressively taking. Then we will all prosper and benefit.

By practicing asteya, people can develop a deeper understanding of their relationship to others, to themselves and to the world around them. They can develop what Paramahansa Nithyananda refers to as *swatantra* - the ability to be so sure about oneself that one is capable of enjoying the whole world as one's "oyster". In other words, to practice asteya well, as is true with practicing all the Yamas, one is able to know oneself so completely that an ability will develop to act with power and decisiveness in all situations. ☸

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GURU MANTRA— THE KEY TO LIBERATION

AVINASH NARRIKKADAN

Understanding Mantras

Mantra has been defined as '*Mananat Trayate Iti Mantrah*'. This means, "That which liberates upon constant contemplation is Mantra." Mantras are not invented or created. They are revealed in visions. They represent eternal truths in existence. Each mantra has a rishi, who realized it first and shared it with the world. It also has a devata, or the intelligence that is represented by the mantra. The mantra and the devata are essentially one. When practiced correctly the mantra leads to the realization of this mantra devata. The devata has a form.

Our body consists of many *koshas* or layers (See link in reference 2 for the list of *koshas*). Each *kosha* vibrates at a different frequency for different beings. The sum of all these *koshas* can be called our vibe. The mantras that one chooses should be constructive in relation to the being's vibe.

Types of Mantras

Mantras can be broadly divided into four types namely, *siddham*, *sadhya*, *susiddham* and *ari*. Out of these the ones that fall under *ari* are destructive. So there is much care to be taken when adopting a mantra for spiritual practices like japa—or repeating the mantra. When the spiritual seeker practices with a mantra that is constructive and aligned to his vibe, eventually the vibrations of the mantra activates the non-mechanical parts of his brain raising his awareness to see the physical form of the mantra-devata in his vision.

Initiation into Guru Mantra

According to *Tantra Shastra* a spiritual seeker should find a Guru and spend six months to four

years living around him. In this period, the seeker and Guru evaluate and study each other. The Guru, after observing the nature, likes, dislikes, and vibes of the seeker's being, decides the time when the seeker is ready to start deeper practices. He then whispers a mantra tailored for the disciple into the disciple's ear as part of a ritualistic process called *deeksha*. This mantra is called the Guru mantra. The Guru mantra can be different for each person depending upon the nature of the being. The mantra is usually the name of a deity. The path of enlightenment for the disciple is through realization of oneness with the deity.

Inculcating Guru Mantra into the Being

The mantra spoken thus by the Guru carries spiritual energy that transforms the disciple's consciousness the moment he hears it. The effects can be quite significant and be seen physically in some, depending upon their nature. From this point the disciple begins his *Sadhana* or practice. He repeats the mantra with regularly appropriate steps of *anganyansa*, *karanyasa* etc. This practice eventually flowers into the realization of the self. The mantra becomes the key for his liberation.

The constant repetition of the mantra first tenses the mind and then eventually collapses it, thus allowing the seeker to experience the no-mind state. He becomes aware of his *Advaitic* (non-dualistic) identity and ultimately plunges into *nithyanandam* or eternal bliss. ☸

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CHANKAYA'S NEETI—PART 3

KRISHNAN NATARAJAN

Chanakya Neeti is described in the Arthashastra (Science of Polity) of Chanakya, also called Kautilya. He was the adviser and prime minister of the first known emperor of the subcontinent, Chandragupta Maurya of the Mauryan dynasty (ruled from 324-297 BCE). Although written for an era more than 2,350 years old, his observations are relevant even to this day. Chanakya Neeti is about understanding human nature and its weaknesses. It can be used as a reference manual to face the realities of life. It must be understood that spirituality according to Chanakya, is not about putting a break on thinking. It is about thinking the right things.

Which family in this world has no blemish? Is there any person who has never fallen ill? Has there been somebody who has not been troubled by his bad habits? Can you point a person who has lived happily throughout his life? i.e. Problems will definitely arrive in the life of each and every one. One should accept this reality and move forward in life. Below is a summary of chapters 3 and 4 and captures these dimensions of life.

How does the Character of a Person Manifest?

1. You can guess the origin of a person through his behavior, his native place via his tone, and his food intake by looking at the size of his belly. A wise man educates his sons, marries daughter to a high class family, exploits weaknesses of his enemies and does friendship with people who do good deeds.
2. On doom's day (पूरलय) the whole land is submerged under sea, but the men with noble characters have a depth that many seas together can't fill. They stand still in every good or bad situation.
3. A stupid person looks similar in appearance like any other human being in spite of being an ass.
4. A hard working person cannot remain poor; a person who continuously remembers God is unlikely to perform a sin; a person with peace cannot quarrel. Similarly, a vigilant person has no fears.
5. A young person, with a handsome face and of a higher family; if he or she remains

uneducated, is always ignored like a scentless flower.

6. As a tree laden with scented flowers spreads fragrance in the whole forest, a worthy son brings glory to the whole family, community, and country.
7. As a dried tree when catches fire burns the whole forest, so is a bad son born in a family. One good son is better than many troublesome sons in a family. The whole family feels comfortable and safe with him.
8. A person having no faith, no wealth and no love simply cannot acquire salvation. He keeps on taking births and keeps dying.
9. Sons, friends, kith and kin are capable of distracting you. A wise man's mind cannot be diverted as he knows that his holy acts will ultimately bring blessings to him and to his loved ones.
10. As a mother takes care of every requirement of her infants, similarly, a saint must deliver spiritual guidance to his followers.

Making Decisions

1. If you have an evil person on one side and a snake at the other; better opt for the snake as it will bite only for self defense but the wicked person will not spare any chance of hurting you.
2. A wise king always accompanies wise councils who always stand by his side irrespective of the situation and place.
3. Expel an individual to save a family, a family to save a village, a village for good of the country.
4. Excess of beauty resulted in the kidnapping of Sita, extreme ego of Ravana got him killed, and unnecessary charity caused great troubles to Raja Bali. Avoid extremes!
5. As nothing is impossible for the Almighty, similarly every place is within the reach of a trader, no land is alien for a knowledge - full person, and none is stranger to a good and polite talker.
6. In case of natural disasters, famine and unstoppable enemy invasion; one should run away and save life i.e. save yourself for another day!
7. The best place to live is where fools are not honored; grains are stored safely, where

husband and wife don't quarrel. Goddess Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) resides at such locations.

8. The king orders once, a great scholar speaks once, and daughters are married once. Therefore, one must be very careful regarding each of these.

Bringing Up Children

1. Chanakya says to use cane over a child only after he reaches 5 years of age. This can continue for 10 more years. Once the son achieves his 16th year, all you can do is to treat him as a friend.
2. When a dead son is born then the person grieves for a few days, but an unworthy son is a grief for a lifetime.
3. Like there is no profit in raising a barren cow, a son without knowledge or devotion is also useless.

Power of Knowledge

Knowledge is like the holy *Kamdhenu* (the Divine Cow) and is like a tree that bears fruit in every season. In unknown territories it provides protection and also fetches rewards for you.

The Environment in Which One Lives

It is very difficult to bear pain that arises from a quarrelsome wife, living in a village with people of bad character, a stupid son, consumption of bad food, working for a wicked family, and by watching a widowed daughter. This world is like a hell where a person cannot get three kinds of relief in form of a devoted wife, a good son, and friendship of a noble person.

Principles of Life

Meditation is performed best when alone, education by two, singing by three, travelling with four persons, farming with five, and battle with as many possible.

An important verse of Chanakya Neeti compares the following with poison:

- a person whose knowledge is confined to books
- a meal without appetizer
- living life in a community of poor people

A wise man will ask these questions, says Chanakya: "How is this situation, who are my

real friends, how is my home's condition, what's my earnings and expenditure, what are my talents and weaknesses? These are the questions that a wise man asks himself all the time."

These lines tell us to think about the outcome before doing anything. You can try the other way, but in that case you won't reach too far.

Relation Between your Desires and your Situation

It's good to desire and desires definitely add to the worthiness of your life. The problem arises when your desires and the situation are a mismatch. For example: It is perfectly normal for a rich man to plan an expensive vacation, but not for a man living on daily wages and without enough savings.

For sure the non-wealthy man has all rights to have such desires. It's all about waiting for the situation to turn favorable or creating the favorable environment with own efforts. Without any question the second option is more appropriate. Most of the things can be achieved by mixing hard work with smart work. Hard-work alone, might prove insufficient.

Real Friends

1. It's a boon to have a true friend in life. The ugly and basic truth is that most of the people in this competitive world envy you. Those who fall in same hierarchy are the ones who envy most.
2. Everyone tries to excel high in life, but at the same time they (most of them) are ever-ready to pull the leg of anyone trying to do so. A man must have discretion to identify people and their motives.
3. There are men who promise to help and also there are a few who will really help. The biggest mistake one can do is to depend on help from someone who has nothing more than a promise to offer. I have made such mistakes and most probably you are not an exception.
4. Help from others should be considered as an added benefit. You are the only person on whom you can rely most.
5. Most of the help is available in the form of mutual benefits. If you don't have anything

better to offer, then why should someone offer you anything? There is a great difference between being good to others and in being useful to others.

6. If you don't have a real friend, then nothing much can be done about it. Either you have them or you don't. Maybe you will get one in the future. At least you can try to maximize the number of your friends (with benefits). In addition to that, you must also work towards reducing the count of your opponents.

Self-Evaluation and Skills Building

1. It's very difficult to perform an honest self-evaluation. Most of the times we either over estimate our potential or underestimate it. No one can judge you better than yourself. Do not allow the external factors to guide you. It's your duty to:
 - a. Identify your area or areas of expertise.
 - b. Evaluate your level of expertise in those areas.
 - c. Prepare the list of improvements to be done.
 - d. And to improve in reality.
2. Not your skills, but what matters most are your accomplishments. History remembers men with great deeds, not those with great skills. Acquisition of skills is important, but is an intermediate step towards achieving something big.
3. Improvement requires a certain amount of time. The required span of time will vary depending on what you are trying to accomplish. The results might not be instantaneous, but provided you do it with proper planning and dedication the situation will change for sure.
4. In summary:
 - a. Have high expectations from life.
 - b. Identify your strengths and weaknesses.
 - c. Improve yourself and your skills.
 - d. Fulfill your dreams by doing hard work in a smart manner. 🙏

THE WORKS OF THE GREAT KALIDASA

SHUBHANGI DESHPANDE

Kalidasa was an unparalleled poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language and lived somewhere in the early centuries of the Common Era or CE. The power of his literary works are such that even nearly two millennia later, they are widely read, researched, discussed, and debated upon in 21st century academia, theatre and media.

It is said that Kalidasa was really a simpleton and a dimwit but a devout follower of the goddess Gadhkalika of Ujjain. Pleased by his devotion, it was the goddess who bestowed on him the gift of imagination, poetry and genius, after which he took on the name Kalidasa, meaning "Servant of Kali". Often referred to as the Indian Shakespeare, he was one of the nine gems or navaratna of the wise, and just Hindu king Vikramaditya.

Kalidasa's World View

Kalidasa believed in the *varnashrama*, which is the social structure of four castes and four ashramas or stages of social life. He believed in dharma (religion), artha (goal/purpose), kama (desire, wish, longing in Indian literature), and moksha (release from the cycle of rebirth impelled by the law of karma). He advocated *tyaga* or sacrifice as opposed to indulgence, and *tapasya* or austerity. Kalidasa also preferred *tapovana* (forest) instead of the palace. He was a Shiva devout and remembered Shiva in all his openings of works referred to as *mangalacharan*. He put society above the individual and would pray for world peace.

Kalidasa gave us seven luminary works in the form of three dramas, two epics, one elegiac poem, and one descriptive poem.

The Dramas

Abhijnanashakuntalam ("Of Shakuntala Recognised by a Token"): This is a poetic drama, and is regarded as Kalidasa's masterpiece. In this play, he describes "Eight forms has Shiva, lord of all and Kings" where he shares that Dwi-isha ie two gods, Shiva and Parvati, guard all eight forces of life.

EIGHT forms has Shiva, lord of all and king;
And these are water, first created thing;
And fire, which speeds the sacrifice begun;
The priest; and time's dividers, moon and sun;
The all-embracing ether, path of sound;
The earth, wherein all seeds of life are found;
And air, the breath of life: may he draw near,
Revealed in these, and bless those gathered here.

Vikramorvashiyam ("Urvashi Won by Valor"): This is a 5-act play, which tells the story of the mortal king Pururavas and the apsara or celestial nymph named Urvashi who fall in love and where Urvashi is won by valor.

Malavikagnimitram ("Malavika and Agnimitra"): The story is a light tale set in a harem, and, unlike Kalidasa's other works, it sustains a playful and comical mood throughout. It tells the story of king Agnimitra the Sunga ruler of Vidisha, who falls in love with the picture of an exiled servant girl named Malavika.

The Poems

Raghuvamsha ("The Dynasty of Raghu"): It narrates, the stories related to the Raghu dynasty, namely Raghu, Dasaratha and Rama. In the prologue of Raghuvamsa, Kalidasa says,

|| *Vagarthaviva sampriktau vagarthah
pratipattaye | Jagatah pitarau vande
parvathiparameshwarau* ||

In this sloka (verse), Kalidasa requests the divine parents Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi to teach him the knowledge of language, speech and its meaning. The beauty of this poem was that Kalidasa infused two words together and oneness of this word became very powerful (e.g. Lord Shiva and Parvati to become Shivparvati)

Kalidasa's powerful narration comes through in the below verses describing princess Indumati's

swayamvara, (marriage of Indumati where she gets to select her husband among a lineup of several princes).

*samcāriṇī dipāsikheva rātrau
yaṃ yaṃ vyatīyāya patimvarā sā|
narendramārgāṭṭa iva prapede
vivaraṇabhāvaṃ sa sa bhūmipālah||*
— Raghuvamśa 6.67

The meaning given below gives you a vivid visualisation of what transpires as each prince is given a pass over by Indumati:

As Indumati walked past each prince and went to the next prince (in a ceremony of choosing her husband), the prince's face would turn bright and then pale. It was like watching a line of houses in the night as a dazzling lamp passed by. And every prince rejected while she sought a husband, darkly frowned, as turrets, bright. One moment with the flame from torches caught, frown gloomily again and sink in night.

Kumarasambhava ("Birth of Kumara"): This work describes the courting of the ascetic Shiva, who is meditating in the mountains, by Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas and the subsequent birth of Kumara (Skanda/Subramanya/Muruga/Karthikeya)—the war god.

The work describes profound Hindu philosophy of the various forms of god and cycle of human life. For example:

Proclaim thy living majesty;
Thou dost create, and then maintain,
And last, destroyest all again.

Kalidasa displayed deep knowledge of geography uncommon in those days. This is evident in his description of the Himalayas in his verses,

"Far in the north Himalaya, lifting high
His towery summits till they cleave the sky,
Spans the wide land from east to western sea,
Lord of the hills, instinct with deity."

Meghadhuta ("Cloud Messenger"): This long lyrical poem is a message sent by an exiled yaksha in Central India to his wife in the Himalayas, his envoy being a *megha* or cloud.

The storyline describes how the hero of the story uses the cloud as a *dhuta* or messenger for conveying message to his beloved in the day and age where internet was not prevalent.

A single glimpse of the verse where he tries to paint a picture for the *meghadhuta* to recognise his beloved whom he is missing, shows the beauty with which Kalidasa was able to describe something that is so commonplace in our current internet-age.

*“twaamaalikhyat pranayakupitaa dhaaturaagai
shilaayaaha|
maatmaanm te charanapatitam yavdichami
kartum|
astraistravanmuhu upchitairdrushtiraalupyate
me|
krurastasminnapi na sahate sangamam nau
krutantaah|*

Meaning:

when I try to draw your (beloved's) picture and show in it that I am bowing at your feet, with a kawa (a type of chalk) on the rock; due to emotional outbreak, my eyes get wet. The Krutanta or Yama himself does not wish to have our meet even in the picture ...

Rtusamhara (“The Exposition on the Seasons”): This describes the six seasons of Indian year and their changing aspects.

Characteristics of Kalidasa's Works

Can be summarised as below:

- Kalidasa is famous for his *upamaa* (metaphor). Indian pundits say, *upamaa kaalidaasasya* (upamaa like Kalidasa's). His *upamaa* were clear, complete and beautiful.
- His observations were sharp and subtle. He knew both mother nature and human nature in and out. He has a sound knowledge of the scriptures.
- His *utprekshaa* (simile) and *artha-antaranyaa*s (transfer of meaning) were also very beautiful.
- He used *anupraasa* (alliteration), *yamaka* (same word repeated with different meaning), and *shlesha* (pun; one word two meanings).
- Kalidasa loved the softer side of nature. He mentioned serene and beautiful ashramas, river banks, gardens, palaces, bumblebee,

deer, cuckoo etc. He loved the Himalayas (the northern mountain chain) more than the Vindhyaachal (the southern mountain chain).

- Kalidasa expressed his inner world and the external world equally well.
- Kalidasa's work displayed his knowledge of woman empowerment and equal rights they enjoyed in Vedic religion, which is amply alluded to in the Kumarasambhava, Raghuvamsha, etc.
- Similarly, Kalidasa was well acquainted with contemporary sciences and arts, including politics and astronomy. His knowledge of scientific astronomy, geography, human psychology and emotions and geometry are manifested in his works.

A Last Word

As a last word, here is a beautiful poem from Kalidasa to give a glimpse into the mastery of this great writer:

“Even the man who is happy
glimpses something
or a hair of sound touches him

and his heart overflows with a longing
he does not recognize

then it must be that he is remembering
in a place out of reach
shapes he has loved

in a life before this

the print of them still there in him waiting” ♀

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THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS OF BUDDHISM

Gautama Buddha, after His enlightenment met his former companions (the five ascetics Kondanna, Baddhiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji) in a deer park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) in Varanasi. To them he delivered his first sermon—The Four Noble Truths.

The Buddha set forth His teachings, which are collectively called Dhamma, that which He directly perceived and realised to be true and common experience to all beings. These are termed as noble because if understood and practised to the full, they lead one to experience Enlightenment.

In Theravada school an arahant means a perfected one, the one who understands the teachings of the Noble Truths. These Truths are not absolute truths, and need to be reflected and contemplated upon. His five companions became the first arahants.

Insights of the Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths have three insights each. First there is the statement or Pariyatti, then the

prescription or Patipatti and then the result of having practised or Pativedha. This is called the reflective pattern of mind that knows things as they are.

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. Dukkha – suffering
2. Samudaya – cause of suffering
3. Nirodha – cessation of suffering and
4. Magga – the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

1st Noble Truth—Dukkha

The Pali word Dukkha means “incapable of satisfying, not able to withstand or bear anything, incapable of truly fulfilling.” There are three insights to Dukkha – there is dukkha; dukkha should be understood; and dukkha has been understood.

The Buddha's experiences as a prince and as a wandering monk made him learn that there was one thing which was common and that is “life is full of suffering.” The Buddha's most important teachings were focussed on a way to end the

suffering he had seen in others. His discovery of a solution began with the recognition that “life is suffering”; this is the first noble truth.

Suffering can be physical or mental. Physical forms of suffering are birth, old age, sickness, death, etc. So Buddha taught that physical suffering is a part of life, recognise it and it cannot be avoided. Mental sufferings include feeling sad, loneliness, depression, separation from loved ones, discomfort, irritation, lack of communication, unhappiness, poverty, and so on. Happiness also is real but impermanent - when happiness fades it leads to suffering. The person suffers when attachment to pleasure has not lasted. When the Buddha spoke about sufferings in life he also spoke about happiness. He taught his followers to look at the bigger picture of their life experiences.

Second Noble Truth—Samudaya

Samudaya in Pali means cause of suffering. The three aspects or insights of Samudaya are: there is cause of suffering, the cause of suffering should be understood, the cause of suffering has been understood.

After Buddha learnt that suffering is a part of life, he realised he could not find a way to end it without finding out what causes it. Then Buddha found out that the causes of suffering are craving of desires or attachment to desires and ignorance.

There are three kinds of desires:

1. Kama Tanha – desire for sense pleasure
2. Bhava Tanha – desire to become, and
3. Vibhava Tanha - the desire to get rid of

Contemplating on these a person frees himself from the attachment, the cause of suffering. Cravings are strong desires that people have to please their senses and for experiencing life itself. Buddha taught that anything that stimulates our senses or our feelings are cravings which leads to suffering. Ignorance is, Buddha says, the inability to see the truth about things as they really are.

Craving is like a tree with many branches - branches of greed, anger, bad thoughts, and so on. The fruit of this tree is suffering. This

tree grows with the help of roots of ignorance. Just desire by itself does not cause suffering. It is the grasping or craving of desires which causes suffering. The craving is nothing but attachment of me, mine and “I” with the desires. Thus, Buddha says that overcoming craving and ignorance leads to true happiness and enlightenment.

The Third Noble Truth

Nirodha means end of suffering. The three aspects or insights of this truth are: there is end of suffering, the end of suffering should be realised, the end of suffering has been realised.

After Buddha realised the truth about suffering and its causes, he spent six years committed to discovering a realisation about the end of suffering. That and his experience of Nirvana were his ultimate achievements. This is what He discovered: there is an end to suffering. It can happen to anyone, anywhere, here and now. The key to end all suffering is to remove all attachment to desires, ill will and ignorance.

The more people free themselves from desires, ill will, and ignorance the greater happiness they experience no matter what is going on around them. When they have completely removed desire, ill will, and ignorance the Buddha says, they will experience the same supreme happiness that He experienced, which is Nirvana.

The Fourth Noble Truth

Magga means the path leading to the cessation of suffering. This outlines the practical means by which Nirvana (final bliss, Nibbana in Pali) can be realised. It is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Nirvana is also described as freedom from conflict and selfishness - the eradication of craving, hatred and delusion.

The Buddha taught and demonstrated that Nirvana can be experienced in our lives while living. For this he discovered the Eightfold Path to Nirvana. ☸

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BUDDHIST STUPAS

MA KAVYAROOPINI

A Stupa is generally known as a sepulchral monument—a burial place or a receptacle for religious objects. Simply put, a stupa is a dirt burial mound with a facade of stone. Stupas are largely related to Buddhism.

The earliest stupas contained portions of the Buddha’s ashes, and as a result, the stupa began to be associated with the body of the Buddha.

History of Stupas

In prehistoric days, stupas were simply mounds of earth and stones (tumuli)—places to bury important kings away from the village. Later on, these hemispherical structure containing relics (śarīra—typically the remains of Buddhist monks or nuns) were used as a place of meditation.

The ashes of the Buddha were buried in stupas built at locations associated with important events in the Buddha’s life including Lumbini (where he was born), Bodh Gaya, where he achieved Enlightenment, Deer Park at Sarnath where he preached his first sermon sharing the Four Noble Truths, and Kushingara, where he attained samadhi. The choice of these sites and others were based on both real and legendary events.

Enhancing the reach of Buddhism

Ashoka, of the Mauryan dynasty, who was the first emperor to embrace Buddhism (ruled from circa 269–232 BCE), created 84,000 stupas and divided the Buddha’s ashes among them all.

While this could be an exaggeration as the stupas were built by Ashoka some 250 years after the Buddha’s death, Ashoka was responsible for building many stupas all over northern India and the other territories under the Mauryan dynasty in areas now known as Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

Early Stupas

Before Buddhism, great teachers were buried in mounds. Some were cremated, but sometimes they were buried in a seated, meditative position. The mound of earth covered them up. Thus, the domed shape of the stupa came to represent a person seated in meditation just like Buddha was when he achieved Enlightenment and knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.

The base of the stupa represents his crossed legs as he sat in a meditative pose called “padma

asana" or the lotus position. The middle portion is the Buddha's body and the top of the mound, where a pole rises from the apex surrounded by a small fence, represents his head. Before images of the human Buddha were created, reliefs often depicted practitioners demonstrating devotion to a stupa.

Importance of Stupas in Buddhism

The stupa represents Buddha's pure and holy mind, Dharmakaya, which is something that is ever present, and each part of the Stupa directs one to the path to Enlightenment. As the importance of the stupa grew, so did its functions and meanings. In addition to being considered the living presence of the Buddha, his protective powers, and living energy, they were also a site of rituals and ceremonies. Their presence eventually attracted other constructions including monasteries.

The pilgrimage activity around the stupa had an important impact on the social history of Buddhism. Merchants, artisans, and monks alike enjoyed the benefits of the income generated by the activity resulting from the emblematic stupas. The religious function of the stupa was still central, but market activity and social interactions revolving around it were equally important for the communities where stupas were present.

The Benefits of Building a Stupa

Building a stupa is a very powerful way to purify negative karma, and to accumulate "punya", merit. In this way one can have realizations of the path to Enlightenment and be able to do perfect work to liberate suffering of all beings, which is the ultimate goal of every life.

The following ten benefits of a stupa were explained by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche in Chenrezig Institute, Australia, in September 1994.

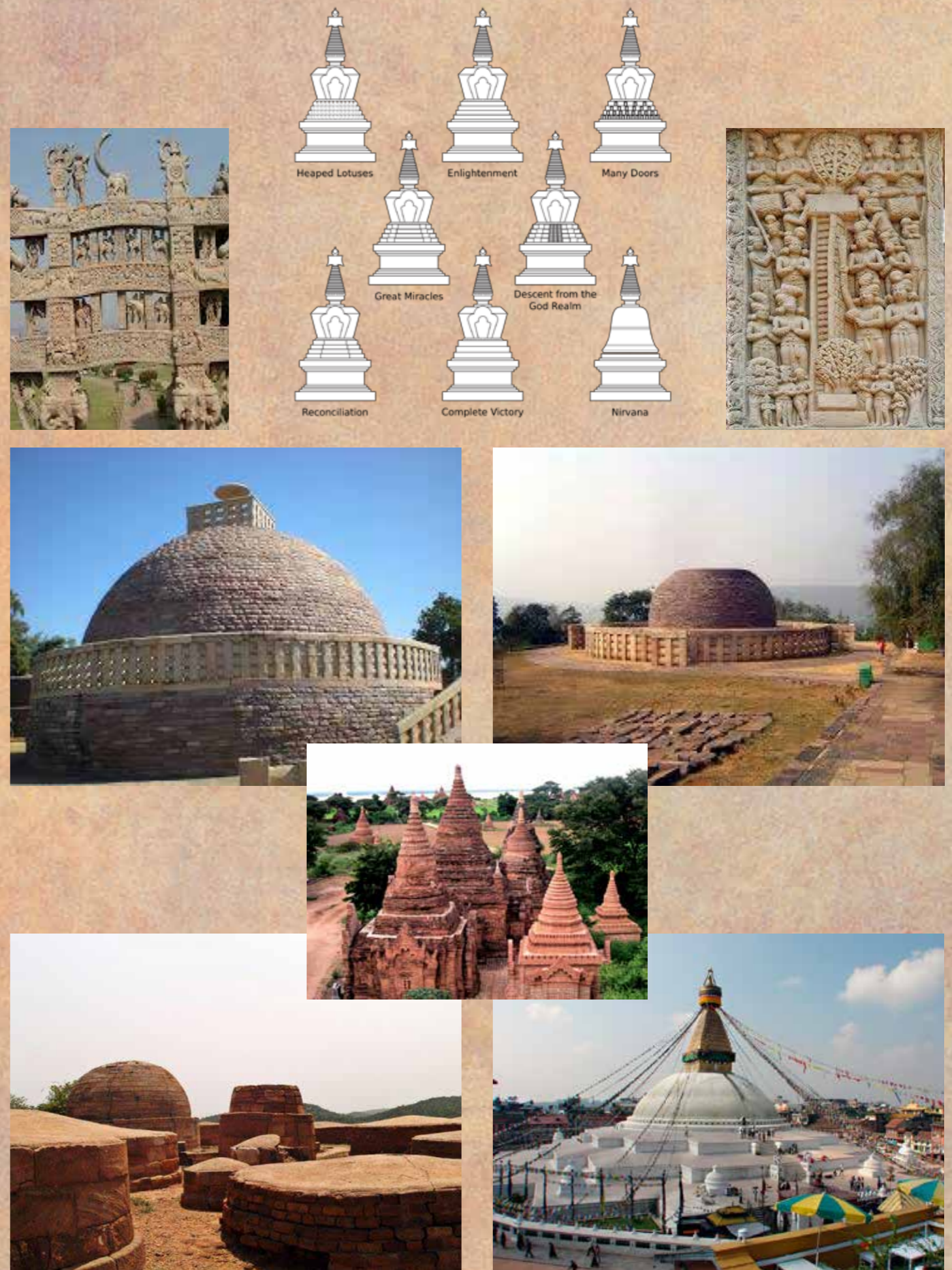
1. If you make 1,000 stupas, you will become a great 'Wheel-turning Holder of the Wisdom Teachings' (Mahayana Secret Mantra) and have clairvoyance knowing all the Buddhadharma.
2. After death, without being born in the lower realms, you will be born as a King.

3. You will become like a sun, rising in the world, with perfect senses and a beautiful body.
4. You will be able to remember past lives and see future lives.
5. You will be able to extensively listen to the Dharma without forgetfulness.
6. The "Stainless Beam" sutra states - 'All negative karma and obscurations, including the five uninterrupted negative karmas, are purified even by dreaming of a stupa, seeing a Stupa hearing the sound of the bell of a stupa and even for birds and flies etc., by being touched by the shadow of a stupa.
7. The sentient beings will always be protected by the Buddhas, who always pay attention to guiding them to achieve complete pure Enlightenment. They abide in the irreversible stage.
8. It is explained by Shakyamuni Buddha in the Sutras, that it is extremely powerful to build a Stupa for those who have passed away, as it immediately changes a suffering rebirth into a fortunate rebirth with the opportunity to meet the Dharma.
9. It can also heal those with serious diseases.
10. There is no question that it accumulates extensive merit and brings success and happiness. Therefore, dedicate for your ancestors, family members and friends who have passed away or who are sick, and for the happiness of yourself and your family in this and future lives."

The Journey to Enlightenment

Buddhists visit stupas to perform rituals that help them to achieve one of the most important goals of Buddhism: to understand the Buddha's teachings, known as the Four Noble Truths (also known as the dharma and the law) so when they die they cease to be caught up in samsara, the endless cycle of birth and death. ☸

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TALAKAVERI THE GANGES OF THE SOUTH



MA NITHYA SATYAGJNANANANDA SWAMI

Talakaveri is the birthplace of the Kaveri river and is popularly also referred to as the river Ganges of South India. Located in the Brahmagiri hill near Bhagamandala, Karnataka, India, it is one of the seven sacred rivers or Sapta Sindhus of the Hindu scriptures. It is around 1,276 meters above sea level. Talakaveri is about 8 km away from Bhagamandala and 48 km from Madikeri. However, there is no permanent visible flow from this place to the main rivercourse except during the rainy season.

Sacred River of the Kodavas

There may be a lot of political turmoil and fight over the waters of the Kaveri between the states

of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, but there is one section of people to whom the river is very sacred. They are the erstwhile warrior clan called Kodavas who are today well settled plantation owners of the region of Kodagu or Coorg, in Karnataka state. To the Kodavas, River Kaveri is worshipped as Goddess Kaveramma, is the most sacred waters and Talakaveri their most important worship site in the whole world.

Religious Significance of Talakaveri

Talakaveri has great religious significance attached to it. The main deity of the temple in Talakaveri is Goddess Kaveramma. Lord Agastheeswara is also worshipped here, which



denotes the link between Kaveri and Saint Agasthiyar (or Agasthya). It is also marked by a small temple, and the area is frequented by pilgrims. There are two temples, a Shiva temple with a rare and ancient Shiva Linga, and another temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha. This temple has a holy Ashwantha tree where, according to legend, the Trimurtis—Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, gave darshan to Agasthiyar.

River Kaveri originates as a spring feeding the tank called the holy Kundike, which gains great prominence on specific days when bathing in the Kundike is considered very auspicious. The waters then flows underground to emerge as the river some distance away. The temple was renovated in recent times, capturing the breathtaking view of the Brahmagiri hills that surround it.

Ganesha Liberates Kaveri from Agasthiyar's Kamandalu

The legend goes that the Kaveri river was held in a kamandalu (a pot of sacred water held by sages) by Saint Agasthiyar. Vinayagar (Lord Ganesha) took the form of a crow and perched on the kamandalu of Agasthiyar when he was meditating. When Agasthiyar realised this, he shooed away the crow. But the divine crow tipped the kamandalu and toppled it. Out poured Kaveri which started flowing. The crow disappeared and in its place stood a small boy.

Agasthiyar thought that the boy was playing some prank and clenching both his fists, went to pound

the head of the small boy. But the boy escaped and Agasthiyar gave chase. Finally, the boy vanished and Lord Ganesha showed Himself to Agasthiyar. Agasthya was aghast at the realisation that he had just tried to knock the head of Ganesha Himself. As atonement, he knocked his own head with both of his clenched fists.

The link between Kaveri and Ganesha also extends to Srirangam as well, in Lord Ganesha's role in setting up the Ranganatha temple there. The temple at Tirumukkudal Narasipura (confluence of Kabini (aka Kapila river, Kaveri and invisible Spatika Sarovara (Crystal Lake)) is also dedicated to Lord Agastheeswara.

Tulasankramana for Talakaveri

On Tulasankramana day—the first day of Makara Masa in Hindu calendar, which normally falls in mid October—thousands of pilgrims flock to the river's birthplace to witness the rise of the fountainhead, when water gushes up from the spring at a predetermined moment. The Tula Snanam (sacred bath in the Tula month) is observed across pilgrim towns of River Kaveri's banks.

Legend also has it that every year on Tulasankramana day Goddess Parvati appears in the Kundike as the sacred Theerthodbhava. Also from Talakaveri, steps lead up to the nearby Brahmagiri peak where the Sapta Maharishis are said to have performed a special yagna. Pilgrims and tourist can take the steps to the hill, to get a view of the blue misty hues of the Brahmagiri. ☸

LIFE IS BLISS

MA NITHYA SHAKTIROOPANANDA

As a teenager living in the United States, I used to ask my parents a lot of questions, with the mindset of a Westerner. My dad would ask me to wear bindi, and I would ask "Why?" They would bring us to the temple, and again, I would go "But Why?" Mom would do puja, and I would ask "Why?"

My mind was filled with whys, looking at all the traditions that we Hindus practice. They were unable to answer the questions that were within me, and I was left thinking that all that I consider as tradition is simply done due to various superstitious beliefs.

It was not till I met my Master, Paramahansa Nithyananda (whom we fondly address as Swamiji), when I discovered the richness of Hinduism, the Vedic Tradition.

The first time I met Him, was on my television at home. Dad was watching one of his videos, and I was wondering why he was constantly playing these videos from a young man with a thick Indian accent who talked very slow for hours together. My logic was not ready to accept Him, but his words just attracted me.

It was only when I went to a satsang, when I realised the richness of the space he puts me into. He puts me into such a powerful, blissful space that I had never imagined. And he explained the context of every action that we practice in Hinduism, from the way we dress, to what we put on our face, to the festivals we celebrate. Every action has such a profound reason. Every action had been designed by the ancient Rishis to shift us to the highest context of Enlightenment.

Many Hindus do not think having a Guru is essential in life. Due to negative paid media, they

have many wrong ideas of what a Guru can do for an individual. In addition to this, even Hindus have started doubting what living Hinduism can do for them.

Ever since I met my Guru Paramahansa Nithyananda, and ever since I have been following Hinduism, my life is filled with abundance. I realised a simple puja can put me in the highest ecstasy of feeling one with the divine. I realised vegetarianism helps me consume only foods which contain positive energies, hence keeping me in an elevated space. I realised that just shifting my cognitions can help me manifest health, wealth, and desires. I realised that the spiritual powers about which I read in the various scriptures are actually possible. Not just for the saints living in the Himalayas, or the saints from tens of thousands of years ago, but for you and me.

When a non-Hindu enters a temple, he sees magnificent architecture and stones. When a Hindu enters a temple, he sees God. Same place, but the eyes through which they view the temple is completely different.

My Guru has given me His eyes. To see the world, to see Hinduism through His eyes. He micromanages the context with which I see every object, the context with which I undertake every action, thus taking me on a beautiful journey from human to divine.

Having Paramahansa Nithyananda as my Guru is my greatest luxury. Just as Arjuna chose Krishna, over Krishna's army, I can say that when I have Him as Guru, he rides the chariot of my life.

I feel that just like the old me, context is what is lacking for every Hindu. I hope this luxury goes to every being on the planet.



JAGANNATH RATHAYATRA JULY 06, 2016





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