



Bala-Gokulam

**Teacher
Handbook**

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA



Bala-Gokulam

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Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA

Welcome to Bala-Gokulam



Gokulam is the place where an ordinary cowherd boy blossomed in to a divine incarnation. It is here that Krishna's magical days of childhood was spent and his powers came to be recognized.

Every child has that spark of divinity within. Bala-Gokulam is a forum for children to discover and manifest that divinity. Bala-Gokulam will enable Hindu children in US to appreciate their cultural roots, learn Hindu values in an enjoyable manner and make good friends. They will also develop a sense of Sewa, Service to humankind.

Our Goal Is ...

- To facilitate children to appreciate, learn and practice Hindu way of life.
- Instill pride and confidence in Hindu children about their identity.
- Raise Hindu awareness in the society around.
- Develop social awareness and leadership skills among children.

Activities In Bala-Gokulam



Children will have lots of fun while they learn. Activities are planned for their physical, intellectual, social and spiritual development. Weekly activities include:

Games		Yoga	
Arts	Crafts	Stories	Bhajans
			Shlokas

Special Events

Festivals

Hindu Festivals like Ganesh Pooja, Raksha Bandhan and Guru Pooja are celebrated with a special focus on children's participation. Children will perform the pooja themselves and the meaning behind the festivals are explained.

Hindu Heritage Camp

Vacation can be magical. That's the time to explore, enjoy and make more friends. Hindu Heritage Camp of HSS conducted during vacations or any other weekends has been a favorite event for the children.

Community Service

Sewa or service is the best way for us to realize the divinity in all and serve the needy. Children from HSS Bala-Gokulam have visited elderly people in convalescent hospital, volunteered at Hindu Mandirs, actively participated in Human Race and have worked with other voluntary groups in serving the community.



"I make it a priority" - Seema Shah (16), Houston, TX

As a Hindu teenager living in America, I make it a priority to participate in cultural or religious activities. The society in this country has a great deal to offer whether it is in education, careers, or recreation. However, it does not give the spiritual and cultural guidance that Hinduism encompasses. Hindu children should realize the importance of their heritage.

The activities offered in Bala-Gokulams are excellent ways for Hindu children to learn about their culture and incorporate the teachings and values in their everyday lives. Furthermore, Bala-Gokulams fosters a productive learning environment that is different from schools.

The breadth of activities from games and exercise to education encourages the children to improve a variety of skills. They also motivate the children to stay committed to the regular Bala-Gokulam classes and partake in the Hindu community events. Thus, Bala-Gokulams are instrumental in providing the necessary cultural and religious education to Hindu children so they may retain and be proud of their Hindu identity.

Starting a new Bala-Gokulam

If you have the desire and the inclination to conduct one such Bala-Gokulam in your town, there is a strong team of dedicated and experienced people in HSS, who are always there to provide training, material and any support necessary.

Steps to start a Bala-Gokulam

The Hindu population in each town is different. Hence, you will have to figure out the best way for your town. Here are some of the standard things that have worked.

- For few days, keep discussing this idea of Bala-Gokulam with your friends and find out who is more interested and committed.
- Make a flier for Bala-Gokulam. A sample flier is attached here. Soft copy is available from www.balagokulam.org and you can modify that. Keep these fliers in Indian grocery stores, Hindu mandirs, or any other place where Hindus meet. Make use of special events like Diwali, Janmashtami, etc. to reach out to more people at one time.
- When people call for details, take down their phone numbers, email, etc. and also check out if they are interested in volunteering.
- Once you have a team of 2 or more people, you are ready to start.
- Contact one of our coordinators and schedule a training session for volunteers and meeting with the parents.
- Find a place to start and get going 😊

Duration, Frequency and Time

- Bala-Gokulam duration can be from 75 minutes to 90 minutes.
- To have the expected impact, it should be held at least once in a week.

Majorities of Bala-Gokulams are held on Saturday or Sunday. However, depending on the convenience of children and parents, they can be conducted at any time and any day of the week.

Time table for 90 minutes

Cheerful, enthusiastic and cordial atmosphere is at the heart of a successful Bala-Gokulam. Physical fitness, knowledge and pride of Hindu Dharma, ability to work together in team and social awareness are being inculcated through various programs. The activities can be broadly classified as 'Sharirik' and 'Baudhik' - the physical and intellectual activities.

The programs depend on the available floor space and number of children. Following is a suggestion for 90 minutes session.

Assembly	5 min
Exercises	5 min
Games	30 min
Surya Namaskar	5 min
Shloka, Bhajans	20 min
Story/Discussion	20 min
Prarthana	5 min

It is better conduct the activities in different groups based on their age.

Other activities

There can be a variety of activities to bring out the **creative power** within the children and Shikshaks and also to make them good **team players**. Here are some ideas that have been found successful. Please experiment and come out with new activities and share with us so that other Bala-Gokulams can benefit from your experiments.

- Clay Modeling - Especially for Ganesha pooja, children can make murti of Ganesha themselves.
- Rangoli - Demonstration and some hands on training.
- Projects on modeling temples with cardboard, foam, sticks, etc.
- Teerth Yatra or Pilgrimage (Visit to temples in your town).
- *Sahal* (Picnic) with all the families to build family level bonding.
- Seva: Visit to convalescent hospitals, children's wards in hospitals, soup kitchens, etc.
- A presentation by social workers group or teenage counselors about challenges facing American society today.
- Sports Day
- Competitions in reciting shlokas, singing songs, speaking, etc.
- Art of Skit writing and acting
- Hindu Jeopardy/Quiz
- Dialogue between parents and children (For teenagers)
- Celebrating Hindu festivals in schools.
- Teaching how to read and write Devnagari script
- Preparing posters on different topics: Can be group projects

Support System for Bala-Gokulam Shikshaks:

- www.balagokulam.org is a good resource place for Shikshaks.
- People, who have been successfully conducting Bala-Gokulams for many years, will be available to conduct training sessions for volunteers or to provide any other assistance required.
- Annual training camp for children and youth volunteers.
- Pravasi Karyakartas will be visiting various places and their trip can be made use of for improving the caliber of Shikshaks.
- Join bala_shikshaks@yahoogroups.com. The purpose of this list is to exchange ideas, experiments, experiences and material related to conducting Bala-Gokulams.

How To Use This Handbook

- This is a handbook for the Shikshaks (Teachers). It is best used after attending a training session for Bala-Gokulam teachers.
- Shikshaks package include:
 - This book (Teacher's Handbook)
 - Bala-Gokulam Book (That is given to children)
 - Games and Yogasana Book
- A suggested month-to-month plan for one year is given here. For each topic listed here, detailed material is provided and also the reference web sites.
- At the end of one year, the Shikshaks should be in a position to make their own plans with the resources available at www.balagokulam.org
- Constant Self-development is the key to becoming a good Shikshak. One has to study to improve one's knowledge, practice to improve one's skills, take up organizational responsibilities to become competent and try new experiments to become more capable.
- Sustaining a Bala-Gokulam and maintaining the growth require a strong organizational system. Please read the section on 'Systems to Sustain' to get some idea about how to expand volunteers team, make collective decisions, plan and execute the activities with precision.
- Involve the parents. Vast talent pool among the parents can add to the quality of programs.
- The topics from the following categories are covered in this suggested plan.
 1. Hindu Dharma
 2. History of Hindus and lives of Great People
 3. Festivals
 4. Social Issues
 5. Organizational
- The plan is given for two age groups (5-9) and (10-15). You may make the plan most appropriate to the children and a particular age group in your place.
- One weekend in every month is devoted to talk about and if possible collectively celebrate the festival of the month. The festivals should be covered in the weekend closest to the festival day. Lives of inspiring people can be covered closest to their birthdays. Here is an approximate timing for the festivals:

FESTIVAL	MONTH	PAGE
Makara Sankranti	January	19
Shiva Ratri	February	20
Yugadi	March	21
Ram Navami	April	22
Hindu Sanghatan Diwas	June	23
Guru Poornima	July	32
Raksha Bandhan	August	35
Ganesha Chaturthi	September	38
Janmashtami	September	41
Vijay Dashami	October	45
Deepaavali	November	46
Geeta Jayanti	December	48

Six festivals that are in bold letters are to be observed in every Bala-Gokulam of HSS. Refer the web site www.hindunet.org/festivals for the exact dates of the Hindu festivals.

SUGGESTIVE PLAN FOR GROUP 2 (10-15 Yr.)

TOPIC	PAGE
1st Month	
Purpose of Bala-Gokulam	1
God in Hindu Dharma	57
Bhagini Nivedita	58
2nd Month	
Raising Hindu Awareness in our Schools (Churcha)	70
What is Hindu Dharma	70
Story of Hanumanta	72
3rd Month	
Meaning of Prarthanaa and abhyas -1	82
Meaning of Prarthanaa and abhyas -2	82
Hindu Scriptures	84
4th Month	
Meaning Behind Rituals ... (1)	87
Life of Doctorji	90
Art of Story Telling	104
5th Month	
Reincarnation and Karma ; Hindu Dharma - Video games	105
Life of Swami Vivekananda	111
Swami Vivekananda's Speech competition	121
6th Month	
Qualities of a Swayamsevak/Sevika	124
Story of Ramayana -1	125
Story of Ramayana -2	125
7th Month	
Ashramas	144
Hindu's Contribution to the World of Sports and Games	145
Prithviraj Chauhan	150
8th Month	
10 Avatars of Vishnu - Part 1	155
10 Avatars of Vishnu -Part 2	155
Hindu Values	161
9th Month	
Meaning Behind Rituals ... (2)	164
Life of Moushiji	167
Duties of a Hindu	168
10th Month	
Hindu Jeopardy/Quiz	170
Durga-Lakshmi-Saraswati	170
Jhnasi Rani Lakshmi Bai	171
11th Month	
Hindus Contribution to the world of Mathematics	181
Story of Rani Padmini; Sati system and Child marriage	185
Poetry and essay writing skills	189
12th Month	
Perfection in God's Creation; Discussion on Sewa	190
Hindu Family	193
Tanaji Malsure - Commander of Shivaji	195

SUGGESTIVE PLAN FOR GROUP 1 (5-9 Yr.)

	TOPIC	PAGE
1 st Month	Heaven and Hell	197
	Elder Brother	197
	One God, many forms	57
2 nd Month	Shibi, the compassionate	201
	Story of Hanumanta -1	72
	Story of Hanumanta -2	72
3 rd Month	Prarthanaa and abhyas	82
	Dhruva, the firm	203
	Panchatantra hindukids.org/grandpa/index_panchatantra.html	
4 th Month	Meaning Behind Rituals ... (1)	87
	Overview of Hindu Deities	207
	Qualities of a Swayamsevak/Sevika	124
5 th Month	Panchatantra Stories	www
	Life of Swami Vivekananda	111
	Swami Vivekananda's Speech competition	121
6 th Month	Story of Ramayana -1	125
	Story of Ramayana -2	125
	Story of Ramayana -3	125
7 th Month	Panchatantra Stories	www
	Markandeya	210
	Story Telling Competition	211
8 th Month	10 Avatars of Vishnu - Part 1	155
	10 Avatars of Vishnu -Part 2	155
	10 Avatars of Vishnu -Part 3	155
9 th Month	Panchatantra Stories	www
	Prithviraj Chauhan	150
	Story of Sudhama	211
10 th Month	Everything happens for Good.	213
	Hindu Jeopardy/Quiz	170
	Durga-Lakshmi-Saraswati	170
11 th Month	Arts and Crafts	214
	Krishna's stories -1	215
	Krishna's stories -2	215
12 th Month	Story of Ranti Deva	215
	Story of Bhasmasura	217
	Tanaji Malsure - Commander of Shivaji	195

There are many short stories for small children on www.hindukids.org and www.hindumythology.com
Please visit these two sites and collect more stories.

Activities For The Parents

In most of the Bala-Gokulams, parents also have parallel activities planned. This is a suggested format for parents activity.

- 10 mins - Shlokas Practice
- 30 mins - Yogasana
- 15 mins - Simple Games
- 10 mins - Geet/Bhajan
- 20 mins - Talk/discussion on Hindu Dharma, Lives of great people, parenting, etc.
- 5 mins - Prarthana (With children)

Initially we may not have enough resources to conduct all these activities. You can start with Yogasana and study group and gradually cover other activities.

The web sites given in this book can help in providing the material for talks or discussions with parents.



Understanding How Children Learn

In Bala-Gokulams, children should learn good values and leadership skills along with knowledge about Hindu culture.

Shikshaks make the Bala-Gokulam a place where children enjoy coming to or a boring place. It is important that Shikshaks understand how children learn and how learning can be made enjoyable to the children as well as for Shikshaks.

Learning through Role models

- Children are influenced by the people in their lives – especially the adults who are important to them, such as parents, other relatives, and teachers. Children learn values and habits mostly by imitating their role models. These things cannot be 'taught'. Shikshaks should be like role models in all aspects. If we sing shlokas and bhajans with devotion and shraddhaa, children will also do. If we are punctual, children will be.
- Children select those people as role models whom they like, whom they respect, admire and adore. We should mold our personalities so that we are 'likeable', we are 'affectionate' and 'friendly' with children while setting up examples. A smiling face and affectionate way of talking to them helps. Playing with them informally after the Bala-Gokulam session brings the Shikshaks closer to the children. *Sampark* - visiting their houses make the children feel that you are part of his family.

Learning and having fun

Children should have both. They should enjoy leaning as well as the group. More friendship they develop with other children, more they feel like coming back. Games play a very important role in building that friendship and bonding.

Keep it simple and yet challenging

Children enjoy activities that are within their ability to master. Try to simplify, maintain or expand your activities in response to the level of understanding the children demonstrate. A healthy competitive spirit and a sense of achievement are good to cultivate for faster learning.

Each child is different

Each child has different learning ability in different areas. We should recognize the strength of each child and make them feel that they can achieve. Do not compare children.

Children's learning proceeds in predictable directions.

Simple -----> Complex

Known -----> Unknown

Self -----> Other

Concrete -----> Abstract

Exploratory -----> Goal Directed

Inaccurate -----> More accurate

Impulsive -----> Self-controlled

Children of different age groups are different. These are some general observations on different age groups. Each child is different. These are only some general observations.

Early Elementary (Age 6 to 8)

More story telling and visual aids make it interesting to children of this age. They enjoy affectionate Shikshaks. Simple crafts can work but difficult ones can get messy.

Rhythm and repetition are two techniques that work for this group. Teaching shlokas, simple songs should follow these two techniques.

Thinking is very concrete at this time. If they have never seen it, heard it, felt it, tasted it, or smelled it, they have a hard time thinking of it. So more visual descriptions in stories should be used. While telling the story of Puranas, Amar-Chitra-Katha books can be used to make them imagine who a 'rishi' is. Similarly, the idea of palace, king, queen, rakshasa, throne, chariot, etc. needs a visual aid in the beginning.

While teaching Yogasanas or conducting games, rather than simply giving instructions verbally, Shikshaks should demonstrate the activity. Doing is important for both the children and the Shikshak.

Children are just learning how to be friends and may have several "best friends" at a time. Fights, although occurring often, seldom have lasting effects.

Children at this stage like to play games. Rules and rituals become fascinating, but the children are not yet ready to accept losing. Cooperative games in which every child wins can be especially enjoyable at this age. Failures should be minimized, and some measure of success should be found

in every experience to ease the blows to young egos. Too much of competition with others is inappropriate at this age.

Middle School (Age 9 to 11)

Activities for the middle school-age children should encourage physical involvement.

Children at this stage are beginning to think logically. They still think in terms of concrete objects and can handle ideas better if they are related to some thing they can do or experience with their senses, but they are moving toward understanding abstract ideas. As they begin to deal with ideas, they think of things as black or white. Something is either right or wrong, fabulous or disgusting, fun or boring. There is very little middle ground.

Although middle school-age children still have difficulty understanding another person's thinking, the 9- to 11-year-olds are beginning to discover the benefits of making other people happy. Near the end of this age range they begin to realize the joy of helping others and start looking for some idealism.

Middle-school-age children have a strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile. School becomes increasingly difficult and demanding for these children. Other pressures are added, too. Successes, even small ones, should continue to be emphasized. Failures should be minimized. (All people learn better and try harder if they believe in themselves and think they can succeed!)

Comparison with the success of others is difficult for children at this age. It tends to erode self-confidence. In addition, it can cause problems in dealing with peers at a time when they are trying to understand and build friendships. Instead of comparing children with each other, build positive self-concepts by comparing present to past performance for the individual.

Young Teens (Age 12 to 14)

This is the age where idealism and activism enters the minds of children. Many young teens turn in to animal rights activists, environmental activists, etc. Stories of great people like Swami Vivekananda and Bhagini Nivedita can provide the right idealism for children at this age.

Young teens enjoy playing with ideas as much as playing sports. Young teens move from concrete to more abstract thinking during this time. If a subject is of interest, it will be intensely explored. Ready-made solutions from adults often are rejected in favor of the young teens finding solutions on their own. In Bala-Gokulam have more group discussions where they are made to think and share their opinions. Give them projects of their interest where they can explore and create their own.

They can be made to understand the complexities in judging and making the right decisions.

Develop leadership skills in this age group. They should be encouraged to tell stories to small children, co-ordinate a skit, write the script for the skit, conduct games, organize a picnic, a program, etc.

Shikshak should be more like a friend to these children.

ART of Story Telling

Story telling is the most important element in public speaking. Like any skill, practice is the best way to improve. Here are some tips to keep in mind while practice.

- Read the story and understand the message you want to convey through this story. Story telling should revolve around that theme. We need not have to tell at the end of story 'the moral of this story is ...'
- Do not read, but tell the story. We will miss eye contact when we are looking at the book. Reading a story is useful with small group of 2-3 children at home.
- Modulations in the voice. Vary the volume and tone with the story.
- You should enjoy the story, so the expressions come out on your face and in your voice. Drop all the inhibitions about acting.
- Eye contact: Move your eyes so that you can see every one.
- Slow down the pace. During normal conversation, most of us speak fast and without much modulation. Children should be able to follow you. So, don't rush. By looking into their eyes, you can see whether they are enjoying it or not.
- The pace should vary with the meaning of the sentence. When you say, "The lion came slow..ly", slow down the speed. When you say, "She started running fast without looking at the back", speed up your telling also.
- Before or after you make a strong point, pause for a while. That gives some time for them to feel the story.
- You can make it gently interactive, Ask questions in between. Questions which require them to say 'YES' or 'NO'. Don't end up in a discussion!
- Have a smiling face.
- Body language: Make use of your hands to bring in the expression needed at places.
- Use examples from their day-to-day life to make it more interesting.
- You can use some pictures to show them.

Every one of us have our own strengths. Use all your creativity and come up with a style that suits you best.

Conducting Discussions

In a group discussion, initial presentation by the moderator should be brief, to the point and make them think on the subjects. The introduction should not have any pre-judgements and opinions. Throw the topic open for them to think.

Make sure every one participates. Many a times it would end up in 2-4 children arguing back and forth.

Do not discourage any opinion.

When the discussion is digressing from the main topic, bring it back on track without wasting much time.

Be prepared for powerful concluding comments that will have an impact.

Teaching Shlokas

The Shikshak should have 'shraddhaa' in reciting religious shlokas. If the Shikshak is very casual about it, children will not have seriousness about it.

- The pronunciation of the Shikshak should be clear and the voice loud. Better the children get to hear it, louder they say it. Louder they say it, quicker they get it.
- First time, say it slow and make children repeat one word at a time.
- Second time, say two words at a time and make them repeat twice.
- Third time, say half line at a time and make them repeat twice.
- Bring out the competitive spirit in the children by asking "who can say the first line now?"
- Generally children say with low volume, because of lack of confidence and comfort level in saying. Frequently, prompt them to say it loud without bothering about the mistakes.
- Appreciate when they say it loud. Make them enjoy a sense of achievement when they get it.
- Explain the meaning of the shloka. Let 3-4 of them read the meaning from the book.
- Every week, revise the previous 3 shlokas and practice the current Shloka.
- 2 Shlokas can be comfortably taught in a month. More can be done depending on the interest of the children and the Shikshaks.
- Parents should also be taught the shlokas we are practicing with the children. Parents can practice them at home.

Teaching Songs

- Select simple songs with simple and appealing tunes for children.
- Once, sing the song completely and let them enjoy it.
- Practice the tune for the first two lines (pallavi) without words 'la-la-la...!'
- Make them repeat one word at a time for the first two lines
- Sing one line at a time and let children repeat.
- Here again, prompt them to sing loud.
- Whatever song they practice for 1 or 2 months, you can have them sing in the next utsav (we celebrate at least 6 utsavs in all the Bala-Gokulams)

Conducting Games

- Have an idea about the number of children in your gana.
- Select more games than what is needed for 30 minutes.
- Maintain enthusiasm in the gana with slogans like 'sanghatan me, shakti hai', 'hara hara - mahadeva', etc.
- Give clear instructions for the game.
- Demonstrate once.
- Make sure all the rules are followed.
- Give chance to all the children.
- Have control over the gana.
- For smaller children, games should be simple with simple rules.
- Remember that the purpose of games is to develop friendship. No hard feelings about winners and losers should be cultivated.
- Keep in mind the constraints of the place while planning the games.

Effective Shikshak

Becoming an effective Shikshak is a process. It is a combination of the knowledge, skills, competence and capacity and some thing more than all of these. Ultimately it is our personality that makes us an effective Shikshak. Like in any 'Saadhanaa', we have to put in continuous effort at it till it becomes effortless and enjoyable.

- *Swaadhyaya* (Self-Study) and *mananam* (contemplation) are important to enhance our knowledge and clarity and we will not run out of stock or steam.
- More a Shikshak thinks about the Bala-Gokulam activities and visualizes how things will flow, easier it will be to plan. One can plan the minute details also. Confusion can be avoided. Plan for every activity -- games, shlokas, songs, stories, skits, etc.
- Friendly personality: Make an effort at becoming more approachable and likeable person by children. By talking to new families, new children, we can enhance our social skills.
- Becoming a good team player. Cultivate the habit of making decisions in a team in the planning baitaks. While participating in such baitaks, detach yourself from your opinions. 'My opinion is just one of the opinion'. Whatever we decide together is every one's decision.
- Our ego should be secondary to the interest of the Bala-Gokulam. It is hard to detect the emergence of ego in our personality. Some signs are:
 - Feeling 'ignored'. 'I was not consulted'; 'I was not told'; type of small thinking coming in to our talk.
 - Getting hurt; getting upset at small things.
 - Frequent use of "I", "My" and "Me" in our conversation.
 - My name was not printed/announced.
 - Looking at some tasks as 'small tasks', 'task below my dignity'.
- Vision of creating new Shikshaks from the children. When a child coming to our Bala-Gokulam become a Shikshak in next few years, that is a mark of our success.
- Harsh on oneself; Soft on others: We should be strict about all the rules, punctuality on ourselves. When mistakes happen from others, be soft on them.
- Positive thinking. Belong to the winner's creed. Try new experiments without any inhibition and encourage others in the team to try new things.

WINNING ATTITUDES

CAN'T	CAN DO
We've never done it before	We have the opportunity to be the first
We don't have enough resources	Necessity is the mother of invention
It will never work	Will give it a try
There's not enough time	We'll reevaluate some priorities
We already tried it	We learned from the experience
There's no way it'll work	We can make it work
It's good enough	There is room for improvement
It's not my job	I'll be glad to take the responsibility

Sustaining Systems

After we start a Bala-Gokulam, certain systems help to work in an organized way and sustain the growth. Following are some such systems.

Sankhya Sheet

Recording *Upasthiti* (attendance) in the Bala-Gokulam. Following is a suggested format:

Bala -- children; Tarun - 18+ men; Mahila - 18+ Women

Date	Bala(5-9yr)	Bala(10+yr)	Tarun	Mahila	Total
10/07/2000	10	8	10	10	38

Database

When a family calls the volunteers for details on Bala-Gokulam, make sure that we collect the details of the family.

Each week, we should collect the details of the new families attending Bala-Gokulam and update in the database. Following is a form that can be used to collect details from each family.



ॐ

Bala-Gokulam

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh

Last Name:

First Name:

Spouse:

Children

Name	Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy)
1.	
2.	
3.	

Phone:

Email:

Mailing Address:



After we collect the information, it should be maintained in an Excel spreadsheet or any database program. If you need a working MS-ACCESS program, please send an email to balagokulam@hssworld.org

Volunteer Sheet

After few weeks, we can call for volunteers among the parents. Here is a sample form that you can make copies and give it to the parents. From the responses, you can expand your volunteer's team.



Bala-Gokulam
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh

Volunteer Sheet

Volunteering at Bala-Gokulam is a very fulfilling and rewarding experience. While we teach, there is so much to learn from the children. It's an opportunity to enhance our knowledge of Hindu Dharma, our communication skills and be part of a friendly team of volunteers.

Every one can contribute in this effort. Each one's talent is useful here. Please offer your talents and time to make Bala-Gokulam a wonderful place for children to imbibe Hindu values of life. Here are some of the areas where we need volunteering. You don't have to have previous experience in performing these tasks. All the necessary training will be provided.

I would like to volunteer for:

- Teaching Shlokas
- Teaching Bhajans And Songs
- Telling Stories
- Giving Brief Talks On Hindu Dharma
- Teaching Yogasans
- Conducting Games
- Arts And Crafts
- Library Project
- Seva: Community Service Activities For Children

Name:

Phone:

Email:



Dhanyavad
Thank You

Planning Baitak

Once in a month, all the Shikshaks in the Bala-Gokulam should meet for 1-1.5 hrs to plan for upcoming 5 weeks. For this baitak to be effective,

- The time should be fixed. E.g: First Friday of every month 8-9:30pm.

Following agendas should be covered in this baitak:

- Quick review of previous month's activities. Feedback from children and parents.
- Plan for upcoming 4-5 weeks (make use of the planning chart in next page). Assign the Shikshaks for each item.
- Plan for any special event (festivals, etc.)
- Updates on projects (Library, etc.)

Activity	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Shlokas				
Bhajan/Geet				
Surya Namaskar				
Games				
Story				
Prarthana				

Depending on the number of ganas we have, more rows can be added to the above chart.

Gata Paddhati

A *Gata* is a unit of 5-7 people. *Gata-Nayak* is the person in-charge of that *Gata*.

As the number of participants increase in Bala-Gokulam, it is important to keep personal contact with every one. Sangh is built on familial relationships. Every one coming to Bala-Gokulam is part of a *Gata*. *Gata-Nayak* keeps regular contact with the 5-7 people in his *Gata*.

Sampark

Sampark is a very unique tradition of Sangh, which literally means 'contact'. Shikshaks visit the families of children and build a very cordial relationship. Children also feel that the Shikshak is part of their family. Many a times when a Shikshak visit the families, parents seek clarifications to clear some doubts.

Sampark is also to bring new people to Bala-Gokulam. We may visit friends of children coming to Bala-Gokulam.

FESTIVALS



FESTIVAL	MONTH	PAGE
Makara Sankranti	January	21
Shiva Ratri	February	22
Yugadi	March	23
Ram Navami	April	23
Hindu Sanghatan Diwas	June	24
Guru Poornima	July	33
Raksha Bandhan	August	35
Ganesha Chaturthi	September	38
Janmashtami	September	41
Vijay Dashami	October	43
Deepaavali	November	44
Geeta Jayanti	December	46

Makara Sankranti

(Usually on January 14th or 15th)



In Samskritam language, '*Kranti*' means change and '*Sankranti*' means **good change**.

It is celebrated on this day because of the positive change in the nature at this time. The Sun enters the sign of *Makara* or Capricorn. From this day, the duration of day increases and that of night decreases. Light symbolizes knowledge, and brighter aspects in our lives and darkness represent ignorance and duller aspects. Thus '*Sankranti*' signifies this positive change of increasing the good qualities in us and decreasing the negative ones.

This also marks the celebration of harvesting season. This happy occasion is termed as *Pongal* in southern *Bharat* and as *Khichadi* in northern *Bharat* - both of them being names of delicacies specially prepared on that day!

In many parts of *Bharat* there is a tradition of special art called Rangoli, which is drawn during this festival season. This art is done in front of the house with the Rice flour and colors.



Flying Kites is seen during this festival. Kite flying competitions are held on this occasion.

In many areas of *Bharat*, there is a tradition of exchanging til-gul the sesame seed and jaggery. The til, brimming with fragrant and delicious oil, stands for friendship and bonding and jaggery for the sweetness of speech and behavior. People exchange til-gul and wish that every one speak sweet words.

The biggest *Mela* - religious fair - on the face of the earth is held once in twelve years at *Prayaag*, the holy confluence of rivers *Ganga*, *Yamuna* and the invisible *Saraswati*.

In short, *Makara Sankramana* embodies the ardent prayer of every Hindu heart :

*Asato maa sadgamaya
Tamaso maa jyotirgamaya
Mrityoormaa amritam gamaya*

Lead me, O Bhagawan, from untruth to Truth, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality.



Shiva Ratri

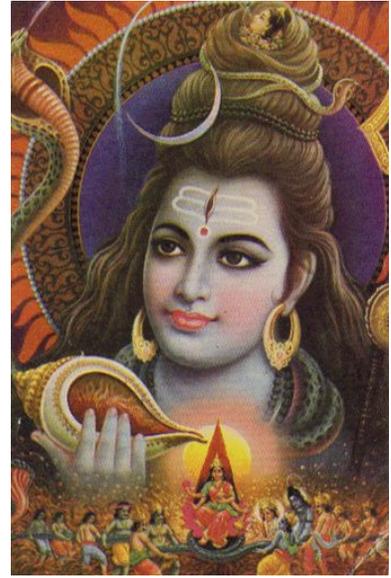
Ratri means night. Shiva-Ratri means the night devoted to Bhagwan Shiva. On this day, Hindus fast the whole day and spend all the time during day and night in singing bhajans to Bhagawan Shiva.

River Ganga on His head is said to be jnana Ganga, the flow of knowledge from teacher to disciple.

On Shiva's head is the **crescent moon** and it represents the nectar of life.

The Snake Garland: This image of Lord Shiva shows that he is fearless.

Ashes (vibhuti) on his body shows that our bodies are already dead, inert matter, which will turn to ashes one day. We should therefore rise above our identification with the body even while we are living. As long as our identification with body remains one can never become the master of situations.



Three-Eyed One

Lord Shiva is trilochana, the three-eyed One. Third eye between the eye-brows, is the eye of wisdom. The other two eyes represent love and justice.

Lord Shiva is also called **nilakantha** (Blue-Necked One). In ages past, when milky ocean was being churned by the gods and demons in order to get the nectar of immortality, the celestial snake, Vasuki, who was being used as the churning rope, began to vomit a fatal poison. None of the gods and daemons wanted it. In desperation they went to Lord Shiva and He took the poison and drank it. However he did not swallow the poison entirely, but kept it in his throat, which turned His neck blue. Only great and wise men will be able to swallow all the poison in life. He did not become poisonous or bitter himself. As he held it in his neck, it became an ornament for him.



Yugaadi

(The first day of *chaitra*, the first month in lunar calendar)

The first day of the year according to the national calendar of Bharat, is significant both for its historical import and for the advent of bountiful nature. The day falls in the beginning of spring - *Vasanta Ritu* - When the Goddess of Nature gets bedecked as a divine bride.

This is celebrated as new year. There is the air of freshness in the nature as this is the spring season. In some parts of Bharat, the tender leaves of *neem* mixed with jaggery and offered to God as *naivedya* and then distributed as *prasaada*. The *neem*, extremely bitter in taste, and jaggery sweet and delicious, signify the two conflicting aspects of human life - joy and sorrow, success and failure, ecstasy and agony. This tells us that we should remain calm and balanced during success and failure, joy and sorrow and take everything as the gift of God. This in fact is the essence of yoga.

Historically, the day recalls the inspiring occasion when the kings Shalivahana and Vikramaditya defeated the invading barbaric forces of *Shakas* from Central Asia during the 1st century A.D. The founding of new Eras in the names of *Vikrama* and *Shalivahana* signifies the supreme importance accorded to them in the Hindu history and tradition for safeguarding the nation's freedom and sovereignty. As such, the continuing tradition of the two Eras has helped to keep aglow the spirit of national freedom in the nation's mind. As a happy and meaningful coincidence, the great founder of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) **Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar**, was also born on this very day of *Yugaadi* of 1889.

Baisaakhi, which follows *Yugaadi*, is the first day of the Hindu Solar Year (2nd week of April). In Punjab and certain other northern parts, it is an occasion for unbounded religious fervor and mass participation in festivities.



Sri Rama Navami

CHAITRA SHUKLA NAVAMI

The ninth day of the bright half of Chaitra

This is the holy day when Sri Rama was born.

" Wherever four Hindus live, *Rama* and *Sita* will be there " - said *Swami Vivekananda*, one of the pioneers of modern Hindu renaissance. The reverse is also equally true - wherever *Rama* and *Sita* live, the people there will remain and live as Hindus.

Every hill and rivulet of *Bharat* bears the imprint of the holy feet of *Rama* and *Sita*. *Sri Rama* reigns supreme to this day in the hearts of our people, cutting across all barriers of province, language, caste or sect. In many northern parts of *Bharat* mutual greetings take the form of *Jay Ramjee Ki* and *Ram -Ram*.

Sri Rama has become so much identified with all the good and great qualities.

Sri Rama's story, *Ramayana*, has been sung and re-sung in all the languages and dialects of the world. The tradition of writing epics centering round the *saga* of *Rama's* achievements started by *Valmiki* in *Sanskritam* and was continued by *Tulsidas* in *Hindi*, by *Kamban* in *Tamil*, by *Ramanujan* in *Malayalm*, by *Krittivasa* in *Bengali* and *Madhav Kambali* in *Assamia* and in fact, in almost every *Bharatiya* language. The influence of *Ramayana* can be seen in many eastern countries like *Indonesia* and *Bali*.

Sri Rama represents the ideal in every aspect. He is ideal son, ideal brother, ideal husband and ideal king.

Hindu Sanghatan Divas (Coronation of Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj)

A small boy is seated on the throne, of course, on a small throne. His soldiers have brought before him bound hand and foot the village Patel. He had dishonored a helpless widow; it was his duty to protect such persons. Indeed he was a wicked Patel. In his limitless pride he did not even think that a small boy would have the courage to hold an inquiry. Yet the young prince subjected this Patel, who proudly sported a thick moustache, to a proper judicial trial. It was clear that the Patel had done wrong.

In a stem and majestic tone the Young prince announced the judgment: both the hands and the feet of the Patel were to be cut off. All present were stunned at the firm devotion of the prince to justice. Not only were they wonder-struck but also pleased beyond measure. The townsfolk began to say to one another: 'Ah! Look! How devoted to justice our young prince is! He is not in the least afraid of the wicked people. He metes out fit punishment to all who do wrong. He is kind and loving towards the poor, the downfallen and the wretched. He is ever determined to help them and to protect them. What is more, he regards all women as mothers. Surely when he grows up into manhood, not only will he save our land but also will uphold our Dharma. Therefore let us all stand by him.'

Don't you wish to know who this young prince was? He was none other than Shivaji. At the time of this incident he was just fourteen. His small kingdom comprised, the few Small villages that skirted the township of Poona. His father was Shahaji who served as a general under the Sultan of Bijapur. The father knew only too well the nature of his son. He felt joyous when he thought of the fearless lion-like disposition of his son which would never let him bow down to any foreigner. How the father became aware of this fearless nature of his son is itself an interesting story.

On a certain occasion Shahaji took his son to the court of the Sultan of Bijapur. Shivaji was then not even twelve years of age. Shahaji touched the ground thrice and saluted the Sultan. He asked his son to do the same thing. But..... Shivaji only retreated a few steps. He stood erect with his head unbent. His dazzling eyes seemed to carry with them his determination that he would not bow down to a foreign ruler. He walked back from the court with a lion-like gait and bearing.

Till then no one had dared to behave in that manner at the court of the Sultan of Bijapur. All were wonder struck at the boldness of the young boy.

Did such acts of the son enrage Shahaji? They did not. On the contrary he was mightily pleased at heart. He had not been fortunate enough to be an independent ruler. He sent his son to Poona, blessing him that at least he might become an independent ruler.

You may ask: how did Shivaji acquire all these noble virtues - courage, heroism, love of the motherland and love of Dharma? Even when he was a little child his mother Jijabai used to tell him stories of heroes, of saints and sages who appear in the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha and the Puranas. As Shivaji listened to these tales of heroism and Dharmic deeds, he grew more and more eager to be like Rama or Krishna, Bheema or Arjuna. He was further blessed in that he had for his teacher and guide such a great man as Dadaji Kondadev. He was also inspired by the memories of the glorious empire of the Vijayanagar Kings in Karnataka.

A Fortress Of Fortresses For The Goddess Of Independence

Shivaji was born in the fort of Shivneri in 1630. Strangely enough, his task of building up an independent kingdom too was to be accomplished with the help of forts only. Even at the young age of sixteen he captured one of the forts. It was the fort of Toranagadh. Torana! What a beautiful name, full of meaning and significance! it was as though he had woven an auspicious garland for independence. The saffron colored sacred banner, the Banner of the Lord, 'Bhagavajhenda', fluttered on the fort. Shivaji ordered order his soldiers to strengthen the fort, this first fort that was to lead to independence. When the ground was being dug in the fort, the diggers saw hidden treasures. Was that the first gift of the goddess of Fortune to the Goddess of Independence? Strangely, the poor diggers who came by so much wealth were not in the least moved by thoughts of greed. They carried the entire treasure to Shivaji and handed it over to him. They knew it was wealth granted for the struggle for independence, it belonged to the lord and they were not to touch it.

After Toranagadh Shivaji began to capture one fort after another. The news that Shivaji was capturing forts reached the Sultan of Bijapur. In order to crush Shivaji the Sultan hit upon a treacherous plan. He got Shahaji captured by deceitful means; then Shahaji was brought to the Sultan's presence and was thrown into prison. A rumor spread that Shahaji would be tortured and executed.

This news was like a thunderbolt to Shivaji who was rejoicing in the birth of an era of independence. His mother Jijabai was heart-broken. She felt as if the God of Death himself was about to snatch her sacred 'maangalya' (The symbol of a life-long partnership with the husband). On the heels of this news came two other bits of frightening news: one, that Fateh Khan, the valiant Sardar of Bijapur, was proceeding against Shivaji with a large army; another, that Farrad Khan, yet another valiant general, was attacking Sambhaji, the elder brother of Shivaji. It was clear that the Sultan was posing these threats only to see that Shivaji gave up fighting and surrendered to him. If he did not surrender and continued to fight, his father's life would be in danger.

Shivaji was worried, not knowing what he should do. At this juncture his fourteen year-old wife, Sayibai, said to him: "Why do you worry yourself over this? See that your father is freed.

See to it also that you retain this state of independence. Destroy your enemies." She was a worthy wife of a hero like Shivaji, Wasn't she?

Shivaji came to a decision. The commander of Purandara gadh was in the employ of the Sultan of Bijapur. Shivaji won his heart with soft-spoken, friendly words. He stationed a small army there. The soldiers of Shivaji fought against Fateh Khan who attacked the fort. This was the first test of the battle for independence. So valiant were the men of Shivaji that Fateh Khan had to retreat and run away. Elsewhere Sambhaji too broke the back of the attack of Farrad Khan.

All this was victory. But how was he to save his father? Shivaji was deeply troubled by this thought. Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, a plan occurred to him. His intellect was as sharp as his arms were supple. Shahjehan was the Emperor in Delhi at that time. So he wrote to the Emperor: "My father is kept captive by the Sultan of Bijapur. As soon as he is released I and my father will willingly serve you. We are very eager." The Sultan of Bijapur came to know of this. He knew well that the Emperor of Delhi was waiting for an opportunity to attack him. He feared what would happen to him if the Emperor decided to attack him. So with all due honor he released Shahaji. With his valor and his diplomacy, Shivaji thus overcame the first great danger to freedom.

Shivaji was twenty-eight. By then Kondana, Purandara, Kalyan, Raigadh and other forts numbering forty flew the flag of freedom. It was also at this time that on the west coast the English, the Portuguese and other foreigners set foot. Shivaji was apprehensive that some day these foreign armies might occupy the whole land. Intent on containing them he began building fortresses by the sea. He began to equip himself with warships and trained the navy. Shivaji was the first among those who in their farsighted vision saw the lurking dangers of foreign domination, and acted to check such aggression.

The Terror Of The Enemies

Sultan Adilshah saw how Shivaji's Swaraj would come true, and felt both anxious and helpless. Every day he received news of some fort or the other falling into Shivaji's hands! The Sultan had a foster mother, by name Uliya Begum. She hated Shivaji like poison. One day she herself held a Durbar. The far-famed heroes of Bijapur all attended it. At that Durbar Uliya Begum threw out the challenge to all present: "If there is one amongst you who can capture and bring Shiva ji captive here, let him accept this token gift of 'pan'." So saying she held out the silver platter in which was placed the ceremonial 'pan' and betel-nut offering. A seven-foot tall robust general stood up and accepted the gift. The general was Afzal Khan. He was a Pathan general who was as brave as he was cruel and deceitful. The Sultan sent a strong force of 25,000 soldiers to help him.

Afzal Khan first proceeded to destroy Bhavani of Tuljapur, the family deity worshipped by Shivaji. His axe broke the idol of Goddess Bhavani of Tuljapur to pieces. The Khan desecrated this idol and another in Pandharpur. Shivaji was being informed of all these happenings daily. The Khan knew that as long as Shivaji was safely behind his fortresses and was in the jungle areas, it was difficult to defeat him. He hoped that Shivaji would come into the open plains and offer battle if he indulged in such desecration of temples, slaughter of cows and the molestation of women. Then it would be easier for him to defeat Shivaji.

Shivaji was not slow to understand this scheme; he knew that the Khan would overpower him if he came down from the forts and offered battle. So he made up his mind to proceed to the new fort of Pratapgadh which he had built in the forest of Javali. He then planned to attract the Khan to this place and fight him there. Just at this time he had a dream, in this dream Goddess Bhavani appeared to him and blessed him saying that he would be victorious.

Afzal Khan wanted to make Shivaji come down from the fort of Pratapgadh and meet him on the plains. Towards this end he sent a representative of his with secret instructions. He met Shivaji and politely informed him that Afzal Khan was a great admirer of his father and that he did not intend any harm and Shivaji should come down to meet him. In reply, Shivaji sent a flattering letter through his own representative. He wrote, "You are like an uncle to me. You must forgive all my crimes. You should come to Pratapgadh and uplift me and take me to the Sultan of Bijapur." The humble and pleading tone of Shivaji's letter deceived the Khan. And the representative sent by Shivaji praised the courage of the Khan and made fun of Shivaji's cowardice. So the Khan was very much pleased.

The Khan arrived at the forest of Javali with all his forces. He stationed himself right at the foot of Pratapgadh. It was decided that Shivaji and Afzal Khan should meet as friends. It was also agreed that, as Shivaji was a little terrified, Afzal Khan alone should meet Shivaji and the bodyguards of both should remain at some distance.

It was the night before this meeting. Who could sleep on such a night? Netaji, Tanaji, Kanoji and other trusted lieutenants of Shivaji came down from the fort and with their battalions, hid in the forest, they stood ready for action. They had been instructed that they should fall upon the enemy ranks and destroy them the moment they heard the booming cannon on the fort. The day dawned. As usual Shivaji bathed, and worshipped Lord Shiva. He put on a metallic helmet to protect the head and a metallic cast to protect the chest. In the scabbard at his waist, were the dagger 'Bhavani' and a sharp knife. Meditating on Goddess Bhavani he went down from the fort, to meet Afzal Khan. They were to meet half-way down the hill; the place was hidden from view from the camp of Afzal Khan. In the shamiana the Khan waited for Shivaji. He rose as soon as he saw Shivaji. Their eyes met for a short while. Pretending to offer him the customary embrace of friendship, the Khan invited Shivaji. He stretched both his powerful and long arms in an act of embrace of friendship. He stretched both his powerful and long arms in an act of embrace. It seemed as though it was an embrace of death itself. But whose death? Shivaji too came forward and embraced him. At once the Khan drew out his sharp knife and biting his lips in anger thrust it into the side of Shivaji. Shivaji's steel vest tore with a grating noise, Quickly Shivaji released himself from the hold of the Khan and drawing out his own sharp knife thrust it deep into the entrails of the Khan. The Khan tried to run away. But Shivaji flung his sword at him and at one stroke the head of the Khan fell down severed.

Shivaji stuck the severed head of the Khan on his sword and ran up the fort. Simultaneously the cannon also boomed as if it would cut open the skies. The Khan's soldiers were rejoicing, forgetful of the situation in the thought that Shivaji would have been caught by Khan. Suddenly the soldiers of Shivaji pounced upon them like leopards. Goddess Tulaja Bhavani was now fully avenged. The Khan's forces were completely destroyed. Shivaji was all victorious. 'He sent Jijabai a gift. Can you guess what that gift was? The head of Afzal Khan!

Shivaji's fame as the slayer of Afzal Khan spread every where in our own country and abroad. A dark and dismal gloom descended on the Sultan of Bijapur. But Shivaji did not grow careless in the joy of victory. Taking advantage of this tempo of victory he proceeded to other places and annexed quite a few forts of the Sultan of Bijapur.

The Sultan of Bijapur again chose another general and sent him to attack Shivaji with a force seventy thousand strong. The general, Siddi Jauhar, tried hard to capture Shivaji who was then in Panhalgadh. Even the English came to his assistance with their artillery. The attack gathered more and more strength. Shivaji hoped that the attack would lose its force and strength as soon as the monsoon set in. But in this Shivaji was disappointed. At the same time, in answer to a request from the Sultan of Bijapur, the Badshah of Delhi sent his uncle Shaista Khan with an army, a hundred thousand strong, to attack Shivaji. All thought that the hopes of Swaraj and the survival of Shivaji were completely blotted out.

During this period of great danger Shivaji's mother Jijabai took charge of the administration in the place of her son and managed the affairs ably. In the meanwhile Shivaji came to the decision that he should free himself from this encirclement. But how? For Siddi Jauhar guarded the fort from below. Shivaji thought of the less dangerous mode of escape. He sent to Siddi Jauhar through his envoy a letter offering to surrender. He had appealed earnestly that he would surrender unconditionally the next day and that he should be given pardon. The moment news of this surrender reached the soldiers of Jauhar they spent the whole night in great merriment. They hardly knew that such letters from Shivaji were sweet only to deceive. It was a night of pouring rain, and terrible thunder and lightning. Just at that moment Shivaji and 800 of his men got down the fort and proceeded stealthily towards Vishalgadh. The soldiers posted to watch the enemies were no doubt in their tents, but they were lost in merriment thinking of the surrender of Shivaji. Even the slightest suspicion would have resulted in utter destruction. Hence Shivaji's men were anxious at every step. But Bhavani's blessings were with this small battalion. They were able to escape.

The group of Mavali soldiers carrying Shivaji in a palanquin ran faster and faster. As they ran the whole area was lit up with a large streak of lightning. One of the spies of Siddi Jauhar noticed the party and he ran to inform Siddi Jauhar of this escape. On hearing this Jauhar was thunder-struck. Still he did not lose heart. He sent for his son-in-law Siddi Masood. He was entrusted with the cavalry and was sent in hot pursuit of Shivaji. Shivaji too felt that it would be difficult to escape from this chase. But once again he thought of a plan. He sat in another palanquin and traveled in a different direction. There was a man in the army who was like Shivaji. This man put on the clothes of Shivaji and sat in the first palanquin. Siddi Masood overtook Shivaji's soldiers, captured . him and proceeded to Siddi Jauhar. But when the captive was questioned it 'was found that he was a 'Shivaji' by name and was just a barber of Panhalgadh! All were put to shame.

So Siddi Masood again took up the chase. By that time Shivaji and his soldiers had already covered twenty-five miles and were now near the valley of Gajapur. Vishal gadh was a few miles from there. Five thousand soldiers of Masood raced towards the group. Shivaji had a brave lieutenant, a man strong like Bheema. He was Baji Prabhu Deshpande. He asked Shivaji to proceed to Vishalgadh taking half the force with him. With the remaining half he was there to face the mighty battalion of Siddi Masood. It was a sight to see Baji Prabhu wielding two swords in both his hands.

In that narrow valley Baji Prabhu began cutting down the Pathan soldiers who rolled in again and again like waves. In the battle he too was wounded all over the body and blood was flowing out. In spite of this he gave battle till the evening. Many of his soldiers too fell in this battle. Finally Baji Prabhu fell a victim to an enemy's sword that severely wounded him. At the same time Shivaji had overpowered the soldiers who were attacking Vishalgadh, and climbing up the fort let the cannon resound in Victory. As Baji Prabhu lay dying he heard this sound. He died in peace, happy that his efforts for his master had not been in vain. The valley was made sacred by the blood of this martyr. From thence this valley came to be known as Pavan Khindi or the Sacred Valley.

The news that Shivaji escaped from Panhalgadh and reached his capital fell on the ears of the Sultan of Bijapur. He felt like one who was struck by a thousand thunder bolts at once. He could not summon again the courage to attack Shivaji. But Shivaji had the other danger from Shaista Khan to attend to. How was he to free himself from this ? For this Shivaji chose the month sacred to the Muslims when they observe Ramzan. It was a time when the community would fast all day and then eat sumptuously and be fast asleep at night. The day also was the anniversary of the coronation of Aurangzeb. Need it be said that on that day there would be all the revelry and merriment of a great feast? , On that day Shivaji came down from Raigadh with an army of two thousand soldiers. He stationed himself at a distance of some two miles from Poona. Shaista Khan was then camping in the Lal Mahal at Poona, where Shivaji had been brought up as a boy. In and around Poona a hundred thousand soldiers of the Moghul Emperor were stationed.

A childhood friend of Shivaji by name Babaji moved to wards the Moghul camp with a small force of soldiers. Behind him proceeded Shivaji with another small troop. Babaji entered the city, chatting and shouting. The sentries stopped him and his men. But without a moment s hesitation, Babaji said, "We too, are the Khan's men; we just went out to keep watch and are now coming back." He and his men disregarded the sentries and quietly entered the city. Shivaji's soldiers followed them. Shivaji went directly towards the gates at the rear of the Lal Mahal. From there he went to the Kitchen and cut down all who were there. From there he proceeded to the place where Shaista Khan was sleeping. He had to pull down a small wall that obstructed his entry. A servant heard the wall collapse and went to inform the Khan of what was happening. But the Khan was so sleepy that he drove the servant away saying that it must be some rat in the kitchen.

Shivaji and his men rushed in. By that time the entire Lal Mahal was reverberating with shouts which announced that the enemy had broken in. The wives of Shaista Khan hid him behind a curtain. Shivaji burst in and flung his sword. Three fingers of the Khan, one as it were for the three syllables of the name of Shivaji, were chopped off by this throw.

The Khan jumped down from the window. By then the Moghul army had surrounded the Lal Mahal. In this utter confusion Shivaji and his men shouted, "Catch the enemy, cut him into pieces!" They opened the doors of the Lal Mahal and went away. They escaped and raced to Simhagadh on the horses that were waiting for them in readiness.

This incident convinced Shivaji's enemies that he was not just a 'mountain rat' but some sort of a fiend or demon, of superhuman powers. Aurangzeb was put to unbearable shame and even transferred Shaista Khan to Bengal as a punishment.

To build up such a vast kingdom independently and to rule it with an army and a navy, Shivaji needed lots of money. Where could he hope to obtain so much wealth for the purpose? He decided to extract this money from Aurangzeb himself who was enjoying the wealth of this country. In those days Surat was known to be almost the city of Kubera, the God of Wealth. So he attacked Surat on one occasion and then emptied the city of its great wealth.

In The Clutches of The Moghul Emperor

This was the limit of Aurangzeb's patience and he was in a great fit of rage. But he checked himself from leading an army against Shivaji. He had known well how sharp the tearing nails of this mountain rat' were. So he thought of a plan. He decided that he should send a 'Lion' to overpower this lion. He chose for this task the King, Raja Jayasimha. (incidentally, 'Simha' means a lion.) Jayasimha was a great warrior and a hero; he was also a clever general. What a shame that a man like him should himself be subservient to a foreigner who was ruling the land! Jayasimha proceeded south with his large army. He won over the Sultan of Bijapur to his side. The battle against Shivaji began. All of a sudden Shivaji wrote a letter to Jayasimha informing him that he would agree to a friendly compromise. What was more, he met Jayasimha and told him that he would remain loyal to the Badshah at Delhi.

Shivaji was a lion that had grown up independently in the mountain ranges of Sahyadri. How then did he all of a sudden agree to bow down to the Badshah? All were baffled. Many thought that there lay behind this some secret plan. It is possible that Shivaji had planned to go to Delhi on the pretext of serving the Badshah as a dependent and then to put an end to the life of Aurangzeb in a direct encounter. This was perhaps a venture of greater heroism and sharper strategy than ever before in his life. Accordingly, Shivaji proceeded to meet the Emperor, Aurangzeb. His son Sambhaji also accompanied him. At home, in the land of freedom, all were filled with great anxiety. As they proceeded, the Hindu community welcomed him and with great respect bowed down to him. Shivaji reached Agra in order to meet Aurangzeb. The latter too was equally tactful. He never let Shivaji approach him. He bid him stay at a distance in the court. This was a great disappointment to Shivaji's hopes. Aurangzeb also acted in a manner that insulted Shivaji. Aurangzeb did not keep the promise that he would treat him with respect. Naturally Shivaji was greatly enraged. Ignoring Aurangzeb he left the court.

Shivaji was now in great danger. For Aurangzeb was not such a fool as to let an enemy who had come within his reach escape easily. He ordered Shivaji to be imprisoned and to be executed also.

In spite of the gravity of the situation Shivaji did not lose heart. At this critical hour his intellect and his courage shone more brightly. Suddenly 'Shivaji 'took ill.' He soon 'grew worse'. Shivaji begged of Aurangzeb that his Maratha soldiers may be allowed to return. Aurangzeb felt relieved and permitted them to go. Shivaji began distributing sweets to the Fakirs, mendicants and ascetics of the town hoping that his illness may be cured. He began sending gifts also to the wealthy in the town. All these were permitted by Aurangzeb. Even such a very clever man as Aurangzeb had no doubts. No Vaidya or Hakim could improve Shivaji's 'condition'. The day of

Shivaji's execution had been fixed. On the previous day Shivaji's 'illness' grew very serious, and he lost 'consciousness'.

As usual the baskets that would carry the sweets were brought in. Shivaji who was lying on his 'sick bed' suddenly jumped into one of the baskets and so did his son Sambhaji. Immediately the servants put on the lids and carried the baskets away.

The sentries who had been examining the baskets were convinced by long custom that they contained nothing but sweets. Even on that day the chief of the sentries, Polad Khan, examined a few of the baskets. They contained mere sweets. Luckily the Khan did not, chance upon the baskets in which Shivaji and Sambhaji were hidden. That was by the grace of Goddess Bhavani, coupled with the forgetfulness of the Khan. He must have meant 'Let him live' when he said, 'Let the baskets go.'

Inside the prison where Shivaji had been lying a little while before, a friend of Shivaji by name Hiroji lay down. He put on the royal ring which Shivaji had given him. He lay down, with his hand which showed this ring thrust out. The rest of the body had been covered with the blanket. Madari, an innocent looking lad, was massaging the limbs. Polad Khan used to peep in now and again just to find out how Shivaji fared. The day came to a close and it was nightfall. The 'Shivaji' who was lying there all the time got up. He made up the blankets and the pillows to look like a man on the couch his usual clothes, he came out and announced to the sentries that the condition of Shivaji was very serious and that it was a matter of a few hours for Shivaji. He said he was going to bring some medicine. So saying he went out. Madan too quietly followed him. Both went away never to return. Inside, on the couch, lay the huddled imitation of Shivaji. Outside the prison the sentries stood with swords drawn.

The day dawned. That was the day appointed for the execution of Shivaji. Polad Khan came in. There was a strange silence. He grew suspicious. As he stepped in he saw 'Shivaji' asleep. For a moment this sight put some comfort into his heart. But there was no movement. Thinking that Shivaji might have died the Khan came near and pulled back the blanket. He was shocked to see just the bare bed and the pillows! Shivaji had disappeared. You can imagine the feelings of Polad Khan, and, more important still, of Aurangzeb. They must have felt the agony of being stung at once by a thousand scorpions. Aurangzeb at once ordered his army to capture Shivaji and the army set out in all directions.

By this time Shivaji and Sambhaji had already mounted the horses that were kept in readiness for them and proceeded south. They dashed away at great speed. On the way they were sheltered comfortably in the " mathas " established by Swami Samarth Ramdas.

Like a holy man in the robes of a 'sanyasi', Shivaji finally reached Raigadh. For a while even his Mother Jijabai could not recognise her son. But when she understood who it was, what a shock of recognition! Who can describe the ecstasy, at such a moment, of a mother who had borne such a noble son?

When the news of Shivaji's escape from Agra reached the ears of his enemies in the south, they were all speechless and helpless. Not just that, Shivaji's fame spread all over India. Shivaji had thrown dust into the eyes of the greatest schemer and politician like Aurangzeb and had escaped from the latter's capital where all the twenty-four hours of the day sentries stood with

drawn swords. He had evaded the gaze of the Moghul soldiery for a distance of a thousand miles. The world had never before heard of such daring and cleverness.

Shivaji The Emperor - The Protector Of The Land And Its Dharma

Shivaji established an independent empire that was a source of inspiration to all the Hindus. Yet he had not been crowned in accordance with the rites of the Shastras. Many, therefore, did not feel that he was truly the King. So a great pundit from Kashi came down south to remedy this shortcoming in the life of Shivaji. Shivaji was crowned King by this great pundit, Gagabhatta by name, in accordance with the rites of the Shastras. This great event took place in 1674. Shivaji was then 44 years of age. The towering fort of Raigadh became the capital. After touching his mother's feet and obtaining her blessings, Shivaji sat on a golden throne on the fort. Gagabhatta held over his head the golden umbrella, the symbol of Kingship, and proclaimed that Shivaji had become the Chatrapati. Women offered 'arati'. Sages and saints blessed him. The people assembled shouted in great joy: "Victory to Shivaji Maharaj!" The cannons over the forts resounded. The Sultan of Bijapur and the English acknowledged Shivaji as an independent King and sent him gifts. Samarth Ramdas sang in praise of this great event: "The land and its Dharma have been uplifted. A kingdom of bliss has arisen."

Shivaji did not just content himself with establishing an independent kingdom by defeating his enemies. He also undertook reforms to make his people happy and contented. To him the people were the gods and he would let no one harm them. His soldiers had to go far to defeat the enemies. To these soldiers he had laid down a firm rule: "No harm should come to the people whom you meet on the way. Their standing crops should not be touched." Shivaji would always mete out severe punishment to those who disobeyed his orders. Shivaji was all affection for the poor farmers of villages. They were all, at that time, groaning under the injustice of wealthy zamindars. Shivaji took over the land of such zamindars and distributed them among the tillers of the soil.

Untouchability too was rampant among the Hindus at that time as it is today. Society had branded some amongst its own members untouchables and had kept them at a distance from the others. Shivaji loved them also. He invited them to join his army and promoted them to high positions and offices in it. They too served Shivaji and looked up to him with great devotion. They struggled hard for the establishment of Swaraj. Many of them gave up their lives too fighting. Shivaji set an example to all Hindus that they belong to the same faith and should not hate one another.

Shivaji was also greatly interested in the education of the people. Sanskrit language had lost its glorious position. Everywhere Persian was being held up to esteem. Shivaji saw to it that Sanskrit words were substituted for Persian words.

Sometimes, Hindus who had been forced to become Muslims wished to come back. But the Hindus refused to take back such converts. Shivaji felt that this was not right. So he reconverted all those who wished to return to their old faith. He also cast aside the foolish belief that it was sinful to undertake a journey on the seas. He undertook expeditions on the sea and established forts. Shivaji was very angry with people who were corrupt or who worked against their country. He hated those who betrayed the land. He would have punished even his own son if the son had turned against his country. Shivaji was an embodiment of justice. He never showed any special favors to his relatives. He always encouraged those who were virtuous and meritorious. This enabled those who were virtuous to progress and occupy high places. There

was no scope for selfish contrivers in his kingdom. In this manner Shivaji revolutionized every department of life.

This is the thrilling tale of how Shivaji won 'Swaraj'. As we read it don't we feel that we too should follow the example of Shivaji? Why is this so? It is because Shivaji underwent all hardships for the sake of his country, for the sake of its Dharma. He did not care for his own life and quite often entered the very jaws of death. Till his last breath, he lived for his country and for the Dharma of the Hindus. It is nearly three hundred years since he died but the memory of this great man lights up the torch of inspiration.



Sri Guru Pooja

Full Moon Day of Aashaadha (July)

Devotional worship of the Guru - the preceptor - is one of the most touching and elevating features of the Hindu cultural tradition. The auspicious moment of *Vyaasa Poornima*, chosen for observing this annual festival, is no less significant. It was the great sage *Vyasa*, son of a fisherwoman, who classified the accumulated spiritual knowledge of the *Vedas* under four heads - *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Saama* and *Atharva*. To him goes the credit of composing the authentic treatise of *Brahma-sootras* to explain the background of *Vedas*. He also wrote the eighteen *Puranas*, the stories of our great heroes and saints, to carry the spiritual and moral precepts contained therein to the common masses.

The greatest of epics of all times and of all climes - *Mahaabhaarata* - embodying the immortal song of God, the *Bhagavad Geeta*, also in it, is also the priceless gift of *Vyasa*. The *Bhaagavata*, the thrilling and devotional story of *Sri Krishna*, was also his contribution. It is in the fitness of things that *Vyasa* should be looked upon as the supreme preceptor of mankind. Offering of worship to him signifies the worship of all the preceptors of all times.

The Guru in the Hindu tradition is looked upon as an embodiment of God himself. For, it is through his grace and guidance that one reaches the highest state of wisdom and bliss. "My salutations to the Guru who is *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Maheswara*. The Guru is *Parabrahma* incarnate"

Gururbrahmaa gururvishnuh gururdevo Maheswarah |
Guruh-saakshaat parabrahma tasmai shrigurave namah | |

Various have been the great sages and saints who have been the spiritual and religious preceptors to countless individuals down the centuries. But is there any one who can be looked upon as the preceptor for the entire Hindu people - for all their past, present and future generations? Obviously, no individual can play that role. A human being is after all mortal and, however great, has his own limitations. He cannot be a permanent guide for the entire nation for all time to come. The preceptor for a whole society should be able to act as a perennial source of inspiration to the people, embodying the highest and the noblest national values and ethos. To the Hindu people, such a Guru can be no other than the sacred *Bhagava Dhruvaj*.

No one knows when and how this flag came into being. It is as ancient as the Hindu people themselves. It has flown over the hermitages of the seers and *sanyaasins* and also over the

celestial palaces of emperors. It has flown triumphantly over the battlefields of freedom struggle and has symbolized the immortal spirit of freedom in the Hindu mind. It is the one supreme symbol held in universal reverence by all sects and castes, and all creeds and faiths of the Hindu people. It is in fact the greatest unifying symbol of the entire Hindu world.

The color of the *Bhagava Dhwaj* - the saffron, depicting renunciation and service, epitomizes the culture of *Bharat*. The flames rising from the *yajna* are saffron in color and indeed reflect this spirit. The concept of *yajna* is extraordinarily unique to Hindu culture and tradition. *Yajna* is not merely a physical ritual. That is only symbolic. The *Bhagavad Geeta* describes the concept of *yajna* as the sacrificial offering of one's self to the good of all beings. "Not mine, but thine" is the true message of *yajna*. Whatever one achieves in this life in terms of physical prosperity and knowledge, one has to offer them back to the society. The *Ishaavaasya Upanishad* declares :

Ishaa Vaasyamidam sarvam, yatkincha jagatyaam jagat |
Tena tyaktena bhunjeethaah maa gridhah kasyaswiddhanam | |

"God is the lord of all creation. After offering to Him, enjoy only that which is left over by Him. Do not rob what belongs to others."

Acquiring of wealth is no sin but utilizing all of it for one's own self and one's own family is very much so. In the *Bhagavad Geeta* Sri Krishna warns: "He who eats all by himself without first offering to others eats only sin". However much one may earn, only the minimum things necessary for one's physical sustenance have to be utilized and the rest offered in service to the society. This is the Hindu way of tackling the challenge of harmonizing economic progress with social justice. This attitude, even while giving full scope to individual initiative, effectively neutralizes the evils of individual capitalism. Also, while it ensures social justice for the lowliest in society, the tragedy of state capitalism of the communist type is obviated and the sanctity of individual freedom upheld.

The superiority of the concept of individual freedom implied in this trusteeship principle lies in its freedom to sacrifice for the social good with a high spiritual motivation, along with the commonly understood freedom to earn and acquire wealth. How is this transformation in individual's attitude to be effected ?

Says *Sri Golwalkar Guruji*: " Herein comes the genius of the Hindu viewpoint which prepares the individual's mind for this adjustment. He is educated and enlightened with regard to the true nature of happiness. The goal that is kept before him is not merely one of physical enjoyment; that is not going to give him lasting happiness. For that, he has to rise beyond his dependence on the physical objects and plunge into the depths of his own being and discover the eternal and boundless ocean of joy and bliss within. He will then realize that the people around him are also manifestations of the same spirit and the enjoyment of the fruits of his labor by them is equivalent to his own enjoyment. It is against the background of this life-attitude that a balance could be achieved. "

Rakshaa Bandhan

Full Moon Day in the month of Shraavana

The *Rakshaa Bandhan* stirs up one of the deepest and noblest emotions in the human heart - the abiding and chaste bond of love between the brother and the sister.

The delicate cord tied by the sister to the brother on this day pulsates with this sublime sentiment. History and legends of Bharat abound in touching episodes of ladies seeking protection from far-off, unacquainted heroes, though the *Raakhi*. A story is told of Alexander's wife approaching his mighty Hindu adversary *Pururava* and tying *Raakhi* on his hand, seeking assurance from him for saving the life of her husband on the battlefield. And the great Hindu king, in the true traditional *Kshatriya* style, responded; and as the legend goes, just as he raised his hand to deliver a mortal blow to Alexander, he saw the *Raakhi* on his own hand and restrained from striking.

A more poignant instance is of the princess of a small *Rajput* principality. It speaks of the spell the *Raakhi* had cast even on those of alien faiths. The princess sent a *Raakhi* to the Moghal Emperor Humayun to save her honor from the onslaught of the Gujarat Sultan. The emperor who was engaged in an expedition against Bengal, turned back and hastened to the rescue of his *Raakhi* sister. But, alas, to his utmost sorrow, he found that the kingdom had already been overrun and the princess had committed *Jauhaar*, i.e., leaped into the flames to save her honor.

The sister-brother relationship highlighted by the *Raakhi* goes far beyond the mere personal protection of a female from a male. It also implies the basic element of an amicable and harmonious social life where all members of the society look upon themselves as brothers and sisters and as children of one common motherland.

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

In the Hindu tradition the *Rakshaa* has indeed assumed all aspects of protection of the forces of righteousness from the forces of evil. Once, *Yudhishtira* asked *Sri Krishna* how best he could guard himself against impending evils and catastrophes in the coming year. *Krishna* advised him to observe the *Rakshaa* Ceremony. He also narrated an old incident to show how potent the *Rakshaa* is.

Once, *Indra* was confronted by the demon king - the *Daitya-raaja* - in a long-drawn battle. At one stage, the *Daitya-raaja* got better of *Indra* and drove him into wilderness. *Indra*, humbled and crest-fallen, sought the advice of *Brihaspati*, the Guru of Gods. The Guru told him to bide his time, prepare himself and then march against his adversary. He also indicated that the auspicious moment for sallying forth was the *Shraavana Poornima*. On that day, *Shachee Devi*, the

wife of *Indra*, and *Brihaspati* tied *Raakhis* around *Indra's* right-wrist. *Indra* then advanced against the *Daitya-raaja*, vanquished him and reestablished his sovereignty.

The *Rakshaa* has several similar *pauraanik* associations. The following couplet is recited, especially in the northern parts, while tying the *Raakhi*. It denotes how the King *Bali* had become so powerful with the *Raakhi* on:

Yena baddho Balee raajaa daanavendro mahaabalah |
tena twaam anubadhnaami rakshe maa chala maa chala | |

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

It is not merely that the spirit of *Rakshaa* manifests itself on occasions of mortal peril to the life and honor of the beloved ones or to the society. It is not like the home guards or the militia which are expected to come to the rescue of the people in times of war or natural calamities. No, it is far more deep and all encompassing. It is like the flow of bloodstream through every limb and organ of the body, carrying strength and nourishment to every cell thereof. As a result, even a small wound anywhere in the body is promptly attended to by the entire body. Every other limb spontaneously sacrifices a part of its blood and energy to heal that wound and keep that organ healthy and strong.

This is how the society can live and prosper amidst all kinds of challenges either from within or without. Especially, various types of internal stresses and strains which are generated in the body-politic of a nation because of ever-changing economic, political and other factors can be overcome only on the strength of this inner flow of mutual affection and amity.

A society imbued with this spirit will see to it that every one of its members is made happy. The idea of the Hindu has always been:

Sarvepi sukhinassantu, sarve santu niraamayaah |
Sarve bhadrani pashyantu, maa kashchit duhkhabhaag bhavet | |

(Let everyone be happy, let everyone be free from all ills, let everyone behold only the auspicious, let no one be afflicted.)

This concept is far more comprehensive than the concept of the `maximum happiness of the maximum number.' In fact, spontaneous love and compassionate service for the poor and lowly in society is held up as the highest form of worship of God Himself. The spirit of selfless social service which makes for the uplift of the needy and deprived sections is thus transformed into a spiritual *saadhanaa*.

It was *Raamakrishna Paramahansa* who coined the world, *Daridra Naaraayana*. He would not even tolerate expressions like `showing pity to the poor and sick.' Once when he was in a semi-*samaadhi* state, he exclaimed, " Compassion for creatures! Compassion for creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man,

recognizing him to be the veritable manifestation of God! " *Swami Vivekananda* picked up the thread and invoked God in the poor and ignorant and said,

' *daridradevo bhava, moorkhadevo bhava.* '

The boon asked of God by the King *Rantideva* who, when his kingdom was ravaged by famine, gave away his last morsel of food to a hungry man and the last sip of water to a thirsty dog, remains the eternal heart-beat of every devout Hindu:

Na twaham kaamaye raajyam na swargam naapunar bhavam |
Kaamaye dukhataptaanaam praaninaam aarti naashanam | |

" Oh Lord, I desire not kingdom nor the heavens nor even *moksha*. All I desire is to remove the suffering from the afflicted beings. "

It is only when this type of attitude towards one's less fortunate brothers and sisters permeates society that exploitations of the weak by the strong will end. Powers of intellect and body, and of material wealth and influence will then be utilized for the uplift and service of others. A *Sanskrit Subhaashita* says,

Vidyaa vivaadaaya dhanam madaaya shaktih pareshaam paripeedanaaya |
Khalasya sadhorvipareetam etat jnaanaaya daanaaya cha rakshanaaya | |

For the wicked, learning is for dry arguments, wealth is for satisfying vanity, strength for harassing others, but in the case of holy men these are for imparting knowledge, offering charity and protecting others.

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



Ganesh Chaturthi

Ganesha is the god of wisdom and prosperity and is invoked before the beginning of any auspicious work by the Hindus. He is the son of Shiva and Parvati, brother of Kartikeya and the general of the gods.

The story of creation of Ganesh is a very fascinating one.

A long long time ago when Lord Shiva, was away fighting for the gods, the lady of the house, goddess Parvathi was alone at home. On one occasion, she needed someone to guard the house when she was going for a bath. Unable to think of an alternative, she used her powers to create a son, Ganesh. She instructed Ganesh to keep strict vigil on the entrance to the house and not to allow anyone into the house. Ganesh agreed and stayed on the strictest of strict vigils.

In the meantime Lord Shiva returned happy after a glorious victory for the gods, only to be stopped at the entrance by Ganesh. Ganesh, acting on Parvathi's orders verbatim, did not allow Shiva to enter the house. Lord Shiva was enraged beyond control and in a fit of rage slashed the head of Ganesh. In the meantime Parvati came out from her bath and was aghast at the scene. She was very very angry at her lordship for what had happened and explained him the situation.

Lord Shiva wanted to make it up to Parvathi very badly and agreed to put life back into Ganesha by putting the head of the first sleeping living creature that came in sight which was sleeping with its head to the north. He sent his soldiers to go in search of the creature. The first creature which came in sight was an elephant. So Lord Shiva re-created his son with the head of the elephant. Hence the trunk of Lord Ganesha.

Parvathi was still not totally happy with the deal and wanted more. Then Shiva granted Ganesha a boon that before beginning of any undertaking or task people would worship Lord Ganesh. Thus the reason for worship of Ganesha before start of any work.

Ganesha went outdoors one day to play and found a stray cat. Too small to know better, he began to pull her ears and tail. He roughed up that poor cat and even began to beat her with a stick, making marks on her head till, yowling, she ran for her life. Some hours later Ganesha went into the house. His mother, to his astonishment and dismay, was looking terrible. Her hair was a mess, she had scratches on her face and she limped from the bruises on her body.

"Mom!" cried Ganesha. "Who beat you up?"

Sadly Parvati replied, "It was you, I'm afraid."

"No way! What do you mean? I never did it!"

"Do you remember, his mother asked, "a while ago, how you treated a certain cat?"

Now Ganesha thought that the cat's owner must have come and beat her on account of him, and he burst into tears.

"Where is that man?" he sobbed.

"No, not that. You see, my boy, I am not just your physical mother. I have filled the whole universe with my Being. As a matter of fact, whatever you do to any least part of it, you do that to Me."



Some years later the Mother was sitting in her dressing room in a very lofty mood. She had recently been meditating and in that mood had become quite conscious of her own divinity. Now she put around her neck a lovely necklace of gems, a gift from her husband, Shiva. But seeing Ganesha and her other son, Kartik

(Karteek), playing nearby, she said to them "Look, I will give this precious necklace to whoever comes back first, after traveling all around the universe. So run this race, but cover every mile of the universe."

Kartik immediately dropped what he was doing, went out, and finding his peacock, he most liked to ride upon, (which was a magic speed), he set off on the long journey. He went as fast as he could, over the earth, out to the moon and planets, sailed through the galaxies and visited the asteroids, even peeping into a black hole or two. Almost exhausted, he recalled that he had to save energy enough to return. When Kartik finally reached home he saw his brother was already wearing the necklace of gems!

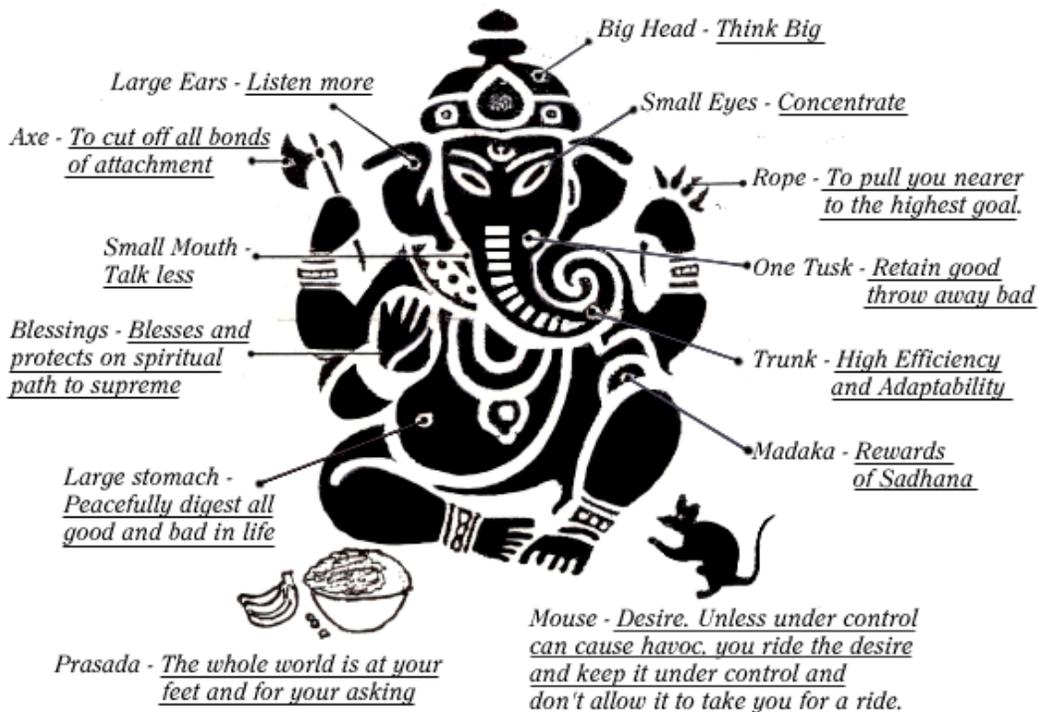
Ganesha, you see, had become much wiser now: he had simply gone all the way around his Mother's body and then bowed down before her. He knew full well that apart from her there was no universe.



Explain the Symbolism of Ganesha to Children. Make copies of this picture and give it to children.



Ganesha Symbolism



Practice : Ganesha is the generous god of wisdom and Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated to worship Lord Ganesha. It's one of the most colorful public festivals iall over Bharat. In Mumbai city alone, more than 6000 Ganesha statues are commissioned collectively by factories. Up to 10

metres in height, these statues are carried on decorated floats. Little Ganeshas are placed in nukkads or street corners and in homes, and pujas are performed daily.

Started by Shivaji, the great Maratha ruler, to promote culture and nationalism, the festival was revived by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak to spread the message of freedom struggle and to defy the British who had banned public assemblies. The festival gave the Indians a feeling of unity and revived their patriotic spirit and faith. This public festival formed the background for political leaders who delivered speeches to inspire people against the Western rule. The festival is so popular that in Mumbai the preparations begin months in advance. Images of Ganesha are installed and elaborate arrangements are made for lighting and decoration, and celebrations are on for 7-10 days. The Chaturthi is the last day dedicated to the elephant-headed god, and thousands of processions converge on the beaches of Mumbai to immerse the holy idols in the sea. This immersion is accompanied by drum- beats, devotional songs and dancing.

It is also forbidden to look at the moon on that day as the moon had laughed at Ganesha when he fell from his vehicle, the rat.



Janmashtami

The festival of *Krishna Janamastami* is the celebration of Lord *Krishna's* birthday. *Krishna*, the eighth incarnation of Lord *Vishnu*, is a unique character in Hindu history. He was naughty in his childhood days, romantic as a young man, and proved to be a profound philosopher in his adulthood as illustrated by the *Bhagwat Geeta*.

The birthday of *Krishna* falls on the *Ashtami* of *Krishna Paksh* (the eighth day of the dark fortnight) in the month of *Bhadrapada* (July-August), eight days after *Raksha Bandhan*. The exact date of *Krishna's* birthday has not been determined but is conjectured to be around 1400 B.C. when the Aryans got settled across the Indo-Gangetic plain. It was the rainy season in India and *Krishna* was born at midnight, in the prison of *Kamsa*, during the middle of a perilous rain and storm. Thus goes the story of *Krishna's* birth.

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

At midnight when the eighth child was born, the guards fell fast asleep and *Vasudeva's* chain fell off his hands and feet. Wasting no time, *Vasudeva* picked up the newborn baby, and carrying it in a basket, he started towards *Gokul*. *Gokul* was a village of cowherds, located across the

Yamuna river, where his friend *Nanda* lived. It was a dark stormy night with blinding rain continuously pouring from the sky. When *Vasudeva* reached the bank of river *Yamuna*, the river was in spate. The wind and storm were blowing wild, and *Vasudeva* was in a fix.

" Lord, what should I do," said *Vasudeva* in a hopeless voice. Suddenly a miracle happened, the river parted and *Vasudeva* walked over the river bed. Throughout the way *Vasudeva* and the baby were protected from rain by the hood of the great eternal snake, *Vasuki*. Finally, *Vasudeva* reached *Nanda's* house.

Upon reaching *Nanda's* house *Vasudeva* found the mother, *Yashoda*, and her newborn baby girl in deep sleep. He had no time to think. He quickly exchanged the babies and returned to the prison with the infant girl, while the guards were still asleep.

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

" What can a girl do to you *Kamsa* ? Spare her life, please ! " appealed *Devaki*, lying at the feet of her brother. The inhuman *Kamsa* did not pay attention to the appeal. As he was ready to kill the baby by smashing its head on a big boulder, the child slipped out of his hand and flew towards the sky.

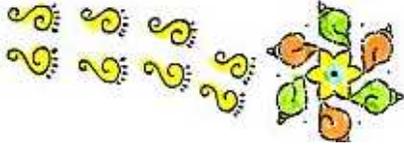
At that moment, a heavenly voice was heard, " *Kamsa*, the one who shall destroy you still lives. He is growing in *Gokul*. " Next morning, *Nanda* and his wife *Yashoda* discovered the boy, left by *Vasudeva*, lying in the crib. They were a little puzzled but did not want to fuss about it because they might lose the baby. The baby was of dark complexion, so he was named *Krishna*.

Kamsa was frightened by the heavenly voice. He immediately sent for *Puthana*, his wicked maid, and asked her to kill all the babies born on the same day when *Devaki* gave birth to the baby. *Puthana* smeared poison on her breast and went around in the town of *Gokul* to breast-feed the babies born in the month of *Bhadrapada*. In the beginning people, out of their goodness, did not suspect *Puthana's* heinous plans, but as time passed, they found out that all the babies whom *Puthana* fondled were dead. They began to search for *Puthana*. In the mean time *Puthana* reached *Nanda's* house and lovingly asked *Krishna's* mother, *Yashoda*, to give the baby to her to love and fondle. *Yashoda* gave the baby and, without any suspicion, went on with her daily chore.

Suddenly there was a loud shriek. Everyone came running to the courtyard and found to their surprise the dead body of *Puthana* lying on the floor while *Krishna* was smiling and kicking. People now knew that *Krishna* was not an ordinary boy. *Yashoda* happily picked up *Krishna* and felt safe.

Krishna grew in *Yashoda's* house until he reached his teens. He later challenged *Kamsa* and killed him. Then he released his grandfather *Ugrasena* and reinstated him to his throne. He respected and loved both his own parents, *Vasudeva* and *Devaki*, and his adopted parents, *Nanda* and *Yashoda*.

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



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

Vijayadashami

AASHWAYUJA SHUKLA DASHAMI

(The Tenth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Aashwayuja)

In Samskritam, 'Vijaya' means Victory and 'Dashami' means 10th day. 'Vijaya Dashami' means victory on the 10th day.

This is among the most auspicious days in the Hindu calendar and comes as the finale of the nine-day festival, *Navaraatri*. This festival of victory is preceded by worship of *Saraswati* the Goddess of Learning, *Lakshmi*, the Goddess of wealth and of *Durgaa* the Goddess of Strength. Grand processions of all Gods and goddesses are taken out in every town and village on this day, signifying the victory of the forces of righteousness over those of wickedness. Various have been the names of the Goddess of Strength - *Durgaa*, *Mahaa Kaali*, *Mahishasura Mardini* etc., under which that supreme protector of the good and the holy put to rout, time and again, the demoniac forces and established the supremacy of the righteous.

This shows that the vistory is possible only when one has strength, wealth and knowledge.



The story of how *Mahishaasura Mardini* took birth is striking for its unique message. At one stage the Gods felt powerless against the onslaughts of the demoniac forces headed by *Mahishaasura*. In answer to their prayers for protection, they were ordered to part with a portion of their divine powers to form into a new Goddess. It was thus that *Mahishaasura Mardini* took on a physical form as the combined might of all the Gods. The dreaded demon *Mahishaasura* was slain by *Chaamundeshwari* after a ceaseless fight of nine days and nights.

The lesson of this legend is so beautifully clear. Even the good and the righteous can succeed against the evil forces only when they come together in an organized endeavor.

Truly has it been said, ' *Sanghe shaktih kalau yuge* ' – Being together holds the key to strength in *Kaliyuga*. And this is the one single, most important lesson which the Hindu people have to learn today.

Vijaya Dashami is the day when Sri Rama killed the daemon Ravana. Symbolic of the victorious occasion, *Raama-Leela* is observed with great enthusiasm in the northern parts of Bharat.



Deepavali

Aashwayuja Krishna Chaturdashi To Kaartika Shukla Dwiteeyaa
(The 14th Day of the dark half of Aashwayuja to the 2nd day of bright half of Kaartik)

If there is one occasion which is all joy and all jubilation for one and all - the young and the old, men and women for the entire Hindu world, it is Deepavali - the Festival of Lights. Even the humblest of huts will be lighted by a row of earthen lamps. Crackers resound and light up the earth and the sky. The faces of boys and girls glow with a rare charm in their dazzling hues and colors. Illumination - Deepotsavas - in temples and all sacred places of worship and on the banks of rivers symbolize the scattering of spiritual radiance all round from these holy centers. The radiant sight of everybody adorned with new and bright clothes, especially women decorated with the best of ornaments, captures the social mood at its happiest.

And all this illumination and fireworks, joy and festivity, is to signify the victory of divine forces over those of wickedness. Narakaasura was a demon king ruling over Praagiyotishapura (the present-day Assam). By virtue of his powers and boons secured from God, he became all-conquering. Power made him swollen-headed and he became a menace to the good and the holy men and even the Gods. The Gods headed by Devendra implored Sri Krishna who was at Dwaaraka (in the present-day Gujarat) to come to their rescue. Sri Krishna responded. He marched from the western end of the country to its eastern end, Praagiyotishapura, destr

After the slaying of Narakaasura, Sri Krishna bathed himself smearing his body with oil in the early morning of Chaturdashi. Hence the invigorating vogue of taking an early morning 'oil-bath' on that day.

Mother Earth, whose son Narakaasura was, requested Sri Krishna that the day be celebrated as one of jubilation. Sri Krishna granted the request and since then the tradition has continued. Mother Earth reconciled herself to the loss of her son and knowing as she did that the Lord had punished her son for the sake of the welfare of the world, she set a glowing example of how one has to brush aside one's personal joys and sorrows in the interest of society. It is this deliverance of the people from the clutches of the *asuras* that fill the people with joy.

Then follows *Amaavaasya*, the new moon day, auspicious for offering prayers and gratitude to the bygone ancestors of the family and invoking their memories and blessings for treading the path of right conduct. This is also the sacred occasion for the worship of *Lakshmi*, the goddess of Wealth and Prosperity. The business community open their New Year's account with Her worship. This reminds us of the famous saying of the sage *Vyaasa*, '*dharmaadarthashcha kaamashcha...*' - it is through right conduct that wealth and fulfilment of desires also accrue.

The third day, i.e., the first day of *Kaartik*, is named *Balipratipada*, after the demon king *Bali*, the ruler of *Paataala* (the netherworld), who had extended his kingdom over the earth also. On that day, *Sri Vishnu*, taking the form of a dwarfish Brahmin by name *Vaamana*, approached *Bali*, for a boon of space equal to his three steps. *Bali*, known for his charity, gladly granted the boon. *Vaamana* now grew into a gigantic form; with one step he covered the entire earth, with the second he covered the outer sky, and asked *Bali* where he should keep his third step. *Bali*, left with no other choice, showed his own head. *Sri Vishnu* placed his foot on *Bali*'s head and pushed him down to the netherworld. However, *Bali* prayed to the Lord that he might be permitted to visit the earth once a year. Now it was the turn of *Vishnu* to grant the boon. And the people too offer their and respect to him on this day.

The annual visit of *Bali* is celebrated in Kerala as *Onam*. It is the most popular festival for Kerala where every Hindu home receives him with floral decorations and lights and festoons adorn all public places. *Onam*, however, falls on the 16th day of *Aavani* (*Sowramaana*) in September.

The *pratipada* is also the day for *Govardhana Pooja* and *Anna Koota* (heap of grains), the former signifying the *Govardhana* episode in *Sri Krishna*'s life and the latter conveying affluence and prosperity.

The fourth and final day is *Yama Dwiteeya*, also called *Bahu beej*. It is a most touching moment for the family members when even distant brothers reach their sisters to strengthen that holy tie. The sister applies *tilak* and waves *aarati* to her brother, and the brother offers loving presents to the sister.

To the *Jains*, **Deepaavali** has an added significance to the great event of *Mahaaveera* attaining the Eternal Bliss of *Nirvaana*. The passing into Eternity on the same *Amaavaasya* of *Swami Dayananda Saraswati*, that leonine *sanyasin* who was one of the first to light the torch of Hindu Renaissance during the last century, and of *Swami Ramatirtha* who carried the fragrance of the spiritual message of Hindu Dharma to the western world, have brought the national-cum-spiritual tradition of *Deepaavali* right up to modern times.



Geeta Jayanti

The Gita Jayanti Day or the Birthday of Srimad Bhagavad Gita is celebrated traditionally on the 11th day (Ekadasi) of the bright half (Sukla Paksha) of the month of Margasira (Dec./Jan.). (Coincides with Vaikuntha Ekadasi). This was the day on which the teachings of Lord Sri Krishna was revealed to the world through Sanjaya (who was blessed with the Divine Sight to witness the war of Mahabharata by Bhagavan Vyasa)!

The Mahabharata

Gita or song is a well-known composition, being the dialogue between Krishna and Arjun, just before the Mahabharata war. In the Gita, Krishna says, "Of all the months I am Margashirsha." Hence the importance of this month.

The Gita is a small part of the Mahabharata, the greatest epic in the world, composed of more than one, hundred thousand slokas.

Kauravas and Pandavas

"The main story of the Mahabharata is the war between two branches of the Kaurava family- the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, led by the eldest brother, Duryodhana, on the one hand, and on the other, their cousins, the Pandavas or sons of Pandu, led by their eldest brother, Yudhishtira.

Yudhishtira had been cheated out of his kingdom in a game of dice to which he had been challenged. He lost and was thereby condemned to cede his share of the kingdom to Duryodhana, while he and his four brothers had to go into exile for thirteen years, the last of which they had to spend in concealment. All this they did, but when Yudhishtira asked for his kingdom back, Duryodhana bluntly refused. Yudhishtira, who was by nature a pacifist, and had an instinctive loathing for war, reduced his demands to a mere five villages; still Duryodhana refused. As a final gesture Yudhishtira sent his friend Krishna, son of Vasudeva, and head of a neighboring clan, the Vrishnis, on an embassy in which Krishna was to make a final bid for peace... Duryodhana then, knowing full well that Krishna was God, rejected for the last time Yudhishtira's offer, thereby defying God Himself. Yudhishtira, having gone to the utmost limit to avoid war, now reluctantly gives in and the scene is now set for a battle that was to prove ferociously destructive. There is, however, a last minute hitch: Arjuna's nerve fails him."

Krishna and Arjun

Arjun, throwing away his weapons, begins to dialogue with Krishna, his charioteer and bosom friend. Krishna tries to convince Arjun that fight be must. In this setting the entire doctrine of the Gita is presented. Gita is perhaps the only scripture that was taught in the battlefield. That's why it relates so much to all of us. Arjuna was a man of action and not a renounced person

sitting in Himalayas. Gita teaches us how to live a righteous life, how to make conscious choice to act according to Dharma, while performing all our day-to-day duties.

There is enough material on the internet and also in printed books about Bhagavadgita. Please read them and only after you digest what you have read after contemplation, you will be able to tell children the essence of Gita.

Suggested programs in December:

- Geeta shloka chanting competition for children. A selection of few Shlokas is given in this handbook. You may also choose any single chapter or few verses from a chapter.
- Urge every family to buy a copy of Bhagavad-Gita. Any edition is okay. For children, special books are available from various organizations.
- Children can have coloring competitions of Gitopadesha i.e Lord Krishna preaching Arjuna in the battlefield.



Sample Skits

Unity is Strength

Narrator: This is a small play depicting the importance of Unity. Here is an old man in a village. He has 4 children. He is worried because his children are always fighting among themselves.

Scene: All the children are fighting with each other.

Child 1: Father, he (II) does not work at all. He is very lazy.

Child 2: You are lazy and cunning. I hate you. Father, I don't want to live with him.

Child 3: Father, he always takes away my things.

Child 4: Don't lie in front of father. Father, he is a liar.

Father: Children!! Enough. For Godsake stop fighting. Come here.

(They all come near him)

Father: Each one of you go and get a stick from our backyard.

(They all come back with a stick)

Together: Father, we have the sticks.

Father: Now, break them in to pieces.

Children: Yes, we did. That was so easy.

Father: Now, tie all those pieces together with a string.

Children: Here it is ready.

Father: Now try to break it.

Children: Father!! It's not breaking. It's strong now.

Father: All of you learn from this simple example. You could break them when they were single but could not even bend them when they were together.

Child 1: Yes father. Now we understand that Unity is Strength.

Child 2: We promise you that we will never fight and separate.

Child 3: We shall always work and live together.

Child 4: "Sanghatan Me, Shakti Hein"

Chandrashekhhar Azad, young freedom fighter

Narrator: August 15th is an important day for all of us. It is the independence day of Bharat. All of us have our cultural roots in Bharat.

It was ruled by British for more than 150 years until 1947. Many people have fought for independence. Men, women and even young children like us made great sacrifices. We shall pay our respects to all of them by enacting an inspiring episode from the life of a young freedom fighter - Chandrashekhar Azad .

The year was 1906. In the city of Kashi, people are protesting the British rule.

(Scene: Many people are marching in the road with slogans)
Vande - Maataram, Bharat Maataa ki Jai (3 times)

Police Officer: STOP. Everybody go home now. Otherwise we will beat you to death.

One protestor: NO. We will not go home.

Second protestor: We shall die here fighting for our freedom.

Police Officer: I will count to 5. 5-4-3-2-1; CHARGE

(Police started beating the people who were holding tricolor flag. A young girl was also beaten. Chandrashekhar saw this and got angry).

Chandrashekhar: How dare you beat my sister! Take this. (Throws a stone at Police's forehead and he starts bleeding)

Police: Hey, Catch hold of that boy.

Narrator: He was brought to the court. Judge was British.
(In the court)

Judge: What is your name ?

Chandrashekhar: My name ? AZAAD, Freedom. "me aazaad huun, aur aazaad hii rahoongaa"

Judge: Look at his arrogance. Punish him with 16 lashes.

(He was brought to ground for lashes)

Police: Get ready.

For every lash, he will shout "Vande Maataram"....

Finally faints.

Police: 1-2-3-14-15-16

Bharat-Maataa-Ki Jai

Greatest Devotee

Narrator: Sage Narada was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. All the time he keeps chanting the name of Sri Narayana.

(Sage Narada enters the stage chanting a Bhajan on Narayana or simply chanting Narayana, Narayana)

Narrator: Once, ego entered in to the minds of sage Narada. He started boasting about himself as the greatest devotee of Lord Vishnu. One day sage Narada went to see Bhagavan Vishnu in Vaikunta.

(Setting: Vishnu will be sleeping in his usual style by resting his head on his hand. His consort Lakshmi will be sitting near his feet. Narada enters Vaikunta)

Narada: "Narayana, Narayana"

Lakshmi: Sage Narada is coming.

Vishnu: O Narada, please come in. You always bring so much of joy to me.

Narada: Srimannarayana, I enjoy chanting your name all the time.
Can I ask you a question ?

Vishnu: Why that hesitation Narada ? Being one of my dearest devotees, will I say NO to you ?

Narada: That's my question. You said, 'Being one of my dearest devotees'. I thought I'm the greatest devotee of you. Is there any other devotee who will come close to me ?

VishNu: O Narada, there are many.

Narada: How can there be any devotee equal to me ? I chant your name all the time. Even in my dream, I chant your names.

Vishnu: Narada, please go and see this farmer in the village of Bhakta-graam. His name is Haridas.

(setting: Farmer Haridas is sleeping with his family. With the sounds of early morning birds, he wakes up. Narada will be watching from the corner.)

Haridas: (looking t his palm) "karaagre vasate Lakshmi, kara madhye sarasvati
Kara muule to govindah prabhaate kara darshanam"

Narayana, Narayana, please make this day a divine one. Let all my actions be offered to you.

Radha (Haridas's wife): Pati dev, I have prepared breakfast for you.

Haridas: Let us offer it to Lord Vishnu first. (places the breakfast in front of Vishnu's murti and offers prayers). Radha, keep some of this food for offering to guests. (Then, he takes his breakfast and after eating says "krishnaarpanamastu")

Narrator: Haridas went to farm. While working in the farm, he chanted "Narayana" few times and when he came back, did pooja to Vishnu and had dinner. Before sleeping, he again chanted "narayana" few times.

(Setting: Back to Vaikunta)

Narada: (With anger) O Lord Vishnu, you are not fair in your judgement on devotees. I saw Haridas in Bhakta-graam. He chanted your name only 20 times in the entire day. I chant not less than 1000 times. How come he is a better devotee than me ?

Vishnu: O Narada, I will explain to you. Please calm down. Go to the kitchen and bring some water in a pot.

(Narada goes inside and brings a pot of water)

Vishnu: Narada, keep this pot on your head and balance it. Walk 100 feet like that.

(Narada does a delicate balance with all the attention).

Narada: Now tell me why Haridas is a better devotee ?

Vishnu: Narada, when you were walking while balancing the pot, how many times did you chant my name ?

Narada: No, I did not remember you even once. I was too engrossed in balancing the pot on my head.

Vishnu: Narada, Haridas is a family holder. His work is like balancing the pot on the head. In spite of that, he remembers me so many times.

Narada: (Does a namaskar to Vishnu) Bhagvaan Vishnu, you have removed the ego that covered me. Give me your blessings so that I will never get caught up in the ego again.

Vishnu: So be it, my child.

Narayana: (leaves the place chanting) "Narayana, Narayana"

Mahishaasura Mardhini

Scene 1

Narrator:

Long ago, there was a wicked demon called Mahishasura. He wanted to rule the entire world and trouble all the people. To become the most powerful, here he is doing a severe penance to Lord Brahma.

Mahishaasura: om namo brahma devaaya.. om namo brahma devaaya... [keeps repeating]

Lord Brahma: [appearing from the side] O Mahisha, open your eyes.

Mahishaasura: Bless me my Lord. Please fulfill my wishes.

Lord Brahma: Mahisha, I'm pleased with your devotion and penance. What do you seek?

Mahishaasura: [with pride] Lord, I do not want to die. I want to rule the entire universe.
Please make me an immortal.

Brahma: O Mahisha, you are asking for the impossible. Everyone must die. Seek something else.

Mahisha: Then, please make me so strong that no man shall be able to kill me. Not even the Gods.

Lord Brahma: Tathaastu. So Be it, Mahisha.

Mahishaasura: Hmmm..., I am the strongest. Nobody can kill me now. I'm the Lord. Everyone should worship me. Yes, all should serve the great Mahishaasura.... ha, haa...haaaa [roars]

SCENE 2:

Narrator: The all powerful Mahishaasura looks around and sees a group of sages offering prayers to Lord Indra, the king of Gods.

Sages [all together]: [are sitting around a fire place and praying]

Om sahanaavavatu, shanau bhunaktu

Sahaveeryam karavaavahai

Tejasvinaa vadhiitamastu

Maa vidvishaavahai, Om shaantih shaantih shaantih

om agnaye swaahaa.., agnaye idam na mama...

om varuNaaya swaahaa.., varuNaaya idam na mama...

om indraaya swaahaa.., indraaya idam na mama...

Mahishaasura: Who? Indra? Oh, Sages, you should offer your prayers to me. I am the Lord. Go away from here. Never ever try to insult me. Go...

Scene 3

[Lord Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma are in the center of the stage. All the other gods are in front of him with folded hands.]

Lord Indra: Lord, please protect the world from the wicket Mahishaasura.

Lord Shiva: Listen, oh, Gods. No individual can defeat the demon Mahishaasura.

Brahma: But, there is a way.

Vishnu: The united strength of all of you alone can destroy him. May goddess Parvati take the form of Chamundeshwari. All of you must give her your arms. With hundreds of arms and weapons, she will kill Mahishaasura.

All Gods [take out their weapons, raise both the hands and start shouting]:

Saraswati: take all my power

Lakshmi: Take all my wealth and strength

Indra: Take my vajraayudha.the diamond sword

Shiva: Take my trishul

Vishnu: The the sacred disc "The sudarshana

All other gods together say: take all our weapons...

"Jai chamundeshwari", "jai kaali", "jai durga",

"Jai chamundeshwari", "jai kaali", "jai durga",

[thus saying all leave the stage]

Scene 4:

[Goddess Durga enters the stage with a trishul in her hand. All gods follow her, saying "jai kaali", "jai durge".. Mahishaasura enters from the other side. Looks at goddess Durga and comes fast to kill her with his sword. Goddess Durga hits him with her trishul. Mahishaasura falls down.

ayi giri nandini, nandita medini
vishwa vinodini nandanute....

[Gods also join while saying:

"jaya jaya hey mahishaasura mardhini, ramyaka pardhini shailasute"]

[like this, they sing 3 stanzas]

[After the bhajan, the back stage singers shout "jai jai maata", all Gods on the stage say "durgaa maataa"; continues for a couple of times.]

[Narrator starts introducing the artists. One by one all leave the stage.]

Importance of Guru

Narrator: In olden days, children used to stay with their Guru's family for many years until they complete their studies. Guru's place was called a 'Gurukula'. Here is one such Gurukula.

< A guru is teaching shlokas - select a simple shloka. Students repeat after Guru >

Shishya 1: Guruji, I have been studying here for 10 years now. I think I have learnt everything from you. Can I go home now ?

Shishya 2: yes Guruji. He memorizes everything.

Guruji: I'm glad that you have learnt every thing. Let us perform a test.
Can you see that huge banyan tree ?

Shishya 1: Yes, Guruji.

Guruji: Go and sit below that tree. Go on chanting saying you have learnt.
For every one mistake you do, one leaf will follow down.

Shishya 1: Okay Guruji.

<He goes and sits below a tree. Few children can stand like a tree with their hands spread out like branches. They will be holding green color paper pieces in their hands. >

Shishya 1: Om sahanaavavatu

< All the leaves start falling. The children will drop the green paper pieces in their hands>

Shishya 3: What a strange thing!!!

Shishya 4: He only said one line and all the leaves have fallen.

Shishya 5: Guruji, he must have done a blunder!

<Guruji goes towards the tree with other Shishyas>

Shishya 1: (Does sashtanga namaskara to Guru) Guruji, forgive my arrogance. What was my mistake?

Guruji: My dear child, you forgot to say "Sri Gurubhyo Namah" before saying any mantra. That was the only mistake. But it was a big mistake

All the children together: "gururbrahma guruvishNuh gururdevo maheshvarah
Gurursaakshaat parabrahma tasmai shrii gurave namah"

God in Hindu Dharma

One GOD, Many FORMS

The fundamental concept in Hinduism is that God is one but has many attributes and many functions and hence is called by many different names. Hinduism gives freedom to believe that God is formless and also allows us to worship God in diverse forms. These forms include complimentary attributes of male and female deities, some in human and some even in animal form.

God is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the Universe

These three aspects are attributed to the trinities - Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara.

God pervades the entire universe

God is equally present in every one and in every thing.

God is beyond gender

Hindus worship both male female forms of God.

Hindu scriptures also point out that whilst God is one, God cannot be fully defined. To define is to limit. Whatever is limitless defies definition. Total knowledge about God is beyond human comprehension and expression, so for this reason Hinduism allows use of various symbols and images to allow people to discover God in whichever way they want to. This freedom of thought and worship is unique to Hinduism and has been misunderstood by many who claim that Hindus worship many Gods.

The Vedas declare that: '*Ekam Sat Vipraah Bahudhaa vadanti*' (Truth is one and the sages call it by different names) - RIG VEDA, 1-164-46

We can take example from daily life, where one person is given different names by different people. A man can be father to his children, husband to his wife, son to his father, and grandfather to his grandchildren. Similarly God is known by different names depending on how people relate with God. One may worship God as mother, a child, a father or a friend. The following prayer illustrates how devotees relate to God.

Twameva maata ca pitaa twameva
Twameva bandhushca sakhaa twameva
Twameva vidyaa dravinam twameva
Twameva sarvam mama deva deva | |

Story of Kanakadasa: God is everywhere.

Kanakadasa was a devotee of Bhagvan Krishna. He was a disciple of Vyasaraaya. Once the Guru called all his disciples and told them - "today is Ekadashi and we are supposed to fast. But, it's difficult not to eat any thing. So, I will give you one banana each. But, you should eat in a place where no one would see you." All the disciples left the place and when they came back next day, the Guru asked them how they managed to eat. One student said, "I covered myself in a blanket and ate it". Other said, "When it was dark in the night, I switched off the light and ate it." Every one explained how smart they were, except Kanakadasa. Kanakadasa said, "Guruji, I could not eat it. I could not find a place where God was not present."

The story of 'The Elephant and Six Blind Men' can be told to drive home the point that each might experience and realize different aspect of the divinity.

Once six blind men came across an elephant. They had no idea what an elephant looked like, so they started to explore. The first blind moved his hand around the elephant's side and exclaimed, "the elephant is like a big wall." The second, who was holding one of the legs, disagreed, "No, it's like a thick pillar." The third interrupted, "I think it's like a big flag." He was near the elephant's big flapping ears. The fourth, who had caught the tail, insisted that it was like a rope. The fifth felt the tusks and announced that it was like a pestle or rod. Finally, the sixth could not remain silent and yelled, "You are all wrong. The elephant is like hose-pipe." He had felt the animal's trunk. They all started to argue about the shape and size of the elephant, until a sighted person came along to show them around it.

Story of Bhagini Nivedita

28th Oct 1867 - 13th Oct 1905

It was more than 140 years ago. Ireland, like Bharat, was a country fighting for her freedom. John Noble was the priest of an Irish Church. Nearer to his heart than all else were his God and his motherland. His son Samuel Noble, who was also a priest, married a lovely young lady, Mary Hamilton. It was of these parents that Margaret, who later became Nivedita, was born on October 28, 1867.

From her grandfather Margaret inherited measureless courage and boundless patriotism, while from her father she inherited tremendous compassion for the poor. And from her mother she inherited not only her great beauty but her tenderness and sympathy.

Margaret often went with her grand father and her father to the homes and hovels of the poor and joined them in rendering service to them. Thus, even from her earliest years, service became her constant companion.

"When The Call Comes"

Samuel's work was toilsome but his income meager. Even out of his slender means he gave away his utmost to the less fortunate among his flock. Overwork and care under mined his health. Samuel was just thirty four when death claimed his precious life. At the last moment he called his devoted wife and whispered in her ears, "When the call comes from Heaven, let Margaret go. The little one will reveal her talents and do great things."

Soon after her husband's death Mary went with her children to her parental home in Ireland. Her old parents gave all their affection to their grand children, yet brought them up under strict discipline.

Some years passed. The grand parents sent Margaret and her sister to the Halifax College, where the two girls were resident - boarders of the college hostel. Discipline was the watch word of the place. Life there was all discipline - rigid, severe discipline. But the sisters loved their studies. Margaret grew fond of music and art. She took keen interest in biology.

As A Teacher

Margaret was now seventeen, a beautiful young woman, with charming manners and a dignified bearing. Her education was over. She yearned to teach little children. She easily got a teacher's post at Keswick. Filled with joy she entered upon life, beginning as a small teacher, only to become a great teacher.

To teach tiny tots is no easy task, as children are fond of play. They must be made to learn even as they are playing. Margaret fell drawn to this challenging task. She tried several experiments to make her teaching not only successful but interesting. In 1892 she started her own school. It soon became popular. People got to know that Margaret was a brilliant teacher.

A Welsh youth, who was an engineer, was attracted by Margaret. Their friendship, growing more and more intimate, finally turned into love. They became engaged. Unfortunately, the young man became bed-ridden with a serious illness, which soon took his life. Margaret was plunged in grief. Yet she faced it bravely by applying herself more and more to her school work and her studies.

Finding the Guru

1895 - the momentous year that changed the very course of Margaret's life.

Lady Isabel Margesson, a friend of Margaret, invited her to her home to meet a Hindu monk on the following Sunday. Margaret has herself described her experience on the occasion. A majestic personage, clad in a saffron gown and wearing a red waist-band, sat there on the floor, cross-legged. As he spoke to the company, he recited Sanskrit verses in his deep, sonorous voice. His serene face, his dignified bearing and his divine voice cast a spell upon the listeners, who felt electrified by his frequent utterance of the name of "Siva, Siva!" Margaret, however, who had already delved deep into the sacred lore of the East, found nothing quite new in what she heard on this occasion. What was new to her was the personality of the Swamiji himself.

Margaret found out that this rare Swamiji with his magnetic personality was none other than Swami Vivekananda who, two years before in 1893, had attended the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago. His inspiring address at the Parliament had captured millions of American hearts.

"Awake !"

Margaret at first remarked that there was nothing new in what the Swamiji had said. But in her own heart of hearts she knew that it was not so. The sayings of the Swamiji kept returning to her mind and haunted her. "God alone is the truth," he had asserted. This assertion might not be new, but the Swamiji's conviction was indeed quite new. And the radiance of his personality! There seemed to be a veritable halo about him. He had given up everything for God. His sayings were not mere repetitions from books. They were living words which sprang from the depths of his soul, charged with the Truth he had seen and experienced.

Margaret came more and more under the spell of Swami Vivekananda. Now like a thunderbolt blasting its way along and burning up centuries of superstition, and now like a chisel chipping away at the ages-old darkness of ignorance; now like the mantras of a great guru awakening the soul of his disciple from its sloth and torpor, and now the mystic sayings of a realized soul

sweeping away all the doubts of his disciple; now like the sincere, frank advice of a devoted comrade and now like the tender comfort of an affectionate mother, the Swamiji's galvanizing words welled up from the depths of his soul. It was his flaming virtue, the glowing purity of his spirit, that had captured her heart and turned her into a servant of his country for his sake, she wrote later.

One day, in midst of his discourse' the Swamiji said in a thundering voice. "What the world needs today is twenty men and women who dare stand in the public street and declare that they have nothing to call their own except their God. Who is there among you that can say so?"

Margaret's heart seemed to whisper, 'Here I am!' But her tongue was yet too timid to utter those words. One day, speaking about the women of India, the Swamiji said, "Our girls over there have not even seen the face of a school. That land of ours cannot advance unless they are educated." Then, turning at once towards Margaret, he said, "I have certain plans relating to the education and the welfare of the women of my country. I believe that you can be of great service to me in translating them into reality."

Margaret felt overwhelmed by the Swamiji's faith in her. Yet she had misgivings whether she was equal to such a mighty task. Sensing her mind, the Swamiji reassured her: "You have the making in you of a world mover, and others will also come..... Awake, awake, great one!"

Margaret took the heroic resolve to leave her own dear homeland and make the Swamiji's far-off homeland her own, and render her utmost service there.

India's Call

Teaching, reading, discussion everything had now lost its interest for Margaret. The Swamiji's voice was always ringing in her ears. It seemed to her that India was calling her, unceasingly, insistently. She felt that it was darkness all around and only in the east there was a streak of light. And that streak of light seemed to be reaching out to her and beckoning her. "Your place is there in India," the Swamiji had said, "but that can be only when you are ready."

But was it so easy to make herself ready? The Swamiji himself had graphically spoken of India to her. He had made her see India in all her squalor. Poverty, ignorance, filth - these had free play everywhere in that country. The British would look down upon her. The Indians would treat her with suspicion and dislike; It was to serve the women and educate the girls of such a country that Margaret was being called. As for education, would they ever allow their precious daughters to be taught by a woman of an alien faith?

It was at such a moment of doubt that she received from the Master this heartening message: "it is not a man we need but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially

"You must think well before you plunge in, and after all your toil, if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you I will stand by you whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. 'The tusks of the elephant come out but never go back'; so are the words of a man never retracted."

On Indian Soil

The boat bringing Margaret to India reached Calcutta on January 28, 1898. Swami Vivekananda came in person to the port to give an affectionate welcome to her. She soon familiarized herself with the city where she had to work and started making the acquaintance of the people among whom she had to live. And she lost no time in learning Bengali, and studying Bengali Literature; for a command of Bengali was essential for her to communicate with, and ultimately win the confidence and affection of the people around her.

A Benediction

*The mother's heart, the hero's will,
The sweetness of the southern breeze,
The sacred charm and strength that dwell
On Aryan altars, flaming, free;
All these be yours, and many more
No ancient soul could dream before --
Be thou to India's future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.*

Swami Vivekananda wrote this to Bhagini Nivedita

A few weeks later, two of Swami Vivekananda's women disciples in America, Mrs Sarah C. Bull and Miss Josephine MacLeod arrived in India. The three soon became fast friends.

Their cottage became an ashram. Every day Swami Vivekananda came there. The moment he entered, the place became charged with a holy spirit. The inspired Master addressed the disciples for hours. His theme was India, her history, her saints, her heroes and heroines, her epics, her puranas, her poets, architects, sculptors and other artists, and above all, her great sages. Under the Swamiji's spell, the listeners forgot the world, forgot themselves, and, as they listened, they relived those glorious ages.

One day, Miss MacLeod asked: "Swamiji how can I best serve you?"

At once came the reply, "Love India, serve her, worship her. That is prayer, that is worship, that is every thing."

Margaret took the Swamiji's answer as his message for her too.

Nivedita

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the god-man of Dakshineswar, was the Guru of Swami Vivekananda. He had passed away in 1886. His saintly wife, Sri Sharada Devi, whom all the Paramahansa's devotees revered as the Holy Mother, blessed them all, and inspired them to noble endeavor and heroic achievement.

Margaret had an irresistible longing to meet the Holy Mother. But she had her own apprehensions. Would the Mother, who had been brought up in the traditions of Hindu orthodoxy, receive her and her comrades who were not only foreigners but members of an alien faith? But Sri Sharada Devi was the very embodiment of love and sanctity. She received Margaret, Sarah Bull and MacLeod as her own children.

The 25th of March 1898 was for Margaret the holiest and most unforgettable day of her life. That was the day her Guru dedicated her the service of India.

It was a Friday. Swami Vivekananda took all there of them to the Math, Leading Margaret into the shrine, he taught her to worship Lord Shiva according to the prescribed ritual. He then asked her to offer worship, unaided. To be invested by the Master himself with the authority to perform the rites of worship was a unique privilege, a matchless blessing. Margaret was in ecstasy. The Swamiji then initiated her ceremonially into the order of celibacy. He gave her the name of 'Nivedita', which means 'the Dedicated One'. He commanded her to place lotus flowers at the feet of Lord Buddha. Then, in tremulous voice, he gave her his benediction and message: "Go thou, my child, go. Tread thou the path shown by that Great Soul who was the very embodiment of compassion and sacrificed himself for others in five hundred lives before he attained the status of the Buddha."

During that summer the Swamiji started for Almora in the Himalayas, taking with him Nivedita and other disciples. During the journey the party looked like a moving gurukula; for it was a regular cycle of instruction, dis course and meditation, right through.

The School - An Experiment

On November 13, 1898 Nivedita started her school in a small way in a rented cottage.

The very personality of Nivedita commanded respect. Her stately, handsome figure, dressed in a long, flowing, snow - white gown, held firm with a silk waist - band, lent her a certain majesty which heightened her natural dignity and grace. The rudraksha rosary around her neck gave her a saintly look. It is recorded that whenever Nivedita came to address a gathering, people spontaneously rose to their feet and gave her a standing ovation.

The school was no doubt started, but the problem for Nivedita was to find students. She went from door to door and had long arguments with parents to overcome their prejudices against sending their girls to school. "Putting girls to school? What an idea!" exclaimed the shocked parents. A good many openly jeered at her. Nothing daunted, Nivedita persisted in her search and succeeded at last in roping in a few girls of varying ages. She taught them to read and write, and instructed them in drawing, painting and clay modeling.

Nivedita loved all the people around her sincerely and deeply. Their resistances were soon broken and they welcomed her into their hearts and into their homes. Moving about freely among these households, she gradually became a member of their families. To everyone in north Calcutta she became Sister Nivedita.

Once an unfortunate mother came running to Nivedita, sobbing bitterly; and dragging her by the hand, she cried frantically, "Come, sister, hurry at once. My last child is dying even now!" Nivedita ran to the place, led by the poor mother. But even as they were entering the house, the child breathed its last. The unhappy mother held the baby to her breast and wailed aloud for hours. And, at last, she folded Nivedita to her bosom and cried, "O sister! What shall I do? Where is my darling gone?" And in her tender accents Nivedita consoled the mother, saying, "Hush, mother. Your child is with the Great Mother: she is with Kali!"

When Nivedita reported this incident to the Master, he gave her a new and inspiring message: "Worship even death, Nivedita, worship the terrible, even as you would worship the beautiful!"

Nivedita took the Master's message to heart. She now realized that death was but the other face of life. And this new realization of hers was soon put to the test.

Plague in Calcutta

In March 1899 a devastating plague broke out in Calcutta and spread like wild fire all over the city. The disease took a toll of hundreds of lives every day. Deeply distressed, Nivedita plunged into action in order to save the city from the grip of the dire menace. She started sweeping the streets and cleaning the drains. Bengali youths, unused to any kind of manual labour, and accustomed to look upon scavenging as dirty work, just sat and watched for a while, though they felt guilty at their own inaction. The women, put to shame, ran into their homes. But it was not long before all of them girded up their loins and came to the aid of their beloved sister. Thus did Nivedita teach the people of Calcutta their first lessons in sanitation, self-help and social service, not by precept but by practice.

Nivedita formed a committee of social workers in order to fight the plague on a well-organized basis. Squads of earnest and devoted workers fanned out in all directions and not only cleaned all the streets and lanes but nursed the victims. Nivedita worked round the clock, often foregoing even food and rest. Her health was seriously impaired, and she became worn out.

She ran from home to home, hoping against hope to overtake and frustrate death. Often, however, to her great grief, death forestalled her and frustrated her noble design. On one occasion, the victim, a mere boy, died in her motherly lap. At such times, Nivedita stayed on with the unfortunate bereaved for hours together, offering them her consolation and sympathy.

Nivedita and her team incessantly carried on their formidable effort for full thirty days before they succeeded in bringing the enemy to his heel. In the meanwhile, Nivedita had literally saved hundreds of victims from the very jaws of death, staking her very life in the process.

All through these gruelling days Nivedita lived on fruit and milk, and nothing more. She had to give up even milk on one occasion to save the money for the medicines needed by a plague victim.

A Pilgrimage to the West

Nivedita's school was just limping on for want of funds. Even to draw pupils was arduous enough; where was the question of collecting any fee? And the problem was to run the school and have enough left just to support her life. Would it be proper to go to the West in order to collect the funds needed for her work here? She sought the Master's advice and was relieved to find that he gave her his hearty approval. Nivedita sailed for Europe in the middle of June 1899.

From Europe she went to America. Her original aim was just to raise enough funds for her small school. But, upon her arrival in America, she found that the urgent task was to educate the Americans about India and her glorious culture.

A great deal of false and malicious propaganda had been carried on against India and her religions by some Christian missionaries. They had grown extremely jealous of the tremendous

impact on the West of Swami Vivekananda's powerful address at the Parliament of Religions and of the growing popularity of Hinduism, especially of the Vedanta, not only in America but in Europe. They had been systematically painting a totally misleading picture of India by blowing up her poverty, ignorance and superstition out of all proportion. These evil doings of so called men of religion were, she felt, an outrage against Christ himself. Like the Master, she went on a whirlwind tour of the States and addressed huge gatherings in all the principal towns and cities in order to educate the Americans about the real state of India at the time, the greatness of her past, the sublimity of her cultural and spiritual heritage and above all, the true causes of the present degradation. She was a gifted orator. She had steeped herself in India's history, her religions and her scriptures. In living words, charged with truth and invigorated by her sincerity, she depicted India in vivid colors. The audience felt a deep regret that they had let themselves be totally misled by pious frauds. They were thankful to Nivedita for revealing to them the very soul of India.

She had succeeded in making America realize that India's degradation was essentially due to her long subjection to foreign rule. But she had not gained substantial success in raising funds for her school and for her other work in India.

The Master is No More

Nivedita returned to India in 1901

She now took up lodgings at No. 17, Bosepara Lane, which became henceforth both her home and her school. It became, in addition, a veritable center of pilgrimage for all the eminent personages of the time-political leaders fighting for the country's freedom, men of intellect.

About this time a young lady from Germany, named Miss Christine Greenstidel, came to serve India and joined Nivedita. Her assistance was very valuable to Nivedita.

Nivedita's school began its work again. This time it was not only girls who came to receive instruction, but even their mothers. It was extremely difficult to meet the expenses of the school. Like Nivedita, Christine too had to undergo great privation. But with a firm resolve they kept up the struggle and carried on their endeavor of educating girls and women.

1902-the darkest year in Nivedita's life. She went to see the Master at the Belur Math. That was on June 29. In the course of the conversation the Swamiji remarked, "A great austerity and meditation are coming upon me. I am getting ready for death." The 2nd of July was an Ekadasi Day. Nivedita felt an irresistible urge to see the Master again. When she was announced at the Math, the Swamiji was filled with joy. He was himself fasting. Yet he got a meal ready for Nivedita and personally served it to her. After she had her meal, he assisted her to wash her hands by pouring water, and then despite her protests, he dried her hands with a towel. Deeply pained, she demurred: "Swamiji, it would be proper for me to serve you thus, not to receive such services at your hands."

That day the Master's entire being was transformed with his love, when he gave his chosen disciple his blessing. The joy she felt at this made her forget her recent pain. She went home, feeling blessed.

Poor Nivedita little knew that this was to be her last meeting with the Master.

The Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi on the night of July 3.

On July 4, even as the day was breaking, the heart breaking message was brought to Nivedita. She staggered under the blow. The Master whom she adored, her all in all, her sole stay and support in life, the Guru who had given meaning and direction and purpose to her earthly existence, was no more. The light was gone. All was dark.

She ran to the Math and, sobbing her heart out, she paid her homage to the Master. The profound serenity of samadhi was upon his face. Seated by the Master, she fanned his face until 2 p.m.

Vedic mantras were chanted. The Swamiji's body was carried in procession to the banks of the Ganga and offered up to the flames. Cries of "Jai Swamiji!", "Swami Vivekanandaji Ki Jai!" rent the air and rose to the heavens.

The millions that had gathered at the cremation ground melted away in a few minutes. The scene was all deserted. Nivedita sat there, all alone, with no thought of her surroundings, with a faraway gaze.

The master was no more. To whom could she go henceforth for counsel and support? From whom could she seek solace?

Fight for India's Freedom

It was not in Nivedita's nature to go on brooding, lamenting and despairing. The message instilled in her by the Master was not one of feebleness and fear, but of confidence and courage. As a lioness springs into action, shakes her mane and marches majestically on with her thunderous roar, so did she rouse herself, shake off her grief and anguish, and, assuming the mantle of leadership, gave to India and the world her ringing message.

Onerous was the burden laid on her by the Master. She must be true to him and fulfil her trust. It was in this spirit that she resumed her life of strenuous toil. Mother India became an object of adoration for her, and the liberation of India her life's mission.

She had once believed that Britain and India could remain friends. But she came to realise that it was a delusion. For she could plainly see that Britain was not only draining the very lifeblood of India but, in her imperialistic insolence, choose to hurl insults upon India's noblest sons.

Two incidents gave her a rude shock. Jagadish Chandra Bose, the world renowned Indian scientist, was an intimate friend of Nivedita. She had witnessed with joyful pride how in France the highest honors were conferred upon him. But in Britain he had not been accorded the honor that was due to him. Again, when Bipin Chandra Pal, the great Indian nationalist, rose to address an American gathering, someone among the audience leapt to his feet to hurl insulting words at him. "Mr. Pal, let your country attain freedom first. You can come and lecture later."

The very recollection of these incidents were enough to make Nivedita's blood boil. The conviction grew upon her that, until India gained political independence, Indians could never hope to be treated like men. So this woman, who was the whitest among the whites, vowed to

fight, in thought, word and deed, for the liberation of a country which she had adopted as her own mother land. The power of her tongue and the power of her pen she dedicated to the sacred cause of India's struggle for freedom.

All over Bengal Nivedita's name became a household word. Addressing mammoth meetings in several important places like Patna, Lucknow, Varanasi, Bombay, Nagpur and Madras, she sounded the clarion call of freedom. The British grew furious, but could not venture to silence her. On the contrary, several distinguished persons of Britain like Ramsay Macdonald, who was to become Britain's Prime Minister, and Lady Minto, whose husband later became the Viceroy of India, visited her small school and commended its excellent work in extending education to India's womanhood.

Nivedita made her school the very centre of nationalism. Bankim Babu's famous national anthem, Vande Mataram, became the prayer song in her school. She changed over to Khadi. With her it became a daily practice to spin on the charaka; following her noble example, her pupils, too, practised spinning every day.

It was Nivedita again who brought about a revolution in Bengali art. Instead of being true to Indian culture or to their own inspiration, Indian painters of the day had become just imitative; they copied western models. Nivedita admonished them for this mentality and kept on goading them to retain their Indianness.

She encouraged gifted artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Asita Haldar by even providing them with funds; this enabled them to make a pilgrimage to Ajanta, Ellora and other centres of art in order to seek inspiration from the great Indian artists of the past. Under Nivedita's powerful influence there was a remarkable flowering of Bengali art.

Everything Indian became for Nivedita an object of adoration. She wrote books in order to interpret for Indians their own national heritage. She upheld, by reasoned argument, ancient institutions like idol worship, religious and national festivals and other holy days; she revealed the greatness of our sublime epics and the sacred puranas; and, above all, she pointed out the uniqueness of our scriptures. She thus made Indians learn to be proud of those priceless things of which they had come to be needlessly ashamed.

Nivedita's life had now become one continuous round of political consultations and campaigns, public meetings and addresses, writing books and carrying on hectic correspondence. These not only took up all her time but sapped all her vitality. Her circle of friends, followers, and admirers also went on growing.

To the Holy Mother she became the darling daughter. To the Parama hamsa's direct disciples she was an object of great affection and regard. To Rabindranatha Tagore she was an unfailing source of inspiration. To eminent political leaders like Surendranath Bannerjea, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobind Ghosh, she was a philosopher and friend. And to the youth of the nation she was a veritable idol.

The greatest of the nation's leaders, Balgangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, came to her and paid their respects.

Nivedita's life was thus a real saga of service and sacrifice, of achievement and fulfillment.

The Swan Song

Through her unbroken, unending toil Nivedita wore herself out. She knew not the meaning of rest. People did not take the trouble of inquiring what she herself needed.

In 1905 she was seriously ill. Her close friends, especially the monks of the Ramakrishna Ashram, tended and nursed her. She rallied for the time being. But she would not rest, little caring to save her wasting body. The British Government partitioned Bengal and this resulted in a great agitation. Nivedita jumped into the fray. Next year, East Bengal experienced devastating floods. This was followed by famine. For miles Nivedita waded through the water and rendered service to the victims of flood and famine, in village after village. She harnessed the youth of Bengal in organizing relief for the affected people.

Her health grew much worse. But unmindful of her own state, she went on serving the poor and saving the distressed.

When her health was very bad, she made her will. All that she had in this world by way of property, the little money she had with her and even the copy right over her writings, she left to the Belur Math. She wanted that her bequest should be used to give national education to the women of India.

October 13. It was morning. Nivedita was in Darjeeling. The sun, which had for days been hiding its face behind the dark clouds, suddenly appeared this morning, and its rays entered Nivedita's room. She was absorbed in deep meditation. Opening her eyes to the sunshine, she murmured: "This frail boat of mine is sinking, but I can see the sunrise". These were the last words of this noble soul.

It was not, however, just a boat that had sunk; it was a mighty ship. The sunrise that she saw was the kind of illumination which only the like of her can see.

Sir J. C. Bose founded his famous Institute for research. There, in Nivedita's memory, he got installed the image of a woman stepping forward, lamp in hand.

In the lap of the Himalayas rests the earthly form of this great lady. Over her grave is erected a humble memorial, which bears this simple epitaph.

"Here reposes Sister Nivedita who gave her all to India".



Raising Hindu Awareness in our Schools

America is an open society. There are plenty of opportunities for us to share with every one about our religion and culture. In their subjects, they study about India, caste system, Hinduism, etc. If we take initiative, the school teachers are, in most cases, more than happy to arrange a guest speaker on India and Hinduism. This has been going on in many schools in different cities.

In this session, discuss with children how it can be done in their school. These are some pointers for discussion. The density of Hindu population is different in each town and hence you will have to come up with the programs in a city and a particular school accordingly. These are only some pointers for discussion.

- First, ask each one approximately how many Hindu children are there in their school.
- Find out if there is any Indian Students club (more in high schools)
- Find out about the multi-cultural-week or some similar program observed in their schools and how India and Hinduism was represented.
- On Hindu holidays like Diwali, in some schools in bay area, California, Hindu parents give sweets to all the children and also celebrate it in the school.
- Ask the teacher who is teaching about India, if they would like to have a guest speaker come and speak to the class about India. If they are interested, arrange for a good speaker from the Hindu community.
- Educate the teachers in Indian History and contemporary India by presenting books and web sites.
- Elaborating on Exhibitions – students in 9 and above grades study World history. We can be the source for information relating to Bharat. Favorite topics for students – evolution of life, life styles, Caste system etc.

These are some ideas that have been successful in few places. Explore more ideas and when an idea is experimented, please share with every one.

What is Hindu Dharma

One of the major living religious traditions of the world, Hinduism is also recognized as the most ancient. It is different from most others because it was not started by any single individual, seer or prophet, and its origins cannot be traced to a particular period of human history.

It is not based on one single book or a set of dogmas; on the contrary, it allows a great deal of freedom of thought, faith and worship. Hinduism is not a single religious faith system because it does not insist on any fixed set of doctrines. There are a variety of religious sects or traditions in Hinduism. However, in spite of this diversity, there is a unity among all the doctrines and schools of thought because their basic principles are based on the 'eternal laws of nature' which can be rightly defined as Sanatana (eternal) Dharma (laws of nature). The knowledge of the universe and the laws contained in the Vedas and in the subsequent scriptures is considered to be applicable at all times and places. As these laws bind the universe and its components together, it is called 'Dharma', i.e. that which keeps all together.

'Dharma' is one of the most intractable terms used in the Hindu philosophy and is derived from the root 'dhru', meaning to uphold, sustain or support. Hindu Dharma comprises a medium, an instrument or an integrated scheme of life by which one is prevented from falling down and is uplifted spiritually. It is thus a way of life or a value system. The word 'Religion' is used for the lack of a better synonym for 'Dharma' in English language.

Hinduism describes Dharma as the natural universal laws whose observance enables humans to be contented and happy, and to save himself from degradation and suffering. Dharma is the moral law combined with spiritual discipline that guides one's life. Hindus consider Dharma the very foundation of life. Atharva Veda describes Dharma symbolically: Prithivim Dharmana dhritam, that is, "this world is upheld by Dharma".

Anything that helps human being to reach god is Dharma and anything that hinders human being from reaching god is Adharma. For instance, in the epic poem Mahabharata, the Pandavas represent Dharma in life and the Kauravas represent Adharma.

According to the Bhagavat Purana, righteous living or life on a dharmic path has four aspects: austerity (tap), purity (shauch), compassion (daya) and truthfulness (satya); and adharmic or unrighteous life has three vices: pride (ahankar), contact (sang), and intoxication (madya).

Manusmriti written by the ancient sage Manu, prescribes ten essential rules for the observance of Dharma: Patience (dhriti), forgiveness (kshama), piety or self control (dama), honesty (asteya), sanctity (shauch), control of senses (indraiya-nigrah), reason (dhi), knowledge or learning (vidya), truthfulness (satya) and absence of anger (krodha). Manu further writes, "Non-violence, truth, non-coveting, purity of body and mind, control of senses are the essence of Dharma". Therefore dharmic laws govern not only the individual but all in society.

The purpose of Dharma is not only to attain a union of the soul with the supreme reality, it also suggests a code of conduct that is intended to secure both worldly joys and supreme happiness. Hinduism is the religion that suggests methods for the attainment of the highest ideal and eternal bliss here and now on earth and not somewhere in heaven.

In essence Hinduism is a way of life and culture in which several religious practices are harmoniously blended and bound by the common bond of 'Dharma'. In the words of a Hindu scholar and writer, Ram Swarup, "it is the name of one religion or one truth lived at hundred points in hundred ways by people of different capacities and preparedness. Unity of Hinduism is not external and geographical; it is deep, subtle, spiritual; it has multiple expressions; it lives in them all; it also exceeds them."

The word 'Hindu'

History is mostly guessing; the rest is prejudice. - Will Durant

The word 'Hindu' has its origin in Sanskrit literature. In the Rig Veda, Bharat is referred to as the country of 'Sapta Sindhu', i.e. the country of seven great rivers. The word 'Sindhu' refers to rivers and sea and not merely to the specific river called 'Sindhu'. In Vedic Sanskrit, according to ancient dictionaries, 'sa' was pronounced as 'ha'. Thus 'Sapta Sindhu' was pronounced as 'Hapta Hindu'. This is how the word 'Hindu' came in to being. The ancient Persians also referred to Bharat as 'Hapta Hind', as recorded in their ancient classic 'Bem Riyadh'. That is why some scholars came to believe that the word 'Hindu' had its origin in Persia. The Greeks, who invaded Bharat under Alexander, dropped 'H' and used the name Indoos or Indus, which later led to the formation of the word 'India'.

Story of Hanumanta

The ideal devotee of Shri Rama and the God of Strength from Ramayana; one of the few Chiranjeevis (who do not die).

There is no village or town in Bharat without a temple dedicated to Hanuman. An unforgettable character in the great epic, the Ramayana, he has become a symbol of courage, loyalty and mature wisdom.

Men and women, the young and the old, people of all ages and of all professions worship Hanuman.

Students pray to him for intelligence and soldiers for strength. In olden days there used to be temples of

Hanuman at the gates of forts. The gymnasiums of wrestlers invariably have his picture.

Every human being has good qualities and bad qualities. Our ancestors have taught that every one should develop his/her good qualities and go nearer God. Divinity is only being full of noble qualities. In our country some men and women have later come to be honored as divine beings, winning the reverence, the devotion and the love of the common people. Hanuman is one such great soul.

According to legend, Hanuman is the son of the Wind God. Air sustains all living beings. One can exist without food, spend days without water; but it is impossible to exist even for a short time without air. Air is life. Therefore, Hanuman is also called 'Pranadeva' or the God of Life.

Hanuman was a master of music. He was also an expert in dance and drama. So, he is worshipped with love and devotion by musicians and actors. He was also a great yogi or mystic.

Hanuman was born to Anjanadevi and Vaayu, the wind God. Hanuman is also called 'Aanjaneya', son of Anjana. Hanuman was extraordinary from the very moment of his birth. There are many very interesting stories about his childhood.

When he was small, Hanuman felt very hungry. Looking up he saw in the east something red. Hanuman thought that the red sun was a fruit and flew up to snatch it. What was a child's whim became something serious. Though the sun's heat burnt his face, Hanuman was determined and continued to fly towards the sun. Indra, the Lord of Heaven, feared that the sun might be caught. So he hit at Hanuman with his terrible weapon Vajrayudha. Hanuman fell down and was hurt. His cheeks became swollen.

(This is why he came to be called Hanuman. 'Hanu' in Sanskrit means the cheek.)

Now, Hanuman's father, the Wind God became very angry. So he would not move at all. In all the three worlds there was no air to breathe. Then all the gods came and consoled the Wind God. Each god conferred a boon upon the little Hanuman. Brahma and Creator said, "No weapon will be able to kill this boy." Indra said to the boy, "You will be a 'Chiranjeevi' (immortal)."

Blessed thus by the gods, Hanuman grew up to be as strong as his father. He flew about as freely and was quite mischievous. The Rishis, who were troubled by his mischief, pronounced a curse on him. Hence, Hanuman would never know how powerful and strong he was. Others will have to remind him about his strength. Only then he would realize it.

Meeting With Shri Rama And Lakshmana

When Hanuman grew up he became the minister of Sugreeva, the King of Kishkindha. Vali was the elder brother of Sugreeva. Once Vali, who was fighting with a rakshasa, entered a cave with his opponent; he did not come out for a long time. Blood began to flow from the cave, so Sugreeva thought that Vali was dead. He returned to Kishkindha and became its king. But a little later, Vali returned and drove out Sugreeva. Sugreeva and his ministers hid themselves in the Malaya mountains; Vali could not enter this region.

When Shri Rama, his wife Seetha and his brother Lakshmana were in the forest, a rakshasa by name Ravana took away Seetha by force. Rama was in great grief. He was wandering in the forests and came to Kishkindha. Sugreeva saw him when he came with Lakshmana to the Malaya mountains. Sugreeva and his companions were full of fear that Vali had sent Shri Rama and Lakshmana to kill them. But Hanuman asked them not to be afraid. Sugreeva was also very anxious to know who those handsome young men were. Whom should he send to talk to them? Finally he choose Hanuman.

Hanuman was an excellent ambassador. He could easily understand the nature of other people. As soon as he saw Rama and Lakshmana, he realized that they were not deceivers, but noble persons. In soft and pleasing words he asked them who they were, and told them about himself. Rama was very happy when he heard the words of Hanuman. He said to Lakshmana, "Did you hear his words? Even an enemy with his sword drawn would be pacified by such words. If a ruler has such a messenger, his efforts will always be successful."

Hanuman took Rama and Lakshmana to Sugreeva. He had hopes that these brave young men would make Sugreeva king again.

Sugreeva's Minister Rama's Messenger

Rama and Sugreeva became friends very soon. When Sugreeva challenged Vali to a fight, Rama helped his friend by killing Vali with an arrow.

When she heard this sad news, Vali's wife, Thara was full of grief. She fell on his body, weeping. Hanuman prostrated before her and said, "Revered lady, Vali came to this condition because of his evil deeds, his own actions. Sugreeva was only the means. Please do not think that Sugreeva killed Vali. No one can live for all times in this world. Look at your son Angada and console yourself."

Sugreeva then became king. All his troubles were over. The kingdom was his. He forgot his promise to Rama that he would immediately send servants to search for Seetha and find her. He left the responsibilities of the state to his ministers; he forgot everything in his pleasures.

Hanuman warned him. He did his duty as a minister, saying the right thing at the right time. He said to Sugreeva, "O King, the kingdom and the fame which you desired are now yours. If you do not help your friends at the right time, even the greatest help you offer later will be totally useless. Though Rama is very anxious to find Seetha, he is waiting for you. It is already late, but he is a patient man. Please send your army at once to search for Seetha."

Sugreeva sent Neela, one of his commanders, to find out where Seetha was. And he returned to his pleasures.

The rainy season was over. It was now autumn. Rama's mind was always filled with thoughts of Seetha's sufferings and sorrows, and he was miserable. He revealed his misery to Lakshmana. Hot blooded Lakshmana was very angry with Sugreeva. He went to see Sugreeva. His anger made Sugreeva's subjects shiver with fear. Sugreeva himself was so terrified, he did not know what to do.

Again it was Hanuman who gave wise counsel. He said to Sugreeva, "Shri Rama may not really be angry with you. Perhaps he was sent Lakshmana to you as his work has been delayed. When those who are more powerful than we are enraged, it is not wise for us to become angry. Our anger will only heighten their rage. At such times we should seek to pacify the mighty. Besides, Shri Rama has helped you and therefore you should behave respectfully towards him."

This time advice was effective. Sugreeva pacified Lakshmana, and with his entire army went to Rama. He sent the army in all the four directions to find out where Seetha was. Vast as the ocean, the army set off with shouts of enthusiasm. The deafening noise seemed to make the earth Shiver. Shri Rama removed a ring from his finger and giving it to Hanuman, said: "When Seetha sees you, she may be afraid of you, or may not believe your words. If that happens, show her this ring. We depend entirely on your strength."

Hanuman prostrated before Rama and set off.

The Vast Sea Before Them

Hanuman, Angada, Jambavantha and others went towards the south in search of Seetha. Sugreeva had given them only a month's time to find her. They wandered far and wide and grew utterly weary. At last they came to the sea. They stood before the vast, roaring sea.

The period granted by Sugreeva was over. So what were they to do? The brave soldiers of Sugreeva sat bewildered. If they returned to Kishkindha, Sugreeva would certainly punish them. So, Angada suggested that they should fast to death on the sea-shore. But Hanuman replied, "Angada, that would not be right. Surely Sugreeva will not punish us if we return." He tried to persuade them in many ways. But the others in their pessimism would not listen to him. All of them spread some grass and lay down on it, determined to die.

Just then a person by name Sampathi came there. From him they learnt that Seetha was Ravana's prisoner in Lanka. Their joy knew no bounds. They danced about shouting, "Oh! Now we know about Seetha!" With great enthusiasm, they turned to the sea. But who could cross the ocean?

One of them said, "I can jump across ten yojanas." (The 'yojana' was the old unit of measurement of distance.) Another said, "I can jump twenty yojanas." Jambavantha was a mighty warrior, but now old. He said, "When I was young, I could leap over any distance. Now I am old, and can leap ninety yojanas. But this is a hundred."

Angada went further can cross a hundred yojanas, and reach Lanka. But I do not know if I will have strength left to come back."

The old Jambavantha consoled them all and said, "Hanuman is the only great hero who can leap over the sea to Lanka and come back. Let me go and cheer him up and encourage him."

Hanuman was sitting away from others and silently gazing at the sea.

You remember that some sages had pronounced a curse upon Hanuman, when he was a young boy - that he would not be aware of his own strength unless others told him of it. Jambavantha now praised Hanuman's strength and ability. He said, "No other living creature has your strength, wisdom and radiance. Why are you sitting quiet, not knowing yourself? You can certainly jump over the ocean."

What Can Stop Hanuman?

As Hanuman became aware of his own powers, great enthusiasm welled up in him. He stood up and after glancing at them all began to grow. His companions were astonished. As they went on praising him, his stature grew.

He grew so tall that he could jump across the sea. Still he was very modest. He bowed to the elders and said, "I am the son of the Wind God who can move in the skies without touching the earth. If need be I can throw skyward all the water of this ocean and make the three worlds float on water. I will go like lightning and surely see Seethadevi."

His voice was like thunder. He stood on Mount Mahendra and grew even bigger and then leapt.

Even the gods in Heaven were amazed at Hanuman's flight over the ocean. They wanted to test his strength; they sent an unearthly spirit by name Surase, from the serpent world, to obstruct him. She appeared before Hanuman in the form of a rakshasi (demon) and roared: "The gods have given you for my food. I will swallow you," "You cannot go further without entering my mouth," she added.

She opened her mouth, and it was big enough to swallow the huge Hanuman.

Hanuman increased his size further and said, "Eat me if you want but your mouth will have to be much bigger." Surase's mouth grew wider as Hanuman's body grew bigger. Hanuman's form grew bigger and bigger. Even so, Surase's mouth grew wider and wider.

Hanuman was clever. He thought there would be no end to this process. Suddenly he shrank to the size of a thumb, entered her mouth and came out. He now stood before her and entreated her with these words - "Now that I have entered your mouth and come out of it also, please allow me to continue my journey."

Surase was pleased with his cleverness and allowed him to go, wishing him success.

Hanuman moved on. But there was another obstacle. There was another rakshasi in the way and she had a strange power. She would drag down those who were flying above the sea by catching hold of their shadows from below and would eat them up later. She was now overjoyed that she could get food and dragged down Hanuman's shadow. Hanuman entered her mouth. But once inside, he grew bigger; he then burst open her body and came out.

Hanuman could see Lanka at a distance. His joy knew no bounds. But he feared that if he entered Lanka as he was, every one would see him. So assuming his normal size, he alighted on a mountain near the seashore.

Hanuman Enters Lanka

It was night. Hanuman was about to enter the city. But a goddess stopped him at the city gates. She was the goddess who protected Lanka. She thundered at him: "Who are you? If you wish to enter, you must first defeat me."

Hanuman was enraged. His left fist came down on her face with crushing force. The blow made her totter. She begged him for life and said, "The Creator Brahma had said that when a monkey defeated me the end of Lanka would be near. Perhaps the time has now come. Go in and look for Seetha."

Where Is Seetha?

Lanka was a city of great splendor. The eyes could feast endlessly on its beauty and wealth. It was full of grand buildings and lovely gardens. But Hanuman's important task was to find Seetha. So, he did not pay much attention to the beauty of the city. He searched for Seetha in the mansions of important rakshasa leaders like Kumbhakarna. She was nowhere to be seen. Then he entered the palace of Ravana himself. He searched in all the nooks and corners of the palace but did not see Seetha.

Hanuman's anxiety grew. Rama and Sugreeva would be waiting with the belief that he would surely bring news of Seetha. What answer could he give them? He thought he should not lose hope and went on with his search with renewed effort. But Seetha was nowhere to be seen.

Hanuman was very much disturbed. Had she fallen into the sea on the way to Lanka? Or, had her heart burst at the sight of the vast ocean? Or perhaps Ravana had eaten her, as she did not marry him? Thoughts swarmed into his mind.

Seetha Overjoyed

Just then he saw the garden Ashokavana at a distance. 'Oh, I have not looked there', thought Hanuman and flew to the garden. He combed the entire garden and finally found Seethadevi. He was in raptures. Seetha was sitting under a tree, in a soiled saree. Her plight made Hanuman both sad and angry. He sat on the tree beneath which Seetha was seated.

Day dawned. The rakshasa king Ravana came to see Seetha. Seetha did not wish to speak to him directly. She held a twig in her hand and replied to Ravana's words, as if she was speaking to the twig. Ravana was very angry and went back. In her grief Seetha decided to kill herself.

From his perch upon the tree, Hanuman could see and hear everything. He now resolved to address her. But he realized that if he talked to her all at once, she might be frightened. So he thought of a plan. From where he sat, he narrated the story of Rama. And he said, as if in wonder, "it seems as if Seethadevi is here!"

Hearing a voice from above Seetha was at first scared, Ravana had just then left. She feared it might be a trick of the rakshasas. But she heard the names of Rama and Lakshmana and their story. She looked up in surprise. Hanuman softly got down from the tree and prostrated before her. He again said that he was Rama's messenger and praised him. Seetha was overjoyed. Hanuman showed her the ring, which Rama had given him. The sight of the ring brought back all her sorrow. Hanuman comforted her with these words: "Shri Rama will surely take you from here. Please do not worry. You need not even wait till Rama comes. If you agree straightaway I can carry you to Rama on my back. Not only you, but the entire city of Lanka with Ravana, I can carry on my back."

But Seetha calmed him and said: "Bring Rama and Lakshmana here." She gave him the choodamani, a jewel she wore in her hair, so that he could show it to Shri Rama.

'Ravana, Think Over This'

Hanuman had now completed his mission. But he thought it would be a good thing if he could manage to get an estimate of the enemy's strength, kill some of the prominent rakshasas and also give a warning to Ravana. It occurred to him that he put Ravana in a rage, if he destroyed the Ashokavana so dear to him.

He set about it and uprooted trees. He pulled from the ground all the creepers bearing beautiful flowers. He trampled upon other plants. Seeing all this, the rakshasas on duty there ran to Ravana in fear. Ravana was furious when he heard the news. But all the rakshasas he sent were destroyed by Hanuman in the twinkling of an eye.

Ravana then sent his son Indrajith himself to capture Hanuman. Indrajith was a great hero. He fought with Hanuman for a while and then shot the Brahmasthra. Hanuman wanted to show respect to the weapon carrying the power of Lord Brahma and allowed himself to be tied up by it for a while.

The rakshasas were excited and in great glee. Indrajith took Hanuman to Ravana's court. The sight of Hanuman threw Ravana into a towering rage. The radiance of Ravana's face astonished Hanuman.

Even Devendra, the King of Heaven, was afraid of Ravana. But Hanuman was fearless. He told Ravana why he had gone there. He said, "Look, Ravana, it is not proper for you to kidnap Seethadevi and make her suffer like this. You have performed tapas (long prayer and meditation) Just think, can you face Rama? You will be destroyed, and your friends, relatives and this city, too, will be destroyed. Give up this evil way and restore Seetha to Rama."

His words were like adding fuel to the fire. Ravana's anger blazed. He ordered the rakshasas to kill Hanuman. But his brother Vibheeshana intervened; he said that it was not right according to the principles of diplomacy to kill the enemy's messenger.

Ravana agreed with him; he said to his servants, "Tails are ornamental to monkeys. So set fire to Hanuman's tail."

At once the rakshasas wrapped some cloth around Hanuman's tail, poured oil over it and set fire to it.

They paraded Hanuman all over the city.

Now Hanuman was in a high rage. Still he was glad that the rakshasas were showing the whole city to him. He carefully noted the hidden fortresses, the topography and other useful details.

Then all at once he leapt high. He freed himself from the ropes. He beat up all the rakshasas following him and stood on a high place. He set fire to all the buildings nearby. The houses of Ravana's ministers and commanders began to burn. Very soon the whole city of Lanka was in flames.

But suddenly Hanuman realized his mistake. In his enthusiasm to burn Lanka, he had forgotten that Seetha was there. His heart was about to burst. Quickly he flew to Ashokavana. He saw Seetha sitting under a tree. His anxiety was at an end. He touched her feet and received her blessings; then he flew back across the ocean.

Jambavantha, Angada and others were waiting for Hanu mantha. The sight of Hanuman brought them immense relief.

A Hero Without Equal

In his anxiety to get news about Seetha, Shri Rama was counting each day.

Hanuman narrated all his doings to Rama in detail and also gave him the ornament sent by Seetha. Rama was overjoyed. He said: "Hanuman has done what no one else in the world could do. I had not seen a hero who could leap across the sea. He is a very intelligent messenger who has done not only what he was asked to, but also what he thought was appropriate. He is a good messenger who performs the task assigned to him and also what pleases his master. Surely, Hanuman is an excellent messenger." Shri Rama embraced Hanuman and praised him highly.

The War

Preparations were afoot for the war with Ravana. The monkey army marched towards Lanka with great enthusiasm. Rama and Lakshmana were carried by Hanuman and Angada respectively on their shoulders.

After Hanuman left Lanka, Vibheeshana tried to advise his elder brother Ravana. But was Ravana a person to listen to wise counsel? So, Vibheeshana left him and surrendered to Rama. There were heated arguments whether Vibheeshana should be accepted or not. Shri Rama turned to Hanuman for his opinion. The latter said, "My Lord, allow me to say one thing. I have carefully watched Vibheeshana's face and listened to his voice when he was speaking. He has no deceit or evil intention. I think you can accept him. But with your matchless intelligence, only you can finally decide what you should do with Vibheeshana."

Finally Shri Rama gave shelter to Vibheeshana and his followers.

The Vanara army built a bridge across the sea. The war between Rama and Ravana began.

'If One Hanuman Is Alive...'

Hanuman's valour rose sky-high in this war. He dashed rakshasas to the ground or whirled them and threw them up. He crushed to death many a rakshasa hero like Dhoomraksha and Akampana. The enemies trembled at his very sight. Anjaneya fought so valiantly that Ravana himself praised him as a real hero. Rama had no chariot to fight Ravana, who was sitting on a high chariot. Hanuman carried Rama on his shoulders when Rama had to fight with Ravana.

Ravana's son Indrajith was a great hero of the rakshasa army. He once shot the Brahmasthra, the terrible missile with the power of Lord Brahma, the God of Creation. The whole Vanara army fell down unconscious. Even Rama and Lakshmana fainted. Hanuman who had also fainted for a moment, got up and going round the battlefield with Vibheeshana, put courage into his soldiers with his words. While walking along, Vibheeshana saw the old Jambavantha and spoke to him. The latter opened his eyes slowly and asked, "Vibheeshana, is Hanuman alive?"

Vibheeshana was amazed and said, "Revered Jambavantha, you do not ask about Rama and Lakshmana or about Sugreeva, Angada or Neela. But you ask about Hanuman only; why?"

"Vibheeshana, if that one great hero is alive, even if the entire Vanara army is dead, it makes no difference. But if that one person is dead, our army is as good as dead. We can hope to live only as long as he is alive." So replied Jambavantha.

Hanuman, who was standing quite near and heard these words, held his feet with respect and devotion, and mentioning his own name, said he was alive. Then Jambavantha said to him, "You have now to do a mighty task to bring our army to life. You have also to save Rama and Lakshmana who have fainted because of the Brahmasthra.

Fly across the ocean and over a great distance till you reach the Himalaya mountains. You will there see a mountain containing all herbs. There grow the herbs Mritha Sanjeevini, Vishalyakarani, Savamakarani and Sandhanakarani. Fetch them at once and save these soldiers."

Immediately Hanuman flew towards the Himalayas with the speed of thought. He could also see the mountain. Hanuman searched for them and, when he could not find the herbs, threatened the mountain itself in his terrible anger. "See what I will do to you," he said, and shaking the very mountain flew back with it to Lanka. As he streaked across the sky with the mountain it appeared as if the very sun was flying towards Lanka.

The very smell of those herbs was enough to make Rama, Lakshmana and the whole army recover and sit up. The rakshasas did not want the enemy to know how many on their side had died; so, obeying Ravana's orders, they had thrown their dead into the sea. So no rakshasa could come back to life. Having achieved his Purpose, Hanuman flew back with the mountain to its place, put it there, and hurried again to the battlefield.

After the war was over, Hanuman entered Lanka and stood before Seetha and told her of the victory. Seetha was speechless for a moment with joy. Then she said that there was no fitting reward she could give to Hanuman who had brought such happy tidings.

"The words you have spoken with such affection are more precious than any heap of diamonds or the divine kingdom. I have seen Rama victorious. What greater fortune can I ask for!" Hanuman replied.

Rama had now to return to Ayodhya. But he had some doubts. Bharatha had ruled over the kingdom for fourteen years. So he might wish to be the king. How could he find out? Even if Bharatha had that desire, he would not say so. And nobody could ask him. Some intelligent person should make it out from Bharatha's face and the way he spoke, and should then inform Rama. It was a difficult mission which would need much shrewdness and a capacity to understand persons.

Who was to go?

There was only one person whom every one remembered when there was a difficulty to be overcome, when courage and intelligence was needed. And that was Anjaneya! Shri Rama, of course, sent for Hanuman.

He told him, "if Bharatha has the slightest wish to be king and does not want me to return, come and tell me. I will stay on here. You must carefully observe his expression and study his words and find out."

Hanuman assumed the shape of a man and went to Ayodhya and informed Bharatha of Rama's arrival. Bharatha fainted with joy. When he recovered he said, "O greatest of men, I do not know whether you are a man or a god. I must reward you for bringing this glad news."

Shri Rama returned to Ayodhya.

His coronation took place with great splendor. Rama gave priceless gifts to all his friends. He also gave an invaluable necklace and ornaments to Seethadevi. But she remembered the great help of Hanuman and gave them to him. She even took off the necklace and looked at Rama. Shri Rama read her mind and said, "Devi, do please give the necklace to the person who has brought you immense joy and in whom valour, ability, courtesy and wisdom are embedded for ever." At once, she gave necklace to Hanuman.



Meaning of Sangh Prarthanaa

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

1. Whom are we praying to?
2. Who are we
3. What qualities are we praying for?
4. What is our collective vision, mission
5. What is our means to realize that vision

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

- **Whom are we praying to?**

सर्वमंगल मांगल्यां देवीं सर्वार्थ साधिकाम् ।

शरण्यां सर्वभूतानां नमामो भूमिमातरम् ॥१

सच्चिदानन्द रूपाय विश्वमंगल हेतवे ।

विश्वधर्मैक मूलाय नमोस्तु परमात्मने ॥२

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

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

- **Who are "We"**

विश्वधर्म विकासार्थं प्रभो संघटिता वयम् ।

शुभामाशिषमस्मभ्यम् देहि तत् परिपूर्ये ॥३

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

- **What are we praying for?**

अजय्यमात्म सामर्थ्यं सुशीलं लोक पूजितम् ।

ज्ञानं च देहि विश्वेश ध्येय मार्ग प्रकाशकम् ॥४

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

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

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

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

- **Material progress and Spiritual upliftment**

समुत्कर्षोस्तु नो नित्यं निःश्रेयस समन्वितः ।

तत्साधकं स्फुरत्वन्तः सुवीरव्रतमुज्वलम् ॥५

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

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

- **Let our commitment to the cause be firm**

विश्वधर्म प्रकाशेन विश्वशान्ति प्रवर्तके ।

हिन्दुसंघटना कार्ये ध्येयनिष्ठा स्थिरास्तुनः ॥६

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

- **Our grand Vision - Pinnacle of Glory**

संघशक्तिर्विजेत्रीयं कृत्वास्मद्धर्म रक्षणम् ।

परमं वैभवं प्राप्तुं समर्थास्तु तवाशिषा ॥७

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

- **This is God's work. Offerings**

त्वदीये पुण्य कार्येस्मिन् विश्व कल्याण साधके ।

त्याग सेवा व्रतस्यायम् कायो मे पततु प्रभो ॥ ८

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

। विश्वधर्म की जय ।

Victory to the Universal Dharma



Hindu Scriptures

(Note: While talking about scriptures, tell them some of the statements from the Vedas, Upanishads. See separate supplement for this.)

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

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

In Hinduism, there are two categories of books:

1. Shrutis, which deal with never changing, eternal principles, and
2. Smritis, which often deal with the practical application of those principles to the ever changing social order.

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

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

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

The Rig Veda consists of hymns which are mostly prayers. The Yajur Veda deals mainly with sacrificial rites. The Sama Veda contains a portion of the Rig Vedic hymns set to music. These have to be sung at appropriate stages during a sacrifice. The Atharva Veda, which is a later composition, consists mostly of morals and ethical codes as also a few worldly sciences.

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

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

It's probably the only religious book that was taught in a battlefield, a place filled with action. It was not taught to the disciples in the serene mountains of Himalayas. It is in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna, the great incarnation of God, and Arjuna, the warrior prince and a man of action, who was caught in a dilemma about his duties. He was confused as to what is right and what is wrong. Serious questions concerning life and death, duty and devotion, knowledge and meditation were discussed, and sensible solutions offered which hold good even to this day. Manliness and selfless devotion to duty are the keynotes of this great little scripture of 700 verses.

There is a verse in Sanskrit that compares the Upanishads to the cows and the Gita to the milk. In other words, the Gita gives the essence of the Upanishadic philosophy in a simple and practicable form. It is an integral part of the Mahabharata.

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

The Puranas are another class of scriptures that describe the teachings of the Vedas through myths, legends and examples of great people. They were created to popularize and simplify religious teachings. There are eighteen main Puranas and many other lesser Puranas. There is also the Devi Mahatmya which describes the worship of God as the Divine Mother.

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

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

Tamil is the oldest of the Dravidian group of languages. It has both Shaivism and Vaishnavism in its classical literature. On the Shaivite side are the four great teacher-saints: Appar, Sundarar, Thirujnaanasambandar and Manikkavachagar. Their compositions are known as 'Thevaram' and 'Thiruvachakam'. Another literary masterpiece describing the idealistic forms of behavior, conduct and ethics is 'Thirukkural'. This anthology of three-line verse numbering 1330 in all, was written by Tirukkural in Tamil. The most popular Vaishnava literature in Tamil is 'Nalayira Divya Prabandham' which is a collection of 4000 verses and comprises devotional songs written by poet saints known as 'Alvars'.

As mentioned earlier, Hinduism is not a closed book. From time to time, sages in Bharat have given new impetus to the faith by removing bad or misleading practices and re-establishing the teachings of the Vedas. One example is Sikhism, which was founded by Guru Nanak Dev about 500 years ago. The 'Guru Granth Sahib' is the main scripture of Sikhism. It is written in Punjabi. The concept of 'Ek Omkar' taught by Guru Nanak Dev is rooted in Vedas.

Another example is Arya Samaj movement started by Swami Dayananda Saraswati more 100 years ago. His best known books are 'Satyarth Prakash' (Light of Truth) and commentaries on the Vedas.

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

Meaning Behind Rituals - Part 1

Note: *Initiate this topic in an interactive way. Find out what are the questions that come to their mind and what are some of the questions frequently asked by friends. Encourage them to remember what goes on in Mandirs or at home during Pooja and ask questions about 'Why do we ...'. Here are some sample questions and answers. If you are not able to answer a question, please share with us.*

Why do we light a lamp?

In almost every Indian home a lamp is lit daily before the altar of the Lord. In some houses it is lit at dawn, in some, twice a day – at dawn and dusk – and in a few it is maintained continuously (akhanda deepa). All auspicious functions commence with the lighting of the lamp, which is often maintained right through the occasion.

Light symbolizes knowledge, and darkness, ignorance. The Lord is the "Knowledge Principle" (chaitanya) who is the source, the enlivener and the illuminator of all knowledge. Hence light is worshiped as the Lord himself.

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

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

Whilst lighting the lamp we thus pray:

Deepajyothi parabrahma
 Deepa Jyotir Janaardana
 Deepo harati paapaani
 Sandhyaa deepa namostute | |

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

Why do we have a prayer room?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why do we do Namaste?

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

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

Namaste could be just a casual or formal greeting, a cultural convention or an act of worship. However there is much more to it than meets the eye. In Sanskrit namah + te = namaste. It

means - I bow to you - my greetings, salutations or prostration to you. Namaha can also be literally interpreted as "na ma" (not mine). It has a spiritual significance of negating or reducing one's ego in the presence of another.

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

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

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

Origin of the Handshake

This inference may sound incredible, but social anthropologists have established that different types of mutual greetings and salutations have originated in actions of two or more persons (facing each other) which aim at proving that all of them are unarmed and that they come in peace. The origin of the handshake has also been found to be a similar one.

Originally, in the hazy past of human history, when two strangers faced one another, they 'held' each other's hand in a tight grasp. This assured to both the persons, that the other person was not holding any weapon in his right hand. This later became the congenial etiquette of our handshake. It is difficult to believe today that our friendly handshake, actually originated as a hand-grasp between two suspicious strangers, as a mechanism to reassure both that the other is not an enemy.

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

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

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

The entire body emanates energy in the form of electromagnetic waves - the forehead and the subtle spot between the eyebrows especially so. That is why worry generates heat and causes a

headache. The tilak and pottu cools the forehead, protects us and prevents energy loss. Some times the entire forehead is covered with chandan or bhasma. Using plastic reusable "stick bindis" is not very beneficial, even though it serves the purpose of decoration.

Why do we apply the holy ash?

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

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

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

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

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

Tryambakam yajaamahe
Sugandhim pushtivardhanam
Urvaarukamiva bhandhanaan
Mrytyor muksheeyamaa amrutaat

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

Dr. Keshava Baliram Hedgewar

22nd June 1897. On that day, Queen Victoria of England completed exactly 60 years of her ascent to the British throne. Naturally, an atmosphere of pompous festivity of that Diamond Jubilee prevailed everywhere. The British Government had arranged grand functions in all villages,

towns and cities in Bharat too. Among other things, they distributed sweets among the school children.

The poor were served with food. The prominent in society were conferred with decorative titles.

A mood of revelry among people in Nagpur (Maharashtra) was evident from their new attire, etc. Children were hurrying to their schools in groups in eager anticipation of the sweets which were to be distributed there.

But amidst all this, one young boy was not happy. He threw away the sweets given to him, and sat alone in a corner brooding.

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

The sweets, which were sweet to others, were bitter for this boy. He had perceived nothing but bitterness in the sweets. He was barely eight at that time. Patriotism had found lodgment in his heart even at such a tender age. Such was Keshav. The boy was eventually to become famous as Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. He founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a nationwide organization. He gave a new orientation to the country. He awakened self-respect and patriotism among the Hindus.

Lineage

It was the auspicious day of Yugadi. The first day of April 1889. Keshav was born in Nagpur. His mother Revatibai hailed from the Paithankar family. She was married to Balirampant Hedgewar. Keshav was their fifth child. They had six children in all. Revatibai was serene and composed by nature. She adjusted herself to the temperaments of all her in-laws. Balirampant was extremely short-tempered. Added to this, the family was in dire poverty. However, this did not come in their way of leading a happy family life.

The three Hedgewar brothers were adventurous by nature. Their spirits rose whenever they were confronted with an impossible task. Once the well in their backyard was to be readied for an annual worship. It was full of dirt and mire. The three brothers took it

upon themselves to clean the well by removing the entire dirt. They did not inform about this plan to the elders in the house, fearing that they might prevent them. The same night they addressed themselves to the task. They first ascertained that all others were fast asleep. Then the trio drew out all the soiled muddy water from the well, removed the accumulated dirt, and quietly went to bed before morn. The others in the house were surprised to find fresh and clean water shining in the well the next morning.

Hardship During Childhood

At the close of the nineteenth century, the epidemic of plague used to play havoc in the country every few years. No medicine or cure was available for the disease at that time. People were greatly distressed. And to add insult to injury, the British's began to intentionally target the people for harassment, which was more severe than the dreaded disease. As an unavoidable consequence, many people died a most tortuous and harrowing death. Nagpur then had a population of a hundred thousand; and out of them two to three hundred people succumbed every day to plague.

Being an orthodox priest, Balirampant was attending to funeral ceremonies of the deceased every day. Many others in the city had deserted their homes and were living in hutments in the outskirts. But Balirampant did not budge from his house. He scornfully remarked: "What can the plague do to me?" But dead rats were soon found in his house too. Both he and his wife caught the disease. Treatment was started. One day, his son Sitarampant went out to bring medicines. On his return, shock awaited him. His father and mother had both died! Keshav was just thirteen then.

After the sudden and simultaneous demise of both parents, Keshav's hardship knew no bounds. The eldest brother Mahadev Shastri had taken to loose and unbridled ways. All the household chores like cutting wood, drawing water, cooking, etc., fell to the lot of Keshav and his elder brother Sitarampant. Sometimes they had to go without food. Often they had to roam about with torn clothes on their person. As if this were not enough, their short-tempered eldest brother heaped abuses and thrashed them often. Keshav began to spend most of his time in his friends' houses.

But Keshav was full of self-respect. Often even when he was hungry, he would not approach his friends for food. It was not in his nature to stretch his hand before anybody for anything. Despite travails, his attention to his studies was never affected. He was always ahead in his class. He was sober and spoke sparingly. He established instant rapport with others, and others too longed for his company. He was a favorite student of his teachers. The daily four-mile run to the school never proved to be a problem for him

He was deeply inspired by incidents from the heroic life of emperor Shivaji.

Gallant Fighter for Motherland

Patriotic personalities like Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., were fighting to put an end to the oppressive rule of the British.

Keshav was ever eager to listen to the speeches of such great leaders. He nourished a desire to become a speaker like them.

Keshav and his friends formed a discussion group for the purpose.

In 1905 Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of Bharat, partitioned the Bengal Province into two. This provoked thousands of youths to revolt against the British. Foreign clothes were burnt. A few British officers were killed. How could the British's tolerate this? They rained lath blows on the protesters, and shot many. They arrested the freedom fighters and dumped them in jails.

This was the time when "Vande Mataram" had become the refrain of the freedom struggle. It turned out to be the war cry of millions of youths, reverberating in the skies of Bharat.

Keshav was then studying in Neel City High School of Nagpur. The very mention of "Wande Mataram" used to enrage the British. It was as, if molten lead was being poured in their ears. They had banned the singing of "Wande Mataram" in schools. Severe punishment awaited those who brazenly sang it. Such was the terror-stricken atmosphere prevailing then.

One day during 1908, an officer of the Department of Education arrived for inspection of the Neel City High School. The students were already occupying their seats in the respective classes. The atmosphere in the school was rather serious and disquieting.

The Inspector set out for inspection along with the Headmaster of the school. They wanted to first visit the matriculation class. Barely had they reached the threshold of the classroom when, like a bolt from the blue, a deafening cry of "Wande Mataram" rang out of that classroom piercing the ears of the duo. The Inspector was angry beyond words. Shutting his tears, he moved to the next class. There too, the same scene awaited him: same resounding roar of 'Vande Mataram' greeted him.

The Inspector thundered, "This is treason. Who have been singing Vande Mataram? Debar all those fellows from the school. They should be punished mercilessly." Passing strict orders, he left the school in a huff.

The question which occupied the minds of all was, who might be the brainy chap who was so bold as to organize the singing of "Vande Mataram" in chorus?

The teachers held out threats to the students. When this method failed, they begged of them to reveal the secret. But to no avail.

They declared that they would order mass rustication if the name were not revealed. The students remained unmoved.

As none disclosed the name of their leader, all the students of both the classes which had sung 'Vande Mataram' were summarily removed from the school. But all of them came out of the school and marched like victorious warriors singing in unison 'Vande Mataram', this time with an even louder voice.

Keshav never set foot in that school again. He was a blossoming youth of just nineteen then. His was a well-built, tall, muscular body: a result of regular workouts in the gymnasium: rather dark in complexion-, face pitted with small pox marks; a bright pair of eyes. It was the same Keshav who had kindled the flame of patriotism in the bosoms of his fellow-students in the Neel City High School to sing 'Vande Mataram'.

After leaving the Neel City High School, Keshav joined Rashtriya Vidyalaya of Yeotmal. The leaders had started such schools at several places for providing national education to students. It was a model school with ideal teachers, who were content with low salaries, but evinced very keen interest in imparting good education to students. Since it was inculcating a national outlook through education, the Government was naturally unhappy, On account of perpetual harassment by the Government the Yeotmal School was eventually closed down. But Keshav remained unperturbed, He went to Pune to continue his studies. Thereafter, he took up his Entrance examination of Calcutta Rashtriya Vidyapeeth at Amaravati in Maharashtra. In those days of extreme hardship, it was a miracle that Keshav had progressed so far in studies. It was indeed a remarkable achievement on his part. Steeped in poverty, the household never knew when the next meal would present itself to them. But it was not this condition that was worrying Keshav. His anxieties were different. What caused immense sorrow to him was that the Motherland was under an oppressive foreign rule. Many felt that armed revolt against the British was the only way for freeing the country. Persuaded thus, Keshav chose to go to Bengal, which was the cradle of revolutionaries, in order to gain experience in their close association. In fulfillment of the desire of Keshav, the elders of Nagpur like Dr. Moonje came forward to provide the necessary help for Keshav's further education. He was sent to the National Medical College of Calcutta - to a strange land 700 miles away from Nagpur, in mid-1910.

'Keshav' become 'Keshavrao' with his admission to the Medical College at Calcutta.

Strong In Mind And Body

Soon after joining the college, Keshavrao developed intimate friendship with students coming from different provinces. He utilized his leisure in cultivating them. He soon became the most sought after friend of all. Hardly was there any one who was not drawn to him. Such was his affable and amiable disposition.

As in Nagpur, he continued with his daily physical exercises without break. Milk was taken in plenty to cope with the exercises.

Thereby his body became well built and shapely.

Intolerant Of Egoists ; Friends Of Sufferers

Righteous indignation was a special -trait of Keshavrao. He was prompt to react to injustice or oppression of any kind. Once during the college vacation, he had gone to Yeotmal Keshavrao was on an evening stroll with his friends in the Civil Lines area. On the way they saw that a British Deputy Commissioner was approaching them. The British officers in those days were full of arrogance. An unwritten code required that the local people were to move away to make way for the British officers and salute them. This was intimated to Keshavrao by his friends. He, however, did not care and went ahead in the usual way without saluting.

The Deputy Commissioner came close, but Keshavrao remained passive. The former then had to move away him.

But how could the high-strung D.C. swallow such an insult? He turned back and burst out, "Don't you know the etiquette here?"

With his hands in his coat pockets, Keshavrao retorted, "What have I to do with the manner here? I come from the Capital City of Nagpur. Nothing like this is observed in Nagpur. And mind you, it's not proper to salute an unknown person." Seething with anger, the D.C. departed helplessly.

Keshavrao never tolerated any insult either to the nation or to national leaders. Once a public meeting was held under the chairmanship of Deshbhakta Moulvi Liyaqat Hussain. One of the speakers passed some disparaging remarks about Lokmanya Tilak. This was enough for Keshavrao to burst forth with indignation, He rushed to the dais and slapped the errant speaker in full public view!

Keshavrao was full of sympathy for those caught in any kind of distress. In 1913, river Damodar in Bengal was in spate. People, animals, homes, and huts were inundated under the floods. Keshavrao with his friends swung into action. They rushed to the spot for protecting the sufferers and bringing succor in their hour of travail. He served food to the hungry and spoke words of courage and confidence as they had lost all hopes about their life. Keshavrao busied himself day and night. No barriers of language or region stood in his way of service to the people.

Prudence And Caution

Keshavrao had close contact with the revolutionaries in Calcutta. His friendship with the prominent revolutionaries like Shyarnsundar Chakravarti, Motilal Ghosh and others were very intimate. Not all were admitted easily to the main organization of revolutionaries, called the 'Anusheelan Samiti'.

From the moment he left Nagpur, Keshavrao was constantly shadowed by the Intelligence Agents. Keshavraosensed it immediately and remained watchful. Once a police officer named Ketkar came to his room under the guise of a student. He began to develop fake intimacy with the other students. But Keshavrao was suspicious. He tried

to convince others that Ketkar was a police agent and cautioned them to be careful while dealing with him. But hardly any one believed him.

Narayanrao Savarkar, brother of Swatantryaveer Savarkar, was released from jail in June 1920. He had thereafter decided to join Calcutta Medical College for his further studies. One day, after ascertaining that Ketkar had gone out, Keshavrao broke open the latter's box. He found a confidential letter from the Government, which said, "N.D.S. is coming there. Keep him under surveillance."

Keshavrao showed that letter to his friends and retrieved it to its original place. They all were astonished. They then appreciated the prudence and alertness of Keshavrao.

In spite of these involvements, Keshavrao never allowed his studies to suffer. He always secured good marks in his examinations.

He passed the final examination and obtained an L. M. S.' degree in 1914. Soon thereafter he received an offer of a handsome job from Bangkok. But he turned it down, as he had already decided to dedicate his whole life for the cause of the nation.

The financial condition of his house had worsened. Naturally all the people hoped that Doctor Keshavrao would open a dispensary and help his elder brothers. In fact, doctors in general commanded great respect of the people in society in those days.

Their income also was substantial. But Keshavrao did not bother at all about it. Many people insisted on his marrying. He did not show the slightest inclination in that direction. He wrote to his uncle: "I want to work for the country and hence wish to remain unmarried. While doing this work, anything -may happen. Knowing this fully well, it is not good to risk the life of any girl."

Revolutionary

On his return to Nagpur, Hedgewar busied himself in various political and social activities.

Bapuji Kavre was a friend of Hedgewar. He was deeply involved in the revolutionary activities in the Central Provinces since 1908.

Hedgewar joined him wholeheartedly. Keshavrao met several prominent persons in Nagpur for the purpose. He delivered speeches wherever he went, deploring the slavery thrust upon the country. His earnest expression and appeal touched the hearts of the people. He also collected some money from sympathetic people secretly and with it he purchased pistols, bullets and gunpowder, for distribution among the young revolutionaries.

There was a town called Kamathi near Nagpur. An army establishment was camping there. Keshavrao, developed contacts with the personnel there. One day, a few of the revolutionaries donned the military uniform and went to the Railway Station. In broad

daylight, they unloaded some boxes of ammunitions, meant for the Army, from the railway wagon and vanished with the booty.

Keshavrao arranged subsequently to burn all those uniforms lest it come to light as a result of some inquiry at a later date.

But the Government undertook a countrywide search for the hideouts and headquarters of the revolutionaries, to exterminate them. This did have a dampening effect on the minds of the revolution ray activists. Some of them bade good-bye to the country's cause. The hold of discipline on them had become slackened. Selfishness came to the fore, and confidence melted away.

Keshavrao gained experience of both the bright and dark sides of a national worker's life through all these activities. He began to seriously ponder about the condition of the society. His incisive thinking brought him to the final conclusion that unless the people are given proper training and good samskars for leading a disciplined life, their love of the country and readiness for sacrifice would never remain firm or last long.

Thereafter Hedgewar plunged into several types of programs for awakening people. Political activities were being carried out under the banner of 'Rashtra Seva Mandal', which was founded at the instance of Lokmanya Tilak. Hedgewar was the youngest member of that group.

Hedgewar also formed 'Rashtriya Utsava Mandal' for generating fervor and enthusiasm among the youths, Program of Shivaji Jayanti, Ganesh Utsav, Shastra- puja, Sankraman Utsav, etc., were celebrated under its auspices. His speeches during these functions thrilled the hearts of the youths.

Whiter Justice

It was the year 1919. The situation in the country was hooting up on account of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements. It was in that year that the All-India Congress Committee held its session in Amritsar. Keshavrao participated in that conference.

The task of mobilizing a strong band of 1,500 volunteers for the Congress session scheduled at Nagpur in the month of July the same year was entrusted to Doctor Hedgewar. He strove day and night for the purpose. He and his colleagues Campaigned for the passage of a resolution declaring 'Poorna Swaraj (complete self-rule) as the goal of the Congress.

The Non-cooperation movement was spreading. People responded enthusiastically to the 'Swaraj in one year' slogan of the leaders. Keshavrao undertook a brisk tour in village after village in the Central Provinces for mass awakening. The British Government naturally could not remain a silent spectator. They imposed restrictions on Doctor Hedgewar that he should neither participate in nor deliver speeches in any public meetings, nor even converse in a group consisting of more than five persons.

Hedgewar totally ignored these impositions. He went on unhindered with his itinerary. The Government then charged him with treason, dubbing his speeches as objectionable. Hedgewar argued his case himself in the court and said:

"Hindusthan belongs to the people of this country. Who gave the Englishmen right to trample on the native people and rule over them oppressively? The British claim of being the rulers of Hindusthan is a brutal murder of justice, morality and Dharma."

On hearing the fierce arguments of Hedgewar the Judge remarked: "Your arguments in the court are even more seditious than your original speech."

Doctor Hedgewar was punished with one year's rigorous imprisonment.

After his release from the jail, Doctor Hedgewar was accorded a hero's welcome. He was honored by the people at several places.

Mothers performed 'aarati'. Khadi clothes were presented to him.

Final Decision

The Sampoorna Swaraj movement was in full swing. Hedgewar brought out a journal in cooperation with his friends titled 'Swatantrya'. It was full of fierce articles demanding complete Independence. When the paper began to limp due to financial losses, Doctor Hedgewar himself took over the reins of its editorship.

But as time passed, the Non-cooperation movement cooled down. In-discipline and selfishness had reared their ugly heads in the society. The conspiring Britishers created rifts and rivalries between Hindus and Muslims.

After observing all this, Doctor Hedgewar came to the conclusion: If the yoke of the British slavery has to be overthrown, we have to mainly trust the Hindus. We have to awaken patriotism, discipline and bravery. Then only will the Muslims shed their separatist tendencies and stand shoulder to shoulder with the 'Hindus in the nationalist movement.

Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Sangh

Hedgewar intensified his contacts and established personal rapport with a large number of people. In 1925, he founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, on the auspicious day of Vijaya Dashami.

From little acorn grows the mighty oaktree. Little droplets make the vast ocean. One heart joining with the other hearts, the strength of Sangh soon grew. People began to attend the Sangh Shakhas irrespective of their being rich or poor, no matter to what caste they belonged. Hedgewar maintained personal contacts with them all. He busied himself in the thought and work for the Sangh day and night. In fact, poverty in his

house was unredeemed. How to run the house with the meagre and uncertain earnings from his elder brother's priestly profession? Doctor Hedgewar had a number of very close and well-meaning friends.

They all were concerned about him and his household. He never sent anyone back without some kind of hospitality. This did involve expense; and resources were scarce.

Some friends of Doctor Hedgewar decided to collect some amount every month to help in the upkeep of the house. But Keshavrao politely and firmly declined the offer and told them, "No money should be collected from the society and spent for my sake." There the matter rested.

Gradually all his associates had begun to endearingly call Keshavrao Hedgewar as 'Doctorji'.

Wherever he went, he created a lively atmosphere full of mirth and enthusiasm around him.

His working method was not showy and pompous. He was walking miles together to reach a village or town for informing the people about the country, its plight and their duty towards it. He was meeting rich people as also the illiterate poor even in small hamlets.

Discipline Personified

Doctorji was not only trying to inculcate discipline in others; he himself was discipline incarnate.

Once he had gone to Adegaon for the Upanayan (sacred-thread) ceremony in a friend's house there. Soon after the function, Doctorji informed his intention to return to Nagpur immediately. But his friends insisted that he stay with them at least for three or four days, as they enjoyed his pleasant company. The next day was a Sunday, the day of the weekly Sangh parade in the morning at Nagpur, which Doctorji wanted to attend at all cost. Though late, he left Adegaon with his companions in the night itself. There were no buses at that late hour from Adegaon, an oddly situated village. The distance between Adegaon and Nagpur was 32 miles.

But undaunted, Hedgewar started on the journey along the muddy track strewn with thorns. In the dead of night, he walked for about twenty miles and reached the main highway leading to Nagpur, which was still some ten miles away. As he was in a hurry, he could not afford sloth. After some time, however, there came a late running Nagpur-bound bus. They took it and reached Nagpur early next morning. This was how he participated in the weekly parade. The Swayamsevaks had thought that he would not be able to attend the parade. It was a sweet surprise to them all.

Doctorji was thus setting his own example of discipline and determination before all of them.

Growth Of Sangh Work

The Sangh was growing in Nagpur and the surrounding districts. It soon began to spread to other provinces too. Doctorji went to a number of places and inspired the youths for taking up the Sangh work, He personally traveled to Kashi (Banaras), Punjab, even distant Karnataka, and planted the sapling of Sangh work there. His advice to the Sangh Swayamsevaks desirous of pursuing their higher education was, "Go to other provinces and pursue your studies there. While studying, start the Sangh Shakhas also."

His plan for expansion of Sangh work in such a natural and unobtrusive way bore fruit. Swayamsevaks went to far-off cities like Kashi, Lucknow, etc., for their further education. They started the Shakhas they'r too. Thus the Sangh work grow in leaps and bounds.

In April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi gave a call far 'Satyagraha' against the British Government. It echoed in the far corners of the country. Doctorji decided to participate in the proposed Satyagraha. He also wanted to use the prison-stay to cultivate youths from other places, as that would enable him to spread the Sangh ideology to different parts of the country. He participated in the famous 'Jungle Satyagraha' along with others. They were promptly arrested by the Government. Doctorji was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment and sent to Akola jail.

Appreciation By Gandhiji

It was an incident in 1934. A Sangh camp of about 1,500 Swayamsevaks was held in Wardha. Just facing the camp was the Ashram of Sevagram. Gandhi happened to be staying there for rest. He was observing the various programs of the Swayamsevaks on the ground in the morning and evening every day. It aroused his curiosity to have an insight into the working of the Sangh camp personally. Jilla Sanghchalak Appaji Joshi came to Know about this. He welcomed Gandhi to the camp.

Mahatma arrived in the camp exactly at 6 a.m. the next day as planned. Swayamsevaks were standing in file with perfect discipline.

Bhagwa flag was hoisted. Along with the Swayamsevaks, Gandhi too did Dhwaja-pranam (salutation to the flag). Then, with a scanning eye, he went round the camp. He saw that all the Swayam sevaks were staying together, dining together, without any differentiation of any kind. Seeing that blend of body and mind of thousands of countrymen in all their activities in a most natural way, Gandhi was greatly impressed.

But he nevertheless was not too sure. He inquired from a few Swayamsevaks, "What is your caste?" All of them answered, "I am a Hindu"! There were people belonging to many castes like Brahmin, Maratha, Mahar, Tailor caste, Barber caste etc., among them. But there were absolutely no caste barriers and no sense of high or low, not even a faint shadow of it. Gandhi was very happy to know this. During the course of the meeting with Doctorji, he said, "Doctorsahab, you have built a really marvelous organization.

You are silently carrying out the work which I wished to do myself."

Many years later while addressing the Sangh workers in Delhi in 1947, Gandhi recollected his experiences about the Wardha camp and said, "You are straightforward people. You don't have even an iota of feeling of untouchability amidst you. An organization like the R.S.S., drawing its inspiration from an attitude of sacrifice and service, is bound to grow and achieve success."

Blessings From The Eminent

Doctorji desired that all the leading personalities of our country should know and appreciate the need for the Sangh work and should be persuaded to be involved in it to the extent possible. Towards the end of 1928, he met Subhash Chandra Bose in Calcutta. Doctorji's way of presenting his ideas and his deep insight into the problems faced by the country did not fail to have an impact on the sharp mind of Subhash Babu.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was one of the greatest patriots of our country. Once Doctorji invited him to the Mohitewada Shakha. Observing the Shakha amid the dilapidated structure and broken walls, Malaviya inferred that the financial condition of the Sangh was not sound. He was famous for collecting funds for any national or social cause. He said to Doctorji, "Doctorsahab, I am called a royal beggar. If you approve, I shall be happy to collect some funds for Sangh also."

"Panditji, Sangh does not need money. Your blessings are more valuable for us."

The reply of Doctorji came as a surprise for Malaviya. He said, "My experience is that all organizations pay more attention to funds than to persons. But your approach is quite different. You have given the first place for heart. I shall proclaim this greatness of yours, wherever I go."

Opposition Weakens

Opposition to Sangh had grown almost in proportion to its spread. The Government of Central Provinces promulgated an order banning the participation of the Government servants in Sangh programs. In 1933, it further suggested that the administrations of the local self-government institutions should also pass such orders forbidding their employees from participating in the activities of the R.S.S.

Under such trying circumstances, Doctorji went on cogently putting forth the policy of the Sangh before all: "Sangh is away from politics. Our organization is not against anybody. Without animosity to any one, the Sangh is striving to make the Hindu society strong and efficient. In the name of the Almighty, we are engaged in this work."

'Kesari' of Pune and other newspapers from Nagpur wrote strong articles in support of the stand taken by Doctorji. People belonging to various parties and sections of society protested against the vindictive attitude of the Government. Public meetings were also held at several places. Hot discussions took place in the Assembly Council of Nagpur about the said Notification. Even members of Muslim, Parsi and Christian communities took the Government to task on this issue. Finally it was put to vote. A resolution condemning this decision of the Government was passed by a majority. Consequently the Government itself collapsed, thereby indicating the collapse of haughty opposition to the Sangh.

Simple, Loveable Personality

In spite of his popularity among the people, Doctorji never posed himself as a great person. In fact, he shunned publicity. Doctorji's life was, simple and austere. Ordinary chappals on his feet; a simple dhoti-, an ordinary shirt on his person: a coat with collar, and a high cap on his head this was all that constituted his attire.

When Doctorji was available in Nagpur, many acquaintances were coming to his house. It was his habit to welcome all respectfully and make kind inquiries about their welfare. If he found that the visitors had no arrangements for staying else where, he would invite them to stay in his house, and to partake in the humble roti available in his house. In case the food available was insufficient, he would say, "I have had my meal. Kindly come and have food." That he had to serve never bothered him. He never allowed the dire poverty to show up in his face or in his manner.

Quick temper was a family trait of the Hedgewars. The father Balirampant was almost dreaded for his irascibility. His eldest son Mahadev Shastri too breathed fire. No less short tempered was Doctorji himself in early days. However, after the beginning of Sangh work, there appeared a total change in his nature. He became mellowed. He thereafter used to speak with others in a most sweet and affable manner. He brought about a metamorphosis in his nature as it were for the sake of the organization.

Last Days

By 1939, Sangh Shakhshas had been started in most of the provinces. Day and night, Doctorji struggled hard for expansion of the Sangh work throughout the length and breadth of the country. He traveled remaining totally unmindful of rain, sun, cold or floods.

He took in his stride both praise and abuse by the people. He faced fun and starvation with equanimity. He struggled hard against odds and crises. During a short span of 15 years, he successfully laid a sound foundation for Sangh work.

Such continuous and strenuous spate of activities naturally began to tell upon even his steel-like body. His health went on deteriorating. Often he suffered from chronic back pain. Fever would invade him suddenly. In January of 1940, he was taken to Rajgirh in Bihar for the hot-spring treatment.

By the time he returned from Rajgirh to Nagpur, the annual 'Sangh Shiksha Varg' training-camp had already begun.

Swayamsevaks from all the States were participating in that camp Doctorji desired to be close to them. Put his hands on their shoulders and talk to each of them. But due to burning fever, it became impossible for him even to move out of the bed. In spite of this, he gathered all his strength, went to the camp and spoke a few words before the Swayamsevaks, saying: "Today, I am seeing a mini-Bharat before me. Let there be no occasion in the life of any of you to say that you were once a Sangh Swayamsevak some years ago." This was his last message.

As days passed, his illness went on aggravating. He saw that he was not going to live much longer. He called Guruji -Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar - near him and in the presence of others said to him, "Hereafter the entire responsibility of the work of the Sangh is on your shoulders."

On the morning of 21st June 1940, at the age of 51, Doctorji breathed his last. People from all walks of life and parties in Nagpur participated in his funeral procession in large numbers. His last rites were performed in Resham-bagh. Today there stands a lofty memorial dedicated to his memory. It has been a perennial source of inspiration to all that go there to pay their homage.

Torch-Bearer to the Country

Hedgewar did not wear the robes of a sannyasin; nor did he run away from the normal way of life in the society. But his inner being enlarged itself to include the entire society: the society at large became his family. He remained a life-long celibate to be able to apply himself totally to the task he had charged himself with. He was indeed a sannyasin in essence, though not in external form.

He lived only for 50 years. But the fragrance of his life will permeate the society for hundreds of years to come. Persons influenced by his thoughts, words and deeds are countless indeed. The incense-stick burns itself into ashes, but spreads its aroma in the surroundings. By wearing himself out, Doctor Hedgewar created a generation of dedicated social workers with unsullied nationalist spirit, character, and total identification with Hindu society, ever willing to sacrifice themselves in the nation's cause.

A tiny lamp lit seven decades ago has now become an effulgent star shining in the national horizon surrounded by a galaxy of millions of shining stars in the expansive skies, illumining cities, villages, hamlets, homes and hearths. With every passing day, the star shines brighter and brighter.



Art of Story Telling

Public speaking is an important skill. Children coming to Bala-Gokulam should be encouraged to master this skill. Story telling is the most important element in public speaking. In fact, a good speech is a collection of relevant stories with a theme connecting them. Practice is the best way to improve our skills. The older children (10 yrs and older) can be encouraged to tell small stories to children.

This session should be conducted as a workshop for the children so that they will get to speak and improve.

Preparations:

- In the previous week, tell every one to come prepared with a small story.
- Spend 5 minutes in giving hints for effective story telling.
- Let few of them tell the story.
- First point out where they did right and gently point out where improvements can be done. Make sure no one is offended here. Children are very sensitive.

These are some hints for effective story telling:

- Do not read, but tell the story.
- Modulations in the voice is the key. Do not speak in a monotonous voice.
- You should enjoy the story, so the expressions come out on your face and in the voice.
- Eye contact: Look straight into the eyes of children. Move your eyes so that you can see every one.
- Slow down the pace. During normal conversation, most of us speak fast and without much modulation. Children should be able to follow you. So, don't rush. By looking into their eyes, you can see whether they are enjoying it or not. If you feel that they did not get it, repeat it.
- The pace should vary with the meaning of the sentence. When you say, "The lion came slowly", slow down the speed. When you say, "She started running fast without looking at the back", speed up your telling also.
- Before or after you make a strong point, pause for a while. That gives some time for them to feel the story.
- You can make it gently interactive, Ask questions in between. Questions which require them to say 'YES' or 'NO'. Don't end up in a discussion!
- Have a smiling face.
- Body language: Make use of your hands to bring in the expression needed at places.
- Use examples from their day-to-day life to make it more interesting.

Every one of us have our own strengths and weaknesses. Use all your creativity and come up with a style that suits you best.

Reincarnation and Karma Hindu Dharma through Video games

[Note: Start the discussion on this subject by posing some challenging questions and making them think: e.g.: Why children are born in families with different atmosphere? Is God cruel - Why some children are born handicapped? How come some of the bad guys go uncaught and lead a happy life?

With smaller children, you may even ask questions like, "What would you like to be born in your next life and why?" These questions will increase the children's imaginative power and creative thinking]

Cycle of Life: Hindus believe that life does not end with death. What perishes is the body; the soul is immortal and eternal. When the body dies, the soul assumes a new body in order to experience the fruits of our good and bad actions in the previous life. While reaping the fruits, we also have the free will to change our destiny. This cycle of being born again and again is called reincarnation. Most of us cannot remember anything about our past lives but there are some who can remember. The most important thing that comes with us when we are reborn is

our character. That is why we see children born in the same family with such different characters. That is why some children are born as geniuses - they had developed their skills in past lives.

We start off being born as a lower being like the plant but we slowly evolve and are reborn as higher and higher beings until we become human.

Law of Karma: The word karma literally means 'deed or action,' but implies the entire cycle of cause and its effects. According to the Law of Karma, every human action-in thought, word, or deed-inevitably leads to results, good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action. There is no such thing as action without results. "As we sow, so shall we reap," is the unerring law which governs all deeds. The Law of Karma conserves the moral consequences of all actions, and conditions our future lives accordingly. We ourselves create our future destinies by our own choices each minute. Every child born in this world is born to work out its own past deeds.

The doctrine of karma is the answer provided by Hindus to the questions of why suffering and inequalities exist in the world: "Why should one person be different from another in his looks, abilities, and character? Why is one born a king and another a beggar? A just and merciful God cannot create such inequalities." The doctrine of karma, a law of actions and their retribution, can be viewed as the law of causation (cause and effect) applied to the moral realm. The law that every action has a reaction works in the scientific world as well as in the moral world.

The doctrine of karma is based upon the principle of cause and effect. This doctrine of cause and effect differs from the Christian notion that God punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous. The underlying basis for this difference is that Hindu religion is a god-loving religion rather than a god-fearing one.

Karma is neither predestination nor fatalism. Fatalism and predestination imply that individuals are bound by circumstances or by some outside power and, as such, cannot free themselves with their own effort. That is exactly opposite of karma. The Law of Karma is actually the law of harmony and equilibrium. It adjusts wisely, intelligently and equitably each effect to its cause. But, it is also the law of opportunity, which allows an individual to change his past for a better future. If we understand karma as the law of order and opportunity, we will become self-reliant and understand that we cannot and should not escape responsibility.

Operation of the Law of Karma

The past karma of an individual consists of two parts, prārabdha karma and sañchita karma. Prārabdha karma is the part of one's past karma, which is to bear fruit in the present life of the individual. Sañchita karma is accumulated karma of the previous births which is to bear fruit in the future. Prārabdha karma of an individual consists of two components: fixed and variable. The fixed component of karma is beyond our control and consists of that component of the past karma, which determines one's parents, the family and the country in which a child must be born, the general features of the physical body that the child will eventually develop, and the social and religious environment in which the child must grow.

The variable component of the past karma remains latent in the subconscious mind of the child in the form of samskāras (natural habits and tendencies). It is this variable part of the past karma that one can overcome by initiative and free will. The level of success one can achieve in diluting the effects of the variable component, however, depends upon the power of the samskāras and the strength of the individual will.

The past karma of an ordinary human being is either good, bad, or mixed. An individual's particular incarnation is determined by the overall balance of past karma. If the overall balance is positive (i.e. overall good karma), the individual will be born in an environment that would be naturally conducive toward the onward progress of his soul. In a particular incarnation, only those innate tendencies (samskāras) are manifested for which conditions are favorable in that incarnation. The right environment is essential for manifestation of the samskāras. For example, if an individual is born as a professor (because of his overall good karma) and if he had been a gambler in his past incarnations, his innate gambling tendency will not find the right environment to manifest itself in the academic environment of his vocation. However, if he happens to be in the company of gamblers at a weekend party, he will exhibit a natural love for gambling because of the residual impressions of his past karma.

Every human action, be it physical or mental, produces two effects. First, depending upon the moral quality of an action, the appropriate fruits of the action will be rewarded later, either in the same life or in a future life. Secondly, the action leaves residual impressions (samskāras) on the subconscious mind of the individual. These samskāras generate thought waves (vrittis) and thereby determine the character of the individual. Thus, actions determine the personal conduct and this conduct molds the character, in a revolving chain of cause and effect. The Brihadāranyaka Upanishad declares thus: "A man becomes good by performing good deeds and evil by performing evil deeds."

Free Will

Human will can be sharpened and strengthened by yoga, meditation, prayers, positive thinking, right environment, and association (satsangh) with the pure-minded persons. According to the philosophy of yoga, the negative thought waves which arise in the human mind due to samskāras of the past karma, can be neutralized by introducing positive thought waves generated by human will.

The consequences of human actions are determined by the doctrine of karma as well as the doctrine of free will. The negative samskāras of the past karma can be overcome by human will. In Hindu view, what separates a saint and a sinner is only time. With right knowledge and effort, a sinner of today can be a saint of tomorrow. As Dr. Rādhākrishnan says, "The cards of life are given to us [in the form of samskāras], but we can play them as we wish, and win or lose, as we play."

The Role of Parents and Teachers

When one commits a murder, two possibilities exist. Either the person is creating a brand new karma (agami karma) by misusing his free will, or his action is motivated by the negative samskāras of his past actions. In either case he is totally responsible for his actions. He could have been helped if his free will had been strengthened by yoga, meditation, prayers, positive thinking, and right environment. This responsibility squarely falls on the society in general, and parents and teachers in particular. The best time (and perhaps the only time!) to implant good

samskāras in a person is when the person is still young and his negative samskāras are not yet ready to bear their bitter fruit. The children in modern societies are constantly subjected to negative samskāras of violence perpetuated by television, family conflicts, and lack of appropriate training of parents to properly raise their children.

Unfortunately, in modern societies more attention is given to development of the body than the mind. The educational institutions generally teach skills that enable one to make a descent living to maintain one's physical body, but no skills are generally taught to nourish one's mind. Just as soap and shampoo clean the physical body, yoga and meditation clean the mind by removing mental impurities, such as fear, anger, lust, greed, jealousy, and conceit. Yoga and meditation also strengthen the mind by increasing its willpower. A strong mind is a virtuous mind and without virtue there can be no happiness in this world. "One may gain political and social independence, but if he is a slave to his passions and desires, he cannot feel the pure joy of freedom," says Swāmī Vivekānanda.

Is God not forgiving?

When we indulge in wrong deeds knowingly or unknowingly, we will have to reap the fruits of our action. However, severity of the fruits of action can be reduced by the grace of God when we sincerely repent for our wrong deeds. This is known as 'pashcaattaapa'.

Can we stop being reborn? Yes, only after we find God. That is the final destination. We have to reach God to stop this cycle of rebirth. This is called moksha.

(Prepare for the question from the children - How to attain Moksha)

Different ways to reach God:

There are lots of different ways to find God.

Some clever-clogs like to use their intelligence to find God - this way to God is called path of knowledge (**jnana marg**).

Then there are others who just fall in love with God - the method they use to find God is called the path of devotion (**bhakti marg**).

There are also some that like to use concentration and find God. This method of finding God is called path of meditation (**raja yoga**).

Some people like to be very active. They love to work. The method they use to find God is called path of action (**karma marg**).

No one method is better than others. The method we choose should reflect our own character and abilities and most of us will have to follow a combination of the above paths.

Hindu Dharma through Video games

[Note: Read the following dialogue between Radhika, who represent any boy or girl in our Bala Gokulam and Ashok, a Shikshak in our Bala Gokulam. After reading this, use your own imagination as to engage the children in a dialogue about video games and convey the concepts of reincarnation, karma, Guru and Atman.]

"Hinduism is so complicated. I do not understand it most of the time", said Radhika, a young girl to Uncle Ashok. Ashok had come over half an hour ago and Radhika was so engrossed in her video game then that she mechanically said "Hi" to Ashok, and continued with her game.

Ashok watched Radhika play Super Mario Brothers (*). He watched her move Mario to the right, hit and get hidden mushrooms and get bigger, or get a fire flower or a cape, collect coins, punch his way through obstacles, climb ladders and occasionally get eaten by turtles. After the end of a life Mario would start his next life, from where he left off. Now that Radhika had finished one level she noticed that uncle Ashok, whom she met every week when her parents took her to the temple, was still there.

"Radhika, you are really good at this video game!" said Ashok. She nodded and added "Yep! and I can even beat my brother at it".

"You know you can learn many ideas of Hinduism from the video games", said Ashok.

"How? Radhika asked.

Let us say if you got a video game and it gave you only one chance to beat it, will that be fair?" Ashok asked.

"No, that is why they give you multiple lives. Actually, with a new game it is very difficult to advance much further. It takes practice. When we had just bought this game, I used to 'die' in just ten seconds, every time", said Radhika.

"Hinduism is similar too. Most people do not lead a perfect life. So according to Hinduism, you get many chances to improve yourself. You get many lives. This is called reincarnation". He continued," and just as in a video game, if one life ends, you start over in the next life where you left off".

"Now what will happen if you do not go towards the right in your video game?" asked Ashok.

"You will not move to the next level. You will not make any progress and time will run out", Radhika said

"Exactly! If you do not move in the 'right' direction, you will not make progress. Thus YOU determine the right direction and how far progress you can make. 'What you do, determines the result' this is called the law of Karma. Your actions bear fruit accordingly. Now what happens in a video game if you keep making same mistakes?" Ashok asked.

"You go back to the start of that level" Radhika replied.

"Law of Karma similarly tells you that if you keep making same mistakes over and over again, you will move backwards. Now in a video game you get rewards and receive setbacks. In this video game a mushroom will make you grow bigger or an attack of a turtle will make you smaller, in real life too you may become rich or poor, but that depends where you start at and

what actions you take. Yet getting big or small in itself does not mean progress. Does it?" asked Uncle Ashok.

"You are right, being big or small does not necessarily mean you will move forward in the game or even to the next level", Radhika replied.

"Now tell me what happens when you go to the next level?" Ashok asked.

"It gets tougher at the next level" Radhika said.

"Same is true in spiritual practice as per Hinduism", Ashok added. "Now tell me what happens if you get stuck at a level, what do you do? and why?", he asked.

"I ask my cousin Ojas. He knows what I should do. He knows where the keys are hidden, where secret passages are. He has beaten the game already, Some times he even takes the controller to help me", Radhika said.

"In Hinduism, similarly a Guru helps you move to next level. A Guru or a master has already 'beaten the game'. She or He knows where the key is hidden that will unlock the door. She or He knows what where the secret passages are. She or He can even show you a 'warp' zone, to go to the next level. **But unlike a video game, in real life a Guru cannot play for you. You have to play it yourself**", said Ashok.

"You keep referring to Guru as She or He, why?" Radhika asked.

"Good question! Hinduism considers man and woman as having the same potential to become a Guru.

Just as you are better than your brother at video games, a woman can reach the highest state also. In fact there were many women who contributed to the Vedas, the Hindu holy books. There were many women

Hindu saints in the past, and there are many women saints even now" said uncle Ashok. He continued, "also there are many ways you can go to next level, so some Guru will show an easier way and some a harder way, all depending on your capability."

Buddhists have Buddha as a Guru, Jains have twenty four Tirthankars as Gurus while Sikhs have ten Gurus whose guidance they follow".

"Now tell me what happens when you beat the last level?" Ashok asked.

"I have not beaten the game yet, but my cousin Ojas says that you see fire works, music plays for long time, and then you see the name of the programmer", Radhika said.

"Interestingly, that is what Hinduism says also, when you go beyond the last hurdle you hear the music and you see THE PROGRAMMER - that is God and then you do not need to play the game again, except to help others" Ashok said.

"Let me ask you one more question. You get so absorbed playing a video game that you feel that you are being Mario or Luigi on the screen. But are you really Mario or Luigi? Who are you?" He asked

"I am Radhika, of course. But while playing the game I forget that I am Radhika and am only concerned about Mario or Luigi on the screen", she replied.

"Exactly, Hinduism believes that we go through different lives believing we are the body or the name in that life. But we are not that body nor its name. We are the Atman or soul which plays as a character of Mario or Luigi (or whatever). That is something we must never forget. We are not this body, but we are the Soul, or Atman". Ashok continued.

"Radhika have you noticed, that from video games you just learnt Hindu concepts of reincarnation, Karma, Guru and Atman." He asked, "Was that complex? "

"Not at all!" Radhika smiled, Her face was glowing by the realization of Hindu concepts, knowledge she already had in the form of video games.

Swami Vivekananda 1863 - 1902

He came to be known as Swami Vivekananda only when he became a sannyasi or monk. His parents called him Narendra. His father was Vishwanatha Datta and his mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi. Narendra was born on 12th January 1863 in Calcutta. As a child he was very lively and naughty.

When Narendra stepped into boyhood, his naughtiness grew. He was a natural leader of the children in the neighbourhood. His companions bowed to his decision always. Once a landlord threatened the children saying, "There is a demon in the tree and he swallows children." Narendra was not impressed by this threat. He settled down on a branch. The other boys took to their heels. Narendra waited for several hours, but the demon did not appear. So, he declared that the landlord's story was a spoof. Narendra loved to tease his sisters. Meditation, too, was a sport to him. But as he meditated he became oblivious of the whole world. Not even a lizard or a snake moving near him could disturb his concentration.

Even as a child Narendra had great respect for sannyasis or ascetics. He would give away anything to anybody if asked for. On his birthday, he would wear new clothes, wouldn't he? If a beggar asked for aims he would give away the new clothes. From that day, his mother would lock him up in a room whenever a beggar passed by the house. But every beggar knew Narendra's nature very well. So beggars would stand near the window of Narendra's room. He would throw to them anything he had. The spirit of sacrifice and renunciation was already blossoming in him.

In her leisure time his mother would tell him the story of the Ramayana. He could not sleep unless she told him a story. Then he would be all ears, forgetting his study and play. He had great reverence for Lord Hanuman. Once he sat before the idol of Lord Shiva, with his body all

smearred with ash. His perplexed mother asked him, "Naren, what's all this?" He smiled and said, "Mother, I'm the Lord Shiva." The mother feared that her son would become a sannyasi, like his grandfather.

Greatness Foreshadowed

Narendra's father was a lawyer. So every day his house used to be crowded with his clients belonging to different castes. The house was like an inn; the clients had breakfast and lunch there. It was the custom to provide the guests with hukkas (long pipes) to smoke after food. There was a different pipe for clients of each caste. Narendra wondered what would happen if he smoked the pipe meant for people of a different caste. Finally he experimented. Nothing untoward happened. He concluded that caste had no meaning.

The maxim "The child is father of the man" was entirely true of the compassionate boy, Narendra. Once there was a display of physical exercises in a local gymnasium. Accidentally an iron bar fell on a sailor among the spectators. He fell down unconscious. The people who had gathered there ran away lest the police should question them. Narendra, with the help of two friends of his, gave the wounded sailor first aid. Then he took him to a doctor. He even raised some money for the wounded man. On another occasion Narendra pulled out one of his friends who had been caught under the wheel of a coach drawn by horses. Likewise he helped a little boy who was a total stranger. The boy was lying on a road with high fever. He took him home. Narendra never knew what fear was.

It was not that Narendra excelled only in sports; he was quick and alert in his studies as well. After a single reading he could remember any lesson. His memory was amazing. Concentration was the key to his success in studies.

The Parents

Whenever Vishwanatha Datta found time he would give his son advice. "You need fear no one so long as you keep to the path of truth and Dharma (Virtue). One should not be browbeaten. One should guard one's self-respect. Love of one's religion should not mean hatred of other religions. Patriotism is essential for man's welfare. Foreign enemies may invade a country, but they cannot take away a people's ancient and potent culture." He loved to listen to his son's sweet voice. Narendra's face would become radiant when he sang devotional songs.

His mother was dear to Narendra as his own life, and to him she was a veritable goddess. In his eyes, there was no one as ready to make sacrifices as the mother. She must have the highest place not only in the home but also in society. He had great respect for his father too. But this did not come in the way of his freedom and independent thinking. He gave expression to what he felt even about his father. "Hospitality is certainly a great virtue. But is it right to feed the lazy? Is it right to provide them with cigarette and pipe to smoke?" Thus he would often question his father. But his father would say, "You do not understand their misery, my boy. When they munch tobacco, they at least for a while forget the bitterness of their life."

By 1880, Narendra passed his Matriculation and Entrance Examination. He joined a college. Day by day, his thirst for knowledge increased. He would borrow from the library books not related to the prescribed courses and read them, and so satisfy his thirst. He was particularly fascinated by the secrets of God's creation. Apart from history and science, he was well read in

Western philosophy. As he advanced in his studies, his thinking faculty developed. Doubts and uncertainties overtook him. He gave up blind beliefs but could not realize the Truth.

He placed his doubts before eminent scholars and sought their guidance. These scholars excelled in debate. But their logic did not convince Narendra. Their line of thinking was stale. It did not convince him, for none of them had direct experience of God.

In Search Of The Guru

Sri Ramakrishna was a priest in the temple of Goddess Kali. He was not a scholar. But he was a great devotee. It was being said of him that he had realized God. Scholars who went to him became his disciples. Once, Narendra went with his friends to Dakshineswar to see him. Sri Ramakrishna sat surrounded by his disciples; he was immersed in discussions about God. Narendra sat in a corner with his friends. All at once Sri Ramakrishna's eyes turned to him. Sri Ramakrishna's mind was in a turmoil. He was thrilled. Indistinct thoughts upset his mind. Memories of an earlier meeting seemed to stir in him. For some time he sat still as if in a trance. Narendra's attractive figure and shining eyes filled him with wonder. "Can you sing?" he asked Narendra. Narendra sang a couple of Bangali songs in a melodious voice. As he listened to the music, the Bhagavan went into a trance. After some time he took Narendra into a room. He patted Narendra on the back and said, "MY child, why are you so late? I have grown weary, waiting for you all these days. I wanted to share my experiences with the right person. You are not an ordinary man. You are Lord Vishnu in human form. Do you know how much I have been craving for you?" And he broke down.

Sri Ramakrishna's behavior puzzled Narendra. He thought the elderly man was mad. "Will you come again? Promise me you will", pleaded Ramakrishna.

Eager to escape from him, Narendra said, "Yes."

After the Bhagavan finished his discourse Narendra asked him, "Have you seen God ?" "Of course I have. I have seen him just as I'm looking at you. I have even talked to him. I can show him to you. But who is yearning to see God?" replied Ramakrishna. Narendra said to himself, "Till today no one had told me he had seen God. This man looks mentally deranged; possibly he is even mad. However, it is not proper to judge without investigating."

A month passed. Narendra went alone to Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna was resting on a cot in his room.

He was pleased to see Narendra; he made him sit on his cot. He went into a trance and put his leg on Narendra's lap. Narendra forgot the outer world. He felt that he was dissolving. He shouted, 'What's this you are doing to me? My parents are still alive. I should go back to them.' Smilingly Sri Ramakrishna said, "Enough for today," and drew back his lap. Narendra became normal once again.

The Attraction And The Test

As days passed, each was attracted towards the other. Neither could bear to be parted from the other.

It did not take a long time for Sri Ramakrishna to realize the greatness of Narendra. Moreover, he was guided by the will of Goddess Kali. But young Narendra would not accept Ramakrishna

as his guru without a test. Ramakrishna used to say that, in order to realize God, one should give up the desire for money and women. One day Narendra hid a rupee under his pillow. Sri Ramakrishna, who had gone out, came into the room and stretched himself on the cot. At once he jumped up as if bitten by a scorpion. When he shook the mattress, the rupee coin fell down. Later he came to know that it was the doing of Narendra.

Narendra was Ramakrishna's favourite disciple. But he would not accept as gospel truth all that Narendra said. Narendra was highly critical of people who worshipped idols. He rejected the theory of "Advaita" (Monism). He had no faith in mystic experiences. Advaitic assertions such as "I am Brahman", "I am Shiva- did not impress Narendra. But Sri Ramakrishna would always bring him back to the right path by saying, "There are many roads to reach a destination. No one has the right to say that the path the other man takes is not the right one. It is improper to pass judgement on anything that one does not understand."

One day Sri Ramakrishna took Narendra to a secluded place. He said, "I have attained some powers after a long period of meditation. They will give whatever a man wants. I have given up all desire, and so I have no use for these powers. Shall I bestow these powers on you ?" "But will they help me to realize the Self?" - asked Narendra. "No," said Sri Ramakrishna. "Then I do not want them. More than anything, I want to realize God." Narendra's reply filled Ramakrishna with joy. The Master had tested Narendra, and Narendra had passed the test.

Gradually Narendra turned towards renunciation, giving up all worldly desires. The parents came to know of this. He was then studying for his B. A. degree examination. They planned to bring him back to worldly life through marriage. Sri Ramakrishna became unhappy on hearing this. He advised Narendra that if bound by family ties, he would not be able to serve mankind. At times, Narendra would lose faith in Ramakrishna's teaching; at such times Ramakrishna would first touch him with his hands. Then Narendra would lose contact with the world around. When he regained consciousness he would surrender to his Guru's teaching. Thus the Guru gradually gifted all his powers to the disciple.

In 1884, Narendra passed the B. A. degree examination. A friend of his hosted a party. As Narendra was singing at the party, the news of his father's death came like a bolt from the blue.

Poverty hit the family immediately after the father's death. The money-lenders began to harass the family. Some of them even went to a court of law. Narendra wandered far and wide looking for a job. His clothes were tattered and torn; and it was difficult even to get one meal a day. Many a day he fasted so that his mother and his brothers and sisters might have something to eat. He would tell them that he had eaten with a friend. Sometimes he would faint with hunger and fall down in the street. But in spite of such overwhelming misfortune he never lost faith in God. Sri Ramakrishna would console him saying "You are here to serve mankind and do mother Kali's work. You should be brave."

One day he said to himself : "God gives whatever my Guru seeks. So it is best to seek my Guru's help." He went straight to his Guru and said, "On my behalf kindly pray before the Goddess to rid me of this poverty. She will give you whatever you wish for, won't She?" The Guru said, "My child, you have no faith in Her, why then will she listen to my prayer? You approach Her yourself. Then she will fulfil your Feed." So in the dead of night Narendra stood before the idol of Goddess Kali. He lost himself in deep meditation. He begged the Goddess, "O Mother,

bestow on me the spirit of renunciation. Let me see You, that is all I beg of You." When he came out, the Guru asked, "Did you submit your prayer to Her? And What did She say?" Narendra said in dismay, "O! forgot about it completely." "Then go back and ask Her, " said. the Guru. Again he forgot to speak about his poverty in his prayer to the Goddess. Again the Guru sent him. Back came Narendra and the same thing happened. The Guru's joy knew no bounds. "My child, you should not crave for only food and clothes. They are not the ultimate goals of man. Have faith in God. He will look after the welfare of your family," said the Guru.

Later Narendra took up the profession of teaching. For some time he taught in the Vidyasagar School. Now the family had at least enough food. While he worked as a teacher he continued his study of law. His Guru' health broke down. Sri Ramakrishna developed a tumour in the throat. Narendra gave up both his job and his studies and devoted all his time to nursing his Master.

Once, while Narendra was in meditation he shouted, "Where is my body?" Others had to touch his body and convince him of its existence. When Sri Ramakrishna heard this episode, he was happy that at last his desire to find a worthy disciple had been fulfilled.

The Guru Is No More

The disciples nursed the Guru to the best of their ability. But the thought that the Guru would not recover from the illness agonized them. His end was drawing near. On the last day he called Narendra to his bedside and touched him. He invested Narendra with all his spiritual powers. He said, "Naren, now you are all-powerful. All these are my children. It is your. duty to take care of them." These words filled Narendra's heart with grief. He went out of the room weeping like a child.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the young disciples went to live in a rented house in Baranagar. Although old, the house was far away from the noise and bustle of the city; and it was on the banks of the river Ganga. It was very close to the tomb of Sri Ramakrishna. So, the Mutt (monastery) was opened there. The young monks had two goals salvation and the service of fellow-men. Some young men left their homes and became monks and joined the Mutt. Narendra became a monk and headed the institution. The young sannyasis were unmindful of lack of food and clothing. But even when they fasted they did not neglect their studies and meditation. Narendra taught his brethren Sanskrit and Philosophy. To visitors he expounded the teachings of the Master.

Pilgrimage

As a sannyasi, one cannot be tied to a particular place. Even the Mutt is a kind of a prison. Attachment to a particular place is also wrong. It was the great good fortune of India that Narendra took to sannyasa and became 'Vivekananda'. Bharat became his home and its inhabitants his brothers. The sacred task of wiping the tears of his unfortunate brothers was dear to his heart. He had to travel all over the country. His assets were - a saffron robe, 'Kamandalu' (an ascetic's waterpot) and 'danda' (staff). On his way he visited many holy places. He lodged at huts and choultries and slept on the bare ground. He satisfied his hunger by begging for food. He was in the company of sadhus, spending the time in religious discussions and holy rituals.

He travelled on foot or by any vehicle whose driver was hospitable. Varanasi was the first city that Vivekananda visited. During his stay there, he met many scholars and exchanged ideas with them. In philosophical disputations he triumphed over them. In Ayodhya, his imagination pulsated with the memory of Sri Rama and Seeta. In Agra the Taj filled him with wonder. He drank water in a pariah's house; begged for aims and accepted food from a cobbler.

At Alwar, he became acquainted with Maharaja Mangal Singh. Initially the Prince had no faith in the Swami. There was a heated debate between the two. "Swamiji, I have no faith in idol worship," said the Maharaja. The Swamiji replied, "An idol is only a symbol. It is not something to sneer at. Every devotee has his own way of realizing God. It depends on the individual's devotion." The Prince was not satisfied with Swamiji's explanation.

There was a portrait of the Maharaja on the wall. The Swamiji asked the Diwan (chief minister) by his side, "Whose picture is that?" "The Maharaja's," replied the Diwan. Vivekananda said, "Spit on it." The Diwan was taken aback. "Why are you unhappy?" asked the Swamiji. The Diwan thought this man was certainly mad. Swamiji explained: "After all, the photograph is just a shadow of your Maharaja. It is devoid of flesh and blood." "But then it reminds us of the Maharaja, does it not?" said the Diwan. Wisdom then dawned on the Maharaja. He apologized to the Swamiji. Later the Swamiji went to Mount Abu, passing through Jaipur and Ajmer. He spent some time in tapas (prayer and meditation) in a cave.

Some Experiences

While Swamiji was travelling by train, in Rajasthan an interesting incident took place. He was resting in a second class compartment. Two Englishmen were profusely hurling abuses at him. They were under the impression that the Swami did not know English. When the train reached the station. Swamiji asked an official, in English, for a glass of water. The Englishmen were surprised; they asked Swamiji why he was silent though he could understand them. Swamiji snapped back, "This is not the first time I have met fools." The Englishmen were enraged, but Swamiji's formidable physique silenced them.

During his travel, Swamiji could travel by train only if somebody bought him his ticket. Otherwise, he had to travel on foot. He had to starve most of the time for he had no money. Once it happened that a merchant travelling with him was helping himself to varieties of eatables. Swamiji was hungry and tired. But he did not beg for food. The merchant spoke to him tauntingly and said, "You are an idler. You wear the saffron clothes only because you do not want to work. Who will ever feed you? Who cares if you die?" Just then, a sweets seller offered Swamiji some eatables and said, "I saw you in my dream this morning. The Lord Sri Rama himself introduced you to me." The haughty merchant was put to shame when he saw all this.

Plans To Go To America

In Mysore, Swamiji got to know Diwan Seshadri Iyre and also the Maharaja of Mysore. The Swamiji's discourse in Sanskrit at a gathering of scholars deeply impressed the Maharaja. One day he questioned the Swamiji as to his future plans. "India is the land of many religions and schools of philosophy. The Western world has progressed in science. Human welfare is possible only by a reconciliation of the two. Therefore, I want to go to America in order to propagate Vedanta," said Swamiji. The Maharaja said, "Then I shall bear all the expenses of the visit." Swamiji thanked the Maharaja for his offer and promised him that he would make use of it when he needed it, and took leave of him.

Swamiji next visited Ramanad. Bhaskara Setupati was the ruler of Ramanad at that time. He discussed with Swamiji the problems that the country was facing. The prince treated him with great respect. "You should attend the Conference of World Religions in America. I shall bear all your travel expenses," said the ruler. Assuring the prince that he would give serious thought to his suggestion, Swamiji went to Rameshwaram and from there he finally reached Kanyakumari. He swam to a rock and sat on it.

Surrounded there by the sea, he reflected on the state of affairs in India. The thought of the poverty of the masses in this country made him miserable. He decided that unless casteism was rooted out, there could be no salvation for his countrymen. He concluded that his first task was to go to Western countries and expose the spiritual values of India. He would then return to awaken his own land in slumber.

It was in Madras that the little lamp that appeared in Bengal's Narendra became the blazing light of all India as Vivekananda. It was there that pressure mounted on him to go to America. The fame he won in Madras travelled to Hyderabad. Thousands gathered at the meeting addressed by him there. It was the first ever public meeting addressed by Swamiji.

After he returned to Madras from Hyderabad, he started making preparations for his tour abroad. Contributions towards his travel expenses poured in from all parts of the country. But he kept with him only as much money as he needed for the journey. He returned the rest of the money to the donors.

The ship set sail from the Bombay harbour on 31st May, 1893.

On Foreign Soil

Swamiji reached the city of Chicago in the middle of July. On his way he touched at the ports of Colombo, Singapore, Hongkong and Tokyo. He chose a hotel for his stay. He made inquiries about the opening of the Conference of World Religions. It was still three months away. How was he to stay so long in a strange place? The money he had was fast disappearing. Meanwhile, an international fair was going on. Swamiji was wandering in the premises of the fair. Just then he spotted a Maharaja from India. He approached the Maharaja. But the Maharaja turned away with a wry face.

Since Chicago was a big city and very expensive, Swamiji moved to the nearby city of Boston. On the way he met a lady. She was from Boston. She was amazed at Swamiji's strange attire, his magnificent physique, and his bright eyes. She decided that he was no ordinary man. She begged Swamiji to be her guest. He agreed. Occasionally he addressed meetings at small clubs. The subject of his talk was Indian Culture and the Hindu Dharma. Gradually many scholars became his friends. One of them was John Henry Wright. He was professor of Greek at Harvard University. He was greatly impressed by Swamiji's scholarship. The delegates to the Conference of World Religions had to submit their letters of introduction to the organisers. But Swamiji had lost his letter of introduction. Wright himself wrote the letter of introduction, in which he called Swamiji "A scholar who surpasses all of us professors."

Swamiji went back to Chicago. When he reached the city he found that he had lost the addresses of some people. Finding no way out, Swamiji curled himself in an empty box which

was lying in the railway station. The next morning he wandered about in the streets. Unable to bear his hunger, he begged for alms at some houses. He could not get anything. On the contrary he was insulted and humiliated. He was sitting on the footsteps of a playground. A lady came out of a house facing the playground and asked him, "Are you a delegate to the conference of World Religions?" The Swamiji replied, 'Yes'. The lady said, "Please come to my house. You can bathe and have food. Then I shall take you to the Conference." Her name was Mrs. George Hails.

Thunderous Response

The conference started on 11th September, 1893. Thousands of delegates belonging to different countries of the world had gathered at the conference. Vivekananda was the youngest of them all. When it was his turn to speak, his heart was pounding. His throat went dry. Besides, he did not have, like the other delegates, a prepared speech. He requested the President to let him be the last speaker, His turn did come as the last speaker, He prayed fervently to Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Sharadadevi, and stood up to speak.

When he began his address in his pleasing voice with the words "Brothers and Sisters of America," there was a thunderous applause; it lasted for a full three minutes. When it subsided at last he continued his short speech. He said that people born in different religions finally reach the same God, as rivers born in different places finally reach the sea. He emphatically declared that no religion is superior and none is inferior. The delegates, every one of them, praised his speech. Newspapers carried his photographs and his speech. In later days people flocked chiefly to listen to his speech. He became the darling of the crowds. Whenever he rose to speak there was deafening applause.

Even as the conference was in session, many institutions and associations extended invitations to Swami Vivekananda. Rich people begged Vivekananda to honor them with a visit. Within a short time he became world famous. Wherever he went, he dwelt at length on the greatness of Indian Culture. He spoke with spontaneous ease on every topic, be it History, Sociology, Philosophy or Literature. He deplored the malicious propaganda that had been unleashed by the Christian missionaries in India.

"He speaks without a scrap of paper in his hand. We see in him some of the qualities of Jesus himself. A strange attire, a radiant personality, a rare elegance, the skill to epitomize Hinduism superbly - with these gifts he has won the hearts of our people. He is mesmeric. He is unsurpassed in conversation. His mastery of English is exceptional. A man like him appears only once in an age. We are fortunate that we can see him and hear him," - thus the newspapers went into raptures.

Wherever Swamiji went, people flocked to listen to him and waited patiently. After the speech they would invite him to their houses and treat him as an honoured guest. They would entertain him lavishly. At such times, Swamiji was constantly and painfully reminded of the poverty and squalor of India. The luxury around him would become unbearable. He spent many a sleepless and tearful night.

Meanwhile, he received pressing invitations from England. A rousing reception awaited him in London when he arrived there. The newspapers were all praise for the Hindu Yogi's oratory

and outlook. Many became his disciples. Among them was Margaret Noble who later became famous as 'Sister Nivedita'. She came to India and settled here.

Swami Vivekananda returned to India after his foreign tour lasting four years.

Fulfilment

By the time he arrived in India, Swamiji's fame had spread far and wide. When he landed in Colombo on 15th January 1897, he was accorded a welcome that befitted an Emperor. When he reached Madras there was an unprecedented crowd at the railway station. He was carried in procession in a coach drawn by an admiring crowd. Innumerable addresses and garlands were presented to him.

Thereafter, wherever Swamiji went, he disseminated the message of his master. To those who came to him for guidance he taught the importance of spiritual development. To his fellow monks he explained the importance of dedicated service. He repeatedly told them that it was mere selfishness to look for personal salvation. He used to say, "I do not want salvation, as long as there is a single sorrow-stricken man in India." He had realized that social upliftment was possible only through the concerted efforts on an organized mission. That is why he started Sri Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and formulated its ideology and goal. During the next two years he bought a site at Belur on the banks of the Ganga, constructed the buildings and established the Ramakrishna Mutt.

The body is no more, but the voice is deathless.

Swamiji's health was constantly eroded owing to tireless work. He visited many hill resorts in the Himalayas. But even there his missionary work continued. He visited many cities in North India in response to public demand. He visited America again at the invitation of his American disciples. He participated in the Conference of Religions in Paris and returned home.

In spite of the entreaties of his disciples he would not rest. He became more inward-looking. The body grew weak, but the mind and the soul remained alert and active.

On 4th July 1902 he performed his daily routine. He taught his disciples as usual. He rested for a while after food; after some time he had a shock. He spent a pleasant time talking to his followers and even cracking jokes. That night at nine o' clock he looked tired and his hands were trembling. He cried and sat up. He breathed a deep sigh and went to sleep. Within a short while he attained eternal bliss. His disciples and fellow-teachers felt orphaned and cried like children.

Although Swamiji is no longer with us, his words live. His message has continued to inspire millions of his countrymen. His voice can comfort the suffering and sanctify their lives.

Listen again: 'You rejoice that you belong to the race of the great sages. But until those who belong to the upper classes help to uplift the downtrodden, and until exploitation ends, India will only be a grave. May Mother India step forth anew from the humble dwelling of the peasant!

"May she appear in the hut of the fisherman! May she step forth from the cottages of the cobbler and the sweeper! May she become manifest in warehouses and factories! May the song of New India echo and reverberate amidst mountains and in forests and valleys!"

**Speech competition
(From the speeches of Swami Vivekananda)**

Encourage children to read and may be even memorize some of the short speeches or excerpts from his speeches. Here are some samples. You may refer to the books and web sites given below for more such speeches.

Tell the children a week or two in advance about this event. Provide them with the collection of speeches and the web sites for reference.

After the event, give every one small books of Swami Vivekananda, like "Thoughts of Power", "Chicago Address", etc. Contact HSS for these books.

**Response to Welcome
At The World's Parliament of Religions
Chicago, 11th September 1893**

Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honor of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to the southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings:

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world, of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita:

"Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him;
All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me."
Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with

human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

Why We Disagree

At The World's Parliament of Religions

Chicago, 15th September 1893

I will tell you a little story. You have heard the eloquent speaker who has just finished say, "Let us cease from abusing each other," and he was very sorry that there should be always so much variance.

But I think I should tell you a story which would illustrate the cause of this variance. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog. Of course, the evolutionists were not there then to tell us whether the frog lost its eyes or not, but, for our story's sake, we must take it for granted that it had its eyes, and that it every day cleansed the water of all the worms and bacilli that lived in it with an energy that would do credit to our modern bacteriologists. In this way it went on and became a little sleek and fat. Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.

"Where are you from?"

"I am from the sea."

"The sea! How big is that? Is it as big as my well?" and he took a leap from one side of the well to the other.

"My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how do you compare the sea with your little well?"

Then the frog took another leap and asked, "Is your sea so big?"

"What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!"

"Well, then," said the frog of the well, "nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow is a liar, so turn him out."

That has been the difficulty all the while.

I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world. I have to thank you of America for the great attempt you are making to break down the barriers of this little world of ours, and hope that, in the future, the Lord will help you to accomplish your purpose.

On Education and Society

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs rot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has memorized a whole library.

Every one wants to command, and no one wants to obey; and this owing to the absence of that wonderful brahmacharya system of yore. First, learn to obey. The command will come by itself. Always first learn to be a servant, and then you will be fit to be a master.

Give up the awful disease that is creeping into our national blood, that idea of ridiculing everything, that loss of SERIOUSNESS. Give that up. Be STRONG and have this SRADDHA, and everything else is bound to follow.

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

Faith and Strength

The history of the world is the history of a few men who had FAITH IN THEMSELVES. That FAITH calls out the DIVINITY within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as man or a nation loses faith, death comes.

Whatever you THINK, that you WILL BE. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be.

Be FREE ; hope for nothing from any one. I am sure if you look back upon your lives, you will find that you were always vainly trying to get help from others which never came. All the help that has come was from within YOURSELVES.

Never say NO, Never say, "I cannot", for you are INFINITE. Even time and space are nothing as compared with your nature. You can do anything and everything, you are ALMIGHTY.

The remedy for weakness is not brooding over weakness, but thinking of strength. Teach men of the STRENGTH that is already WITHIN them.



Qualities of a Swayamsevak or Sevika

Swayamsevak or a Sevika stands for a person who is self-motivated to do good for others and be a role model. Below, we will find some of the qualities we have to imbibe in oneself to become a ideal Swayamsevak/Sevika.

- Respect to Parents, Guru (Teacher) and all living and non living entities. Love towards self, family, friends and the community, country. Remember the story of Sravana Kumar, who took care of his blind parents. He is our ideal, our role model.
- Being good and helpful to others. Can you remember the best and ideal Swaymasevak? Yes, Lord Hanuman. He had all the good qualities like being the best of the learned, being helpful without expecting anything in return. There are a lot of such examples. Can you guess one more person whom you know was very helpful to others?
- Always punctual – to Bala-Gokulam/Shakha, and also at Home, School and outside. Did the Sun God ever feel tired of rising in the morning or setting in the evening? Just imagine, if the Sun or Wind God wanted to take a break? ☺
- Being Disciplined – From morning till evening, one should be organized. For example, when we get up from bed, remembering to say the shloka
 Karaagre vasate Lakshmi
 Karamadhye Saraswati
 Kara muule to GovindaH

Prabhaate kara darshanam

- till the end of the day, one should maintain cleanliness, be polite in speech and actions, etc. A simple habit we should learn is to keep our shoes in line where ever we leave them, whether at Home, Shakha, Temple or any place. Can you think of some examples in our history who were role models in good habits like this?
- Be strong and healthy physically and emotionally.
- Good Character – for example, non-injury or non-violence, speaking truth, non-stealing, non-indulgence, non-covetousness (or being selfless) are some examples of Good Samskar or Good Character. Lord Rama had all these good qualities and many more. Read Ramayana – the story of Sri Rama. It has a lot to offer this world. Do you know Ramayana was translated into lot of European, Asian languages? Sri Rama is considered an ideal person born on this Earth.
- Sharing and Caring – It is said, by sharing one's wealth (knowledge, money or anything) with others, the value of the wealth increases.
- Caring – The concept of Seva:
- Self-confidence – This is the most important for a Swayamsevak/Sevika. Revered Doctorji, the founder of Sangh, was a person of self-confidence. The incidents from his childhood teach us, what a single individual can achieve. Once a person was being chased by a monkey. A person standing by shouted at this running person. "Stop running and chase the monkey". You can guess what happened next. The monkey started running.... Chatrapati Shivaji didnot have anything with him, when he took the oath of establishing a Hindu kingdom. With his mother and teacher's blessing, he could bring together thousands of Hindus and build a strong Hindu kingdom.
- Walk the Talk – Always practice what you speak. The world respects those who can show in practice what they speak. A vessel half filled with stones makes more noise than the same vessel filled completely.
- Friendly and Influential: A Swayamsevak/Sevika should have many friends and the friends should be influenced by our character.
- Devotion or Shraddha – This is the basis for all good work in the world. Without devotion, how much ever a person might achieve, it is useless.

Sri Ramayana

Note: Tell the story of Ramayana in 2 or 3 weeks time.

The Boyhood Of Rama

On the banks of the Sarayu River stood the beautiful city of Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala. In the city there were magnificent palaces decorated with precious stones. Spires of great temples rose above the city as if to touch the sky. For protection, the city was surrounded by a great moat. The people of Ayodhya were peace loving and happy. No one was ignorant or poor. Everyone had faith in God and read the scriptures daily.

Yet, all was not well in Ayodhya. Dasaratha, the king was unhappy. He was getting old and he had no son to inherit his throne.

One day the king called upon his priest Vasistha. "Vasistha," he said. "I am growing old. I long for a son, a son who will take my place on the throne."

The priest knew all too well that his king needed to have a son. He replied, "Dasaratha, you will have sons. I shall perform a sacred rite to please the gods."

Excited by this wonderful news, the king ran to tell his three wives Sumitra, Kaikeyi, and Kausalya, "I will have sons!"

At the same moment many of the gods were growing more and more angry with Ravana, the ruler of the rakshasas, or demons. Ravana was no ordinary looking demon. He had ten heads and twenty arms. He also had remarkable powers. But he was using his power to prevent the gods and holy men from performing sacred rituals. This was a terrible insult to all who were holy.

Learning of Ravana's actions, Vishnu, the protector of the universe, decided it was time to do something. But what? Years ago Ravana was granted a boon, or promise. This boon protected him from gods and demons. How then, Vishnu wondered, could Ravana be stopped?

Vishnu thought, "Ravana, in his arrogance, protected himself only from those beings whom he thought could hurt him. He failed to protect himself from humans and monkeys."

Vishnu decided to be born as a human who could kill Ravana. The gods and holy men were pleased with his decision.

Vishnu sent a messenger to king Dasaratha with payasam, a sweet made of milk and rice.

The messenger said, "Give each of the three wives this drink. It is a boon that will bring sons." Then the messenger disappeared.

The king gave each of his wives part of the drink. No sooner had his wives finished, than each shone with the glow of a divine being in their womb.

There was great rejoicing in the city when four sons were born to their king. Their names were Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrugna.

Even as infants, everyone noticed that Rama and Lakshmana were inseparable. It was as if they were one life in two bodies.

All four sons grew to be intelligent men. They learned the holy scriptures well. They were devoted to the welfare of others. Dasaratha was finally happy.

He enjoyed watching his sons grow before his eyes. He did not say it in so many words, but he did have a special place in his heart for Rama.

One day the sage, or wise man, Vishvamitra came to Ayodhya to see the king. The king had great respect for him.

"Greetings, oh, wise one. What brings you to my kingdom?"

The sage said, "I have come to ask you a favor."

"How can I help? No wish is too great to ask," the king responded.

"It pleases me to hear those words from you," said Vishwamitra.

I have been trying to perform an important sacred rite, which is again and again being interrupted by Ravana's demons. My vows prevent me personally from fighting these demons."

The king listened intently.

"I pray, Dasaratha, that you allow me to take Rama with me to protect my sacred rite."

"But Rama is only a child. He is but sixteen years of age. I have a better idea. I shall send you my armies to battle these demons. I will even accompany you. I shall fight these demons with my own hands. But please do not take Rama. Without Rama I cannot live even a few minutes."

The king began to weep.

Vishwamitra understood the king's pain. But the sage also had no choice. He knew that Rama was an avatar, or incarnation of Vishnu on earth. He also knew that only Vishnu in human form could kill Ravana.

The king told Rama about Vishwamitra's request. Rama understood and willingly went with the sage.

"I shall go, too, father," declared Lakshmana. The king did not protest.

Rama and Lakshmana, weapons slung over their shoulders, and followed the sage along the Sarayu River bank.

The journey was a long one. Whenever the three stopped to rest, the sage took the time to teach the boys how to use the powerful weapons of the gods to fight the demons.

They journeyed until they reached the foot of a frightening forest. They paused. The sage said, "This was once a beautiful and prosperous country. Now the terrible she-demon, Tataka, lives here. She attacks and kills anyone who enters."

Neither Rama nor Lakshmana were afraid.

The sage turned to Rama and said, "Now it is up to you to rid this forest of these demons. By doing so, you will restore the land to the prosperity and the peace it once enjoyed."

Rama clutched his bow and removed arrows from his quiver. Rama and Lakshmana followed Vishwamitra into the forest. They heard many strange and frightening sounds. Each step they took brought them deeper into the forest.

Suddenly there was an unearthly roar. The three men stopped. From nowhere a huge rock came hurling out of the sky heading straight for Rama. He slipped an arrow in place and drew his bow. He fired just as the rock was about to hit him. The arrow split the rock in two. The pieces fell harmlessly to earth.

Then appearing out of between two trees, Rama saw a horrible sight. It was the hideous form of the demoness, Tataka. She was enormous. Around her neck was a human skull. She had sharp claws on her hands. She looked at Rama and made a growling noise. Lakshmana decided to wait no longer. He fired his arrow and gravely wounded the demoness. A strange look came over her face as she felt the arrow pierce her flesh. Placing her hand to the wound she moaned, "What mortals have wounded me?" Then taking careful aim, Rama fired his arrow into Tataka's heart killing her.

No sooner had the she-demon died, than the gods in heaven rained lotus blossoms down on Rama blessing him. The three continued on their journey deeper into the forest. Along the way, Rama and Lakshmana killed many demons.

The sage told Rama: "I am delighted with you. I shall give you even greater weapons to defeat any enemy."

He knew that Rama's work was far from complete. There was still the powerful Ravana to deal with. It was one thing to kill Ravana's demons; it was another to kill Ravana himself.

The three finally left the forest. They headed for Mithila to visit King Janaka.

Seeing the sage, Janaka greeted him saying, "Have I told you about my daughter?"

"Please tell me about her," responded the sage.

The king spoke: "A few years ago a portion of my land was being plowed and I found a divine child in a furrow. I called her Sita and adopted her as my own daughter. She has grown into a beautiful, young woman. Many princes have desired her hand in marriage."

"But I wanted the man who married my Sita to be a man of great strength and righteousness. To prove his strength, this man would have to lift and string the ancient bow of Shiva. No man has shown the strength to even lift this bow."

The sage turned to Rama and said, "There is a bow belonging to King Janaka that I would like you to string."

Rama entered a long room filled with thousands of people. The bow was so heavy it took no less than five thousand exceptionally strong men to bring the bow and its casing into the room. Several princes who had tried to lift the bow looked on as Rama approached the weapon. Rama looked at Shiva's bow. First he touched it. It was beautiful. Then with no effort whatsoever, he hoisted the bow from its casing and started to string it. As he did so, the bow snapped in two and fell to the palace floor. First there was disbelief, then everyone stood and chanted, "Rama. Rama."

The king rose to his feet and declared, "Sita has found her spouse! Send a messenger to Ayodhya informing them of the wedding of Rama to my daughter, Sita."

The wedding ceremony was held in the palace. As part of this ceremony, the worship of the sacred fire began. The holiest sages recited mantras, prayers.

After this, King Janaka led Sita to Rama. He placed her hand in his and said to Rama, "This is Sita, my daughter, O Rama, who is from today your partner in life. Accept her. Hold her hand in yours. She will always follow you as your shadow."

Following the wedding everyone returned to Ayodhya. All in the city cheered their arrival. Rama and Sita continued to serve their parents and delight the holy ones and gods. Sita and Rama were the perfect husband and wife. They were exceedingly devoted to each other.

Rama's parents watched him mature into a young prince. Rama was a perfectly perfect young man. He had all the noble qualities. He was patient with others' wrongs, but would not do wrong himself. He enjoyed the company of elders and wise men. He was very intelligent and courageous. He was righteous and kind. He was the perfect warrior. He knew when to use violence and when not to. He was healthy, strong and handsome. He was highly learned in the scriptures. Rama was a sat-purusa, the ideal man.

Life In Ayodhya

Now the king was growing older. He noticed omens suggesting his end was near. "I have lived long enough," he thought. "I must be sure my throne goes to Rama, the most worthy of my sons. What a great blessing it would be to see him as king before I go to heaven. "Then it will be done," Dasaratha concluded, "I shall step down and Rama shall be made king."

The king told everyone about his decision. He informed the priests to begin the sacred rites that would allow Rama to assume the throne of Ayodhya.

Kaikeyi, the last and youngest of the king's three wives, had heard of the decision to make Rama king while Dasaratha was still living. This decision pleased her.

But Manthara, a maid-servant, did not want Rama to be king. If she could somehow convince Kaikeyi to change the king's mind, her position at the palace would be secure.

That evening, she spoke to Kaikeyi in secret. "If Rama takes the throne, you would lose all your control over the king. If Rama is crowned, his mother will control of the kingdom Your rule will come to an end. Awake. Act now. You must convince Dasaratha that it is your son who should be king."

Kaikeyi believed Manthara. She decided to see Dasaratha.

She tried everything to convince Dasaratha to listen to her.

"Dasaratha," Kaikeyi began, "Do you remember that fateful day I saved your life in battle? Do you remember how I stopped your runaway from the chariot. "

"Yes," replied the king.

"And do you remember what you said after I saved your life?"

Without waiting for an answer, she said, " Oh my powerful king and beloved husband you promised me two boons. Hear my boons now so that they may be granted."

The king reluctantly listened to his wife's requests.

"First," she began. "I wish to have my son, Bharata, placed upon the throne of Ayodhya. Second, I want Rama banished from the kingdom for a period of no less than fourteen years."

The king fell to his knees and begged his young wife not to hold him to these dreadful wishes.

As a righteous and honest man, he knew he could not go back on his word. Yet, he couldn't bear to ask Rama to forsake the throne and go away for fourteen years. He turned pale and speechless.

Kaikeyi told Rama the terrible news. Rather than argue, Rama comforted his father.

"Father, your word is law. I shall do whatever you bid. It is the sacred duty of a son to respect his father."

Then, he turned to his own mother Kausalya, and requested "Please be sure that father installs Bharata as crown prince."

Rama knelt and touched the feet of his parents respectfully. He stood, turned and left the palace.

Lakshmana declared, "I shall destroy anyone who opposes your right to the throne."

Rama responded, "No, Lakshmana. You know it is my sacred duty, my dharma, to fulfill these wishes."

"My brother, if you must leave Ayodhya, then I shall follow you," Lakshmana said.

Rama tried to convince Sita to remain, but she said sobbing, "And, it is my duty, my dharma, as a wife to be at your side. How can I live without you? I must join you."

Rama tried hard to convince them to stay but they were insistent.

"Then, Sita, come with me," Rama said.

Rama also gave his brother permission to join them.

As the three left the palace, they cast away their royal robes and put on the clothes of hermits.

The people of Ayodhya wept as Rama, Sita and Lakshmana passed from the city. As the chariot went from sight, Dasaratha cried, "Rama! Rama! Do not leave me."

In time, Dasaratha lost the will to live. His heart simply gave out. Ayodhya mourned the loss of their king.

In a few days, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita crossed the river Ganges searching for a land undisturbed and isolated from everyone.

Soon they reached Chitrakoot, a beautiful place with many trees and streams. It was paradise. They built a small hut near a stream.

Several days had passed. Lakshmana, while hunting in the forest, heard the pounding of a thousand hooves. He climbed a tree to see whose army was approaching. To his amazement, he saw the lead horseman carrying the flag of Ayodhya. Bharata had found his brothers. Lakshmana was sure that his brother had come to kill them.

Lakshmana called to Rama: "A great army is approaching led by our brother, Bharata. I will kill him with my own hands."

"Don't be a fool," Rama said. "He is our brother and he is the king. We must welcome him."

Bharata embraced his brothers. He cried, "My heart is filled with grief and shame. Grief for the loss of our noble father. Shame for being offered the throne that you rightfully deserve. Come back to Ayodhya and be our king."

"That cannot be done," Rama said. "I gave my word and I shall stay here for fourteen years and no less. Then and only then will I return." Nothing could sway Rama.

"Rama, my brother," Bharata declared, "as long as you are in exile, no one shall be king. To ensure this, give me your sandals. I will place them on the throne. For the next fourteen years I will serve our land in your name. And, if after those fourteen years, you do not return, I shall walk into a fire and die."

Bharata took the sandals, mounted his horse and left the forest. In Kosala, Bharata put Rama's sandals on the red and gold Ayodhya throne.

The Forest Life

Several days passed. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita walked south until they came upon Dandaka forest. Once a beautiful place, Dandaka was now a barren wasteland. Shreds of bark from dead trees littered the ground. Stumps of trees were all that remained of a once lush forest. The sound of the wind seemed to warn anyone who approached. At night demons prowled the land in search of flesh.

Religious men who gave up all worldly comforts and became hermits also lived in the forest. They spoke of the horrors that Ravana's demons had done. Rama and Lakshmana promised they would kill all these demons.

After ten years, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita crossed the Godavari River and reached Panchavati. Here was a magnificent forest, untouched by demons. The air was fragrant with the smell of flowers. Fruit grew on every vine. Birds sang joyfully.

"Let us build a hut here." Rama said.

Nearby lived the ancient vulture king, Jatayu. Jatayu made friends with them and enjoyed guarding Sita while the brothers hunted.

Just beyond the clearing lived Shurpanakha, the she-demon. She was Ravana's sister. She had a pot belly, huge ears, claws on her fingers and toes, slits for eyes, and dirty hair.

One day she saw Rama in the forest. She put down the bone she was gnawing on and said, "I want him for my husband."

Using her magical powers, she turned herself into a beautiful maiden.

She asked Rama, "Why does such a strong, handsome man like you live in this forest? Who are you?"

Rama told her his story. Upon seeing Sita, the she-demon said, "That woman is not good enough for you."

Rama responded, "And who, might I ask, is?"

"I am. I can make you happy."

"Perhaps I should introduce you to my brother, Lakshmana,"

Rama said half-jokingly.

Sensing that Rama was not interested in her, the demon grew angry. She assumed her original form and jumped on Sita.

In an instant, Lakshmana took his gold-handled knife from his belt and cut off the she-demon's nose and ears. She howled in pain as she fled.

Shurpanaka ran until she met her brothers Khar and Dushan who lived on the edge of the forest. Seeing his sister's bloodied face, Khar cried, "Who has done this to you?"

His wounded sister whimpered, "A human."

"A human!" Khar replied, "What human can do this?"

Take us to them. We will kill them."

Khar gathered his army of demon warriors and marched into the forest.

Lakshmana noticed the sky growing darker. Day seemed to turn into night. Then he looked again. The sky was filled with flying demons. Upon seeing this, Rama told Sita to remain in the hut. With Lakshmana at his side, Rama would face Khar's forces. Rama fired his golden arrows skyward. With each shot, mortally wounded demons fell to earth.

The fierce battle continued. No magic or weapons could save the demons from Rama's divine weaponry. In the end, Khar and his 14,000 warriors were slain.

Shurpanakha watched in horror as her brothers and their army were destroyed. She hurried to Lanka to see her brother, Ravana.

"Oh, Ravana. Khar and Dushan have been killed by humans. All their warriors are dead, too," Shurpanakha cried.

Ravana rose from his throne. The crowns on his ten heads glistened. He raised his ten left arms pointing to his disfigured sister and said, "And how many thousands of humans fought so well?"

"There are but two, my lord." answered Shurpanakha weeping.

"Two!" roared Ravana, his voice echoing through the palace.

"The two banished princes from Ayodhya. They have done this alone," his sister said.

"What gods are on their side?" Ravana wondered.

"One more thing," Shurpanakha added. "Rama's wife, Sita, is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She would make a lovely queen."

"Sita," said Ravana.

"Whoever Sita embraces as her husband will outgain the gods in happiness," she added.

"Perhaps there is a way to revenge my sister's wounds and avenge the loss of my two brothers," Ravana thought. "Maybe I can punish Rama in a way he will never expect."

Ravana summoned his magic chariot and flew off. Over the vast ocean and great mountains he travelled until he landed at the den of Mareech, the magician. This magician was able to assume the form of any human or beast.

Ravana told Mareecha about Rama. He also spoke of his desire to take Sita from the forest, carry her back to Lanka and make her his queen.

"I shall do whatever I can to help," said the magician.

He continued. "I will go to the Chilrakoot forest where I shall change into a golden deer and stand near their hut. I will lure Rama away. You will do the rest."

The next day, a beautiful deer appeared at the stream in Panchavati. Sita was enchanted by it.

"Please capture that deer for me," Sita asked Rama.

Lakshmana looked carefully at the creature. He told his brother, "This deer is too beautiful. It is too perfect. I have never seen a deer like that before. Brother, approach it with caution."

"Stay with Sita," Rama told Lakshmana.

"I will, my lord," Lakshmana replied.

No sooner had Rama taken a step toward the deer than it darted into the woods. It was taking Rama farther and farther from the hut. Then deep in the forest, the deer paused. Rama moved closer to it. As he did so, the deer changed into the form of Mareech.

"Lakshmana was right," cried Rama. His heart was filled with fear. He ran as fast as he could.

Then he heard a voice that sounded exactly like his own cry out, "Lakshmana! Help me!"

Rama knew he had been tricked. He hoped his brother would ignore these cries.

"Lakshmana," sighed Sita. "That is your brother, my husband. He is crying for help. You must go to him."

"But Rama told me not to leave your side."

Sita insisted, "You must help him."

"I cannot," replied Lakshmana.

"You cannot? Are you not worried for my husband's safety? How can you just stand there? Do you not help him because he is only your half-brother? Or because he is my husband?"

"Then I shall find him," said Sita.

"No!" said Lakshmana.

"If you do not go after him, Lakshmana, I shall kill myself."

Finally Lakshmana made his decision. Before he left, he drew a circle around the entrance to the hut.

"Sita," he said, "do not step beyond this magical circle. Inside of it you will be safe."

Lakshmana grasped his quiver and ran in the direction of Rama's voice.

From behind a tree, Ravana watched his plan unfold perfectly.

In an instant, he changed himself into a sanyasi, an old wise man, clutching a begging bowl.

Seeing this common sight, and knowing it was her duty to feed the poor, Sita offered the man fruit. Then Ravana noticed the magical circle. He knew that as long she remained within the circle, he could not get her. He had to get Sita outside of it.

"Take this offering," said Sita.

"I am a sanyasi. I cannot enter your home. To accept your gracious offering you must leave your home."

Sita hesitated. She had always helped the Sanyasins. How could she ignore this man? Disregarding Lakshmana's warning, Sita stepped beyond the circle.

Then like a tiger springing from high grass, Ravana grabbed Sita and placed her in his chariot.

Sita screamed, but it was too late. The chariot rose into the sky and sped off to Lanka.

As Ravana headed south, Jatayu, the great eagle, saw Sita. Jatayu spread his huge wings and flew up to the chariot. "Free Sita," Jatayu declared "or I shall kill you."

Ravana ignored the threat. Jatayu tore off one of the chariot's railings. He gently removed Sita from the chariot and set her on the earth.

In blind fury, Jatayu attacked tearing off Ravana's arms and heads. Blood spurted from Ravana's mutilated body. As fast as Ravana lost an arm or head, it grew back. Jatayu was growing tired from the fight. Sensing this, Ravana drew his sword and cut off both of Jatayu's wings. The brave bird fell to the ground dying. Sita caressed Jatayu.

She thanked him for trying to save her. In an instant, Ravana pulled Sita back into the chariot and staggered back to Lanka.

Once in the city, Ravana tried to convince Sita to stay in Lanka and be his queen. But Sita would not listen. She loved only Rama. Hearing this Ravana led Sita out of the palace and into a garden. He guarded her with a hundred demons.

Back in the forest, Lakshmana found Rama unharmed. Terror filled Lakshmana's heart. He, too, had been tricked.

Upon returning to the hut, Rama cried out, "Sita is gone. What will I do?"

Rama knelt down and cried uncontrollably. "What must she be suffering?" he wondered.

Rama gathered his strength. He said, "This act shall not go unpunished. I will slay Ravana and his entire family."

Rama's Stay in Kiskindha

Rama and Lakshmana began their search for Sita. They entered Kiskindha, the kingdom of the monkeys. Kiskindha was located south of Kosala. Soon they came to a mountain where Sugriva lived. He was the ruler of the monkey kingdom. Hanuman, a devoted follower of Sugriva, guarded the entrance to the kingdom. Seeing the brothers approach, he ordered them to halt.

"Who are you?" Hanuman asked.

"I am Rama, the exiled prince of Ayodhya. This is my brother, Lakshmana. We wish to see your king. I am hoping he can help us find my wife, Sita. She was taken by Ravana."

Rama and Lakshmana met Sugriva. They told their story.

Sugriva said, "I, too, am in exile. My brother seized my kingdom and my queen."

Sugriva paused. He thought about Rama's story. Then said. "Help me regain my throne and I will help you find your wife.

One of my people saw Sita being carried off to Lanka. As she passed overhead, she dropped this."

Rama reached out his hand. It was one of Sita's ornaments.

Tears filled Rama's eyes.

Rama and Lakshmana did as they were asked. They defeated Sugriva's brother and won back the throne.

It was now the rainy season. Rama and Lakshmana returned to the forest. They could not begin their search for Sita until the rains stopped in autumn. Rama grew more depressed. The rain seemed to Rama like tears from the gods.

Then when the sun shone upon the land again, Hanuman arrived. Sugriva had fulfilled his promise. Hanuman divided his troops into four divisions. Each division would go in search of Sita for one month.

At the end of the month, three of the four divisions returned with no word of Sita's whereabouts. Only Hanuman's division had yet to return.

Hanuman's Prank

One day as Hanuman and his men searched for Sita, they saw a great bird on a mountainside. This bird was the brother of Jatayu. Hanuman told the bird about his search. Then he asked, "Do you know where Sita is?"

"Yes," the bird said, "She is in the Asoka garden near Ravana's palace."

"How do I get to her?" asked Hanuman.

"You must cross a great ocean," the bird said.

Hanuman's army marched to the mighty ocean. There was no way they could cross this great body of water.

"We must return," said one of the monkey warriors. "How can we get to the other side?"

In a loud voice, Hanuman declared, "I will cross this ocean and rescue Sita."

Hanuman prayed for strength. He saw the unhappy image of Rama. Hanuman prayed to Rama. Then incredibly, he began to grow. He grew so huge that the ground began to shake.

With a great cry, "Victory to Rama," Hanuman leapt into the sky.

The monkey army cheered as their leader flew across the great ocean. The gods smiled down on Hanuman as they admired his courage and devotion.

Nothing could stop Hanuman. On the horizon, he could see Lanka. As he approached the city, he changed back to his normal size. Once in Lanka, he set out to find Sita.

Soon he came upon Ravana's palace. He looked in each of the palace gardens, but he could not find Sita. How could he return without Sita or some word of her whereabouts. Then he saw a grove of trees. Beneath one of the trees was the most beautiful woman Hanuman had ever seen. She was crying and repeating, "Rama, Rama."

"I have found her," Hanuman declared. "Lord Rama will be so happy."

Hanuman looked around. He noticed that Sita was surrounded by many she-demons.

Just as Hanuman was about approach her, he saw Ravana coming. The king of Lanka was sat on the ground next to Sita. He was saying, "Sita, come with me. Come live in my palace. I will make you my queen. You can have anything you wish."

Hanuman hid from view.

Sita spoke: "How dare you speak to me this way. You have kidnapped me. I am Rama's wife, King Janaka's daughter. Rama will come for me. He will rescue me and kill you and all you demons. If you let me go, I will try to spare your life."

Ravana seemed hurt by Sita's words. Anger and sorrow filled Ravana's heart. He knew at that moment he would never have Sita.

"Then you shall remain here," he said as he turned away.

Hanuman did not move a muscle. He waited and waited. The she-demons guarding Sita were getting tired. One by one they fell asleep.

Here was his chance to speak to Sita. Hanuman approached her and knelt at her feet. "Do not fear. I am Hanuman, Rama's servant and messenger. He has sent me to find you. He cries for your return."

"How do I know you are telling me the truth? You may be just another demon in disguise." Sita said.

Hanuman reached into his pocket and removed Rama's ring. "Here," he said, "This should prove that Rama has sent me."

Sita pressed her hands to her face and cried. "I am sorry I doubted you. Go to Rama and tell him where I am. Tell him I will wait for him to save me." Sita gave Hanuman a jewel. "Here. Take this to my lord as proof of my love."

Suddenly the demons awoke. They attacked Hanuman. He killed them with ease.

Hanuman was finally taken to the palace. Ravana ordered him killed.

One of Ravana's wise men reminded the king, "It is not permitted to kill a messenger."

"Then we shall punish him. Set his tail on fire. Let him return home that way," Ravana declared.

As the king's men wrapped Hanuman's tail in cloth to set it on fire he grew it longer and longer. The more they wrapped, the longer Hanuman grew his tail. Finally, Ravana ordered, "Set it on fire!" cried Ravana.

With his long tail on fire, Hanuman flew into the sky. He decided to set the city of Lanka ablaze to punish Ravana. He flew low over the city and set each building, temple, palace and garden on fire. Flames shot high into the sky. As he flew over Asoka garden he made sure Sita was safe. Then before he headed home, he put his tail in the ocean to put out the fire.

The Great War

Hanuman received a great welcome from his warriors. They hurried back to tell Rama the good news. By now Rama had given up all hope of ever seeing Sita alive again. When Rama saw Hanuman returning, he ran to him.

"I pray you have word of Sita."

Without saying a word, Hanuman gave Rama Sita's jewel.

Rama praised Hanuman for his bravery and said, "You have given me reason to live again."

Meanwhile back at Lanka palace, Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, tried to save Sita's life. "Let her go," he said, "so we can save our kingdom from Rama's anger."

Ravana responded angrily, "If I return Sita, I will be ridiculed by all the gods and demons."

Vibhishana warned again, "Do not underestimate Rama's strength. It is said that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu sent to earth to destroy all that is unholy. With his powers he will destroy Lanka. Why do you tempt such a fate?"

"I fear no one," Ravana roared.

"Then," Vibhishana said, "I can no longer remain in Lanka. Save yourself brother."

"Then go," shouted Ravana. "I have no place in my kingdom for the weak and timid."

Vibhishana left the palace and magically flew to Rama. Arriving at his camp, Vibhishana declared, "I am the brother of Ravana. I tried to convince my brother to return your wife. But he refused and I left Lanka.

I wish to join you and fight at your side."

Rama responded, "Vibhishana, you have rejected evil for good. You are welcomed here."

Now Rama had to make a battle plan. Vibhishana told him that Ravana and his evil son, Indrajit, had great magical powers. His army was made up of millions of demons.

For his honesty and bravery, Rama promised Vibhishana that he would become the new king of Lanka.

Rama stood on the shoreline of the great ocean and spoke to the ocean god. "Hear me," he called. "I am Rama. I have weapons that are beyond imagination. In an instant I can dry your ocean. If you wish to avoid this fate, show me how to reach Lanka."

The ocean said, "Rama, here is Nala, son of the great builder. He will build you a bridge across these waters. I shall support that bridge."

With the help of the monkey army, Nala put up a bridge made of wood, rocks, and stones. Every creature helped in its own way. It took five days to complete the bridge to Lanka.

Rama, Hanuman, and the monkey army crossed the bridge by nightfall. As they crossed into Lanka they shouted, "Victory to Rama!"

Hanuman's army surrounded the city. Rama knew that Sita would soon be safe.

Ravana called for two of his demons. "Change yourselves into monkeys. Move among the monkey army and find out what you can."

The demons entered the camp and Vibhishana recognized them. They were brought to Rama. He decided not to punish them. He said, "Send a message to your king. Tell him that I have come to save my wife and kill him."

Ravana was angered by his inability to learn about Rama's plans. Enraged he called upon one of his demons.

"Make me an exact copy of Rama's head. Then bring it to me," he said.

Ravana took the head to Sita. "O, Sita," he said, "Rama has failed in his attempt to rescue you. His army has been destroyed. That is the end of your hope. The time has come to change your mind and become my queen."

Sita looked at Ravana and said, "I do not believe any of this."

Ravana responded: "I thought you might say that. So I brought the head of your husband, soaked in blood and sand, to prove my words."

Sita collapsed wailing, "Alas, O Rama, you have followed your dharma. But I have been widowed. Widowhood is a terrible tragedy in the life of a woman devoted to dharma. You came to save me, but you gave your own life.

O Rama you are happy now. You have rejoined your beloved father in heaven. But what shall I do?

O Rama, I am the terrible woman who has brought all this upon you. I pray take me too. Take me with you, my love."

Angered by Sita's devotion to Rama, Ravana stormed from the garden.

When he returned to the palace, he ordered all his troops to march toward the city gates.

For four days both armies stood poised.

On the morning of the fifth day, the great battle began. Each side suffered terrible losses. Blood filled the streets of Lanka. Bodies of fallen warriors were everywhere.

Rama and Lakshmana fought gallantly.

Hanuman was injured in a duel. Vibhishana showed great valor.

Indrajit, Ravana's son, rained poison arrows upon Rama and Lakshmana. So overwhelming was this attack, that the two brothers suffered many wounds. "I shall send both of you to the house of death," cried Indrajit.

Rama and Lakshmana were bleeding heavily, but they fought on.

Indrajit hurled even more powerful weapons at them. Each weapon took a new toll. Rama and Lakshmana fell to the ground unconscious.

Vibhishana prayed to the gods for their safety. "Protect Rama and Lakshmana while they are hurt."

While the monkey warriors stood by grief-stricken, the battle raged on without Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana's demons made themselves invisible and attacked the heart of the monkey army. Ravana's forces were merciless. Thousands were killed by unseen attackers.

Seeing his forces in retreat, Hanuman charged on with a great cry. "Victory to Rama! Death to Ravana!"

With his remarkable strength, Hanuman smashed the skull of every visible enemy. He challenged any of Ravana's men to advance. Seeing Hanuman's great courage, the monkey-army rallied behind their leader and fought harder.

Ravana's army was losing its advantage. Angered by this news, he decided to join the battle. He climbed in his chariot and soared above Lanka in search of Rama.

By now Rama and Lakshmana, having regained consciousness but still dazed, returned to the fight. Ravana viewed the battle scene from the clouds. Then he spotted Lakshmana. He aimed his magic bow and fired. The arrow cut through the air and struck Rama's brother in the chest. He collapsed. Hanuman rushed to Lakshmana's side. He gently lifted the wounded prince and carried him to safety.

Just when things were starting to look up for Rama's warriors, Indrajit returned to the battle. He was now invisible. All the monkey soldiers could hear was the mocking laughter of Indrajit as he soared over them. Indrajit's weapons took an enormous toll on the monkeys. By the time he returned to the palace, every monkey was either wounded or killed. Only Rama, Hanuman, and Vibhishana remained standing.

Rama looked upon around and said, "The battle has been lost."

Then in a weakened voice, Jambuvan, one of the leaders of the army, said, "No, Rama. There is still a way we can regain the advantage and defeat Ravana. Tell Hanuman to go to Kailasa Mountain. There he will see a blazing hill of medicinal herbs. Have him bring these herbs back before sunrise and our army will be saved."

Hanuman rose above the earth and flew off with great speed.

When he reached the mountain, he saw the hill that Jambuvan described. But he could not find the herbs. Realizing time was short, he uprooted the entire hill and carried it back to Lanka. Hanuman flew off balancing the hill in one hand.

When he returned to Lanka, the monkey warriors began inhaling the healing air of the herbs. One-by-one, they rose to their feet and regained their strength. Even Lakshmana recovered from his near-mortal wound. Hanuman returned the hill to its original place.

Rama embraced Hanuman and said, "I know no one who shows your valor and devotion."

With that, Hanuman cried out, "Victory to Rama!"

Using all their weapons, Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, and Hanuman finally overpowered Indrajit. Ravana's son had fought long and hard, but now he was dead.

Hearing of his son's death, Ravana decided now was the time to kill Rama and put an end to this bloodshed.

Arming himself with his most powerful weapons, Ravana left Lanka palace. He spotted Rama leading the monkey army toward the city gates. Ravana fired a magic arrow at Rama. Seeing the arrow, Rama split it with his own arrow.

Ravana tried everything to overpower his foe. But each time, Rama had an answer.

The fight lasted two days. Rama could feel his strength leaving him. He turned to one of his sages and said, "My spirit is nearly gone. My arms and legs ache. My heart wants to go on, but my body can no longer respond."

The sage said to Rama: "Listen carefully to this secret. It is the heart of the sun that will bring you victory and the auspiciousness to destroy Ravana. Worship the sun, O Rama. He alone protects all beings. Pray to him."

As Ravana was reloading his weapons, Rama knelt to pray to the sun.

Then the sage said, "Rama, you will this very moment conquer Ravana."

After looking at the sun, Rama felt his strength return. His heart was filled with joy.

Ravana attacked again. Both armies stood by and watched.

Rama reached for his most powerful weapon, the Brahma-missile, to be used only when all else had failed. He took it to his hands. As he did so, the earth shook. All the warriors covered their eyes and fell to the earth.

Rama stood poised. He aimed the weapon at the on-rushing Ravana. He fired. The missile struck Ravana's chest and exploded. Ravana fell dead.

"Victory to Rama!" shouted his men.

The gods praised Rama. The earth became steady once more. The wind blew softly. The sun shone brighter than ever. Vibhishana knelt at the body of his dead brother and burst into tears. "Why didn't you listen to my words? Why were you so overcome with Sita and power?"

Rama touched Vibhishana's shoulder and said, "Our ancients say that you should not mourn a mighty fallen warrior on the battlefield. Victory is the monopoly of none. Weep not for one who is no more. Rise, for we still have work to do."

Vibhishana prepared the funeral rites for his brother. "My brother was so evil, people will try to keep me from giving him an honorable funeral."

Rama replied, "No one will stop this rite. Hostility ends with death. He is your brother and he is mine too. You must honor him with this rite."

Following the funeral rite, Rama made Vibhishana the new king of Lanka. Vibhishana's wife and maidens took Sita from the garden. A beautiful sari was placed around her. Jewels made her sparkle. A scarlet spot adorned her forehead. Sita could not wait to see her victorious husband.

Rama entered the palace and Sita bowed at his feet. He felt both love and sorrow for his wife. "We shall return to Ayodhya," he said.

Shri Rama returned to Ayodhya.

His coronation took place with great splendor. Rama gave priceless gifts to all his friends. He also gave an invaluable necklace and ornaments to Seethadevi. But she remembered the great help of Hanuman and gave them to him. She even took off the necklace and looked at Rama. Shri Rama read her mind and said, "Devi, do please give the necklace to the person who has brought you immense joy and in whom valour, ability, courtesy and wisdom are embedded for ever." At once, she gave necklace to Hanuman.

Ashramas : Four Stages in Human Life

[Note: We should relate these topics with the current values we have and the problems associated with them at every stage in life.]

Just as we differ in aptitudes, so do we differ in age. There are different seasons in human life as in nature. What grows in the spring will not grow in the autumn. The action that is appropriate in the spring is out of place in the fall.

In this way the normal human life was regarded as eighty-four years, consisting of four sections of twenty-one years each.

Brahmacharya: The first twenty-one years is called the "Brahmacharya ashram", the stage of youth or learning, which requires a certain discipline, guidance and purity for its full flowering.

Grihastha: The second twenty-one years, from ages twenty-one to forty-two, is called the "Grihastha ashram" or householder phase. This is the main time for having children and raising a family, as well as for working and fulfilling our duties to society. This second stage of life begins with marriage. One enters the householder stage and starts a family. One earns a righteous living. One looks after all family members including the elderly, guests and children. One is supposed to work for the good of the society as a whole (dharma). This stage allows one to acquire wealth (artha) and fulfill legitimate desires (kama). This stage in life is the key stage, as it acts as the financial support for the other three stages of life. It has relevance today in teaching values of righteous living, carrying out one's duties, not just looking after one's own family but also doing good work for society as a whole.

Vanaprastha: The third section of twenty-one years, from ages forty-two to sixty-three is the "Vanaprastha" or the hermitage phase. This is a time for return to contemplation and for guiding society in the distance. The scriptures say 'when the skin becomes wrinkled' one begins this stage. It literally means - 'the stage of the forest dweller.' It encourages withdrawal from family duties. It is a stage of retirement. One acts as the advisor in the family and passes on the

duties of running the household to the younger members of the family. One withdraws from worldly desires in order to attend to one's spiritual needs. Normally one continues to live with the family but spends time in contemplation and meditation.

Sanyasa: The fourth and last section from sixty-three to eighty-four is the "Sannyasa" or renunciation phase. The person, now an elder, full of wisdom, inwardly aims to renounce all the outer goals of life. He also becomes a teacher of the spiritual knowledge and no longer partakes in social or political concerns.

This order reflects the general rule. More advanced souls may go directly to the renunciation phase. Less advanced souls may not even qualify for the first phase. They may never develop the purity, innocence and humility of the Brahmacharya phase.

In this we see that only twenty-one years are allotted for the outer duties of life. Three-quarters of life is to be devoted primarily to spiritual study.

A true society provides the appropriate experiences for each of these four stages of life. Our present American society is based mainly on adolescent values. Even the elderly are expected to act like the young, pursuing sex, sports and money. Such a culture is one-sided and imbalanced. The potentials of the soul in old age are denied. The natural movement of the soul in its later years towards detachment and meditation is suppressed. As the elderly naturally begin to lose interest in the outer goals of life we tell them that they are sick and encourage them to do things to remain in the mainstream of worldly seeking. The elderly are not able to grow in wisdom and become our true elders and teachers. We make them into mockeries of the young. We do not respect them and they feel we have abandoned them. As we live longer and the average age of individuals in our cultures increases this problem becomes more acute.

Any society which does not recognize the stages of life cannot flourish for long, just as a farmer cannot be successful if he only knows the plants that flourish in one season. Nor can any individual be happy if they are following the needs of a stage of life, which is no longer appropriate for them. Hence this ancient Vedic understanding of the stages of life must be brought back again.

Society is not a two dimensional drawing. It has the invisible dimension of spiritual growth. Without recognizing this we have a warped perspective on our existence. Vedic values aid us in restoring this inner dimension to society as well as to our individual existence. It is that power of aspiration that gives true meaning to human life and allows us to appreciate the different levels and stages of our existence.

Hindu's Contribution to the World of Sports and Games

Source http://hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/india_contribution/sports.html

In the area of recreation and sports Bharat had evolved a number of games. One would be surprised to know today that games like, Chess, Snakes and Ladders, Playing Cards, Polo, the martial arts of Judo and Karate had originated in Bharat and it was from here that these games were transmitted to foreign countries, where they were further developed.

At times the changes made in the original nature of the Bharatn sport-forms were so many and so fundamental that the game lost all similarity with its original form in Bharat.

Some games were not transmitted abroad and remained confined to Bharat. For instance we have Kabbadi, Kho-Kho, AtyaPatya, Malkhamb, Gulli-danda, etc., which are being played today exclusively in Bharat. In this chapter we shall look into how the games like Chess and Ludo (Snakes and Ladders), the martial art of Karate, and Playing cards had existed in Bharat for the past 2000 years and how in some cases the indigenous form of the game became totally extinct erasing the fact that- the game had ever been played in Bharat.

THE MARTIAL ARTS - KARATE AND JUDO

Many eyebrows would be raised when a Hindu lays claim to the martial arts of Judo and Karate. Such askance is understandable. Everybody the world over knows that it was the countries of the far-east China, Korea and Japan who have given these arts to us. The finest exponents of Karate, Judo come from these countries, schools like Shaolin and Ninja that have nurtured these arts are from the far-east. But in the distant corner of Bharat a dying martial art exists which comes significantly close to Karate. This art from is called Kalaripayate. The practitioners of Kalaripayate have to develop acrobatic capabilities and use swords or knives to attack an opponent.

Even an unarmed exponent of Kalaripayate presents an invincible adversary.

Kalaripayat from Kerala was transmitted to China by a sage named Boddhidharma in the 5th century

The Chinese called him Po-ti-tama. He taught this art in a temple. This temple is today known as the Shaolin temple. Thus Judo, Karate, Kung Fu and other similar marshal arts which are today identified with the far-east actually originated from Bharat.

Buddhists monks who traveled barefoot and unarmed to spread the gospel of Buddha seem to have accepted this art with alterations suitable to the philosophy of nonviolence. Such a technique of defense would have been necessary for them as they traveled individually or in small groups in foreign lands during which they were exposed to dangers from bandits and fanatics from other religions. Buddhist monks seem to have tempered the originally violent character of this art. The violent and exterminative nature of Kalaripayate is evident from the daggers and knives that are used. Unlike Kalaripayate, Judo and Karate do not allow the use of lethal weapons.

The aim of a Karate practitioner is mainly to disarm and disable his opponent without mortally wounding him. This can be looked upon as a reflection of the Buddhist attitude towards life. Further both Judo and Karate are deeply interwoven with meditation unlike other martial arts like boxing, wrestling, fencing, etc. The concentration aspect in Judo and Karate perhaps stems from this. Both Judo and Karate are sought to be kept as arts to be used for just purposes for protection of the weak, etc.,

The oath that every student of these disciplines has to take is evidence of this. A teacher of Judo or Karate traditionally commands deep respect of students and a lesson always starts with a

bow of the students to the teacher. The teacher here is not looked upon only as a coach as in western martial arts like boxing and fencing. This relationship between a teacher and student in Judo and Karate could have its roots in the Guru-Shishya tradition of Bharat.

Thus it is quite possible that these martial art forms originated in southern Bharat and were transmitted to China, Korea and Japan by Buddhist monks. But it has to be conceded that they were neglected in Bharat where like Buddhism they atrophied and today the world considers them to be a legacy bequeathed by the countries of the far-east.

CHESS

Chess originated in ancient Bharat and was known as "Chatur-Anga" meaning 4 bodied, as it was played by 4 players. From this name we have its current name "Shatranj"

A game very similar to modern Chess and Ludo was played in ancient Bharat. In this game there used to be four participants due to which it was named Chaturanga meaning 'four bodies'. This four-bodied game was played with counters and a dice (aksha). Another name for this game was Astapada meaning 'eight steps'. This game was perhaps the progenitor of both modern day games of Chess and Ludo. There are instances in our history of this game being played.

One such instance is in the Mahabharata when Pandavas and Kauravas play this game. The Mahabharata story throws light on the fact that a game similar to Chess was played in ancient Bharat. The Mahabharata is variously dated around 800 and 1100 B.C. Thus this game was known in Bharat nearly 3000 years ago.

It is the view of some historians that this game was also used in the allocation of land among different members of a clan when a new settlement was being established.

The Bharatiya origin of the game of chess is supported even by the Encyclopedia Britannica according to which, "About 1783-89 Sir. William Jones, in an essay published in the 2nd Vol. of Asiatic Researches, argued that Hindustan was the cradle of chess, the game having been known there from time immemorial by the name Chaturanga, that is, the four angas, or members of an army, which are said in the Amarakosha (an ancient Bharatiya Dictionary - S.B.) to be elephants, horses, chariots and foot soldiers. As applicable to real armies, the term Chaturanga is frequently used by the epic poets of Bharat. Sir William Jones' essay is substantially a translation of the Bhawishya Purana, in which is given a description of a four-handed game of chess played with dice." "Sir William, however, grounds his opinions as to the Hindu origin of chess upon the testimony of the Persians and not upon the above manuscript," He lays it down that chess, under the Sanskrit name Chaturanga was exported from Bharat into Persia in the 6th century of our era; that by a natural corruption, the old Persians changed the name into chatrang; but when their country was soon afterwards taken possession of by the Arabs, who had neither the initial nor the final letter of the word in their alphabet, they altered it further into Shatranj, which name found its way presently into modern Persian and ultimately into the dialects of Bharat."

The Encyclopedia Britannica further says that Wander Linde, in his exhaustive work, Geschichte and Litteraturdes Schachspiels (1874), has much to say of the origin-theories, nearly all of which he treats as so many myths. He agrees with those who consider that the Persians

received the game from the Hindus. The outcome of his studies appears to be that chess certainly existed in Hindustan in the 8th century, and that probably that country is the land of its birth. He inclines to the idea that the game originated among the Buddhists, whose religion was prevalent in Bharat from the 3rd to the 9th century. According to their ideas, war and slaying of one's own fellow-men, for any purpose whatever, is criminal, and the punishment of the warrior in the next world will be much worse than that of the simple murderer, hence chess was invented as a substitute for war. "

"H.J.R. Murry in his monumental work A History of Chess, comes to the conclusion that chess is a descendant of an Indian game played in the 7th century."

According to the Encyclopedia "Altogether, therefore, we find the best authorities agreeing that chess existed in Bharat before it is known to have been played anywhere else. In this supposition they are strengthened by the names of the game and some of its pieces. Shatranj as Forbes has pointed out, is a foreign word among the Persians and the Arabians, whereas its natural derivation from the term Chaturanga is obvious. Again affix the Arabic name for the bishop, means the elephant, derived from alephhind, the Bharatn elephant." Even the word checkmate is derived from the Persian term Shah Mat which means 'the king is dead!'. The Sanskrit translation of this term would be Kshatra Mruta. Another term viz. 'the rooks' which is the name for one set of the counters used in chess, originated from the Persian term Roth which means a soldier. The Persian term according to the Encyclopedia is derived from the Bharatn term Rukh, which obviously seems to have originated in the Sanskrit word Rakshak which means a soldier from Raksha which means 'to protect'.

About the introduction of this game into Persia, the Encyclopedia says that "The Persian poet Firdousi, in his historical poem, the Shahnama, gives an account of the introduction of Shatranj into Persia in the reign of Chosroes I Anushirwan, to whom came ambassadors from the sovereign of Hind (Bharat), with a chess-board and men asking him to solve the secrets of the game, if he could or pay tribute. The king asked for seven days grace, during which time the wise men vainly tried to discover the secret.

Finally, the king's minister took the pieces home and discovered the secret in a day and a night."

The Encyclopedia Britannica concludes that "Other Persian and Arabian writers state that Shatranj came into Persia from Bharat and there appears to be a concensus of opinion that may be considered to settle the question. Thus we have the game passing from the Hindus to the Persians and then to the Arabians, after the capture V of Persia by the Caliphs in the 7th century, and from them, directly or indirectly, to various parts of Europe, at a time which cannot be definitely fixed, but either in or before the 10th century. That the source of the European game is Arabic is clear enough, nor merely from the words "check" and "mate", which are evidently from Shah mat ("the king is dead"), but also from the names of some of the pieces".

Thus it was from Bharat that the ancient Persians are said to have learnt this game, and from them it was transmitted to the Greco Roman world. The evidence of the Persians having borrowed this game from Bharat is seen in the name the Persians gave to it. The Persian word for chess is Chatrang, which was later changed by the Arabs to Shatranj. As said in Encyclopedia Britannica, this word is obviously a corruption of the Sanskrit original Chaturanga.

The other term Astapada meaning eight steps, which was also used to describe this game in ancient Bharat, perhaps was a description for the eight steps (Squares) which the modern Chessboard, has. The modern Chessboard is chequered with 64 (8 x 8) squares in all, with eight squares on each side. The old English word for chess which is Esches, possibly stems from this eight squared aspect of the game as did the Sanskrit word Astapada.

PLAYING CARDS

Surprising though the popular game of cards originated in ancient Bharat and was known as Krida-patram in ancient Bharat

The game of playing cards was also one of the favourite pastimes of Bharatns in ancient times. This game was patronized especially by the royalty and nobility. This game was known in ancient times as kridapatram, in the middle ages, it was known as Ganjifa. In medieval Bharat Ganjifa cards were played in practically all royal courts. This game is recorded to have been played in Rajputana, Kashyapa Meru (Kashmir), Utkala (Orissa) the Deccan and even in Nepal. The Mughals also patronized this game, but the Mughal card-sets differ from those of the ancient royal courts.

Some scholars are of the opinion that this game was in fact introduced into Bharat by the Mughals. But according to Abul Fazal author of the Ain-e-Akbari, the game of cards was of Bharatn origin and that it was a very popular pastime in the Bharatn (Hindu) courts when the Muslims came into Bharat. According to Abul Fazal's description of the game, the following cards were used. The first was Ashvapati which means 'lord of horses'. The Ashvapati which was the highest card in, the pack represented the picture of the king on horseback. The second highest card represented a General (Senapati) on horseback. After this card come ten other with pictures of horses from one to ten.

Another set of cards had the Gajapati (lord of elephants) which represented the king whose power lay in the number of elephants. The other eleven cards in this pack represented the Senapati and ten others with a soldier astride an elephant. Another pack has the Narpati, a king whose power lies in his infantry. We also had other cards known as the Dhanpati, the lord of treasures, Dalpati the lord of the squadron, Navapati, the lord of the navy, Surapati, the lord of divinities, Asrapati, lord of genii, Vanapati, the king of the forest and Ahipati, lord of snakes, etc.

On the authority of Abul Fazal we can say that the game of playing cards had been invented by sages in ancient times who took the number 12 as the basis and made a set of 12 cards. Every king had 11 followers, thus a pack had 144 cards. The Mughals retained 12 sets having 96 cards. These Mughal Ganjifa sets have representations of diverse trades like Nakkash painter, Mujallid book binder, Rangrez, dyer, etc., In addition there were also the Padishah-i-Qimash, king of the manufacturers and Padishah-izar-i-Safid, king of silver, etc.

Cards were known as Krida-patram in ancient Bharat. These cards were made of cloth and depicted motifs from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. A tradition carried on today with floral motifs and natural scenery.

Story of Prithviraj Chauhan

Source: http://hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/hindu_history/landrajput.html

The refusal of the two Rajput Kingdoms of the Chauhans and the Rathods (Gahadwalas) to unite in face of the Muslim invasion led to the fall of Delhi and Kannauj to the Muslims and led to the establishment of Muslim Rule in India.

The Rajputs - The Brave Warriors

In spite of the Muslim rule up to Punjab, the Rajputs gained control of the heart of North India. The Rajput (from Raj-Putra i.e. prince or literally "king's son") who held the stage before the coming of the Muslims were a brave and chivalrous race. The Rajput legend traces their ancestry to Bappa Rawal - the legendary founder of the race who is said to have lived in the 8th century. It is the Rajputs who held the banner when the first Muslim invaders reached the Indian Heartland in the 12th century i.e. around 1191 C.E.

The main Rajput kingdoms in the 11th and 12th centuries were that of the Cahamanas (Chouhans) in East Punjab, Northern Rajasthan and Delhi. The Gahadwalas (Rathods) ruled the Ganges valley today's UP. The Paramaras ruled Malwa in Central India and the Tomaras ruled from Gwalior. The most powerful kingdoms were those of the Chouhans and the Rathods - both of which unfortunately were incessantly at war with each other when the Muslim raiders appeared again in the 1191 C.E.

In the 11th century i.e. in the post-Mahmud Ghazni era, the most powerful Hindu Kingdom in North India was that of the Gahadwalas or Rathods who were a Rajput clan. The founder of the Gahadwala line was Govindchandra Gahadwala. He was an astute ruler and ruled from Kannauj. Most of North India, including the university town of Nalanda was a part of his kingdom. He stoutly defended his kingdom from further Muslim incursions. He instituted a tax for this purpose, which was called Turushka Danda (i.e. tax to fight the Turushkas or Turks). His grandson was Jaichandra Gahadwala (Rathod) who played a tragic role in Indian History.

The Story of Prithviraj Chauhan and Mahmud Ghori

In Jaichand's days, a rival Rajput clan had established itself in Delhi (Pithoragarh). The ruler there was Prithviraj Chauhan. Prithviraj was a romantic, chivalrous and an extremely fearless person. After ceaseless military campaigns, Prithviraj extended his original kingdom of Sambhar (Shakambhara) to Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Eastern Punjab. He ruled from his twin capitals at Delhi and Ajmer. His fast rise caught the envy of the then powerful ruler Jaichandra Gahadwala and there was a lot of ill-feeling between the two.

Prithviraj's Love for Sanyogita - Jaichandra's Daughter

The story of Prithviraj's bold exploits spread far and wide in the country and he was the center of much discussion in the circle of the nobility. Sanyogita, the daughter of Jaichandra Gahadwala fell secretly in love with Prithviraj and she started a secret poetic correspondence with him. Her father the haughty Jaichandra got wind of this and he decided to teach his daughter and her upstart lover a lesson. So he arranged a Swayamwara (a ceremony where a bride can select her husband from the assembled princes. She had the right to garland any prince and she became his queen. This is an ancient Hindu custom among Royalty). Jaichandra

invited all the big and small princes of the country to Kannauj for the royal Swayamwara. But he deliberately ignored Prithviraj.

To add insult to injury, he even made a statue of Prithviraj and kept him as a doorman.

The Elopement of Sanyogita with Prithviraj

Prithviraj got to know of this and he confided his plans to his lover.

On the said day, Sanyogita walked down the aisle where the royals had assembled and bypassed all of them only to reach the door and garland the statue of Prithviraj as a doorman. The assemblage was stunned at this brash act of hers. But what stunned them and her father Jaichandra was the next thing that happened.

Prithviraj who was hiding behind the statue, also in the garb of a doorman, whisked Sanyogita away and put her up on his steed to make a fast getaway to his capital at Delhi.

Chouhan-Rathod Warfare Leads to Weakening of both Rajput Kingdoms

Jaichandra and his army gave earnest chase and in the resultant string of battles between the two kingdoms fought between 1189 and 1190, both of them suffered heavily. While this drama was being enacted, another ruler also named Mahmud who was from Ghori in Afghanistan had grown powerful and had captured Ghazni and subsequently attacked the Ghaznavid Governor of Punjab and defeated him. The kingdom of Mahmud Ghori now stretched up to the domains of Prithviraj Chouhan. A clash was inevitable.

The 1st Battle of Tarain 1191 C.E. - Victory of Prithviraj Chouhan

Mahmud Ghori threw the gauntlet by laying siege to the fortress of Bhatinda in East Punjab which was on the frontier of Prithviraj's domains. Prithviraj's appeal for help from his father-in-law was scornfully rejected by the haughty Jaichandra. But undaunted Prithviraj marched on to Bhatinda and met his enemy at a place called Tarain (also called Taraori) near the ancient town of Thanesar. In face of the persistent Rajput attacks, the battle was won as the Muslim army broke ranks and fled leaving their general Mahmud Ghori as a prisoner in Prithviraj's hands.

Mahmud Ghori was brought in chains to Pithoragarh - Prithviraj's capital and he begged his victor for mercy and release. Prithviraj's ministers advised against pardoning the aggressor. But the chivalrous and valiant Prithviraj thought otherwise and respectfully released the vanquished Ghori.

The 2nd Battle of Tarain 1192 C.E. - Defeat of Prithviraj Chouhan

The very next year Prithviraj's gesture was repaid by Ghori who re-attacked Prithviraj with a stronger army and guilefully defeated him by attacking the Rajput army before daybreak. (The Hindus incidentally followed a hoary practice of battling only from sunrise up to sunset. Before Sunrise and after Sunset there was to be no fighting- as per a time honored battle code). The defeated Prithviraj was pursued up to his capital and in chains he was taken as a captive to Ghori in Afghanistan.

The Blinding of Prithviraj

The story of Prithviraj does not end here. As a prisoner in Ghor he was presented before Mahmud, where he looked Ghori straight into the eye. Ghori ordered him to lower his eyes, whereupon a defiant Prithviraj scornfully told him how he had treated Ghori as a prisoner and said that the eyelids of a Rajputs eyes are lowered only in death.

On hearing this, Ghori flew into a rage and ordered that Prithviraj's eyes be burnt with red hot iron rods.

This heinous deed being done, Prithviraj was regularly brought to the court to be taunted by Ghori and his courtiers. In those days Prithviraj was joined by his former biographer Chand Bardai, who had composed a ballad-biography on Prithviraj in the name of Prithviraj Raso (Songs of Prithviraj). Chand Bardai told Prithviraj, that he should avenge Ghori's betrayal and daily insults.

The Blind Prithviraj Avenges the Injustice done to him

The two got an opportunity when Ghori announced a game of Archery. On the advice of Chand Bardai, Prithviraj, who was then at court said he would also like to participate. On hearing his suggestion, the courtiers guffawed at him and he was taunted by Ghori as to how he could participate when he could not see. Whereupon, Prithviraj told Mahmud Ghori to order him to shoot, and he would reach his target.

Ghori became suspicious and asked Prithviraj why he wanted Ghori himself to order and not anyone else. On behalf of Prithviraj, Chand Bardai told Ghori that he as a king would not accept orders from anyone other than a king. His ego satisfied, Mahmud Ghori agreed.

On the said day, Ghori sitting in his royal enclosure had Prithviraj brought to the ground and had him unchained for the event. On Ghori's ordering Prithviraj to shoot, Prithviraj turned in the direction from where he heard Ghori speak and struck Ghori dead with his arrow. This event is described by Chand Bardai in the couplet, "Dus kadam aggey, bees kadam daey, baitha hai Sultan. Ab mat chuko Chouhan, chala do apna baan." (Ten feet ahead of you and twenty feet to your right, is seated the Sultan, do not now miss him Chouhan, release your baan - arrow).

Thus ended the story of the brave but unrealistic Prithviraj Chouhan - the last Hindu ruler of Delhi. Delhi was to remain under Muslim rule for the next 700 years till 1857 and under British rule till 1947. Those few Hindus who came close to liberating Delhi during the seven centuries of Muslim rule were Rana Sanga in 1527, Raja Vikramaditya in around 1565 (2nd battle of Panipat), and Shrimant Vishwas Rao who was the Peshwa's son and was co-commander of the Maratha forces in the 3rd battle of Panipat in 1761.

Metaphorically speaking, the next Hindu ruler to actually preside over Delhi was to be Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of Independent India (and Jawarharlal Nehru - who was the President's first Minister).

The orante interior of Jaipur's Rambagh palace. A typical symbol of late Rajput architecture. However for all this glory, the Kings of Jaipur/Amber could preserve their throne during the Muslim rule giving away

their daughters to the Mughal Rulers and serving as the paid servants in the Mughal armies against their fellow countrymen. Raja Man Singh and Raja Todar Mal helped the Mughals against Maharana Pratap - the valiant Rajput ruler of Mewad who defiantly held up the banner of Indian independence in face of overwhelmingly powerful alien attacks. But unfortunately, renegade Rajput soldiers fought against Maharana Pratap at the Battle of Haldighati. It was these dark sheep who, to save their throne and skin, brought defeat and dishonor to the nation.

Ten Avatars of Vishnu - Dashaavatara

(Note: This topic should be covered in two weeks or more)

"Whenever Dharma, or the situation of law and order, is endangered on this world, I incarnate onto this world to re establish Dharma, law and order, and to protect the good people and to destroy the evil elements of the society. " This was the assurance given by Lord Krishna in Bhagavadgita.

Vishnu is the name given to the protector and sustainer of the universe. Lord Vishnu, has incarnated in various life forms through different yugas (ages or eons) in situations where Dharma was in danger, because of certain evil elements in the world. There are ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. These incarnations are termed as the 'avatars' of Lord Vishnu. Each avatar of Lord Vishnu shall be presented below with appropriate details of the situation under which the lord was compelled to appear on the earth.

While many explanations are given for the 10 avatars of Vishnu, one can see striking similarity of these stories with the theory of evolution of life.

THE FIRST SIX INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU	DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION
Matsya (Fish)	Life starts in water (600 million-400 million years ago)
Kurma (Tortoise)	The first amphibians emerge (100 million years ago)
Varaha (Boar)	The first mammals evolve (60 million years ago)
Narasimha (half man-half lion)	Half man-half animal appear (30 million years ago)
Vamana (short man)	Homo Erectus, Upright, yet short and weaponless (5 million - 2 million years ago)
Parashurama (parashu=axe, Rama=name of God)	Bronze age; the coming of Ramapithecus; development of first weapons such as axe. Homo Sapiens (350,000-100,000 years ago)

The Story of MASTYA Avatar

In MASTYA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a fish in this world. In the earliest yuga (era) of Sata-yuga, a king named Manu was performing severe penance for thousands of years. One day as he was performing ablutions with river water, a small fish came into his hands and just as he was about to throw the fish back into the river, the fish requested the king to save its life. Heeding its request,



the king put the fish into a jar of water but the fish started growing and the jar was not big enough for it. Then the king threw it into the river, but it soon it outgrew the river and the king then threw it into Ganges and then into the ocean. The king realized that it was Lord Vishnu himself and then the lord made an appearance and made a special request to the king. It predicted that the world would come to an end by a huge flood in seven days and requested the king to build a huge boat and take the seven sages(hermits), seeds of all plants, one animal of each type and told

him that he would appear as a fish to propel the boat to Mt Himavan for surviving the flood to the next yuga(eon). True to his word, after seven days the Lord appeared and the king tied the boat to the fish by using the royal serpent Vasuki and the fish took all of them to Mt Himavan and kept them there till the flood was over and in the new era, the king started procreation for the new era.

The Story of KURMA Avatar



In KURMA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a tortoise. It is an interesting story involving both the gods (devtas) and asuras (demons). In the ongoing saga of battle between the gods and asuras, on one occasion the gods suddenly lost all their strength due to a curse by the short-tempered sage Durvasa. The sage had once presented a garland of flowers to Indra, king of gods, who carelessly gave it away to his elephant which trampled it.

The Devtas approached Vishnu for help. Vishnu then asked them to churn the ocean of milk after adding medicines into the ocean. Mt Mandara could be used as the churning stick he said. He requested them to ask them help of Asuras in lifting the mountain in exchange for offer of the share of nectar of immortality that would ensue from the churning. Both the devatas and the asuras churned the ocean using the serpent Vasuki as the rope. At the start, playing a Machiavellian trick, Indra, king of the gods asked the asuras for the head end of vasuki. But asuras suspecting foul play, took the head end, only to be deceived as the poison from Vasuki was slowly weakening them. But as churning was proceeding the mountain was sinking and then Lord Vishnu took the form of the tortoise KURMA and kept the mountain afloat. As soon as the bowl of amrita, the nectar of immortality was out, the asuras grabbed it. Then Lord Vishnu took the form of an apsara, a beautiful maiden, and seduced the asuras into letting her distribute the nectar and also to abide by her order of distribution. As soon as the devatas were served the

maiden disappeared thus totally deceiving the asuras and making them totally weak.

The Story of VARAHA Avatar



In VARAHA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a boar in this world. A demon Hiranyaksha, had prayed for Lord Brahma and got awarded a boon that no beast nor man nor god could kill him. But somehow from the list of beasts the name of boar was missing. This proved to be his lacunae. He then started a campaign of plunder across the worlds. He pushed the world to the Pataal loka, or the under of the sea. He stole the Vedas, the holy scriptures from the Lord Brahma, while he was asleep and performed huge atrocities.

To retrieve the Vedas and to save the world the Lord Vishnu assumed the role of a boar and brought out the earth from the under of the ocean, using its two tusks. It then killed Hiranyaksha and retrieved the Vedas from the asura and brought it back to the safe custody of the Lord Brahma.

The Story of NARASIMHA Avatar



In NARASIMHA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a semi-man, semi-lion in this world. The king of demons (asuras), Hiranyakasyapa, wanted to become immortal and wanted to remain young forever. To this end, he meditated for Lord Brahma and because of his severe penance, the gods were frightened and asked Brahma to pacify the king. Brahma was impressed by his austerity and granted him a wish. HiranyaKasyapa wished that he be neither killed by a man or beast, nor in daylight or at night and neither inside or outside a building. Having obtained the wish he considered himself the supreme God and forbade all worship of gods by anyone.

But his son Prahlada, was an ardent devotee of Vishnu. This enraged Hiranyakasyapa very much. He ordered numerous ways to kill Prahlada including asking his sister Holika to sit with Prahlada in the fire. But everytime Prahlada escaped unhurt. Enraged, once he asked Prahlad to show him the Lord Vishnu.

Prahlad said, "He is everywhere". Further enraged, Hiranyakasyapa knocked down a pillar, and asked if Lord was present there. Lord Vishnu then emerged as a half lion, half man from the pillar which was neither inside the house nor outside, and the time was evening, neither night nor day. He then killed Hiranyakasyapa thus saving the life of his devotee Prahlada.

The Story of VAMANA Avatar

In VAMANA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a dwarf priest in this world. Bali, the grandson of Prahlada was a very valorous and mighty asura. By his penance and might, he conquered the whole world. Indra and other gods fearing that he and asuras would conquer all the three worlds, went to Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu was then born as a dwarf Vamana in the household of a brahmana (priest). He went to Bali on growing up and asked for alms. Bali was delighted to offer him anything he requested even though his priest warned him that it was Lord Vishnu.



Vamana then requested for the amount of land that could come under his three feet. Bali gracefully agreed. Lord Vishnu then grew in size and covered the earth and heaven in two stride. And due to lack of space, he put his third leg on Bali himself and crushed Bali to the nether or the Patala loka (underground world), thus helping the Gods out.

The Story of PARASURAMA Avatar



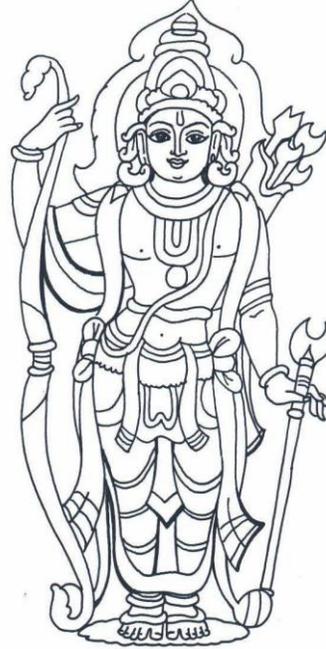
In PARASURAMA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as a brahmana (priest) in this world. He was brought in this world to avenge all kshatriyas who had become arrogant and were suppressing the brahmins in the world. He was born to Jamadagni and Renuka, and belonged to the Brighu clan. Parashurama was always carrying an axe presented to him by Lord Shiva of whom he was an ardent devotee. Kartavirya a powerful king, once went to Jamadagni's home when he was out, and after a meal, stole the Kamadhenu cow, which was supposed to give endless quantity of milk.

Jamadgni was enraged and he went and killed the king and brought Kamadhenu back. On hearing this, the son of the king came back and killed Jamdagni.

Parasurama was enraged at this and went and avenged the death of his father by killing all kshatriyas in 21 battles.

The Story of RAMA Avatar

In RAMA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as RAMA, the central character in the epic RAMAYANA. In the epic, the character RAMA is expected to show the world the characteristics of an ideal person, including ideal son, ideal husband, ideal king and an ideal person. RAMA was incarnated upon this planet to get rid of the asura with ten heads, Ravana, who had been granted a boon by Brahma of immunity from gods, and other celestial beings. Ravana was too vainglorious to be thinking of being vanquished by a man. Hence RAMA was born and Laxmi, wife of Lord Vishnu was born as Sita, his wife to be in this life. The story of Ramayana, is an exciting nail-biting story of the war raged by Rama against various evil elements of the world and in the end against Ravana.



RAMAYANA epitomises the ideal behaviour of man, with special focus on man-wife relationship, son-father relationship and the rules for ideal governance by a king.

The Story of KRISHNA Avatar



In KRISHNA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as KRISHNA, the central character in the epic MAHABHARATA. In this biggest epic of Indian mythology a myriad of topics are covered, including war, love, brotherhood, politics etc. It is essentially the story of two warring groups of cousin brothers, the PANDAVAS and the KAURAVAS. As a part of the Mahabahrata, during the war KRISHNA, gives a long discourse to his disciple ARJUNA, collectively termed as Bhagvad-Gita.

Krishna, during his child-hood was responsible for the killing of Kansa. Krishna is also considered to be an ultimate playboy who was responsible for charming all gopikaas around him.

Unlike Ramayana, Mahabharata deals with more down to earth issues like politics, human nature, human weaknesses, and does not attempt to idealise the characters as in RAMAYANA.

The Story of BUDDHA Avatar

In BUDDHA Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnates himself as BUDDHA, the ascetic prince who renounced the throne to lead the world on the path of peace. He is the founder of the BUDDHIST religion prominent across the world. In certain sects of Hinduism, he is considered to be a divine incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He was born the crown prince of the Kapilavastu to Suddhodana and Maya. He was named Siddhartha, meaning "All thing fulfilled" by the king. But his mother died soon after his birth but Prajapati, the sister of Maya, brought Siddhartha up.

Buddha was saddened by death of living creatures, since his childhood days and used to question: "Alas! Do all living creatures kill each other?" He wasn't happy with any answers that were provided to him and he decided to find out the meaning and the absolute truth and he left his wife and child to a hermit's life in the forest and one day, became the enlightened one. His preaching spawned off the religion of Buddhism now popular across the whole world.

The Story of KALKI Avatar



KALKI is the last of the avatars of Lord Vishnu.

In KALKI Avatar, Lord Vishnu will incarnate himself as KALKI, the machine-man, who will come riding his white horse and with his blazing sword in his hands. This is supposed to be a future avatar of Lord Vishnu. At the end of Kali Yuga (present eon) He will punish all evil doers in this world, destroy this world and recreate a golden age again.

Hindu Values

While different sects in Hindu society have their own mode of worship and their own name of God, Hindus have some common values to live by. This is a brief description of some of the values.

Respect for mother and mother earth

"This earth is my mother and I am the son of this earth" - Atharve Veda, 12-1-12

Hindus have raised the status of mother to the level of Goddess. The first value that a child learns from his or her family is respect for the mother. In Hindu families it is a common custom to bow down to touch the feet of elders and parents. This traditional custom emphasizes the value of elders. The concept of Mother worship is deeply ingrained in the Hindu way of life and the mother is considered as the first Guru of the child.

This concept of respect for mother is extended to other natural phenomena which provide sustenance for life. For example rivers are worshipped as mother. The cow, provider of milk, is worshipped as mother. Similarly the earth is treated as mother and is respected.

In Hindu tradition, everything good, blissful, protective and evil-destroying is associated with a mother-image.

Respect for father and ancestors

In Hindu families, respect for parents and elders is emphasized. Hindus believe that bringing up children is a religious act-the Dharma of every parent. For children, the parents are therefore divine. Hindus consider the service of one's parents to be a pious and divine duty and preventing any one from carrying that duty is considered to be a sinful act. The story of Shravan Kumar, who was dedicated to serve his parents is often recited.

The Story of Shravankumar

Thousands of years ago there was a tick forest on the banks of river Sarayu which flowed close to the city of Ayodhya. One night, king of Ayodhya, Dasharath, came to the forest to hunt. Dasharath could shoot in the dark by merely following the direction of the sound made by animals.

Dasharath waited under a tree. He heard a gurgling sound. Thinking that an animal had come to drink water from the river he shot an arrow in the direction of the sound. A moment later there came the cry of a human being. The anxious king ran to the place and found a youth crying in pain on the bank of the river. The arrow was stuck in his heart.

The young man's name was Shravan Kumar. He was a caring person and was dedicated to serving his parents, who were old and blind. It was their wish to visit holy places in their last days. Shravan carried them from shrine to shrine in two baskets which hung from a sling. While on their pilgrimage the three had come to the banks of Sarayu for a short rest. Shravan's parents felt thirsty and asked him to fetch some water.

With difficulty Shravan told the King Dasharath about his parents who were waiting for him not far from the river. He requested the king to take the pot of water to them and then he died. Dasharath carried the pot of water to Shravan's parents. They said, "Son, why are you so late? Where did you go?" Dasharath did not reply. Then the mother asked, "Why don't you speak? What is wrong?"

With tears in his eyes Dasharath told them about their son's death. He was willing to take them to his palace and look after them. But the old people were not interested in his offer. They only cried for their son. The mother dashed the pot of water to the ground and cursed the king, "One day you too shall die when your sons are not around."

Many years later, Dasharath's son Rama and Lakshman had to go in exile for fourteen years. The pain of separation from his son was so great that it led to Dasharath's death. His only fault was that he had unintentionally prevented a son from serving his parents.

Respect for Teachers

There is a great Guru-Shishya tradition in Bharat. The Hindu scriptures say that, like parents, the Guru is also worthy of worship. A guru is not simply a teacher. A guru not only gives education, but also gives inspiration and passes on experience and knowledge. For a Hindu, a Guru can be a person, a symbol or a book. For example, in the Sikh tradition, the holy book "Guru Granth Sahib" is treated as the Guru. In Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, we treat 'Bhagwa Dhvaj' (Saffron flag) as the Guru.

Truth

Hindu scriptures declare: 'Satyameva Jayate' (Truth alone triumphs). This saying also appears in the national emblem of Bharat. Story of Harishchandra illustrates the value of following the truth irrespective of any obstacles and difficulties.

Righteous living

The word 'Dharma' is many a times translated as righteousness. It is an essential part of Hindu values and way of life. Our scripture says: 'if you protect righteousness, the righteousness shall protect you.'

Forgiveness and Fearlessness

There are numerous stories in Hindu scriptures which convey the message that development of qualities like non-violence and forgiveness require fearlessness and strength, as shown by Swami Dayananda.

The story of bold Swami Dayananda

Swami Dayananda was a sanyasi who dressed in orange robes. He was a great reformer and the founder of Arya Samaj. He was also an intellectual and spiritual giant and he possessed an athletic body. He was fearless and he felt for the poor. In his discourses he propounded the his

views about education of women, abolition of child marriage, eradication of untouchability and similar prevalent dogmas that weakened Hindu society.

Some seemed to understand him, but many were angered by it. They threatened to harm him, but Swami was afraid of no one.

Once, during one of his discourses, a misguided man called Karansingh was present in the crowd and he approached Swami in anger. The man said, "we do not accept your interpretation of Vedas." The Swami replied, "You might go ahead with your ill-conceived notions, but I have to perform my social and spiritual duty."

Swamiji's words annoyed the man and he drew a sword from his waist and rushed to Swami. Swami Dayananda quickly grabbed his arm and wrenched the sword from it. He broke it by pressing its point to the ground. The man felt ashamed and hurriedly left the place. Swami Dayananda's friends asked him to charge the man. But Swamiji said, "Eventhough the man forgot the duty of a warrior, how can I forget the duty of a Swami? A Swami does not harm anybody. Besides God, he fears none." Swami Dayananda was a fearless man.

Honesty

Here is a short story from Upanishads that illustrate the value of honesty.

In the past, students used to live with their master to gain education. Such places were called Gurukuls. In one gurukul, the master wanted to test his students, so he gathered them around and said, "I need some money urgently. Can you go and bring some from your families? But please be careful. I do not want any one to know about this, so only bring the money when no one is looking."

All the students went home and came back with some money, except for one student who came empty-handed. "Why have you come empty-handed? Couldn't you pickup some money when no one was looking?" enquired the master. The boy replied that in spite of many attempts he kept of failing. 'Why?' questioned the master. 'I did come across many chances when no one else was looking, but I always felt myself looking at my own wrong deeds.' The master declared that he was the only student who has gained any real education because he knew the value of honesty.

Service to humankind

Hindus consider that the service to other is a virtue; giving pain to other is a sin. Giving and sharing is one of the values preached relentlessly in Hindu scriptures.

Non-violence

Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore they practice non-violence. One has to be fearless in order to be non-violent.

Meaning Behind Rituals - Part 2

Why do fast?

Most devout Hindus fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food.

Fasting in Sanskrit is called upavaasa. Upa means "near" + vaasa means "to stay". Upavaasa therefore means staying near (the God), meaning the attainment of close mental proximity with the Lord. Then what has upavaasa to do with food?

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

Also every system needs a break and an overhaul to work at its best. Rest and a change of diet during fasting is very good for the digestive system and the entire body.

The more you indulge the senses, the more they make their demands. Fasting helps us to cultivate control over our senses, sublimate our desires and guide our minds to be poised and at peace. Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to indulge later. This happens when there is no noble goal behind fasting.

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

Why do we regard trees and plants as sacred?

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

Hence, in Bharat, we are taught to regard trees and plants as sacred. Hindu scriptures tell us to plant ten trees if, for any reason, we have to cut one. We are advised to use parts of trees and plants only as much as is needed for food, fuel, shelter etc. we are also urged to apologize to a plant or tree before cutting it.

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

Why do we say shaanti thrice?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May peace alone prevail. Hence shaanti is chanted thrice.

Why do we do aarati?

Towards the end of every ritualistic worship (pooja or bhajan) of the Lord or to welcome an honored guest or saint, we perform the aarati. This is always accompanied by the ringing of the bell and sometimes by singing, playing of musical instruments and clapping. It is one of the sixteen steps (shodasha upachaara) of the pooja ritual. It is referred to as the lighted lamp in the right hand, which we wave in a clockwise circling movement to light the entire form of the Lord. Each part is revealed individually and also the entire form of the Lord. As the light is waved we either do mental or loud chanting of prayers or simply behold the beautiful form of the Lord, illumined by the lamp. At the end of the aarati we place our hands over the flame and then gently touch our eyes and the top of the head.

We have seen and participated in this ritual from our childhood. Let us find out why we do the aarati?

Having worshipped the Lord of love - performing abhisheka, decorating the image and offering fruits and delicacies, we see the beauty of the Lord in all His glory. Our minds are focussed on each limb of the Lord as the lamp lights it up. It is akin to silent open-eyed meditation on His beauty. The singing, clapping, ringing of the bell etc. denote the joy and auspiciousness which accompanies the vision of the Lord.

Aarati is often performed with camphor. This holds a telling spiritual significance. Camphor when lit, burns itself out completely without leaving a trace of it. It represents our inherent tendencies (vaasanas). When lit by the fire of knowledge which illumines the Lord (Truth), our vaasanas thereafter burn themselves out completely, not leaving a trace of ego which creates in us a sense of individuality that keeps us separate from the Lord. Also while camphor burns to reveal the glory of Lord, it emits a pleasant perfume even while it sacrifices itself. In our spiritual progress, even as we serve the guru and society, we should willingly sacrifice ourselves and all we have, to spread the "perfume" of love to all. We often wait a long while to see the illumined Lord but when the aarati is actually performed, our eyes close automatically as if to look within. This is to signify that each of us is a temple of the Lord.

Just as the priest reveals the form of the Lord clearly with the aarati flame, so too the guru reveals to us the divinity within each of us with the help of the "flame" of knowledge (or the light of spiritual knowledge). At the end of the aarati, we place our hands over the flame and then touch our eyes and the top of the head.

It means - may the light that illuminated the Lord light up my vision; may my vision be divine and my thoughts noble and beautiful.

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

Also the sun is the presiding deity of the intellect, the moon, that of the mind, and fire, that of speech. The Lord is the supreme consciousness that illuminates all of them. Without Him, the intellect cannot think, nor can the mind feel nor the tongue speak. The Lord is beyond the mind, intellect and speech. How can these finite equipment illuminate the Lord? Therefore, as we perform the aarati we chant;

*Na tatra suryo bhaati na chandra taarakam
Nemaa vidyuto bhaanti kutoyamagnib
Tameva bhaantam anubhaati sarvām
Tasya bhasa sarvām idam vibhaati*

He is there where the sun does not shine,
Nor the moon, stars and lightning.
then what to talk of this small flame (in my hand),
Everything (in the universe) shines only after the Lord,
And by His light alone are we all illumined.

Life of Vandaneeya Mousiji

Vandaneeya Mousiji's life story is an inspiring tale- a sage of warrior, who battled against every odd to emerge as a victor.

Mousiji was born on 6th July 1905 in Nagpur. She was named 'Kamal' i.e. lotus flower.

As a child Kamal was adored by every one. She loved going to the temples with her auntie popularly known as 'Dai'. The bhajans, stories, and the Hindu rituals to which Kamal was exposed at the temples, left an indelible impression on her mind and heart.

Kamal was eager to go to school. She was admitted to 'mission school' which was the only girl's school situated near her residence. Kamal noticed that what she was being taught in school was contrary to what she was taught by her parents and 'Dai'. Yet she tried to get adjusted for the sake of learning.

All the girls were expected to keep their eyes closed during prayer time. Kamal was curious whether the teacher also practiced what she preached. So she opened her eyes. The teacher asked angrily "Kamal why are your eyes open?" Kamal replied in a calm and cool voice-"aren't you also expected to keep your eyes closed?" As a result she had to receive a tight slap from her teacher.

Another remarkable incident, clearly indicated Kamal's leadership qualities and the power of oration which could influence the people.

Kamal enjoyed playing with dolls as much and she enjoyed boyish games. She often arranged marriage of the dolls along with her other friends. One day the marriage celebrations took place as usual and the feast began. At that moment Kamal was called at home for some work. In her absence an argument started among the kids and the marriage game turned into a battlefield. On her return, Kamal glanced at the pandemonium and commanded everyone to be calm in the powerful voice. She said -'look here, let us forget our small fights. No one is either inferior or superior. Each person has his own importance, and thus let us not indulge in small disputes'. All her friends were mesmerized by Kamal's speech. They all started to play together again.

As lama; entered her teens, she blossomed into an exquisite beauty. The beauty was not confined to mere looks but she had a glow of goodness and a wealth of virtues. Kamal's father had little to offer in the way of dowry. So she firmly decided to marry a person who would never ask for dowry.

As per her terms Kamal was married to Purushottamrao. She was now called Lakshmi bai Kelkar. Purushottam rao already had two daughters from his first wife who was dead.

Lakshmi treated and cared for these girls and was more than a mother to them. She herself had six sons.

Vatsala Lakshmi's younger daughter was interested in Education. But there were no schools at 'Wardha' the place where she lived then. She searched for dedicated teachers and arranged their accommodation in her own house. Her intention was to educate not just her daughter but numerous other such girls. Thus Lakshmi's intiring efforts resulted in laying the foundation of the first girl's school at Wardha.

It was the start of the work, which later knit the country into a joint Samiti family.

One day, Manohar, her eldest son asked her. "Ma, please give me money. I want to buy a dand"[a wooden stick used in fighting. Her other two sons also echoed after him. Later Lakshmi learn't from her sons about the shakha of R.S.S. [Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh]. She noticed a very remarkable change in her sons, who were more disciplined, patriotic and obedient.

She then thought thus- "it is essential to create in the heart of every woman, the pride of ancient glorious Hindu culture.

With the guidance and support from Param Poojya Dr. Hedgewar, Sar Sanghachalak of R.S.S, Lakshmi Bai Kelkar started Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the largest and the only Hindu women Organisation.

It was started on the auspicious day of Vijayadashami 25th October 1936. A large number of girls and ladies gathered under one roof to learn more about Hindutva. Everyone was called a Sevika.

Lakshmi Bai an affectionate and warm person became guide confidant and a role model for the Sevikas. All the Sevikas began called her 'Mousiji' who was like a mother to them.

She became the most revered figure, due to her selfless service and devotion. Thus Lakshmi Bai was popularly and respectfully addressed as- Vandaneeya Mousiji.

Daily Duties of a Devout Hindu

(Note: Make this session highly interactive. Find out what each family is doing and also motivate them to start practicing them. When this topic is taken for children, the same topic should be discussed with parents in parallel. Handouts can be given to all the families)

In addition to the normal activities associated with one's profession (*varna dharma*) and stage in life (*āshrama dharma*), the daily routine of a devout Hindu is to perform *pañcha mahā yagñas* (five daily duties) and *pañcha nitya karmas* (five constant duties). These are the minimal practices which guide a person in everyday life and ensure peace, material and spiritual prosperity.

Pañcha Mahā Yagñas (Five Daily Duties)

1. Worship God (*Deva Yagñā*) in the form of a family deity (*Ishta Devatā*) in the home shrine through prayers and meditations. This practice helps one to become God-conscious in all daily activities. Additionally, this practice arouses a sense of togetherness in the family, since the family members worship together and participate in the rituals, chants, singing, and study of scriptures. Tradition says that "**a family that prays together stays together.**"
2. Study religious books (*Brahma Yagñā*). This practice refreshes one's mind with sacred knowledge and also helps to preserve and enrich such knowledge.
3. Contemplate on the life and teachings of the sages, saints, holy men and women, and one's forefathers (*Pitri Yagñā*). This practice is intended to serve as a reminder to preserve, enrich and continue one's cultural heritage and family values.
4. Provide food for those who are in need (*Bhuta Yagñā*). This practice is intended to create the spirit of sharing with others.
5. Serve guests with love, respect, and reverence (*Nara Yagñā*). This practice is the basis for the traditional hospitality of Hindu households.

Pañcha Nitya Karmas (Five Constant Duties)

1. **Dharma** (Righteousness): Live a virtuous life in accordance with the teachings of the scriptures. Cultivate virtues of purity, self-control, detachment, thinking of others first, truth and ahimsā. Be respectful of parents, teachers, and elders. Dharma also means performing all duties associated with one's normal profession, and individual and social

obligations. Work must be performed purely for its own sake. This means that all actions must be performed for excellence and not merely for reward (*nishkama karma*). "Fix your heart upon your work, but not on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do your work." (Bhagavad Gītā 2.47)

2. **Tirthayātrā** (Pilgrimage): Regularly visit holy persons, temples, and sacred pilgrimage sites. Such journeys provide freedom from routine life and thereby freshen the mind. Pilgrimages also help to create a sense of togetherness in the family, since all members undertake the pilgrimages together. IN USA, visiting all the temples in your own city can also be called pilgrimage.
3. **Utsava** (Holy Days): Participate in festivals and holy days in the home and temple. Observe fasts on holy days. This practice inculcates God-consciousness, refreshes the mind and creates a sense of togetherness in the family and the community. Hindu sages tell us that occasional fasting prevents bodily diseases, restores the body's healing power, and heals the mind by removing lust, anger, hatred, pride, and jealousy.
4. **Samskāras** (Sacraments): Perform various *Samskāras* in accordance with the scriptures. *Samskāras* are the religious ceremonies, which mark and sanctify an individual's passage through life. They purify the mind by inculcating truthfulness in the mind, and purity and generosity in the heart.
5. **Sarva Brahmā** (God is in all): God lives in the hearts of all beings. Practice this truth, realize it and be free.

Hindu Jeopardy/Quiz

In all the Bala-Gokulams, this has been one of the favorite events. The questions can be based on the topics you have covered in the past 6 months.

Durga-Lakshmi-Sarasvati

(Note: Have a discussion with the children at the end about what would happen to an individual and a society without strength or without wealth or without knowledge)

Hinduism is one of the few religions in which worship of independent Goddesses survives. Religions with a dated origin like Christianity, Islam, Judaism does not recognize worship of Goddesses. This form of worship of Goddesses, survives only in those religions which preserve a continuous link with antiquity. In

Hinduism Goddesses are associated with every major God, for instance Parvati with Shiva, Laxmi with Vishnu, Saraswati with Brahma, etc. Worship of these Goddesses takes place along with that of the Gods. But there is another form of worship of Goddesses who are not associated with any God, like Goddess Durga, Kali, Ambika, Chandi, Bhavani, etc

But this worship of mother-Goddess is not limited to Bharat. It is found in most of the ancient civilizations. In Mesopotemia there was the cult of Ishtar, in Greece there was Athena or Pallas Athene. In pre-Islamic Arabia, independent Goddesses were worshipped. One of them was named Mannat. But only in Bharat has this tradition has survived in a significant way. There are shrines all over Bharat dedicated to Goddesses alone. We have the shrine of Vaishno-devi in Kashmir, Meenakshi and Kanyatamari in the South, Ambejogai in Maharashtra etc.

The three main forms of Mother Goddess are Durga-Lakshmi-Sarasvati.

Durga is the Goddess of strength.

Lakshmi is the Goddess of wealth.

Sarasvati is the Goddess of learning.

Worshipping these three forms of Mother in real life is the key to success of an individual or a society. Many a times, people accuse overdose of Hindu philosophy for the poverty in Bharat. Hindu philosophy always emphasized the importance of wealth.

Hindu society has tremendous knowledge. But for the lack of physical strength, Bharat was ruled by foreigners for nearly 1000 years! A handful of British could rule Bharat! So, strength is the language that is understood by the entire world.

Strength without morals and character is dangerous. Hence right knowledge has to accompany the strength. So, we worship Sarasvati.

To translate our grand vision in to reality, wealth is equally important. Hence we worship Lakshmi.

A perfect balance has to be there between all three: Strength, Wealth and Knowledge.

JHANSI LAKSHMI BAI

It was one evening after the rainy season. Outside Bethur, along the road on the banks of the Ganga, three horses were galloping. Two riders were young men and one a girl.

A Brave Girl

When one of the young men overtook her, the little girl galloped her horse faster and overtook him! Was the young man to accept defeat? Of course, he tried to overtake her but his horse stumbled and he fell down.

"O Manoo, I am dead."

When she heard that sorrowful cry, the girl rode back. The young man had been hurt and was bleeding. With difficulty she lifted him and made him sit on her horse. By that time the other rider also joined them. All the three returned to the palace.

When the horse returned without the rider, Baji Rao the Second, the Peshwa of the Mahrata empire, was quite disturbed. Although Moropanth who was with him tried to soothe him, his mind was troubled. When his children returned he breathed a sigh of relief.

The injured youth was Baji Rao's adopted son Nana Saheb and his companion, his younger brother Rao Saheb. The girl was Manubai, the only daughter of Moropanth, a member of the Peshwa's council.

When they returned horn Moropanth said: "Manu, how unfortunate! Nana has been seriously hurt."

"Not so, father; he has been hurt just a little. Did not Abhimanyu continue to fight although seriously injured?"

"Those times were different, Manu."

"What is the difference, father? It is the same sky, the same earth. The sun and the moon are also the same."

"But Manu, the fortunes of the country have changed. This is the age of the British. We are powerless before them."

The father's reasoning did not appeal to the daughter. The father himself had taught her the lessons of the lives and the examples of the saintly Seeta, the brave Jeejabai and the brave Tarabai.

Another incident happened in the same town of Bethur: Nana Saheb and Rao Saheb went out on an elephant. Baji Rao wanted to send Manubai with them. Moropanth also wished it. But their wish was not fulfilled. Nana Saheb asked the mahout to move on. Manu was disappointed.

The father said to the daughter when they were back home:

"Manu, we must move with the times. Are we chieftains or kings to ride elephants? We should not wish for something for which we are not destined."

"No, not so, father; I am destined to own not one but, several elephants," replied Manu.

"So be it."

"Father dear, I will not practice shooting with a rifle," so saying she left.

Observing her manly qualities Moropanth was troubled.

Child Marriage

Baji Rao the Second was the Peshwa only in name. The British East India Company was paying him a pension of eight lakh rupees a year and had given the 'jagir' (the free gift) of Bethur.

Bhagirathibai was the wife of Moropanth. She was good looking, cultured, intelligent and godly. Manubai was the daughter of this ideal couple.

The child, born on the second day of Karthika (the 19th of November 1835) was beautiful like her mother. She had a broad forehead and big eyes. Her face reflected royal ty.

Manu lost her mother when she was four years old. The entire duty of bringing up the daughter fell on the father. Along with formal education -she acquired skill in sword fight, horse riding and shooting with a gun.

The young girl became the wife of Gangadhar Rao, Maharaja of Jhansi, in 1842. The poor Brahmin's girl became Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi.

Those Dark Days

It was the beginning of the nineteenth century. The British who came to India for trade began steadily to acquire political power in the name of the East India Company.

The Indian rajas and maharajas who were engaged in quarrels competed with one another to become puppets in the hands of the British.

Every misfortune of India at the time was used to expand the British empire. One kind of agreement was reached when the British had the upper hand, quite a different kind of agreement was reached when the British were defeated. In any case, the Indians were the sufferers.

Diminished Power

After the British removed the last Peshwa from power, their arrogance was boundless. They brushed aside even the Mughul Emperor.

Dawn is the child of the night. On one side there was a determined effort to destroy freedom; on the other side attempts were being made to get rid of slavery.

The love of freedom can never be put down; the more it is suppressed the stronger it grows. On one side the crowns of the native kings were trembling, the kings were accepting the humiliating conditions imposed by the Company government and their states were being made protected states. On the other hand, the desire was growing to nip British rule in the bud and defend the country's freedom and honor. But outwardly there was calm; every thing was being done secretly; the country was like the volcano which is silent and secret before erupting.

The Story Of Jhansi

Jhansi is now the headquarters of a district in Uttar Pradesh. There were two conditions in the treaty between the British and the Raja of Jhansi - the first, that, whenever the British needed help Jhansi should help them, and, the second, that, the consent of the British was necessary to decide who should be the ruler of Jhansi. So the seed of total ruin was sown.

In 1838 the British appointed Gangadhar Rao as the Raja.

The former Raja Raghunath Rao had left the treasury empty. The administration had collapsed and the people had no place. Gangadhar Rao quickly set right every thing.

The palace acquired more cattle, elephant and horses. The armoury was well stocked with arms and ammunition. The army had five thousand infantry and five hundred cavalry; and these were supported by artillery.

But the British army was also stationed in the state. On this account alone the treasury was spending rupees 2,27,000.

A Crushing Blow

In 1851 Maharani Lakshmi Bai gave birth to a son. But the fate was cruel; within three months the child died. Gangadhar Rao was troubled about the future of the state. This led to mental illness.

The reason for that distress was the cruel rule followed by Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor General. Some native rulers had accepted the help of the British; the British, in return, had imposed a condition: if a ruler died without children the British would take over the state. Even if the ruler adopted a son, the adopted son would not have ruling powers. Lord Dalhousie's rule was this: a yearly pension would be fixed for the descendants and the full responsibility for protecting the state would be that of the British Government.

Applying this rule the British had swallowed many native states. Now it was the turn of Jhansi. To Maharaja Gangadhar Rao, who was already old, this was a serious blow. He was bedridden. In 1853, the Maharaja and Lakshmi Bai decided to adopt Anand Rao, a boy of their community. Anand Rao was adopted according to religious rites and he was named Damodar Rao.

Withered Hope

After the celebrations were over, Gangadhar Rao wrote a letter to the Company. He gave all the details about the adoption and requested the Company to recognize the adopted son as the heir. He suggested that, till Damodar Rao came of age, Rani Lakshmi Bai should be recognized as his representative. The Maharaja reminded the Company of the friendly relations between Jhansi and the Company. The letter was handed over by the Maharaja to Major Ellis with a request to give it to Lord Dalhousie.

The Maharaja shed tears when handing over the letter. He was overcome by emotion and his voice was choked. The sobs of the Maharani crying behind the curtain could be heard.

Gangadhar Rao told the Major: "Major Saheb, my Rani is a woman. But she is endowed with many qualities which even the ablest men of the world should appreciate." As he was speaking, unknown to him, his eyes were filled with tears.

"Major Saheb, please see that on no account Jhansi becomes an orphan," he said.

Within a few days, on 21st November 1853, Gangadhar Rao died. The inexperienced 18-year-old Lakshmi Bai became a widow.

A Hindu woman - that too, a young woman and a widow bound by the chains of custom; in addition, the responsibility of a state with no protection; on one side, Dalhousie who was waiting to annex the kingdom; on the other, Damodar Rao, an infant in her arms - this was the plight of Lakshmi Bai. Limitless, endless her problems and her sorrows!

Lakshmi Bai sent a number of petitions to Dalhousie for a decision on the Maharaja's representation. Three months passed, but there was no reply.

On one unfortunate day, in March 1854, Dalhousie's order arrived.

It read: "The Company does not recognize the right of the late Maharaja Gangadhar Rao to adopt an heir. It has, therefore, been decided to merge Jhansi in the British provinces. The Rani should vacate the fort and live in the palace situated in the city. She will be paid a monthly pension of rupees five thousand."

The Rani could not believe it at first. She was taken aback for some time, and then exclaimed: "No, impossible: I shall not surrender my Jhansi."

It did not take her long to realize how difficult it was for the small state of Jhansi to oppose the British might and cleverness, when even the Peshwas had bowed before it. The kings of Delhi also were on their knees before the British.

After the British took over the government from her, the Rani's daily routine changed. Every morning the hours from four to eight were set apart for bathing, worship, meditation and prayer. From eight to eleven she would go out for a horse ride, practise shooting with a gun, and practise swordsmanship and shooting with arrows, with the reins held in the teeth. Thereafter she would bathe again, feed the hungry, give alms to the poor and then have food; then she rested for a while. After that she would chant Ramanam by herself. She would exercise lightly in the evening. Later she would go through some religious books and hear religious sermons. Then she worshipped her chosen deity and had supper. All things were done methodically, according to a strict time-table.

Preparations for An Explosion

People who dumbly suffer tyranny and injustice are like breathing corpses. It is moral to bow to justice, immoral to bow to injustice. Even the nut caught in the nutcracker leaps. Under severe pressure the cannon ball explodes. Even a mild animal gets ready to retaliate against cruelty, without thinking of what may happen.

The kings who lost their kingdoms because they had no sons, the members of their families, their dependents, the disbanded army, the well-wishers of all these people - all were seething with discontent.

Tatia Tope, Raghunath Simha, Jawahar Simha and such lovers of freedom were secretly coming to meet Rani Lakshmi Bai. They used to give her details of the dissatisfaction and discontent of the people.

Rani Lakshmi Bai had carefully studied the geography of her kingdom, the strategic points and the formation of the Sikh army of Punjab in its fight with the British.

When the Rani went out on horseback she was attired like men; she wore a metallic helmet and on top of it, a flowing turban, a protecting metallic plate bound close to the chest, pyjamas and a sash over them. On both sides she carried pistols and daggers. In addition she carried a sabre.

The Rani, who was conversant with the characteristic marks and the mettle of different types of horses, liked most the Kathiawar horse of spotless white colour.

The Rani had flowing hair and so it was difficult for her to wear the helmet and tie the turban over it. In Maharashtra widows used to shave their heads. The Rani decided to have her hair removed at Benares. In addition, she wanted to study the political situation in that part of the country.

But the British officials did not permit her journey.

The Rani took an oath: "I will remove my hair only after the country gains freedom; otherwise it can take place only in the cemetery."

The dissatisfied Nana Saheb and Rao Saheb, Bahadur Shah, the King of Delhi, and the well-wishers of the Nawab of Oudh were all anxious to meet. The same thought came to the Rani also.

A religious celebration was the occasion when all the leaders could meet.

Organization

The adopted son Damodar Rao had by then completed six years and entered the seventh. Arrangements were made to invest him with the sacred thread.

A petition was sent to the British officer in charge of the state. There were six lakh rupees in the treasury in Damodar Rao's name. The petition asked for permission to withdraw a lakh of rupees for the religious ceremony.

"Damodar Rao is still young. If four persons stand surety to my satisfaction the amount will be paid," said the British officer.

The Rani swallowed the insult and got the money. The leaders met for the religious ceremony.

Women kept strict watch all round the palace, as the leaders held their meeting.

The leaders had some information. The Hindu soldiers in the British army were enraged because they were not allowed to wear the 'tilaka' (a sacred mark) on their foreheads; in the same way the Muslim soldiers were enraged because they were compelled to use cartridges smeared with fat. There was deep discontent in the army.

Haste was unwise. Also, the army was not yet quite ready. It was also necessary to ensure that during those days there would be no looting and dacoity. Otherwise the sympathy of the people would be lost. This was the stand of the Rani. Others agreed.

The Explosion

Using song and fairs and entertainment, the women also engaged in fanning dissatisfaction in the army camps. The Rani was kept informed of all that happened.

The full moon day of Holi Feast had passed. It was a pitch dark night in February. Tatia Tope came to meet the Rani.

Tatia brought with him a handbill. It read: 'It is impossible to suffer any more. How long can we bear the agony of the dagger pierced through the heart? Arise and get ready to sacrifice your life for justice. Some tyrants have kept this country in subjection, drive them away. Free the country; uphold the right.'

The Rani felt that the time was not yet ripe. Tatia said that there was extreme dissatisfaction in the army, that it was not difficult to get the money needed and that arms and ammunition were ready.

It was decided that throughout the country people should rise in revolt on Sunday the 31st of May.

The lotus is the emblem of the greatness of Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning, and Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. This lotus was chosen as the symbol of the revolution. The cake also became a sign of the revolution. The way to spread the message of revolution was this: the cake sent from one town would be accepted and in its place another sent to the next town.

In Barrackpur, trouble broke out even before the appointed day. On 10th May the spark of revolt flared up in Meerut. The Indian army in Meerut and Delhi joined and established their authority over the throne of Delhi. The dethroned Bahadur Shah was proclaimed as the Emperor of India.

'Sepoy Mutiny'

In the histories written by the British rulers the flood 'of the people's wrath was described - to suit them - as the 'Sepoy Mutiny'. This gives the impression that only soldiers took part in the uprising and no others.

It is true the soldiers took a leading part in this people's war. But they were not the only ones who rose in revolt. Not only the rajas, maharajas, chieftains, peshwas, nawabs and the Emperors of Delhi but also Hindus, Muslims, moulvis and purohits (that is, the priests) joined the revolt. Most important of all, women played an important role. The blood bath went on for eighteen to twenty months.

It is true that, as history has described, we were defeated. It is no shame for a country in subjection to be defeated any number of times in its fight for freedom. The struggle itself is the mark of a living people. That itself is glory.

India is a vast country. The British found a fertile land for their trade. They could freely buy raw materials here and sell the finished product here at four times its price and fill their coffers. The disunity among the Indians was the secret of the East India Company's success.

In 1752, when the Mughul Emperor's permission to trade was sought on bended knees by the British, the company had three godowns. The total area of land in their possession was only twenty square miles. One hundred years later, the area of land ruled by them was six and a half lakh square miles.

It was not enough for the Company that the country's political and economic life came under its control; the Company wanted India to accept its religion, too. It strengthened its efforts to spread Christianity.

Thus, there were several causes for the people's agitation.

The Spreading Fire

There was no change in the routine of the Rani. In the midst of worship, prayer and religious discourses preparations for the war went on.

"Your Highness, why still this training for fighting? Can you not set apart some more time for meditation upon God?" questioned a bosom friend once.

"I am a Kshatriya woman; I am doing my duty. It is the duty of Kshatriyas to protect the country and justice. If necessary, we must be prepared to fight. I cannot surrender to an enemy, I cannot just weep and die like a helpless widow. I shall fight for my cause and accept death with a smile."

On 4th June the revolution burst in Kanpur. Signs of trouble were seen in Jhansi the same day. One Havildar with a few soldiers entered the Star Fort, newly constructed by the British, and seized war materials and money.

Immediately arrangements were made to shift the British women and children to the fort who were in their camp. The British officers came to request the Rani's help. "We are quite confident of bringing the situation under control. But at this difficult time you must also help us," they requested.

The Rani replied: "I do not have an army or weapons. If you agree I am prepared to get together an army to protect the people."

The British agreed to the proposal. But, when on the very next day the soldiers shot and killed a British officer, they were alarmed.

At once the senior officer raced to the Rani. He said, "We are men, we are not worried about ourselves. But you must afford shelter to our women and children in your palace."

The Rani's friends advised her not to make any such promise. But she said firmly: "Our war is only against the men among the English, not against women and children. If I cannot check our soldiers in this matter how can I be their leader? The English women and children will get shelter in the palace immediately."

So assured the Rani. And not only this; she fed and took care of them throughout the war.

The leaderless army had scored a victory over the British. The soldiers wished to loot Jhansi. The Rani then gave her jewels and money to the soldiers and they were satisfied. The army marched towards Delhi.

The Happy Home Of Freedom

The Rani took action at once to end the anarchy. The chieftains and commanders begged the Rani with one voice to become the ruler of the state. The Rani consented. Once again the flag of the state fluttered on the top of the fort.

Jhansi prepared for war working day and night. New arms were manufactured. But within a period of four or five days a new danger confronted the Rani.

Thinking that Jhansi was being ruled by a weak woman, one Sadashiva Rao rebelled in a part of the state and proclaimed himself the king. Immediately the Maharani went there and put down the rebellion.

Light And Shade Of Victory And Defeat

An army under the command of Sir Hugh Rose reached Jhansi. He sent word to the Maharani to come unarmed along with her friends and meet him.

But the Rani refused. She replied that she would go to any meeting only with her army.

Within a period of ten months (June 1857 to March 1858) after Lakshmi Bai took over the administration of Jhansi from the British, it had improved. The treasury was full. The army was well organized. There was an army of women matching the army of men. The Rani had named some of her guns: 'Mighty Roar', 'Bhavani Shankar' and 'Lightning Streak'. These guns were being fired in turns by men and women. Old weapons were sharpened. New weapons were got ready. During those days every house in Jhansi was busy preparing for the war. And everything was done under the guidance of the Maharani.

The army under Sir Hugh Rose declared war on 23rd March 1858.

For ten or twelve days the tiny state of Jhansi marched in the light and the shadow of victory and defeat.

The relief of one success was followed the next moment by the shock of a defeat. Many faithful Sirdars fell. Unfortunately no help came from outside.

Goddess Of War

When the British gained the upper hand and Hugh Rose's army entered Jhansi city, the Rani herself took up arms. She put on the clothes of a man and she fought like the Goddess of War. Whenever she fought the British army bowed down. Her organization of her forces and her fight surprised Hugh Rose.

When the situation went out of control the Maharani called the courtiers who yet remained and placed her suggestion before them. The noblemen agreed.

Accompanied by some warriors, the Rani forced her way through the enemy lines and departed from Jhansi.

A British officer, Boker by name, followed her with an army. He was himself injured during the fighting and retreated. The Rani's horse died. Even then she did not lose heart but went to Kalpi and joined Tatia Tope and Rao Saheb.

Before The Light Went Out

Even in Kalpi the Rani was busy getting together an army. Hugh Rose laid siege, to Kalpi. When defeat was certain, Rao Saheb, Tatia and others fled with the Rani towards Gwalior.

They reached Gopalpur and took rest in a grove. During the night Rao Saheb, Tatia and the Nawab of Banda held a council, and next morning met the Rani. They had lost the will to fight.

The Rani said, "We have so far stayed inside the fort and faced the British. That is what we should continue to do. Gwalior Fort is near here. It is true that the Raja there is inclined towards the British. But I know that the army and the people are against the British. In addition, there is already a huge stock of guns and ammunition there."

The Rani's suggestion was acceptable to the noblemen. When Tatia Tope reached Gwalior with a small army the greater part of the army in Gwalior cooperated. The Raja of Gwalior ran away and sought the protection of the British at Agra.

But what happened thereafter was a repetition of the earlier foolishness.

Except the Rani and her friends, the leaders indulged in merry-making. The timely warning of the Rani wafted away on the air.

The Rani who was away from such revelry undertook inspection of the vulnerable parts of the Gwalior fort. She prepared a stronghold. But the other leaders did not lend their ears to the advice of this lady.

The End Of The War

Hugh Rose was not prepared to wait. On 17th June 1858 the fighting started again. The Rani put on men's clothes and was ready.

Hindus Contribution to the world of Mathematics

Source: http://hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/india_contribution/maths.html

"India was the motherland of our race and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages. India was the mother of our philosophy, of much of our mathematics, of the ideals embodied in Christianity... of self-government and democracy. In many ways, Mother India is the mother of us all."

- Will Durant

- American Historian 1885-1981

Mathematics represents a high level of abstraction attained by the human mind. In Bharat, mathematics has its roots in Vedic literature which is more than 4000 years old. Between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. various treatises on mathematics were authored by Indian mathematicians in which were set forth for the first time, the concept of zero, the techniques of algebra and algorithm, square root and cube root.

As in the applied sciences like production technology, architecture and ship building, Indians in ancient times also made advances in abstract sciences like Mathematics and Astronomy.

- It has now been generally accepted that the technique of algebra and the concept of zero originated in India.
- But it would be surprising for us to know that even the rudiments of Geometry, called Rekha-Ganita in ancient India, were formulated and applied in the drafting of Mandalas for architectural purposes. They were also displayed in the geometric patterns used in many temple motifs. Many motifs in Hindu temples and palaces display a mix of floral and geometric patterns.

- Even the technique of calculation, called algorithm, which is today widely used in designing soft ware programs (instructions) for computers was also derived from Indian mathematics. In this chapter we shall examine the advances made by Indian mathematicians in ancient times.

ALGEBRA- THE OTHER MATHEMATICS ?

In India around the 5th century A.D. a system of mathematics that made astronomical calculations easy was developed. In those times its application was limited to astronomy as its pioneers were Astronomers. Astronomical calculations are complex and involve many variables that go into the derivation of unknown quantities. Algebra is a short-hand method of calculation and by this feature it scores over conventional arithmetic.

In ancient India conventional mathematics termed Ganitam was known before the development of algebra. This is borne out by the name - Bijaganitam, which was given to the algebraic form of computation. Bijaganitam means 'the other mathematics' (Bija means 'another' or 'second' and Ganitam means mathematics). The fact that this name was chosen for this system of computation implies that it was recognized as a parallel system of computation, different from the conventional one which was used since the past and was till then the only one. Some have interpreted the term Bija to mean seed, symbolizing origin or beginning. And the inference that Bijaganitam was the original form of computation is derived. Credence is lent to this view by the existence of mathematics in the Vedic literature which was also shorthand method of computation. But whatever the origin of algebra, it is certain that this technique of computation Originated in India and was current around 1500 years back.

Aryabhatta an Indian mathematician who lived in the 5th century A.D. has referred to Bijaganitam in his treatise on Mathematics, Aryabhattiya. An Indian mathematician - astronomer, Bhaskaracharya has also authored a treatise on this subject. The treatise which is dated around the 12th century A.D. is entitled 'Siddhanta-Shiromani' of which one section is entitled Bijaganitam.

Thus the technique of algebraic computation was known and was developed in India in earlier times. From the 13th century onwards, India was subject to invasions from the Arabs and other Islamized communities like the Turks and Afghans. Along with these invaders came chroniclers and critics like Al-beruni who studied Indian society and polity.

The Indian system of mathematics could no have escaped their attention. It was also the age of the Islamic renaissance and the Arabs generally improved upon the arts and sciences that they imbibed from the land they overran during their Jihad. The system of mathematics they observed in India was adapted by them and given the name 'Al-Jabr' meaning 'the reunion of broken parts'. 'Al' means 'The' & 'Jabr' mean 'reunion'. This name given by the Arabs indicates that they took it from an external source and amalgamated it with their concepts about mathematics.

Between the 10th to 13th centuries, the Christian kingdoms of Europe made numerous attempts to reconquer the birthplace of Jesus Christ from its Mohammedan-Arab rulers. These attempts called the Crusades failed in their military objective, but the contacts they created between

oriental and occidental nations resulted in a massive exchange of ideas. The technique of algebra could have passed on to the west at this time.

During the Renaissance in Europe, followed by the industrial revolution, the knowledge received from the east was further developed. Algebra as we know it today has lost any characteristics that betray its eastern origin save the fact that the term 'algebra' is a corruption of the term 'Al jabr' which the Arabs gave to Bijaganitam. Incidentally the term Bijaganit is still used in India to refer to this subject.

In the year 1816, an Englishman by the name James Taylor translated Bhaskara's Leelavati into English. A second English translation appeared in the following year (1817) by the English astronomer Henry Thomas Colebruke. Thus the works of this Indian mathematician astronomer were made known to the western world nearly 700 years after he had penned them, although his ideas had already reached the west through the Arabs many centuries earlier.

In the words of the Australian Indologist A.L. Basham (A.L. Basham; The Wonder That was India.) "... the world owes most to India in the realm of mathematics, which was developed in the Gupta period to a stage more advanced than that reached by any other nation of antiquity. The success of Indian mathematics was mainly due to the fact that Indians had a clear conception of the abstract number as distinct from the numerical quantity of objects or spatial extension."

Thus Indians could take their mathematical concepts to an abstract plane and with the aid of a simple numerical notation devise a rudimentary algebra as against the Greeks or the ancient Egyptians who due to their concern with the immediate measurement of physical objects remained confined to Geometry.

GEOMETRY AND ALGORITHM

But even in the area of Geometry, Indian mathematicians had their contribution. There was an area of mathematical applications called Rekha Ganita (Line Computation). The Sulva Sutras, which literally mean 'Rule of the Chord' give geometrical methods of constructing altars and temples. The temple layouts were called Mandalas. Some of the important works in this field are by Apastamba, Baudhayana, Hiranyakesin, Manava, Varaha and Vadhula.

The Arab scholar Mohammed Ibn Jubair al Battani studied Indian use of ratios from Rekha Ganita and introduced them among the Arab scholars like Al Khwarazmi, Washiya and Abe Mashar who incorporated the newly acquired knowledge of algebra and other branches of Indian mathematics into the Arab ideas about the subject.

The chief exponent of this Indo-Arab amalgam in mathematics was Al Khwarazmi who evolved a technique of calculation from Indian sources. This technique which was named by westerners after Al Khwarazmi as "Algorismi" gave us the modern term "Algorithm", which is used in computer software.

Algorithm which is a process of calculation based on decimal notation numbers. This method was deduced by Khwarazmi from the Indian techniques geometric computation which he had studied. Al Khwarazmi's work was translated into Latin under the title "De Numero Indico"

which means 'of Indian'. This translation which belong to the 12th century A.D credited to one Adelard who lived in a town called Bath in Britian.

The Arabs borrowed so much from India the field of mathematics that even the subject of mathematics in Arabic came to known as Hindsa which means 'from India and a mathematician or engineer in Arabic is called Muhandis which means 'an expert in Mathematics'. The word Muhandis possibly derived from the Arabic term mathematics viz. Hindsa.

The Concept of Zero

The concept of zero also originated in ancient India. This concept may seem to be a very ordinary one and a claim to its discovery may be viewed as queer. But if one gives a hard thought to this concept it would be seen that zero is not just a numeral. Apart from being a numeral, it is also a concept, and a fundamental one at that. It is fundamental because, terms to identify visible or perceptible objects do not require much ingenuity.

But a concept and symbol that connotes nullity represents a qualitative advancement of the human capacity of abstraction. In absence of a concept of zero there could have been only positive numerals in computation, the inclusion of zero in mathematics opened up a new dimension of negative numerals and gave a cut off point and a standard in the measurability of qualities whose extremes are as yet unknown to human beings, such as temperature.

In ancient India this numeral was used in computation, it was indicated by a dot and was termed Pujyam. Even today we use this term for zero along with the more current term Shunyam meaning a blank. But queerly the term Pujyam also means holy. Param-Pujya is a prefix used in written communication with elders. In this case it means respected or esteemed. The reason why the term Pujya - meaning blank - came to be sanctified can only be guessed.

Herein could lie the reason how the mathematical concept of zero got a philosophical connotation of reverence.

The concept of 'Zero' or Shunya is derived from the concept of a void. The concept of void existed in Hindu Philosophy and hence the derivation of a symbol for it. The concept of Shunyata, influenced

South-east asian culture through the Buddhist concept of Nirvana 'attaining salvation by merging into the void of eternity' (Ornate Entrance of a Buddhist temple in Laos)

It is possible that like the technique of algebra; the concept of zero also reached the west through the Arabs. In ancient India the terms used to describe zero included Pujyam, Shunyam, Bindu the concept of a void or blank was termed as Shukla and Shubra. The Arabs refer to the zero as Siphra or Sifr from which we have the English terms Cipher or Cypher. In English the term Cipher connotes zero or any Arabic numeral. Thus it is evident that the term Cipher is derived from the Arabic Sifr which in turn is quite close to the Sanskrit term Shubra.

The ancient India astronomer Brahmagupta is credited with having put forth the concept of zero for the first time: Brahmagupta is said to have been born the year 598 A.D. at Bhillamala (today's Bhinmal) in Gujarat, Western India. Not much is known about Brahmagupta's early life. Of his two treatises, Brahma-sputa siddhanta and Karanakhanda-khadyaka, first is more famous. It was a corrected version of the old Astronomical text, Brahma siddhanta. It was in his Brahma-sputa-siddhanta, for the first time ever had be formulated the rules of the operation

zero, foreshadowing the decimal system numeration. With the integration of zero into the numerals it became possible to note higher numerals with limited characters.

In the earlier Roman and Babylonian systems of numeration, a large number of characters were required to denote higher numerals. Thus enumeration and computation became unwieldy. For instance, as per the Roman system of numeration, the number thirty would have to be written as XXX: while as per the decimal system it would be 30, further the number thirty three would be XXXIII as per the Roman system, would be 33 as per the decimal system. Thus it is clear how the introduction of the decimal system made possible the writing of numerals having a high value with limited characters. This also made computation easier.

Apart from developing the decimal system based on the incorporation of zero in enumeration, Brahmagupta also arrived at solutions for indeterminate equations of 1 type $ax^2+1=y^2$ and thus can be called the founder of higher branch of mathematics called numerical analysis. Brahmagupta's treatise Brahma-sputa-siddhanta was translated into Arabic under the title Sind Hind.

For several centuries this translation remained a standard text of reference in the Arab world. It was from this translation of an Indian text on Mathematics that the Arab mathematicians perfected the decimal system and gave the world its current system of enumeration which we call the Arab numerals, which are originally Indian numerals.

Story of Rani Padmini Sati system and Child marriage

(Note: While telling the story of Rani Padmini's sacrifice, we should highlight what kind of sacrifices have been made to keep our civilization alive. Also, discuss how the system of Sati and child marriage came in to being during the Islamic rule in Northern Bharat.

Children in America read about these topics in their school text-books or in the western media coverage of India. The following write up would clarify some of the questions on its origin and its prevalence today.)

Reference: http://hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/hindu_history/practices1.html

Sati (Self-Immolation by a widow)

Sati i.e. self-immolation by a widow would normally be looked upon as a negative aspect of culture. When confronted with questions as to why such a practice should have existed, a student of history with misplaced national pride would try to explain away such practices.

According to Hindu mythology, Sati the wife of Dakshya was so overcome at the demise of her husband that she immolated herself on his funeral pyre and burnt herself to ashes. Since then her name 'Sati' has come to be symptomatic of self-immolation by a widow.

Today Sati is illegal. It is also generally looked down upon but one still does hear of stray incidents of woman being forced to or trying to commit Sati. The country owes the abolition of this deplorable practice to the crusading efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy, the 18th century social reformer.

In the medieval ages Sati was given the status of an act of honor. This was mainly so among the Rajput martial caste of northern India among whom Sati took the form of a collective suicide after a battle in which male members had suffered death at the enemy's hands.

Sati was even committed by women before their husbands were actually dead when their city or town was besieged by the enemy and faced certain defeat. This form of Sati was more popularly known as Jouhar. The Jouhar committed by Rani Padmini of Chittor when faced by the prospect of dishonor at the hands of a Sultan from Delhi has been immortalized in Indian history.

In those days North India was under foreign subjugation. The most powerful kingdom set up by the invaders was the Sultanate of Delhi.

But in Rajputana, the Rajputs had defiantly preserved their kingdom by resisting the Delhi Sultans. One such Rajput kingdom was at Chittor. Chittor was under the Rule of King Ratansen, a brave and noble warrior-king. Apart, from being a loving husband and a just ruler, Ratansen was also a patron of the arts. In his court were many talented People one of whom was a musician named Raghav Chetan. But unknown to anybody, Raghav Chetan was also a sorcerer. He used his evil talents to run down his rivals and unfortunately for him was caught red-handed in his dirty act of arousing evil spirits.

On hearing this King Ratansen was furious and he banished Raghav Chetan from his kingdom after blackening his face with face and making him ride a donkey. This harsh Punishment earned king Ratansen an uncompromising enemy. Sulking after his humiliation, Raghav Chetan made his way towards Delhi with -the aim of trying to incite the Sultan of Delhi Allah-ud-din Khilji to attack Chittor.

On approaching Delhi, Raghav Chetan settled down in one of the forests nearby Delhi, which the Sultan used to frequent for hunting deer. One day on hearing the Sultan's hunt party entering the forest, Raghav-Chetan started playing a melodious tone on his flute. When the alluring notes of Raghav-Chetan flute reached the Sultan's party they were surprised as to who could be playing a flute in such a masterly way in a forlorn forest.

The Sultan despatched his soldiers to fetch the person and when Raghav-Chetan was brought before him, the Sultan Allah-ud-din Khilji asked him to come to his court at Delhi. The cunning Raghav-Chetan asked the king as to why he wants to have a ordinary musician like himself when there were many other beautiful objects to be had. Wondering what Raghav-Chetan meant, Allah-ud-din asked him to clarify. Upon being told of Rani Padmini's beauty, Allah-ud-din's lust was aroused and immediately on returning to his capital he gave orders to his army to march on Chittor.

But to his dismay, on reaching Chittor, Allah-ud-din found the fort to be heavily defended. Desperate to have a look at the legendary beauty of Padmini, he sent word to King Ratansen that he looked upon Padmini as his sister and wanted to meet her. On hearing this, the unsuspecting Ratansen asked Padmini to see the 'brother'. But Padmini was more wordly-wise and she refused to meet the lustful Sultan personally.

But on being persuaded she consented to allow Allah-ud-din to see her only in a mirror. On the word being sent to Allah-ud-din that Padmini would see him he came to the fort with his selected his best warriors who secretly made a careful examination of the fort's defenses on their way to the Palace.

On seeing Padmini, in the mirror, the lustful 'brother', Allah-ud-din Khilji decided that he should secure Padmini for himself. While returning to his camp, Allah-ud-din was accompanied for some way by King Ratansen. Taking this opportunity, the wily Sultan treacherously kidnapped Ratansen and took him as a prisoner into his camp and demanded that Padmini come and surrender herself before Allah-ud-din Khilji, if she wanted her husband King Ratansen alive again.

On seeing Padmini, the lustful 'brother' decided that he should secure Padmini for himself. While returning to his camp, Allah-ud-din was accompanied for some way by King Ratansen. Taking this opportunity, the wily Sultan treacherously kidnapped Ratansen and took him as a prisoner into his camp.

Allah-ud-din showed his true colors and demanded , that Padmini be given to him and in return Ratnasen was to get his liberty. Word was sent into the palace about the Sultan's demand.

The Rajput generals decided to beat the Sultan at his own game and sent back a word that Padmini would be given to Ala-ud-din the next morning. On the following day at the crack of dawn, one hundred and fifty palanquins (covered cases in which royal ladies were carried in medieval times) left the fort and made their way towards Ala-ud-din's camps. The palanquins stopped before the tent where king Ratansen was being held prisoner. . Seeing that the palanquins had come from Chittor; and thinking that they had brought along with them his queen, king Ratansen was mortified. But to his surprise from the palanquins came out, not his queen and her women servants but fully armed soldiers, who quickly freed Ratansen and galloped away towards Chittor on horses grabbed from Ala-ud-din's stables.

On hearing that his designs had been frustrated, the lustful Sultan was furious and ordered his army to storm Chittor. But hard as they tried the Sultan's army could not break into the fort. Then Ala-ud-din decided to lay siege to the fort. The siege was a long drawn one and gradually supplies within the fort were depleted. Finally King Ratansen gave orders that the Rajputs would open the gates and fight to finish with the besieging troops. On hearing of this decision, Padmini decided that with their men folk going into the unequal struggle with the Sultan's army in which they were sure to perish, the women of Chittor had either to commit suicides or face dishonor at the hands of the victorious enemy.

The choice was in favor of suicide through Jauhar. A huge pyre was lit and followed by their queen, all the women of Chittor jumped into the flames and deceived the lustful enemy waiting outside. With their women folk dead, the men of Chittor had nothing to live for. They charged out of the fort and fought on furiously with the vastly powerful army of the Sultan, till all of them perished. After this victory the Sultan's troops entered the fort only to be confronted with ashes and burnt bones of the women whose honor they were going to violate to satisfy their lust.

These women who committed Jawhar had to perish but their memory has been kept alive till today by bards and songs which glorify their act which was right in those days and circumstances. Thus a halo of honor is given to their supreme sacrifice.

But this halo of honor has to be seen in the light of the above compulsions of alien rule in India during the medieval ages. From the 13th century onwards up to the coming of the British, the position of women was insecure under the rule of the Sultans of Delhi. Their insecurity increased after the demise of their husbands. This compulsion which was resultant of a particular age was by far the most important reason for the prevalence of Sati during the middle ages.

CHILD-MARRIAGE (Bal Vivaha)

Child-marriage is another 'blessing' of the medieval age and it was born from the same compulsions that perpetuated Sati. Child-marriage was not prevalent in ancient India. The most popular form of marriage was Swayamvara where grooms assembled at the bride's house and the bride selected her spouse. Swayamvara can be translated as self selection of one's husband, Swayam = self, Vara = husband. Instances of Swayamvara ceremony are found in our national epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Various types of marriages were prevalent in ancient India Gandharva Vivaha (love marriage), Asura Vivaha (marriage by abduction) etc., But among these there is no mention of child marriage.

There are many reasons to believe that this custom originated in the medieval ages. As mentioned earlier in the turbulent atmosphere of the medieval ages, law and order was not yet a universal phenomenon and arbitrary powers were concentrated in the hands of a hierarchy led by a despotic monarch. In India the Sultans of Delhi who held the place of the despotic monarch, came from a different type of culture. They were orthodox in their beliefs with a fanatical commitment to their religion and a ruthless method in its propagation. Intolerant as they were to all forms of worship other than their own, they also exercised contempt for members of other faiths.

Women as it is are at the receiving end during any war, arson, plunder, etc. During the reign of the Delhi Sultans these were the order of the day and the worst sufferers were Hindu women. During these dark days were spawned customs like child-marriage and selection of women from the rest of the society, wearing of the Ghunghat (veil). Amidst the feeling of insecurity, the presence of young unmarried girls was a potential invitation for disaster. Hence parents would seek to get over with the responsibilities of their daughters by getting them married off before they reached the marriage age. The custom of child marriages with the 'bride' and 'groom' still in their cradles was a culmination of this tendency. This way the danger to a growing girl's virginity was somewhat reduced.

Sati, Child-marriage, Ghunghat, etc were largely caused by the arbitrary tyrannical rule of the Sultans of Delhi.

The creative power within the children should find ways to express itself and Bala-Gokulam can be one such avenue. Inform the children a week in advance that the next week will be poetry and essay activity. Depending on their aptitude and interest they may choose either poetry or essay. Suggest some topics related to Hindu Dharma or Hindu unity or about their experience in Bala-Gokulam.

In many places, group poetry competitions have been very successful. 3-5 children form a group and together they will compose poems and also sing it at the end. This has been a favorite event in the youth camps and in Bala-Gokulam.

Perfection in God's Creation; Discussion on Seva

Seva or service to humanity is one of the essential values in Hindu way of life. The attitude of 'helping' is very primitive. We believe in the existence of God in every one and hence 'serving' is the right mindset. Karma-Yoga, selfless service, has been proclaimed as one of the means to attain liberation or 'Moksha'.

Note: Discuss with children the problems afflicting the society where we live and how we can serve the needy. Also discuss with them about the Seva activities in Bharat, where our roots lie. Refer to <http://www.idrf.org> for some of the activities.

The compassion element in one's personality should be brought out by telling some stories. Here are some samples.

Story 1

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush is a school that caters to learning-disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be main-streamed into conventional schools.

At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?"

The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish and stilled by the piercing query.

"I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that He seeks is in the way people react to this child."

He then told the following story about his son Shaya.

One afternoon Shaya and his father walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball.

Shaya asked, "Do you think they will let me play?"

His father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. Still, his father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a sense of belonging.

Shaya's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play.

The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning."

Shaya's father was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly. Shaya was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because he didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it.

However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's teammates came up to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch.

The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya and his teammate swung the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman.

Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first!" Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball.

He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head.

Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third."

As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya run home!" Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

Story 2

A young man was picking up objects off the beach and tossing them out into the sea. A second man approached him, and saw that the objects were starfish.

"Why in the world are you throwing starfish into the water?"

"If the starfish are still on the beach when the tide goes out and the sun rises high in the sky, they will die," replied the young man.

"That's ridiculous. There are thousands of miles of beach and millions of starfish. You can't really believe that what you're doing could possibly make a difference!"

The young man picked up another starfish, paused thoughtfully, and remarked as he tossed it out into the waves, "It makes a difference to this one."

Story 3

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.

And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall. The man asked the nurse what could

have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

Hindu View of a Harmonious Family

Every human being is potentially divine and the goal of life is to express this divinity by performing useful work. A harmonious family is an institution which provides the energy and inspiration to bring forth one's divinity. A child of a harmonious family becomes a divine personality.

Expressing one's inherent divinity is akin to entering a house that has four doors, with each door having a unique key. Each door must be opened to gain entry into the house. There is one road that leads to this house. In this example, the four doors are *dedication, contribution, learning and responsibility*. The four keys are *love, recognition, sharing and trust*. The name of the road is *offer and receive (sammarpan and swikār)*. The following illustrates which key opens which door:

Offer	Love	& Receive	Dedication
	Recognition		Contribution
	Sharing		Learning
	Trust		Responsibility

Love and Dedication

Love is accepting a person as he (or she) is and helping him to grow. Love is a divine feeling which is beyond likes and dislikes. Dedication is self-sacrificing devotion to whatever one does. Dedication builds attitudes in people. Positive attitudes are necessary to perform useful work in the world.

Love and dedication are two aspects of the same relationship. When parents are loving, the children are dedicated. When the children are dedicated, the parents are loving. When the teacher is loving, the students are dedicated and when the students are dedicated, the teacher is loving. The love-dedication relationship brings out noble qualities of the child and helps him to grow and establish harmonious relationships within the family and with the outside world.

Recognition and Contribution

While attitudes are necessary, abilities and skills are required for an active and contributing personality. Abilities and skills are developed by performing useful work. It is essential to ensure an atmosphere of daily useful work in the family. When children contribute to useful work, they can perform useful work for the society, nation and humanity in their adult lives.

Recognition and contribution are two sides of the same interaction. Recognition begets contribution and the contribution begets recognition. Parents are the starting point. When parents recognize and appreciate, children will contribute more and more. When children contribute, parents will appreciate more and more.

Sharing and Learning

Dedication and contribution alone are not sufficient. Knowledge is necessary to perform useful work in the world. Knowledge comes from learning, and learning comes from sharing. While

there is an end for every teaching, there is no end for learning. When parents continuously share their knowledge and experience with their children, the children continuously learn. Sharing and learning are two aspects of the same relationship. When parents share, children learn and when children learn, parents share. Sharing is the best way of teaching. Sharing encourages learning. With a positive attitude towards work and learning, children can grow into noble personalities.

Trust and Responsibility

Positive attitude, dedication and knowledge alone are not sufficient for a person to express divinity. Responsibility is another key factor. A responsible person is an enriched person. Assuming responsibility for the family, society, nation, and humanity is divinity.

It is essential to inculcate a sense of responsibility into children, a task for the parents. The parents cannot perform this task unless they are responsible themselves. Trust and responsibility are two aspects of the same interaction. When parents trust their children, the children take on responsibility, and in turn develop increasing trust with their parents. A trusted person is a divine person.

Conclusions

- A harmonious family is an institution, which provides the energy and inspiration necessary to bring forth one's divinity.
- The key to a harmonious family is the *offer and receive* philosophy (*sammarpan* and *swikār*), as taught by *rishis*. Family members must learn to rise above the *take and take* (a thief's philosophy), *take and give* (government philosophy), *give and take* (business philosophy) and adopt the *offer and receive* philosophy within the family.
- The love-dedication relationship builds positive attitudes in children. As parents offer love and receive dedication, children will offer dedication and receive love.
- Encourage children to participate in all aspects of daily work of the family. With positive attitudes and useful work, they will develop into noble and productive personalities in their adult lives.
- Share knowledge with children. With positive attitudes, useful work and learning, they will become dedicated, knowledgeable and contributing personalities.
- When parents trust children, children will take on responsibilities. A responsible person is an enriched person.
- The three basic ideals of Hindu Dharma-*seva* (unselfish service), *vishva kutumbam* (universal family), and *sahaviryam* (together-ness in the family)-can be realized when children grow into responsible, knowledgeable, and dedicated contributors.

Tanaji Malsure - Brave Commander of Shivaji Tanaji's Impossibly Brave Deed

The fort of Kondana, which is today on the outskirts of Pune town was then an outpost overlooking Pune and the surrounding countryside. It was strategically placed in the center of a string of forts of Rajgad, Purandar, and Torna. The capture of Kondana was necessary if Shivaji Maharaj was to re-establish de facto control over the Pune region.

Recognizing the strategic importance of Kondana, the Mughals had maintained a battalion of 5000 troops led by Udai Bhan, a relative of Mirza Raja Jai Singh. The fort was built in such a way that all its approaches were covered by cannon-fire. Only on turret was not well defended as it was at the top of a vertical overhanging cliff.

Tanaji decided that this was the only way, he could enter the fort. He dressed himself as a Gondhali (devotee of the Goddess Bhavani of Tuljapur) and roamed the surrounding villages. He won the trust of one Mahadev Koli who was in the service of Udai Bhan. Koli presented the disguised Tanaji to Udai Bhan, who was suitably impressed by this "devotee" and allowed him free access to the fort.

THE GHORPAD CLIFF

This is the sheer cliff that Tanaji and his brave Mavalas (comrades) scaled to surprise the Muslim army that was engrossed in a drunken orgy on the plateau seen at the top during a dark night in 1669.

Tanaji carried out a careful surveillance of the fort and at that very night when he was told that at the overhanging cliff Udai Bhan and all his senior commanders would be celebrating a usual party with an alcohol and dance orgy; Tanaji decided that he should seize this opportunity.

With almost all his troops, Udai Bhan had a roaring party on top of the overhanging cliff. Unknown to them after midnight, Tanaji and his brave followers who numbered 300 scaled the cliff using ropes tied to a reptile called Ghorpad. The Ghorpad can stick fast to any surface and a number of adults can use this force to scale a vertical cliff with the help of a rope, one end of which is tied to the Ghorpad. Silently Tanaji and his comrades slunk up to the top of the cliff.

On the other side his uncle Shelar Mama and his brother Suryaji had moved close to the other gates of the forts with another 300 Mavalas (Maratha Soldiers). On a signal from Tanaji, all his comrades who has taken up strategic position all round the celebrating Mughal army, broke into the party and mercilessly fell upon their enemies. They started slaughtering the surprised and ill-prepared and drunken Muslim soldiers.

When Udai Bhan saw that Tanaji - the leader of this invading band of Marathas was no other than the devotee whom he had given permission to visit the fort, he flew into a mad rage. On seeing Tanaji, Udai Bhan rushed at him and we are told that for a few fatal seconds, Tanaji started dancing in the same fashion as he had done as a Gondhali (devotee) when he had met Udai Bhan earlier in the day. The enraged Udai Bhan lunged at dancing Tanaji and cut off the arm with which Tanaji was holding his shield. But undaunted Tanaji used his turban to ward off further thrusts from the blade of Udai Bhan's sword and continued fighting him for 2 hours in this state with his wristless left arm bleeding profusely. It is for this feat of Tanaji, that he is called Narvir - Brave amongst Men. At the end of this ordeal, the exhausted Tanaji fell to a fatal swish of Udai Bhan's sword. But Udai Bhan too was throttled by Shelar Mama and thus lost his life.

Shivaji Maharaj is said to have said on this occasion "*Gad aala, paan Simha gela*" (We have won the fort but have lost the Lion - Tanaji). The fort of Kondana was renamed as "Sinhagad" in honour of Tanaji's brave deed.

Heaven And Hell

Once a group of people wanted to know what makes for hell and what makes heaven. Where all suffer, it is called hell and where all enjoy it is called heaven. So the committee of the above persons wanting to know how hell is made, first went to hell where all people were suffering. What they saw in hell surprised them very much because hell looked a very rich place where every enjoyable object was available in plenty. Why should any one suffer here, they wondered.

As it was the lunch time in hell, all denizens of hell were in the dining hall and the committee went to investigate whether there was any food problem. Again what met their eyes surprised them beyond words because the dining table was full with a variety of delicacies in abundance and no one need starve for lack of food. Yet the most puzzling thing of all was the fact that all the hell-dwellers who were gathered there looked famished, hungry and angry. They were quarrelling and shouting at one another blaming one another in abuse language.

The members of the investigation committee closely scrutinized the people who were thus quarrelling and fighting. They found that the persons in hell had no elbow joints in their arms because of which they were unable to bend their hands and feed themselves though food was plenty available. So all of them starved and had no joy.

The committee felt that it was cruel joke to play upon people. Why give them plenty of food if it was not meant to feed themselves?

They wished to see how things were in heaven and went there in time to see the heavenly beings at lunch. The heaven was exactly like hell... looked very rich with all enjoyable things of life. As they approached the dining hall they could hear the loud cries of satisfaction and joy emanating from the hall. The committee members hastened to the hall to witness such an exuberance of joy. The dining table was full with delicacies just as in hell. The people looked happy, well-fed and contented and they were still eating. Now the committee members watched carefully how their arms were. Here too the arms of the denizens were without elbow joints. They too could not bend their forearms to feed themselves. Still they were not unhappy. They understood that the plenty of food in front of them was not given to them to feed themselves but was meant for serving others. So they all collected enough food from the table and fed the others. When each one fed the others, all of them got plenty to eat and nobody famished. All were happy and it became heaven. In the other place they did not know that the hands were given to serve others. When they tried to serve themselves they could not, and it became hell.

The Elder Brother

Once upon a time there lived a widow with her only son in a small village. They were very poor and could not afford to live in luxury. They had a small hut adjoining a forest. Their village being very small, there was no school for children. On the other side of the forest there was a

bigger village with a school in it. Therefore the widow got her son admitted to that school and the boy had to walk through the forest daily in order to reach the school. He was the only boy going to that school from that village and so he had to walk alone in the forest.

The boy used to feel terribly afraid while walking alone in the forest and often expressed it to his mother. Poor mother, what could she do? She was a great devotee of Lord Krishna. She fervently prayed to God to help her only son. One day the boy was so afraid that he refused to go to the school and started weeping. Then the mother embraced him, wiped his tears and said, "My son, don't be afraid of the forest. Will I send you alone there, if there is any danger? In the forest dwells your elder brother Gopal who promised to look after you daily. Hereafter, when you feel frightened, call upon your brother. He will surely come and keep company with you in the forest."

The boy was surprised. "Really, mother? Have I got a brother in the forest? What does he do there? Why does he not come home to be with us here?" The mother smiled and said, "My dear, your brother looks after the cattle in the forest. That is why he does not get time to come home. But don't worry. He will surely come whenever you call upon him."

Now the boy was reassured. He was no more frightened. On the other hand he was eager to meet his own elder brother and see what he was like. He took his meals and went running into the forest in order to meet his brother. Once he reached the depth of the forest he cried out, "Gopal, my brother, please come out. I am anxious to see you." He waited for some time. No one came. He called out once again. Still no response. Yet a third time. No one came out of the forest. He grew very frightened and out of fear cried out desperately, "Brother, where are you? Mother told me that you would surely come to me. I am very frightened. Please come out quickly."

As he was thus crying out and shivering in fright, low, from the forest came forth a young boy, blue in complexion, wearing a yellow dhoti and having a peacock feather in the hair and a bewitching smile on the lips. He looked a little older than this boy and said, "O brother, I just heard your cry and came running. Why are you crying? Has not mother told you that I am here?"

The boy was very happy to think that he had such a beautiful brother. He caught hold of the hands of Gopal and gazed at him in rapture. Gopal smiled and asked, "What are you looking at?" The boy laughed out in great joy and said, "O my brother, I never knew that I had a brother until mother told me today morning.

How beautiful you are! Why do you never come home?" Gopal smiled and said, "Did not mother tell you that I am working here? I am always busy. But I shall always come whenever you are in the forest and call me out. Let us go now. It is time for your school." Hand in hand they walked together. Gopal knew the names of all the trees and birds in the forest. He pointed out them all as they walked along. The boy was so much engrossed with this wonderful brother of his, that he never noticed that they were walking. When the forest ended, Gopal said, "Look, we have reached the village. Yonder is your school. Now I shall go back." But the boy did not want to lose sight of his brother. He clung on to Gopal and begged hard that he might also go to school with him, but Gopal shook his head, "I have to tend the cows. How can I attend the school? Don't worry. I shall meet you in the forest in the evening." The boy let him go with great reluctance. The whole day he was thinking of this wonderful brother of his. How lucky he was

to have such a brother! He waited impatiently for the evening to come, for he was eager to be with his brother again once more.

As soon as the school closed, he rushed to the forest and called out aloud. "Gopal, Gopal, I have come. Do you hear me!" The blue boy came running and laughing. They embraced one another lovingly and walked towards the home village. As they reached the village and the forest ended, Gopal took leave. The boy parted his company only after repeated assurances from Gopal that he would surely come to him again the next day. The boy ran home bursting with the news of his new-found brother. The mother listened to his tale in wonder and gratitude. From the description of Gopal which her son gave, she had no doubt that Lord Krishna Himself came to protect her boy in the forest. She shed grateful tears and prayed to the Lord to look after her son.

Now the boy had no more fear for the forest. He would rush out of the house even before it was time for the school, because he was eager to spend as much time as possible with his brother. In the company of his brother he did not know how the time fled. Gradually the year came to an end and the teacher's birthday approached. It was the custom for each student to bring some present to the teacher on his birthday. All the students were busy planning what things were to be presented by each. Our boy stood aloof not participating in the discussions as he knew how poor his mother was. She would not be able to give anything at all. It would be a matter of shame not to give anything. But where from to get even a tiny present? He was worried. In the evening he asked mother what he could give to the teacher. Poor mother! She had nothing at home she could offer. At last she said, "Why don't you ask your brother Gopal when you meet him tomorrow? Surely he would bring something for you."

The boy's face grew bright. He was certain that his affectionate brother would bring something or other to be presented to the teacher. Why worry about anything as long as he had his brother?

Next day as they were walking through the forest, the boy asked Gopal whether he could give something to be presented to the teacher on the morrow. Gopal replied, "I am not very rich. But never mind, I shall try to get something tomorrow." The boy was happy. He slept peacefully in the night without any worry. Next day when he met Gopal, he eagerly looked at him to see whether he remembered yesterday's promise. Sure, Gopal was not one to forget his promise. He took out a small pot with curds from his bag and gave it to the boy. It was a very small pot but the boy was happy. He won't have to go empty handed to the school today.

Inside the school everything wore a festive look. There were to be no classes that day. Along with the pupils, their parents also gathered and several rich presents were given to the teacher by the students as well as the elders. The teacher smiled and laughed in joy as he was getting the presents. Somebody brought a bag of rice, another a cow. A third one brought fruit and a fourth one loads of flowers. The school was filled with the presents..... curds, milk, ghee and what not. Looking at all the rich presents brought by others, the boy felt ashamed. He brought such a tiny present! What would the teacher think? Would the other pupils laugh at him? Fearful of their mockery, the boy stood in one corner, not daring to approach the teacher and hiding the small pot of curds under his shirt.

As one by one were coming forward offering their presents, the teacher who was receiving them with a smile and a kind word for all, observed the boy shyly standing in a corner hiding something under his shirt. He knew that the boy's mother was a poor widow who couldn't afford to send any present, nor did he expect anything from her. Out of love he taught one and all irrespective of their wealth. When he saw that the boy brought something which he was hesitating to show, he was overwhelmed with pity for the young boy. He called out with an encouraging smile, "Son, why are you standing there? Come forward and show me what you brought for me."

The boy slowly moved forward and brought out the tiny pot from under his shirt. His face grew crimson with shame from the thought that his friends would make fun of him. As he offered the tiny cup to the teacher, there was suppressed laughter of derision from behind. But the kindly teacher received the pot from his hands, "How nice of you to have brought such shining white curds. Thank you very much." He poured the curd into the big pot of curd brought by some other pupil and was about to throw away the empty pot outside the window. Suddenly his hand stopped and he glared at the pot in disbelief. Instead of being empty, the pot was again full with curds. Surprised, he poured the curds again into the big pot and looked. The tiny pot was again full with white shining curd. Again he poured it out. Again the pot was full. The whole class and the elders who gathered there looked on in wonderment as the teacher again and again emptied the pot and it got filled again and again. The boy also looked on in fascination. He never knew that his brother Gopal gave him such a fine gift for the teacher. His heart filled with pride, as other looked at him with respect. He knew that his was the best gift offered that day, thanks to his brother.

The teacher was puzzled. He looked at the boy and asked, "My dear boy, where did you get this magic pot from? The boy answered, "My brother Gopal gave it to me, Sir." "Brother!" exclaimed the teacher, "You have no brothers. Which brother is this?" "I have no brother at home, Sir," replied the boy. "It is my brother Gopal who is in the forest that gave the pot."

Thus the whole story came out. When the teacher heard the description of Gopal the teacher at once knew that the boy's brother was none other than the Divine Cowherd Himself. He shed tears in ecstasy and asked the boy in a choked voice, "Son, will you take me to your brother?" The boy was eager to introduce his unique brother to one and all. He readily agreed to take the teacher to his brother in the forest. Not only the teacher but all others who were there wished to have a vision of the Divine brother of this boy. All followed the boy to the forest. They entered the forest and the boy took a few steps forward and called out, "Gopal, my brother Gopal, please come out. My teacher, class-mates, and several elders have come out to see you. Please quickly come out." He waited for some time. Gopal did not come. The boy thought that his brother must have gone far today, and hadn't heard him. So he called out louder again and yet louder. Still no response. The boy ran from one corner to another corner calling upon his brother again and again but in vain. The boy was very much disappointed. He was afraid that his brother might have become angry with him for having brought all the visitors without taking his permission. With tears in his eyes, the boy begged, "Gopal, are you angry with me for bringing these people without your permission? Please do not be angry with me. If you don't appear before them they will not believe me and consider me as a liar. Please come out if only for once."

As the boy thus importuned in a piteous voice, there came a voice from afar, wafted over the air, "No, brother, I am not angry with you. I love you very much. But your teacher and others can't see Me. They are not yet fit to see me. You alone can see Me but not others."

All heard the Divine voice. The teacher's eyes were filled with tears. He embraced the boy and said, "Son, it is true. We are not pure enough to have a vision of the Lord. You are pure in mind and simple in faith. That is why you could get His darshan. We are to some extent lucky. We could hear His voice at least because of you. Thank you very much, my dear boy. Here after it will be my genuine aim to make myself as pure as you, so that one day I shall be fit to have the vision of the Lord."

Shibi, The Compassionate King

Once upon a time there lived a great king called Shibi. He was very kind and charitable and became very famous. His fame spread all over the earth and spread in the heavens too.

The lord of heaven Indra wanted to test and see if king Shibi was really as great as his fame proclaimed him to be.

So Indra and god Agni started from heaven. Agni assumed the form of a dove and Indra, of a fierce hawk. Agni flew in the front fluttering the wings as though terrified and Indra followed at a distance as if in hot pursuit. They straight flew to the palace of the king.

Shibi was in the garden distributing charities to the poor. The little fluttering frightened dove came and perched upon the wrist of Shibi looking at him with tearful eyes full of fear. Shibi immediately took her in his hands. Stroking her back kindly he said, "Fear not, O dove, I will save you from all harms."

Just as he was saying this, the hawk came angry and haughty and tried to snatch the dove away from the king's hands. But the king raised his hand in a flash and obstructed the hawk. The hawk looked at the king angrily and said, speaking like a human being, "This dove is my bird of prey. I had been pursuing it from the morning. Why do you obstruct me in having my food, O king?"

Surprised at hearing the hawk speak like a man, Shibi replied, "I do not know who you are, O hawk, who can thus speak like a man. This poor frightened dove has sought my shelter. It is my duty to protect her from all harm. I won't allow you to snatch her away from me and make her your prey."

The hawk then said, "Rajan, you are renowned as a kind one. Perhaps it is your duty to protect those in distress. But is your kindness limited only to the dove? What about me? Am I not equally entitled to claim your pity? I am a bird who can live only by eating the meat of small birds. By depriving me of my food are you not condemning me to die? Is this your dharma?"

King Shibi was non-plussed. The hawk could not only speak like a human being but also argue like one! Evidently his duty was towards both the dove and the hawk. He was very thoughtful. At last he said, "Hawk, what you say is true. I won't deprive you of your food. But at the same

time I can't give up this poor frightened dove. Will you accept if I give you some other flesh as a substitute?"

The hawk replied, "Very well king. I have no objection as long as my hunger is satisfied. But you must give me flesh exactly equal to that of the dove. I won't accept less." And he further mockingly added, "But where do you get substitute flesh from? Will you kill another life to save the life of this dove?"

Shibi hastily replied, "No, no, I won't think of harming another life, be sure. I will give you my own flesh in the place of the dove." He then turned to his attendant ordered them to bring a balance. The attendants accordingly brought the balance and erected it before the king. Shibi placed the dove on one side of the balance.

He took out his sword and cutting small portions of his flesh placed it on the other side. But strange! The dove which looked so small and frail in the pan could not outbalance it! King Shibi went on cutting portion after portion from his body and placing it in the balance.. Yet to no purpose... till at last no more flesh remained in his to cut. Wondering at the heaviness of the dove, Shibi then threw away the sword and himself mounted the balance. Lo, now the balance was quite equal. Rejoicing that he was at last able to give the hawk its due, Shibi turned to the hawk and said, "O hawk, my weight is equal to the weight of the dove. Please eat me and leave the dove."

As he said these words there was a cheering applause from the gods who gathered in the sky to witness the test. They beat the heavenly drums and showered flowers on the king. The hawk and the dove shed their assumed forms and stood before him in their shining glorious forms. Shibi looked at them in blank amazement.

Indra said, "O kindly king, know that we are Indra and Agni come down from heaven to test you. You have indeed proved yourself to be greater than your fame. You will be blessed with long life and vast riches. Your name will remain in the world as long as the sun and the moon remain."

So saying, Indra touched Shibi with his hand. Lo! All the cuts and wounds vanished from Shibi's body and he stood there as strong as ever. He bowed to the gods with great devotion, who blessed him and returned to their abodes.

Dhruva, The Firm

Long long ago there was a king called Uttanapada. He had two wives Suniti and Suruchi. Suniti had a son called Dhruva while Suruchi's son was called Uttama.

Suruchi was the younger wife full of charms and very very lovely. The king was therefore very much enamoured of her and always lived in her palace. He never visited Suniti's palace even once.

Dhruva and Uttama were equal in age, both five years old. So there was keen competition between them in all things. Though his father neglected him, Dhruva rushed to meet and be

with his father in the palace of Suruchi. Suruchi did not like is coming to her palace. For the fear of offending her, though he liked Dhruva, Uttanapada could not exhibit his love.

One day, when Dhruva reached the palace, Uttama was sitting on his father's lap saying something and mischievously laughing. Uttanapada was holding him tightly to his heart and saying endearing words. Dhruva rushed forward opening his arms wide to embrace his father and get on to his lap. But Suruchi was on the watch. She pulled Dhruva by the shoulder and asked, 'Where are you going, you chit?'

Dhruva tried to wriggle himself out of her hold but he could not. Flushed red in the face he replied, 'I want to sit on father's lap.'

Suruchi could not control her anger any longer. Raising her voice she shouted, 'Father's lap indeed! Who are you to sit on father's lap? Had you been so fortunate you would have been born to me like Uttama. Why were you born to your mother? Go.... go away from here and pray to God that you may be born to me at least in the next life.'

Stuck to the quick Dhruva looked at his father with tearful eyes. He hoped that his father would say something and console him. But no, Uttanapada didn't even glance at him. Poor Dhruva realised that his father had no love for him.

Sobbing aloud he turned back and ran to his mother. Suniti saw him from a distance and came out anxiously for Dhruva was a very good boy and he never wept for trifles. She held him close to her heart and wiping away the tears, asked lovingly, 'What happened my boy? Did anyone say anything to you? Have you been hurt?'

When consoled by his mother Dhruva's grief increased. He broke into loud weeping. Among sobs and hiccups he told her what passed in Suruchi's palace and asked, 'Why is my father so unloving, mother? Why is he not like all fathers? Everybody loves his own children. Why does my father neglect me? Will you not speak with him?'

Suniti shed bitter tears on hearing this and lamented, 'My unfortunate child it is as your aunty said. You were born to me because you are unlucky. The king loves only your aunty and does not love me all. Because of me you are also neglected. I am myself helpless. How can I help you, my poor child?'

Dhruva was sadder than ever. He hoped that his mother who was big could speak with his father and set the matters right. But here she was more miserable than himself. He rose to his feet and asked, 'Mother, tell me, is there no way to gain my father's love? Can no one help at all?'

Suniti looked into his eyes poor child, he appeared so sad and worried at his young age. She wiped her tears and tried to look brave. She said, 'My dear, there is only one who helps all helpless people in the world. He is the Lord Narayana. If you can get a vision of the Lord, all your troubles will be at an end.'

Dhruva's face brightened on hearing this. If there was anything on earth that he could do to gain his father's love he would be sure to do it! He eagerly asked, 'Mother, where is this Lord Narayana? How can I meet him? Will he listen to me or will he shove me off as father does?'

Suniti replied, "No, my boy, He will never do like that. He will be very kind and considerate and will grant you all that you ask."

Dhruva then and there made up his mind to go in search of the Lord and begged his mother very hard to allow him to do so. Poor Suniti! She was already feeling very forlorn by the neglect of her husband. Now here was her body intent upon to do Tapas for God. It was not possible even for great sages to get a vision of the Lord even after years of penance. What could this strip of a boy do? But Dhruva was inconsolable and insistent that he should win his father's love at any cost. She could pour out all her love on the boy and immerse him in it, but how could she get him the father's love for which he was thirsting? At last she had give in. She removed the princely dress of Dhruva and dressed him in clothes made of the bark of trees. "My darling, leave the kingdom and go into the forests. Sitting under a tree chant the Lord's name with all your mind. The Lord dearly loves those who love Him. Forget everything else and remember only Him. Then he will appear before you and give you what all you desire. May God be with you and protect you always." She embraced her son with tearful eyes and bade him farewell. Dhruva bowed to her and left for the forests.

The servants and attendants in the palace all gathered together and wept aloud when their young master thus left like an ascetic. There was not a single soul that day in the palace who did not curse Uttanpada and Suruchi for their heartless behaviour.

When any one seeks out God with a sincere heart, surely, God Himself will send His messengers to help him and put him on the path.

As Dhruva left the kingdom behind and was slowly walking towards the forest, Narada accosted him and asked, "Son, you are very young barely five years. Who are you? Why are you wearing clothes made of tree bark? The kingdom is behind you and the path you are going by now will only lead you to the forest. Don't you know that there will be fierce animals in the jungles. Come, I will take you back to your parents."

There was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu who is called Narada. He is the son of the Creator, Brahma. Therefore he is called the Devarshi, the sage of the gods. He knew what all happened anywhere in the three worlds and was always going round the worlds with his veena in his hands singing joyously Lord Narayana's name. He knew all about Dhruva and his going to the forests. He wanted to see if Dhruva was firm in his determination to do tapas for the Lord; and if he was, he would help him in doing the tapas.

Dhruva did not know who Narada was. But he was a good boy brought up by his mother in good traditions. He bowed at the feet of the sage with great devotion and told him his full story. He concluded saying, 'O Mahatma, I will do tapas in the forest until Lord Narayana gives me a vision and my father's love.'

Narada made light of Dhruva's words and laughing said, "My dear boy, is it only a man's love that you are in need of? Come, I will take you to great kings who are nicer than your father and

will love you dearly. Who will not like a dear child like you? Think of your mother .. how lonely and forlorn she must be feeling! Go back to her. She will be most happy to see you. Don't go to forest. Even grown-ups can't live there. It is not easy to do tapas."

But Dhruva was very firm in his determination. He could not be dissuaded from his purpose. "Of what use is the love of others to me O Maharshi, if my own father scorns me? My mother herself is very much neglected by my father. If I gain my father's love, she will also benefit by it. I am not afraid of the forests. My mother told me that no harm will come to a person who relies on the Lord."

Seeing Dhruva thus firm in his purpose, Narada was very happy. He blessed the boy and said, "Dhruva, verily Lord Narayana Himself is inspiring you. You go straight along this road till you reach the sacred river Yamuna. On her banks is the forest called Madhuvana which is very suitable for tapas. You live in the forest. Take a bath in the river and worship the Lord sitting under a tree in the forest." He then drew the boy near him and whispered the Narayana Mantra in his ears. 'Om Namoh Narayana!' As he heard the Mantra, there was a thrill in Dhruva. Narada advised him to do japa of the Mantra contiguously, forgetting everything else. "O Dhruva, drive the thoughts of your parents, of your father's neglect, your aunty's cruelty and your mother's sorrow. Concentrate on the Lord alone. He will surely appear before you soon." Dhruva respectfully prostrated before the sage and went towards the Yamuna river.

Narada's mission did not stop with this. He was very kind by nature and always wanted to help wherever sorrow and misery prevailed. He was sure that Uttanapada must be repenting for his callousness by now, for he was a nice man though too much enamoured of his younger wife. As expected, Uttanapada was in great distress. He came to know through his servants that Dhruva left for forests dressed like an ascetic and he sorely blamed himself for his heartless conduct.

So when Uttanapada saw Devarshi Narada coming to the palace, he greatly rejoiced for, a Mahatma's darshan indicated auspicious occurrences. He came outside the palace to greet the sage. Prostrating before him with great devotion he led the sage inside and worshipping him in due manner, he unburdened his heart before him. Narada consoled him saying, "Don't worry, king. Your son is not an ordinary person. He will succeed and will return safely after gaining the vision of the Lord. He will not only become famous but will also perpetuate your name. Now be kind and loving to your senior wife who is quite forlorn because of Dhruva's departure." Thus saying he disappeared from there.

In Madhuvana Dhruva carried on severe austerities. He gave up food and immersed himself in japa throughout the day. In the first month he ate one or two fruit once in three days. In the second month he ate only a few leaves once in six days. In the third month he drank a little water once in nine days. In the fourth month he opened his mouth once in twelve days and swallowed only a little air. In the fifth month he stopped even that and stood on one foot like an immovable post and continued japa with all his mind set on Lord Narayana.

Such a terrible austerity in so small a child moved the three worlds. The intensity of the tapas created such a heat that even the gods in heaven could not withstand it. They all went in a deputation to Lord Narayana in Vaikuntha and said, "O Lord, we are being burnt up by the intensity of Dhruva's tapas. Please rescue us from it."

Lord Narayana was reclining on the cobra bed with Lakshmi Devi at His feet. He smiled and said, "Yes, I know. Dhruva's tapas has reached the culmination. I will give him a vision now." So saying He got up. Garutmanta, His bird chariot who always knew what his master wanted even before he spoke out, was ready at the gate as Lord Narayana reached there. Seated upon the eagle chariot Sri Vishnu flew faster than wind and reached Madhuvana in no time. Dhruva was standing one foot with eyes closed and doing japa intensely.

Lord Narayana stood before Dhruva and called aloud, "My child Dhruva, I am very much pleased with your tapas. I give you whatever you pray for. Open your eyes and see me."

Dhruva heard the words of the Lord but did not open his eyes. Instead, he said, "O Great God, excuse me if I don't obey your orders immediately. During these five months I heard such voices many times and thinking that you have come, I opened my eyes, but I found that it was only a trick of my mind. My mother said that you are everywhere within and without of all beings. If you have really come please appear before my mind so that I can be sure that you have really come."

The Lord smiled at Dhruva's words and lo, He appeared before his mind's eye in His effulgent form. Dhruva hastily opened his eyes... lo, in front of him was the Lord's form same as that which appeared in his mind..... shining like a thousand suns, with four hands holding a lotus, mace, conch shell and discus. He had a glittering jewel on His chest and sweet smelling garland around His neck. Dhruva hurriedly prostrated to Sri Maha Vishnu. He wanted to praise the Lords but as he was only a small boy, he did not know what to speak.

Knowing his predicament Sri Maha Vishnu touched him with the conch shell and Dhruva suddenly found that words were flowing out of him. "O Madhava, Mukunda, Govinda, Narayana, even the Creator with his four faces cannot describe your glory. Can, I a mere child, describe you? You are the Creator, Sustainer and Annihilator of all the worlds. By you men live, act and think. By gaining your vision, your devotees gain all things in the world."

Lord Narayana was very much pleased with Dhruva's words. "O child, your father and all others will love you dearly hereafter. Go back to your kingdom. You will become a great king and rule over the kingdom for a long time. You will perpetuate your name on earth. After your life on the earth is over you will become the Dhruva star that will shine brightly in the sky. All the great planets and even the seven great Rishis will whirl round you. The whole world will look up to you for guidance in the nights."

So saying Lord Narayana blessed Dhruva and vanished. Dhruva was happy beyond words and quickly returned to the kingdom. Lo, even as he approached the kingdom, he could see his father, mother, aunty, Uttama and the entire kingdom and waiting for him on the outskirts of the city. Uttanapada rushed forward to take Dhruva into his arms and shed tears of joy and repentance. His mother, now a favourite queen, shed tears of joy and fondly embraced him. There was great rejoicing throughout the kingdom for a number of days in honor of his return.

In time Dhruva grew up to be a mighty king and ruled over a big kingdom for long and lived happily with his wife and children. After his life on earth was completed, he flew to the sky. As he was firm in his tapas, so is he in the sky. He never changes his position in the sky and all the other stars including the seven Maharshis go round and round him throughout the year. That is

why he is called the Polar star. Sailors and travellers in strange places look up to him for knowing their directions in the nights.

Parichay of Hindus Dieties

(Note: Please take pictures of all these deities while talking on this topic and make it interactive.)

Brahma

The creator god appears seated on a lotus (a symbol of glorious existence), He has four heads and hands. Each hand is holding a sacrificial tool (sruva), the Vedas (knowledge), a water pot (kamandalu) and a rosary respectively. His vehicle is a swan (hans) which is known for its judgment between good and bad.

Vishnu

The preserver god of the Trinity has four hands. The first holds a conch shell (sankha) indicating spread of the divine sound "Om"; one holds a discus (chakra), a reminder of the wheel of time, and to lead a good life; one holds a lotus (Padma) which is an example of glorious existence and the fourth hands holds a mace (gada) indicating the power and the punishing capacity of the Lord if discipline in life is ignored.

His vehicle is the swift-flying bird Garuda. He rests on the bed of the powerful, coiled serpent, Seshanag, who represents the sleeping universe. Lord Vishnu is also known as Hari.

Shiva

Lord Shiva appears in a meditating but ever-happy posture. He has matted hair, which holds the flowing Ganga river and a crescent moon, a serpent coiled around his neck, a trident (trishul) in his one hand and ashes all over his body. He is known as the "giver" god. His vehicle is a bull (symbol of happiness and strength) named Nandi. Shiva-Linga, a sign of the Lord, is worshipped in temples.

Saraswati

She is the wife of Lord Brahma and is the Goddess of speech, wisdom and learning. She has sacred scriptures in one hand and a lotus (a symbol of true knowledge) in the second. With her other two hands she plays the music of love and life on the veena. She is dressed in white (sign of purity) and rides on a white swan.

Lakshmi

She is the wife of Lord Vishnu and is the goddess of prosperity, purity, chastity and generosity.

Parvati or Durga

She is the wife of Lord Shiva and exists in various divine (both friendly and fearful) forms. Two of her fierce but very powerful forms are Durga and Kali. Both have eight hands and great power and energy (Shakti). Durga rides on a lion. Parvati was called Sati in her previous divine incarnation. The family of Lord Shiva, Parvati and their sons Ganesha and Kartikeya is an ideal example of family unity and love. She has a charming personality. She is adored by married women for a happy married life.

Ganesha (Ganapati)

This god of knowledge and the remover of obstacles is also the older son of Lord Shiva. Lord Ganesha is also called Vinayak (knowledgable) or Vighneshwer (god to remove obstacles). He is worshipped, or at least remembered, in the beginning of any auspicious performance for blessings and auspiciousness. He has four hands, elephant's head and a big belly. His vehicle is a tiny mouse. A unique combination of his elephant-like head and a quick moving tiny mouse vehicle represents tremendous wisdom, intelligence, and presence of mind.

Kartikeya

Kartikeya, the second son of Lord Shiva, is also known as Subramaniam and represents a person of perfection. The Lord's vehicle is a peacock which is capable of destroying harmful serpents (symbolizing bad qualities of people).

Hanuman

Hanuman is a noble hero and great devotee of Lord Rama of the Ramayana. This deity is a provider of courage, hope, knowledge, intellect and devotion. He is also called Mahaveera (the great hero) or Pavan-suta (son of air)

Venkateshvara

Venkateshvara is another form of Lord Vishnu who is also very popular as a Hindu deity. He is also known as Balaji. He has a dark complexion and four hands. In his two upper hands he holds a discus (a symbol of power) and a conch shell. With his lower hands extended downward he asks devotees to have faith and surrender to him for protection.

Rama

Lord Rama is one of the most commonly adored gods of Hindus and is known as an ideal man and hero of the epic Ramayana. He is always holding a bow and arrow indicating his readiness to destroy evils. He is also called "Shri Rama". More commonly he is pictured in a family style, (Ram Parivar) with his wife Sita, brother Lakshmana and devotee Hanuman who is sitting near Lord Rama's feet.

Krishna

Because of his great godly power, Lord Krishna is another of the most commonly worshipped deities in the Hindu faith. He, like Lord Rama, is also known for his bravery in destroying evil

powers throughout his life. The Lord is usually depicted as playing the flute (murali), indicating spread of the melody of love to people.

The Lord is usually remembered and worshipped as Radha-Krishna. The pair symbolizes the eternal love between people and god. Lord Krishna is also shown with his pet cow, his childhood favorite. Lord Krishna performed many divine sports (leela) as a child.

Markandeya

Mrikandu was a great rishi. Marudvati was his wife. For a long time they had no children.

The rishi prayed to God Siva. God Siva appeared to him, and said, "I am pleased with you, Mrikandu. Tell me, do you want a hundred sons, who will live for a long time, but will all be foolish?"

Or, do you want one very intelligent son, who will live for only sixteen years?"

The rishi at once said, "God, give me that one intelligent son."

God Siva said, "Good! You shall have him."

Soon the rishi got a son. He named him Mrkandeya. The boy grew to be very intelligent and handsome. The rishi invested him with the sacred thread. Markandeya learnt the Vedas and Sastras, easily. Every one liked him.

As the boy was getting on to be sixteen, Rishi Mrikandu became sadder and sadder. One day Markandeya asked his father: "Father, why do you look so sad?"

The rishi said, "Son! What shall I say? When God Siva gave you to me, he said you would live only sixteen years. You are now about to reach that age. How can I and your mother bear to lose you as we will at the end of this year?"

Markandeya said, "Father! Is that the reason? God Siva is very kind to His devotees. You yourself told me that. He has saved many from death before. I have read about it in the Puranas. I shall therefore worship God Siva day and night from today. I am sure, He will save - me too! "

Rishi Mrikandu was very happy to hear his son say this. He blessed his son.

Markandeya built a Siva-Linga at a spot on the sea-shore. He started worshipping Siva morning, noon and night. He sang bhajans, and often danced in joy. On the last day, Markandeya was about to sing bhajans, when Yama, the God of Death, came to him. Yama rode on a buffalo. He held a noose in his hand. He spoke to Markandeya, "Stop your bhajan! you boy! Your life in this world is over. Be ready to die."

Markandeya was not afraid. He clung to the Siva-Linga as one clings to one's mother.

Yama threw his noose round the boy's neck, and pulled him along with the Siva- Linga.

Then the Siva-Linga burst open and God Siva came out of it, and said, "Yama, go away! Don't touch this boy. He is my beloved devotee. He will live for ever!"

Yama went away crest-fallen. Markandeya then prayed to God Siva more fervently than ever. This prayer says at the end of each line, "What can Death do to me?" Many people recite this prayer even now.

Markandeya came home, and fell at the feet of his parents. They embraced him, and wept with joy.

Markandeya became a great rishi, and lived very long.

Story Telling Competition

You can leave the selection of stories to the children. Give 3 weeks advance notice about this event and make sure that the parents take active interest in preparing their children. If any one requires help in stories, you can provide them with some of the material in this book or any Amar-chitra-katha book.

Reward each child for participating. A certificate and a small story book is useful. Special books can be given as prizes.

Sudhama

God Krishna had in his student days a classmate, who was very poor. His name was Sudhama. Krishna became king of Dwaraka later on.

Sudhama remained a poor householder. He had many children. He was, however, a good-loving man.

Everyday Sudhama went out singing bhajans in the streets. People gave him handfuls of rice. He came home and gave the rice to his wife. She cooked it. Sudhama first offered the food of God. Next he gave part of it to his guests. Then he fed his children. The husband and wife ate what remained.

Sudhama never stored food for the next day. He was sure God would feed him everyday, as He had always fed him.

When the children grew up, the alms Sudhama brought were not enough. On some days they had to go without food. Sudhama had no fine clothes to wear. He was in rags. So people called him 'Kuchela'. It means a man with torn clothes.

One day Sudhama's wife said to him: "Lord! Why don't you meet Krishna? You were at school together. He will surely help us!"

Sudhama had been wanting to see his friend Krishna, not for money, but for the joy of meeting a beloved friend.

When we go to see a baby, a great man or God in a temple we must not go without gifts. We must take with us some sweets as a token of affection or respect. Sudhama took what his wife could give him-a small package of beaten rice. They were that poor.

Sudhama walked all the way to Dwaraka. When he reached Krishna's palace, he went in. Krishna saw him from a distance. At once he rushed out and met Sudhama at the gate. He gave him a great welcome. He embraced him. He washed Sudhama's feet. He took him to his room, and seated him on a silken cot. Krishna's wife Rukmini gently fanned Sudhama. The maids-in-waiting gave him plenty of sweet food and delicious drink in golden vessels.

Sudhama had never seen such a beautiful palace of such riches. No one had ever treated him so nicely before. So he did not even know how to thank Krishna for the hospitality.

After Sudhama had taken a rest, Krishna spoke to him of their student days and about their teacher, Sandipani.

At last Krishna said to him: "Are you married? How many children have you?" Sudhama nodded his head shyly, meaning to say that he was happy and content. "I am sure you have brought something for me to eat," said Krishna suddenly.

Sudhama was ashamed to take out the package of beaten rice. But Krishna saw the bag and pulled it out. Taking a handful from and putting it in his mouth, he said: "How nice of your wife to have sent this to me?" Then he ate two more handfuls.

After spending the day happily at Dwaraka, Sudhama took leave of Krishna, and walked back to his village.

He completely forgot to ask for any gift of favor of Krishna.

On the way he was thinking how loyal and generous Krishna had been.

When Sudhama reached home, a great miracle waited for him there.

There was a grand palace where his old home had been. Many servants went about doing all kinds of work. His wife stood before him. She wore a costly sari and had golden ornaments on! All his children wore gorgeous clothes. He could not believe his eyes.

Sudhama's wife said: "It all happened by the grace of Krishna."

Sudhama worshipped Krishna with greater devotion than ever before.

Everything happens for Good.

In one of India's little kingdoms of long ago there lived a King who (like most of them) was fond of hunting in wild places. His Chief Advisor was a very intelligent man, and also a very optimistic one. He was famous for seeing the rosy side of things. In fact, so strong was his habit of finding good in everything that at times this annoyed his ruler.

One day when the King and his Advisor were on a hunting trip through a dense jungle which went on for miles, the King decided to have a fresh coconut for his breakfast, and, finding a coconut tree near at hand, with his sword cut down a coconut. But as luck would have it, his sword slipped in his hand and came crashing down on one of his toes, cutting it off! Limping over to his Advisor with loud shouts of pain, he was terribly shocked to hear the latter say, "Ah, that's wonderful!"

"What?!" yelled the King; "I cut off my toe and you say it is wonderful?"

"This is a real blessing," replied the Advisor. By now the King was furious, thinking the man was making fun of him.

"Take it from me," said his Advisor, "behind this apparent bad accident there is some good which we cannot now see." That was it! The King had noticed a dry well nearby, and being a strong man, he picked up his companion and just threw him into that well. Then he set out to limp back to his fortified town and castle.

This meant, however, walking through dense jungle, frequented by the wild tribes of those days, some of whom were headhunters. On his way the King met a band of those headhunters, who decided that, being royalty, he would make an excellent sacrifice for this month's festival. As you may imagine, the King did not feel at all honored by this decision. The warriors carried him to the tribal priest. It was the duty of this priest to approve all of the offerings that were to be presented. The priest was most particular to see that the item to be offered to the gods was perfect in all respects. While anointing the King's body the priest noticed that he was lacking one toe.

"I am sorry," he told the King, "but we cannot use you after all for this holy sacrifice. The gods will not accept anyone who is not whole-bodied. You will have to go." Naturally the King was delighted and began hobbling away toward his palace. Aha! he thought, so his Advisor had been right -- there was indeed a hidden blessing behind that accident. As fast as his wounded leg would allow, he turned around and went back to the well where he had left his counselor. There he was, standing down in the well and whistling happily to himself.

Now the king managed to reach down far enough to grasp the hand of the Advisor and with great effort to pull him up. Then he apologized for having doubted him and having thought him a fool.

"Oh how sorry I am that I threw you in there," said the King as he dusted off his courtier. "I was taken prisoner by some wild native headhunters who were about to make me a sacrifice victim. Then they saw that my toe was missing, and let me go. And you foretold all this, in a way. Can you ever forgive me?"

"You need not apologize at all; it was a blessing that you threw me down the well and left me there."

"Now, how are you going to make something positive out of that?" queried the King.

"Well," said the other, "if I had been with you they would surely have taken me for their sacrifice."

Arts and Crafts can be done more than once in a year. On special occasions like Diwali and Ganesh Chaturthi, appropriate art work can be done.

'Akash-Kandil' can be prepared during Diwali time and clay modeling of Ganesh for Ganesh Chaturthi.

Following site gives a description of making 'akash-Kandil'.

http://www.navneet.com/fun_zone/doityourself/25oct1999/doityourself25oct1999.html

Other good sites for arts and crafts are: Pitara.com and netfundu.com

Make a Kandil for Diwali

Make your own lanterns to brighten up your home this diwali. It is very easy and fun to make! Follow our simple instructions and use colors of your choice to make the kandil look the way you want it to.

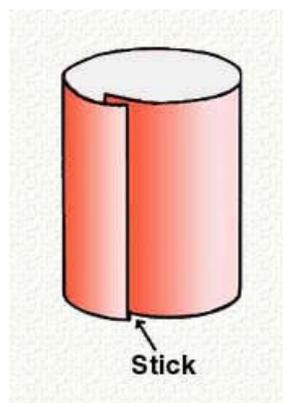
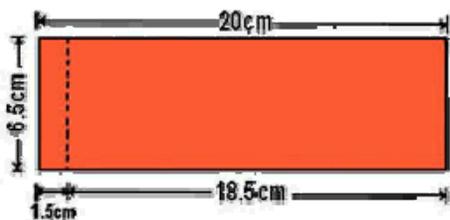
Form a roll with a sheet of cardboard 20cm x 6.5cm.

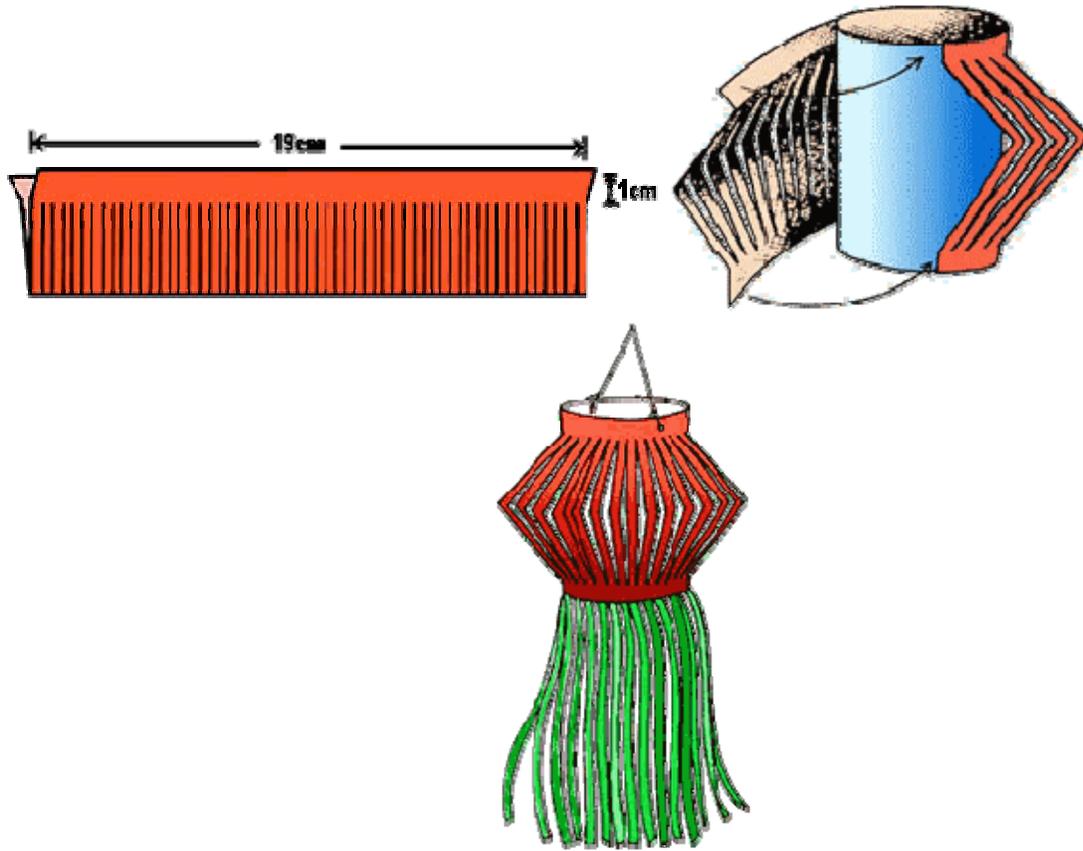
Take a colored tinted paper 19cm x 8.5cm and fold it in half.

Make parallel cuts at a distance of about 0.4cm as shown, leaving a margin of 1cm.

Now unfold and paste the margins along the upper and the lower edges of the cylinder.

For extra decoration, cut a sheet of thin colored paper 19cm x 19cm, as shown, leaving a margin of 1cm. Stick it along the lower edge of the lantern.





Sri Krishna's Stories

There are many stories from the life of Sri Krishna. The childhood stories and those of adventure make a very interesting story telling for children. We can tell these stories for many weeks.

Please refer to this site

<http://hindumythology.com/bhagvata.htm>

for a collection of Sri Krishna's stories from Bala-Bhagavatam.

The Story Of Rantideva

Those were the glorious days in ancient India when men were honest and truthful and kings were ever engaged in striving for the welfare of their people. In such times there once lived a king whose name was Rantideva. He had a large and generous heart and every being came within his embrace of love for he saw Lord Hari in every living creature.

Rantideva was always making gifts to the poor and the needy. He said to himself, "The Lord gives me all these things in plenty. Should I then sit back and enjoy them when so many mouths of Sri Hari are yet to be fed? I shall not be in want, because He has made me His blessings in the world."

And sure enough, he would always have plenty of food and clothing to distribute. The king was famous in the world for his warm hospitality which he extended to rich and poor alike. Whenever anyone was in trouble, he would go to the king. And whenever Rantideva was of service to anyone, he would feel that it was a service unto Sri Hari. Thus he gave a mother's love to his people. Like a child runs to its mother with its troubles, hurts and pains, so too his

subjects would go to him. He would try to remove the cause of their sorrow and if he was unable to do so, it would pain him immensely.

Thus passed many years of prosperity and people basked in the generous love of their king.

But then a time came when the country was hit by famine. The crops failed, the cattle died and men, women and children starved in large numbers. They flocked to the gates of the king's palace. Rantideva would sit and pray, "O Lord, give me the strength to remove their suffering." Then he would go out and distribute to his people what little he had left. And yet the famine continued. In fact it grew worse from day to day. And there was a time when he did not have enough to eat for himself. He could not even feed his family. For none of the members of his household ate unless the masses had been fed. Sometimes there would be food for them, but the king would have to go hungry. Nevertheless, he was happy, because his mind was satisfied when his people were fed. As the conditions grew worse, he did not have anything left to give to the hungry and the starving. No help came to him. And yet his faith in Sri Hari only increased. Day after day, the king and his dependents starved and the famine persisted.

When the king had thus fasted for forty-eight days, someone brought him a bowl of porridge made of flour, milk and ghee. By this time the king was in no position to even move, so weak had he become due to continuous starvation. Overcome by hunger and thirst, Rantideva and his family were indeed glad to see an unexpected meal before them. They were about to eat when there came to the door, a wrinkled old Brahmin, much in need of food. The king received him respectfully and gave him some of the porridge to eat. As they were about to eat again, a beggar came to the door. His face appeared pinched with hunger, so Rantideva gave him too, some of the meal to eat. Then there came a sweeper and he brought with him his dogs. He looked at the king pitifully and said, "Maharaj! My dogs and I have not had any food for many days now. We are starving for want of food. Now we have come to you, for if you will not help us, who will?" So the king gave him the remaining porridge.

Now the king and his family had again no food to eat. There was just a little drink left. Just then, came a Chandala, his throat parched with thirst, his eyes heavy with exhaustion. He begged the King to moisten his dry lips with a little bit of water. Rantideva saw him as yet another form of Sri Hari and held the cup to his cracked lips. He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please, Lord! I do not care for the rewards of this earth. Nor do I care for powers of any kind. My only prayer is - give me the capacity to feel the pain of others and the power to serve them. Let me not ever be indifferent to their sorrows and their sufferings. Make me Thy instrument to give them relief, to make them happy."

The man drank the water. The sparkle of life came back into his eyes. And wonderfully enough, the king felt his own hunger, thirst and fatigue dropping away from him. He felt refreshed and fulfilled, as a hungry man is after a good and satisfying meal. Suddenly there appeared before him Maya and all her attendants. She smiled at him and said, "O King, I am indeed pleased to see your devotion and your extraordinary love for your people. You have suffered much. If you worship me now, I can remove all your wants for all time to come. I can give you the riches and the entire wealth of the world."

Rantideva showed them due respect, but only as the different forms of Hari. He asked Maya for nothing, for his mind was absorbed in Sri Hari. He said to her, "I have no use for all the riches

you have to offer me. I have no wish to live any longer than I have to. I do not hanker for the enjoyments of the world, because my mind does not run after them."

And Maya, the queen of the world, the mistress of all beings, the consort of Sri Vishnu, fled from his presence with her whole retinue of attendants. She vanished like a dream does when a person awakes.

Then Rantideva was blessed by the presence of the Lord Himself. He worshipped Him and prayed that he might never be separated from Him. In time, Rantideva became one of the greatest yogis of the land. He merged himself in meditation. By his wonderful service to his people and his love for all living creatures whom he worshipped as Sri Hari, he attained the blissful Being of Lord Narayana.



Bhasmasura

Way up in the Himalayas, where the snow never melts, there once sat a Rakshasa performing severe penance. He was a devotee of Lord Siva and had spent many, many hundreds of years, with no thought for food or clothe, heat or cold, sun or snow, sitting there, his mind fixed on Lord Siva. "Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva." His name was Bhasmasura.

After ages had passed thus, Siva decided to bless him. So, one day, as Bhasmasura was meditating, the Lord appeared before him. He was shining like the morning sun. He was the supreme ascetic, dressed in deer skin, body smeared with ashes, locks matted, the snakes dangling around his neck and arms, his hand holding aloft the divine Trishul. Ah, what a magnificent sight he made in all his ascetic glory! Bhasmasura's eyes were dazzled. He was speechless with wonder at the Lord's beautiful form: "Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva."

Gently Siva spoke to the awe-struck Bhasmasura. He said, "I am pleased with the severe penance you have performed. Ask of me any boon you desire." And Bhasmasura thought, "I must indeed be a great Tapasvi, as Lord Siva has granted me a boon." Aloud he said, "Lord, grant that whatever object I touch with my right hand will be immediately reduced to ashes." "Siva-Siva." Bhasmasura, even after going through such rigorous penance, yet, had an asuric mind. "Siva-Siva." What a boon to ask for! Lord Siva said, "Tathaastu! - so be it."

Then at once Bhasmasura said, "Lord, you have granted me the boon alright, but how will I know it is true? Once you disappear now, I will not be able to get you for the next few hundred years perhaps. I would like to test your boon. This is a mountainous, snowy area. For miles around there is no object that can be touched. Therefore, come forward. I will touch your head and see if what you say is true."

"Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva."

The wicked Rakshasa thought that once I burn up Lord Siva's head there will be nobody greater than I.

A panic arose in Siva's heart. He knew that if he complied with Bhasmasura's request he would surely turn to ashes. And if he was no more, the world would come to a chaotic end. Yet, once having granted a boon, how could he take it back? There was only one way out of his sticky situation-he would have to run!

And run he did. Clutching his trident, he ran as fast as his legs would carry him. He ran over mountain and down valleys, he crossed rivers and lakes, he ran across vast plains and fields, he passed peaceful ashramas and huts, he ran through dark, dense forests and light, cheerful woods-with Bhasmasura never far behind! "Siva-Siva."

What a strange sight it was! The Lord of the Universe running for his life! Pursued by an evil-minded Rakshasa! The hearts of the birds fluttered as they twittered away from tree-tops. The animals stared with huge startled eyes as they scampered away out of the way. And the chase went on - Siva, panic stricken, panting ahead; Bhasmasura, thirsting to rest his unintelligent boon, close on his heels!

Siva was now getting out of breath. The chase had been long and tiring. Yet, what could he do? He had to press on. But he was beginning to feel that unless something happened soon, Bhasmasura would have his way.

At this time Visnu was in Vaikuntha watching this unusual occurrence with amused interest. He thought that Siva had been sufficiently punished for carelessly granting such a boon. It was time now to go and help him. After all, were they not the very best of friends? "Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva."

Siva had just turned round the shoulder of a mountain and Bhasmasura had not yet reached the bend. Visnu transformed himself into a delightful maiden, soft, shy and beautiful and stood at the bend. As Bhasmasura came panting up, hot in Siva's pursuit, this girl Mohini, gently caught his hand and said, "Maharaj! You look very tired indeed. Why are you running so fast? Come, my father's ashrama is not far away. Come and rest there a bit. Take some refreshment. Then you will feel fresh enough to start with renewed vigour."

Bhasmasura shook off her hand impatiently and said, "O, let me go. That wretched Siva will get away. I want to touch his head with my right hand so he will be burnt to ashes and I can then become Lord of the three worlds."

He was about to run ahead when he saw, really saw, Mohini for the first time. The image soon filled his eyes. Her lovely black tresses, her smooth fair brow, her large, soft, doe-like eyes and her small delicate mouth-he looked at the shapely wrist and fingers resting lightly on her arm, her lissom body, her fair feet with tinkling anklets and he forgot all about Siva and his boon. He looked Mohini up and down, not twice, but over and over again. Desire was planted in his heart. "Siva-Siva."

He lunged forward to catch her, but Mohini quickly stepped back. Then Bhasmasura said, "You are so very beautiful, Mohini. I want you to be my bride. Will you marry me?"

Mohini gave a rippling little laugh. She said, "Maharaj, how can I trust you? The man I marry must never have another wife. Once he marries me, he should never marry again. But you

Rakshasas have so many, many wives. No, it cannot be." Saying this, she let out a long, wistful sigh.

Bhasmasura, now crazy with desire, said, "Mohini, I cross my heart I shall not marry again. I promise you that if you become my wife I will not so much as look at another woman. Please, please give your consent to marry me."

Mohini looked at Bhasmasura and then looked modestly away. "O, you men. I know you are all the same. "Siva-Siva." You are none of you to be trusted. Promises! Promises!! But you never stick to them. No, I shall not be satisfied till you place your hand on your head and swear that you will not marry again if I become your wife."

Bhasmasura now thoroughly caught up in this net of Maya, quickly touched his head with his right hand. "Mohini, I swear - " he began. But he never lived even to complete his sentence. For, the moment he placed his hand on his head, he burnt into a heap of ashes. "Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva."

Siva was still heaving and panting as he ran along. He looked nervously over his shoulder to see how close Bhasmasura was to him. But for quite a distance behind he saw no Bhasmasura. Strange! What could have happened? He could not have sat down to rest. He had tremendous energy and did not tire easily. For some time Siva waited where he was. But still there was no sign of Bhasmasura.

So, he retraced his steps and reached that very bend. He saw there a huge heap of ashes and the most beautiful girl standing there next to it. He asked her if she knew what had happened to Bhasmasura. Very modestly, she narrated all that had happened.

Siva was very pleased with her timely assistance. Above all he was pleased the way she praised him-"Lord, I saw you running and sensed your distress. I saw you were in need of help. Had Bhasmasura caught up with you and placed his hand on your head, where would have been the poor creatures of this earth? Therefore, I tricked him into placing his hand on his own head by asking him to swear that he would never marry anyone else if I agreed to marry him. I did this all for your sake, my Lord," Thus saying she folded her hands and bowed her head.

Siva beamed. He made to embrace her. But she slipped from his arms. Bewildered he looked. There was no sign of Mohini anywhere. Instead, there stood the beautiful resplendent form of the Four-armed Lord Visnu. The corners of His mouth lifted in a slow smile.

Siva smiled too, as he realized that once again the Supreme Protector of the Universe had run to the aid of the good and manoeuvred the destruction of the evil.

"Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva, Siva-Siva."



Resources for Bala-Gokulam

www.balagokulam.org	All about Bala-Gokulam
www.hssworld.org	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh
www.hindukids.org	Stories, Books, Pictures and more ...
www.atributetoHinduism.com	Excellent article, Quotes, etc.
www.hindunet.org	Everything you need about Hinduism
http://www.hindubooks.org/bansi_pandit/hindu_dharma/	"Hindu Dharma" by Bansi Pandit
www.hindumythology.com	Stories from Hindu Puranas and more
www.hindubooks.org	Online Books on Hinduism
http://www.hindubooks.org/hinduqa/index.htm	Hinduism through Q&A
www.divinedawn.org/surya_namaskar.htm	All about Sun God. Gayatri mantra, Surya Namaskar, etc.
www.hindunet.org/festivals/	Hindu festivals, Dates, etc.
www.bhajans.org/	Bhajans Online
www.hindutwa.com/	Well researched material about Hindu culture, history, etc.
www.hanuman.com	All about Hanumanji
www.mysticindia.com/yoga/postures.htm	Yogasana Postures
www.tandurusti.com/	Yoga, Exercises, Naturopathy
www.santosha.com/asanas/asana.html	Yogasana
Hindunet.org/hindu_pictures/	Hindu Pictures
www.hindukids.org/grandpa/index_panchatantra.html	Panchatantra Stories
www.hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/india_contribution/index.html	Ancient India's Contribution
www.freeindia.org/biographies/	Biographies of Great People
www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/arjuna/	"Arise Arjuna" by Dr.David Frawley
www.hindubooks.org/hinduism_simplified/hinduism_simplified_questions.html	"Hinduism Simplified"
www.geocities.com/SoHo/Lofts/6834/	Hindu Pictures
sanskrit.gde.to/	All Stotras, Subhashitas and other Sanskrit Documents
www.pitara.com	Stories, coloring, arts, humor for children
www.netfundu.com	Riddles, tricks, coloring, humor, etc.

Besides web resources, there are many good books. Please contact balagokulam@hssworld.org to get the list and also to get information about how to order them for your Bala-Gokulam library.