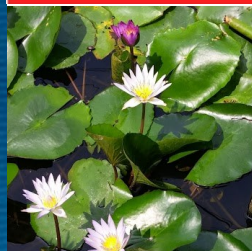




Gitanjali 2017

An Ohmkaram Publication



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From the desk of Gitanjali's editorial team:

Another year has gone whooshing by and our Ohmkaram family has grown. As we release this latest edition of Gitanjali we would like to say that it is inspiring to see kids and adults submitting their articles and artwork. Gitanjali gives all of us an opportunity to experiment our creative skills of writing, painting, poetry etc. while exploring our literary and artistic talents.

We whole-heartedly appreciate the efforts taken by each of you in contributing to our souvenir. Publishing Gitanjali involves soliciting articles, editing, proof reading, and printing. In the end, it is extremely gratifying to see the outcome of all of our combined efforts.

The highlight of this year's souvenir is the contributions by *Ohmkaram men* towards the cover page content. The men have been very creative and have come up with some interesting stories and experiences about places in Kerala which hold fond & nostalgic memories in their hearts. See if any of it brings back your memories.

Articles on Hinduism, meditation give us a good understanding of our roots. The photo pages are another attraction that takes us back to the moments of togetherness we enjoyed this year. Do look for intellectual articles written by our youth members. In the current times of electronic extravaganza, it is heartwarming to see a bunch of contributions from our younger generation, the kids.

Through the years, via advertisements Gitanjali has also become a source of revenue for our organization. Thanks to the voluntary fund-raising efforts of our advertising team, this souvenir is made possible by the generous support of our advertisers. Please continue to support them.

It has been a great experience working with the editorial team. We have had few additions to the team this year, and we hope the team continues to grow. As we functioned as a team, we also discovered benefits from this mutually enriching experience. Thank you for giving us this opportunity and hope that this tradition of publishing Gitanjali continues into the future.

Lastly, we would like to thank the current President Suraj Alakkassery and the Executive Committee for supporting us. Enjoy your this edition of Gitanjali!

The Editorial Team



Suraj Alakkassery



Pramod Nambudiri



Vinay & Kavita Menon



Vinod Menon



Anoop Kadungath



Anjana Prayaga



Raj Unni

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Dear Ohmkaram Members,



It was an honor and privilege to be the President of Ohmkaram for the year 2017. It was the Ohmkaram's Onam celebration at Gandhi center in 2011, to which me and my 6 year old son - Omkaar walked into, just to enjoy the Onam sadhya. It was Ohmkaram's mission to promote the rich Kerala Hindu Culture and traditional values that motivated me to become a part of the organization. Since then I had various opportunities to serve Ohmkaram as the treasurer, as editor of Gitanjali, and as Vice president before becoming the President. I thank every member of Ohmkaram for bestowing me the opportunity. I thank every committee member who dedicated hours of their personal life voluntarily and worked for realization of Ohmkaram's mission. I also thank every Board member whose guidance was invaluable.

Ohmkaram in 2017, as in the past years, continued its consistent growth. It started with Anniversary celebration in January. The Onam and Vishu celebrations were grandiose. Picnic was lot of fun with games, food and bar-be-que. The various variety programs for Onam and Vishu celebrations, performed by children and members, with hours of practice were all amazing. Its quality and standard has raised the bars to new higher levels. Vallomkali - the Boat race, this year too was a grand success.

Ohmkaram in 2017 successfully launched two programs –

- 1) '**Kalakriti**' - The Painting competition and Art exhibition, in April on the occasion of Vishu to promote art among children and adults.
- 2) '**Gnanadeepam**' – Started in August following Swami Udit Chaitanya's visit, under his guidance and blessing, is a monthly gathering of family members, to spread the wisdom of knowledge in our ancient scriptures to the children and next generation, through prayer, storytelling, reading Gita and Bhajans followed by Meditation.

Ohmkaram is thankful to Missouri Arts Council and Regional Arts Council for their support through grants to various programs of Ohmkaram to promote arts and culture.

I thank Souvenir committee and every member who they work diligently - getting sponsors, collecting advertisements and articles and put together the 'Gitanjali'.

I want to thank all the executive committee members for their support, suggestions and guidance. I am sure the next executive team under the leadership of Anjana Prayaga will continue to grow Ohmkaram with new programs to further Ohmkaram's mission.

Sincerely,

Suraj Alakkassery MD

President 2017



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*I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth
and non violence are as old as the hills*
- Gandhiji

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This year's Cover Feature: മലയാളിയുടെ ചെറിയൊരു ഓർമ്മകുറിപ്പ്

തിരുവില്വാമലയുടെ മാഹാത്മ്യം



Thiruvilwamala is a temple town in a hilly region, approximately 47 kilometers north-east of Thrissur. It is located on the banks of the river Bharathappuzha, with nearest towns being Lakkidi and Ottappalam. The place is famous for the Villwadrinathan temple, which is among the rare Sri Rama temples in Kerala. There are two deities in this temple, Lord Lakshmana facing east

towards Pazhani Subramania Swami temple and Lord Rama, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, facing west towards Guruvayur temple. The shrine on the west is the one given to Lord Parashurama by Lord Shiva which he himself was worshipping. Legend has it that Parashurama came across this beautiful place, constructed a temple and consecrated the deity. The shrine on the sanctum facing west is Swayambhu or self-born image. It is almost five feet tall fitted with gold plated cover for the protection of the image. It is also believed that there is a cave under this sanctum where there is a golden vilwa tree. It is because of this tree that the town is known as Vilwamala or Thiruvilwamala. Famous festivities in the temple are Niramala (decorating the walls of the temple with garlands) and Ekadashi. Niramala festival is on the first Thursday of the Malayalam month of Kanni and Ekadashi is in the month of Kumbham. Devotees from the village and neighboring towns assemble in the temple for prayers on these special occasions.

Few other important temples in this village are Parakkottu Kavu Devi temple, Srikrishnan Kovil and Poothanakkara Sivan temple. Parakkottu Kavu is famous for its Thalappoli on the last Sunday in the month of Medam which is conducted with 3 colorful processions (one each by Kizhakkummuri, Patinjattummuri and Pampady desams) of decorated elephants with the accompaniment of Panchavadyam, Poothan and Thara joining on the Thalappoli Para just when the Sun is ready to set. No one should miss the beautiful scene of all the decorated elephants facing west in the evening when the rays of the Sun reflect from their ornaments. Once the procession starts entering the temple display of grand fireworks by the three desams start. It is to be noted that the display of fireworks has been banned for the last couple of years by the Kerala Government due to several accidents in recent years. Srikrishna Jayanti is celebrated with much fanfare in Srikrishnan Kovil and Sivarathri is celebrated in Poothanakkara temple.

Another attraction in the village is Punarjani Guha (cave) which is a 15 meter long tunnel running from the top to down on a hill between Vilwamala and Bhoothamala. The tunnel is very steep and narrower in certain stretches and one has to crawl through that stretch with the help of other devotees. It

is believed that anyone crossing the Guha from bottom to top will have their all sins washed away and there will be Rebirth or Punarjanmam in a positive way for that person. This ritual is performed on the day of Guruvayur Ekadashi in the month of Vrischikam. Head Priest or Melshanti of Thiruvilwamala temple spray Theertham (holy water) at the top of the Guha to make it sacred and drops a Nellikka (Gooseberry) to make sure that there is no obstruction on the path inside the Guha. If the Nellikka reaches the bottom end of the tunnel, it is believed that the Guha is safe for people to cross. Only men venture to cross the tunnel due to the physical challenge of accomplishing the feat. It is also believed that there are ways from this Guha to sacred Kasi and Rameswaram.



Ex-Chief Minister of Kochin State (Kochi was a state before 1956), (Late) Raobahadur T. K. Nair was from Thiruvilwamala. The famous Malayalam novelist V.K.N. (Vadakke Koottale Narayanankutty Nair) hails from this village. Late poet Kunhiraman Nair stayed for a long time in Thiruvilwamala, having fallen in love with the scenic beauty and culture of the village. Current Kerala High Court judge Sri. Ashok Menon and additional Director General of Police Sri. Padmakumar, IPS belongs to this village. This village is famous for several other important personalities.

By Raj Unni

Our Beloved Kerala Express



The loud whistle by the train guard in the rear, followed by the long horn of the diesel engine, signaled the beginning of the most exciting journeys of our childhood years – the two day long train journey from New Delhi to Palakkad Junction. It was THE day we used to wait for the whole year, not just for all the fun and merriment that awaited us at the destination, the 'God's Own country', (although the term was seldom used back then), but the whole experience of travelling through the length of India on our most beloved "Kerala Express"!!

After all the scurrying about in first trying to find our compartment and then our berths, fitting our suitcases and bags into whatever spaces we could fit them in, and the last minute purchase of the 'chains' to secure our luggage, we

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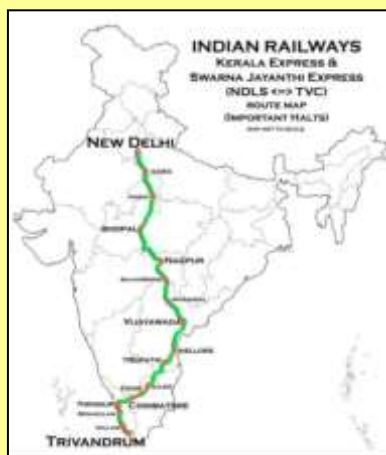
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would finally settle down next to the window seats to say 'goodbye' to our Achan. He, like most of the dads around that time, would send his family ahead of time and join us later during the vacation. And that is when we kids, the devils we were, also made the most of his emotional distress of "being away from his little pearls for so long", by asking for "Frooti", our favorite drink back then – he would never say 'no' to us in that moment, would he!!

As we would wave our byes, the train caught speed, the clamor of the railway tracks grew louder, and the platform vendors' noises faded. My mom would then look around at our neighbors, trying to gauge how friendly they were with a probing smile and if they did reciprocate, we were mostly in



for a good time. Conversations would flow, starting with our origins until they almost exchanged our 'kundlis' (horoscopes). And if they had kids of our age, then there was nothing better. Army uncles would be usually on the side berths, and would serve as the moral support for my mom, providing a sense of security, and also helping

her with getting water or buying things from the Stations.

Every station on the route was like an oasis in the middle of a desert – serving us periodically with the much needed entertainment quotient – food, water, people, activity, or to summarize, 'life' outside of our train. Over the years, I got well versed with the order of the stations and the timing, and would show off to the fellow passengers on the accuracy of my reporting whenever a station arrived. I always felt that each station had its own personality. Along with the flavor of the local delicacy it had to offer (like the 'Agra ka petha'), the size of the stations, cleanliness of the platforms, the scenes of the town as we approached the station, all gave each station its own perspective. My personal favorite was the Vijayawada junction in Andhra Pradesh.

We would be stocked with food, homemade juices and goodies for both the days. With meals packed in separate aluminum foils and newspaper wraps, my mom would have planned for all eventualities. In addition we would have unni appam, mixture, murukku, etc. for evening time snacks. But nothing would entice me as much as the breakfast on the third morning, or sometimes even the dinner on the second evening that we bought from the train pantry... slurrrp! And an occasional 'cutlet' would be a rare treat that my mother would allow us to have, if we had been at our best behavior, and she was in a good mood herself. Tea, Coffee was of

course 'no restrictions', and even as kids we would get our share of these beverages every now and then.

Using the restrooms on these distant journey trains was an 'art' by itself. Waking up very early in the morning was a key to avoid long wait times. My mom was great at this, and my sister and I cooperated quite well. Brushing our teeth during that hour when the superfast express would be travelling at its highest speeds was a technique we had perfected over the years. And without getting into too much details, let me also say that using the toilets for our nature calls was the toughest task, especially in those Indian style ones. Even as a college student I once lost my wallet through that dreadful hole as I was getting ready, and obviously couldn't even raise an alarm. But once it was all done, and we were back at our seats, while the rest of the folks around us were just waking up, we had a sense of achievement none less than winning a marathon! We would sip on our coffees and savor our breakfast bites with puffed up chests and a gleeful grin, almost taunting those who were still getting started.

Time would fly. Yes, it might feel strange today, when a six-hour flight from New York to California seems excruciatingly long, let alone the long haul flight to India. But for us, back then two days were too short when we had so much to do – chit chatting, playing board games, cards, antakshari, dumb charades, reading books, climbing up and down the berths, walking along the length of the train (accompanied by an adult of course) to spend those precious few moments in the A/C compartments (that was meant for the privileged ones), or just simply staring outside for hours together. We would simply never get bored!

As the train charted its course southwards, crossing nine states, and important landmarks – the Gangetic plains in UP,



the ravines of Chambal in Madhya Pradesh, the hill tracts and the long high tunnels around the Vindhyas range, the flats of the

Deccan plateau in AP and the mighty rivers Narmada, Godavari & Krishna, I would never get tired of looking out of the window, absorbing the beauty that was presented along the entire length of the trip. But the BEST was kept for the last. Undoubtedly the most magnificent section began once we left the Coimbatore station, early morning of the third day of our journey. Approaching the southern Sahyadris (or Western Ghats, as it is commonly known), as the train sped through the forests of Walayar, you could suddenly feel the freshness of the cool air; you could see the lush greenery all around with coconut groves, palm trees, banana plantations, mangroves and rich paddy fields spread across acres and



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acres of land, rivers and rivulets meandering through the mountains into the plains, cleanliness in every inch of each small station you pass by. Even if you were asleep you could sense that you're traversing through a paradise on Earth.

Alas we're at the end of our Journey, sigh! As we approached our station, we would bid good byes to our fellow passengers, taking down their addresses and phone numbers (although I don't recollect calling them ever again), and promising to catch up another time, perhaps again on the train itself. At the Palakkad Junction, our final destination, our cousins and uncles would be waiting eagerly for us, along with the pre-monsoon showers that would hit the Malabar Coast just as we reached there around mid-May. And thus began our month and half long stay in Kerala, unarguably the best vacations I've had till date, period.

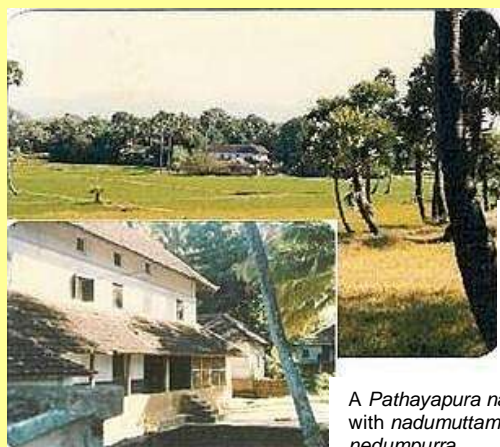
By Prashanth Sivadasan

Our Tharavad

I have fleeting memories of trips to India when we were kids. These took place once every two or three years, thanks largely to passage awarded to my father for dedicated career in civil service. This was the '70s and 80s. More specifically, we would be "based" in our *Ammachan & Ammama's* spacious house in the city, and make periodic trips (sometime extended stays) to our native village in Palakkad district. (Occasionally other parts of India too).

Whether it was summer holidays, monsoon season, temple tours, a significant wedding – regardless of the time of the year we travelled, there was always some festival or the other going on. *Vishu, Onam* aside, forms of *theru, kallli(s), villaku, puram, vella, theyyam* ... events unique to our area would be on grand display.

But my vivid memories stuck largely on *Valliya Veedu*, the grand old ancestral house from where generations of relatives on our dearest Mummy's side hailed from. This is our century-plus old matriarchal *Tharavad*, as is customary in Kerala Hindu tradition. However, it was our Papa who took pains (and delight) to narrate stories of our roots and lineage home.



THEN ... rare picture of the *Tharavad* in the old days, near Koduvayur, almost true to the original construction.

A *Pathayapura nalukettu*, complete with *nadumuttam, kullapura, pattayam, nedumpurra*.

(Our late father left India due to challenging conditions at the tender age of 16 and braved the world in search of better opportunities).

NOW ... after very necessary renovation a few years ago. Fortunately *Valliya Veedu* was saved, credit to a massive campaign by mostly youngsters, no less, supervised by elders. (Followed by a very successful *Kudumbasangamam* reunion attended by hundreds of clan members far and wide).



Downside is the bit more "modern" looking façade all round, but fortunately historical integrity was maintained.

While absorbing all of these fascinating facts, as a youngster my focus remained on playing with endless number of cousins all day long, wandering the mysterious and exciting hallways and rooms, just sitting and enjoying awesome scenery of paddy fields, swaying coconut and palm trees, or taking a dip in the *kulam*. Along with visiting various *Muthis* at their respective dwellings, even though my language skills were rudimentary at best. (Because I looked forward even more to being so lovingly welcomed and fed with snacks, sweets, tea – if not a full meal). And the occasional walk to the nearby *chaya kadda*, where folks animatedly talked politics or gossiped under a rare Bodhi (Pipal) tree by the *Shivan Kshetram*, closer to the *Nivas* (house) of our beloved father's side of the family.

Sometimes I felt like Swami in RK Narayan's *Swami and Friends*. It was so much fun. Sadly, trips to India are too few and far between past couple of decades. I must reconnect.

REVERED MUTHIS ... another rare picture of the main matrilineal elders together (circa early '80s; a fourth member is not pictured – she was 94!). Most of the *Muttachans, Ellayachans, Ammamans*, or any male member for that matter, were not around that much, having travelled nearby, other parts of India, or to "the Gulf" for work).

By Vinod Menon



ആറന്മുള

ക്ഷേത്രങ്ങൾ, വള്ളംകളി, സദ്യ, വാസ്തുശില്പകലകൾ, പച്ചവിരിച്ച കൃഷിയിടങ്ങൾ; കേരളം എന്ന് കേൾക്കുമ്പോൾ ഏതൊരു മലയാളിയുടെയും മനസ്സിൽ നിറയുന്ന കാര്യങ്ങളാണ് ഇതെല്ലാം. എന്നാൽ ഇവയെല്ലാം അതിന്റെ തനതായ രൂപത്തിൽ നില കൊള്ളുന്ന ഒരു സ്ഥലം കണ്ടെത്തുക എളുപ്പമല്ല. അങ്ങനെയൊരു സ്ഥലമാണ് എന്റെ തറവാട്ടിനടുത്തുള്ള ആറന്മുള എന്ന ഗ്രാമം.



ഗീതോപദേശ സമയത്ത് അർജുനൻ ദർശിച്ച ശ്രീകൃഷ്ണന്റെ വിശ്വരൂപം അർജുനനാൽ തന്നെ പ്രതിഷ്ഠിക്കപ്പെട്ട ശ്രീപാർത്ഥസാരഥി ക്ഷേത്രമാണ് പമ്പാനദിയുടെ തീരത്ത് സ്ഥിതി ചെയ്യുന്ന ആറന്മുളയുടെ മുഖമുദ്ര. ഈ വിഗ്രഹം ആദ്യം സ്ഥാപിച്ചത് ശബരിമലയ്ക്കു അടുത്തുള്ള നിലയ്ക്കൽ എന്ന സ്ഥലത്തായിരുന്നു എന്നും പിന്നീട് ആറു മുളകൾ ചേർത്തു കെട്ടിയ ഒരു ചങ്ങാടത്തിൽ ഇവിടെ കൊണ്ടുവന്നു എന്നുമാണ് ഐതീഹ്യം. അങ്ങനെ യാണത്രെ ആറന്മുളക്ക് ആ പേര് ലഭിച്ചത്. എല്ലാ തിരുവോണ നാളിലും ഭഗവാനു സദ്യ ഒരുക്കാനുള്ള വിഭവങ്ങളുമായി കുമാരനല്ലൂരിൽ നിന്ന് മങ്ങാട്ട് ഭട്ടത്തിരി ആറന്മുളയിൽ എത്തും. തുടർന്ന് നാല് ദിവസങ്ങൾക്കു ശേഷം നടക്കുന്ന ജലമേളയാണ് ഉത്രട്ടാതി വള്ളംകളി. ആറന്മുളക്ക് ചുറ്റുമുള്ള 51 കരക്കാരുടെ പള്ളിയോടങ്ങൾ (ചുണ്ടൻ വള്ളം) ഇതിൽ മത്സരിക്കുന്നു. ഭഗവാന്റെ വാഹനം ആയതുകൊണ്ടാണ് അതിനെ പള്ളിയോടം എന്ന് വിളിക്കുന്നത്. ജാതിമതഭേദമെന്യേ ഒരു കരയിലെ ജനങ്ങളെ മുഴുവൻ ഒരുമിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ഒരു ഘടകമാണ് പള്ളിയോടങ്ങൾ. മറ്റു ചുണ്ടൻ വള്ളങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്തമായി പള്ളിയോടത്തിലെ 64 തുഴക്കാർ 64 കലകളേയും, 4 അമരക്കാർ 4 വേദങ്ങളേയും, നടക്കളത്തിൽ പാട്ടു പാടുന്ന 8 നിലയാളുകൾ അഷ്ടദിക്പാലകരേയും പ്രതിനിധാനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. അറുപത്തതിനാലിൾപരം വിഭവങ്ങൾ വിളമ്പുന്ന ആറന്മുള വള്ളസദ്യ ഭാരതത്തിലെ തന്നെ ഏറ്റവും വിഭവ സമൃദ്ധമായ സദ്യകളിൽ ഒന്നായിരിക്കും. ഉണ്ണാൻ ഇരിക്കുന്നവർ ചോദിക്കുന്ന ഏതു വിഭവവും വിളമ്പണം എന്നതാണ് വള്ള സദ്യയുടെ നിയമം. വഞ്ചിപ്പാട്ട് രൂപത്തിൽ ഉള്ള ശ്ലോകങ്ങളിലൂടെ വേണം വിഭവങ്ങൾ ആവശ്യപ്പെടാൻ. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് "പണ്ടൊരിക്കൽ കൃഷ്ണനപ്പോൾ കൃഷ്ണ കൊടുത്തതും വേണം..." എന്നാകും ചോദ്യം. പാഞ്ചാലി ശ്രീകൃഷ്ണന് കൊടുത്ത ചീരയാണ് ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നതെന്ന് മനസ്സിലാക്കി അത് വിളമ്പണം. ഒരു വീട്ടിലെ ഓരോ കണ്ണാടിയിലും നമ്മൾ കാണുന്ന രൂപം വ്യത്യസ്തമായിരിക്കും. എന്നാൽ നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന എല്ലാ കണ്ണാടി കളിലും ഒരേ രൂപം പ്രതിഫലിക്കുന്ന ഒന്നാണ് ആറന്മുളക്കണ്ണാടി.

പ്രതിബിംബം കണ്ണാടിയുടെ പ്രതലത്തിൽ നിന്നും വരുന്ന തിനാലാണ് ഇത് സാധ്യമാകുന്നത്. ചെമ്പും വെളുത്തീയവും അടങ്ങിയ ഒരു ലോഹം ഉറച്ചു മിനുക്കിയെടുത്താണ് ആറന്മുള കണ്ണാടി ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നത്. രണ്ടു ദിവസം മുതൽ ഒരു വർഷം വരെ വേണ്ടി വരും ആറന്മുളക്കണ്ണാടി നിർമ്മിക്കാൻ. വാസ്തുവിദ്യാ കലകളുടെ സാന്നിദ്ധ്യമാണ് ആറന്മുളയുടെ മറ്റൊരു സവിശേഷത. ഇവിടെ സ്ഥിതിചെയ്യുന്ന വാസ്തുവിദ്യാഗുരുകുലം പാരമ്പര്യ വാസ്തു കലകൾ, ചുവർചിത്രങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങിയവ അഭ്യസിപ്പിക്കുകയും കേരളത്തിലെ പ്രാചീന വാസ്തുശില്പകേന്ദ്രങ്ങൾ സംരക്ഷിക്കുന്നതിൽ മുൻകയെടുക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഇതി നെല്ലാം പുറമേ അടയ്ക്ക, കരിമ്പ്, നെല്ല് എന്നിവ സമൃദ്ധമായി വിളയുന്ന കൃഷിയിടങ്ങളും ആറന്മുളയ്ക്കു അലങ്കാരമാണ്. ഈ സവിശേഷതകൾ എല്ലാം സ്വന്തമായ ആറന്മുള കേരള സംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ തന്നെ ഒരു പ്രതിരൂപമാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ടു തന്നെയാണ് 2006 ഇൽ യുനെസ്കോ റ്റു റ്റേപ്പിസ് ആറന്മുളയെ ഒരു സാംസ്കാരിക പൈതൃക ഗ്രാമമായി പ്രഖ്യാപിച്ചത്.

പ്രമോദ് ഡി നമ്പൂതിരി

ജടായു പാറ

സൂര്യന്റെ തേരാളി ആയിരുന്ന അരുണന്റെ പുത്രനായിരുന്നു ജടായു എന്ന പക്ഷി ശ്രേഷ്ഠൻ. സീതയെ അപഹരിച്ചു കൊണ്ട് ലങ്കയിലേക്ക് പോകുക ആയിരുന്ന രാവണനെ ജടായു മാർഗമദ്ധ്യേ തടഞ്ഞു നിർത്തി. തുടർന്ന് ഉണ്ടായ ശക്തമായ യുദ്ധത്തിൽ രാവണൻ ചന്ദ്രഹാസം എന്ന വാൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് ജടായുവിന്റെ ഇടതു ചിറകു അരിഞ്ഞു വീഴ്ത്തി. ആകാശത്തിൽ നിന്നും വീണ ജടായു ഒരു പാറ മുകളിൽ വന്നു വീണു. സീതയെ അന്വേഷിച്ചു വന്ന ശ്രീരാമൻ ജടായുവിനു മോക്ഷം കൊടുത്തു എന്ന് ഐതീഹ്യം. ജടായു വന്നു വീണ പാറ ജടായു പാറ എന്ന് വിളിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. ജടായു പാറ ഇരിക്കുന്ന സ്ഥലം ആദ്യം ജടായു മംഗലം എന്നും, ഇപ്പോൾ ചടയമംഗലം എന്നും അറിയപ്പെടുന്നു. ചരിത്ര പ്രാധാന്യമുള്ള ഈ പാറ ഇന്ന് ഒരു ടൂറിസം കേന്ദ്രം ആയി മാറി കൊണ്ട് ഇരിക്കുന്നു. ലോകത്തിലെ തന്നെ ഏറ്റവും വലിയ പക്ഷി ശില്പം ഇവിടെ പണി പൂർത്തി ആയിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ഗിന്നസ് ബുക്കിൽ സ്ഥാനം പിടിക്കാൻ പോകുന്ന ഈ ശില്പത്തിന് 200 അടി നീളം, 150 അടി വീതി 70 അടി ഉയരവും ഉണ്ട്. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽ നിന്നും 750 അടി ഉയരത്തിൽ ഉള്ള ഈ ശില്പവും അതിനു ചുറ്റുമുള്ള കാഴ്ചകളും നയന മനോഹരം തന്നെയാണ്.



Photo Credit: <http://jatayuadventurecenter.com/>

By Sreejith Pillai



The Cosmic Dance: Amavasya & Poornima

By Kavitha Sivadasan

Nature offers us the most beautiful *dhrishtaantham* or illustration on how to fall in love and stay in love through the sun and the moon. This is entirely my perspective through my musings while camping under the stars, my readings in mysticism and astrology and my

ruminations on life...thought maybe I should jot it down somewhere.

The sun in most ancient civilizations represents the raw masculine energy, the soul, the father, the yin in Chinese yin and yang, Purusha or Lord Shiva's energy. The moon on the other hand symbolizes feminine energy, the mind, the mother, the yang, Prakriti or Goddess Shakti's energy. It is the union of the masculine and feminine, of yin and yang, of purusha and prakriti that makes the universe's soul complete. And so, the sun and the moon court each other in a cosmic dance every fortnight to seek this primordial union.

The sun when it courts the moon woos her affectionately, showers her with his affection and gives the moon his energy slowly and steadily. The moon coyly basks in his affection, shyly at first, gets nourished by his energy and grows steadfastly. She is emboldened by his advances and dances to his courtship until she drains the sun off his life-force during their divine union to bloom into the full moon on Pournami. This courtship of a fortnight gives us the feminine energy in its all-powerful form in the universe - the oceans sway to the moon in high tides, Prakriti is in full bloom and Shakti is feted to be all powerful on Poornima. Invariably, all auspicious Hindu festivals fall on the Pournami and devotees seek Goddess Parvati's blessings.

On waxing full, intuitively the moon realizes that she has to nourish the exhausted sun back to strength. It is now her turn to court him. She woos the sun ardently, gives off a piece of her soul daily and it is the Sun's turn to drain her. Interestingly, the feminine form of giving is full of surrender. She wanes bit by bit while nursing the Sun back to strength, until she gives all of herself to unite with him and disappear on the day of Amavasya. This courtship of a fortnight gives us the masculine energy in its all-powerful form in the universe - the Sun is considered to be the most potent on the day of the Amavasya. This is the day of tantra when Shiva worshippers invoke the power of Shiva's raw masculine energy when it is at its zenith. The day of the aghoris, the tantrics and the Shiva bhoothas. Since everything related to tantra is arcane and potent, we have been kept in the dark for generations by being told that the Amavasya is inauspicious. On the contrary, the daytime during Amavasya when the sun is all-powerful, is the most auspicious of all days to worship the Sun and Lord Shiva. It is believed that if one can fast on an Amavasya that falls on a Monday then Lord Shiva's blessings are assured. Such is the power of Amavasya among Shiva bhaktas.

The Sun and the Moon continue this cosmic dance of love fortnight after fortnight steadfastly. They exemplify to us that the male and female energies need to take turns to court each other, to nourish each other, and to submit to each other in complete surrender in an endless cosmic dance. This is the only way for a union to be truly divine. We need look no further than up at the sky to learn how to surrender ourselves in love when we finally do find our soul mate.

About the author: Kavitha has a Master's degree from Harvard University in Public Administration & International Development majoring in Economics, and is an Alumni of IIM Bangalore & NTU, Singapore. Her interests include classical dance, music, travelling, and espousing policy change for people & children with disabilities. She is a Senior Management and International Development Professional based in Switzerland.



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Mechanics of Meditation

By Dr. Sudhirdas Kumar Prayaga



Mechanics is the study of motion. Without going into aspects of motion, one of its meaning can be loosely translated as 'karma'. In Gita, Krishna says nothing in the universe can remain motionless because of the nature of their qualities, or 'gunas'. Something can be said to be in motion only in comparison to something else.

Nahi kaschit kshanamapi jaatu thishtatyakarmakrit
Kaaryate hyavascha karma sarvah prakritijairgunaih ----- Gita 3.5

Ancient Hindu cosmology or astronomy teaches us that everything in the universe is in motion, except the Brahman, or Akshara. Anything that is in motion should be in comparison to something immovable; for the universe it is the immutable Akshara. Modern science has proven that everything in the universe is in a constant motion, from sub atomic particles to cosmic bodies. Now, physicists say that the whole universe is expanding, which means moving away from each other. Until few centuries ago, people in the west thought that the earth is flat and motionless. How is motion connected with meditation? Meditation is a form of yagna, or karma done intentionally, but without sangha, or attachment. According to Gita, the whole universe functions due to yagna by the supreme consciousness (Akshara).

Karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahamakshra samudhbavam
Tasmat sarvagatham brahma nityamyagne prathishtitham ----- Gita 3.15

Prakruthi, or the universe, is made up of 8 building blocks, according to Gita. These are bhoomi or solid, aapaha or liquid, vaayu or gas, analaha or energy, kham or space, manaha or mind, budhi or intellect and ahamkaaram or self-knowledge (or consciousness).

Bhoomiaapo nalovaayu khammano budhir evacha
Ahamkaaram ithiyame bhinna prakrithi ashtadha ----- Gita 7.4

Only sentient beings have the ability to do yagna. Different forms of yagna are explained in chapter-4 of Gita. One of them is pranayama meditation which involves regulation or controlling of respiration. Controlling inspiration, or praanan, and expiration, or apaanan.

Apaane juhuti pranam pranepaanam thadaapare
Praanapaana gadhirudhua pranayaamaprayanaya ----- Gita 4.29

Abhyasa yogam or yogasanas is another recommended yagna practice in Gita. Probably the purpose of human life is implicated as doing some form of yagna, as we are the amsha of the supreme consciousness.

Adhachittam samaadadhum nasaknoshi mayisthiram
Abhyasayogena thadho maamichapthum dhanamjaya ----- Gita 12.9

Meditation affects various motions in our body. Abhyasa yogam, and some pranayama techniques, for example, increases the heart rate and respiration. While prathyahara, dharana and dhyanam, or transcendental meditation slows down the heart rate and respiration rate.

Many scientific studies have shown that meditation slows down the brain activity from high frequency alpha waves, to lower frequency delta waves. EEG shows 5 major wave forms in the human brain called alpha, beta, gamma, theta and delta. The beta waves have a frequency of 15 to 40 cycles per second, while alpha frequency ranges from 9 to 14, theta frequency from 5 to 8, and delta frequency from 2 to 4.

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Higher frequencies of alpha and beta indicates active or excited brain state, while low frequency of delta indicate a restive, or peaceful state of mind. Thus, meditation helps both the physical and mental well-being of the practitioner.

Some measurable physiological changes associated with meditation are lowering of heart rate, slowing of breath, and reducing blood pressure. These physio-chemical changes are controlled by our autonomous nervous system. Parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system forms the two opposing but complementary arms of the autonomous or involuntary nervous system. As the name suggests, involuntary nervous system is controlled by our brain independent of our volition and acts upon our body to regulate all our bodily functions. Meditation seems to have a direct effect on this regulation of involuntary nervous system, specifically, stimulating the parasympathetic arm. Sympathetic and parasympathetic activities need to be in balance for good health.

Sympathetic nervous system controls the so-called 'fight-or-flight' response, which keeps you on the alert of any danger. Evolutionarily, sympathetic nervous system evolved to help us cope with impending danger from predators. When in danger of an attack by a predator, we do not have time to think to respond. Sympathetic nervous system takes over with the 'fight-or-flight' response instantaneously. It appears, in modern times, we are constantly on the alert with elevated sympathetic activity. An increase in metabolic diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, blood pressure, and stroke, seen world over especially in developed countries, are linked to such chronic elevated sympathetic activity. Meditation has been scientifically shown to balance the effect of sympathetic activity by stimulating parasympathetic system.

Yoga and Meditation practices probably originated in India 5,000 to 10,000 years ago. There are many references to meditation in Vedas and Upanishads. Jaabala Maharishi explains the techniques and benefits of breath yoga and Kundalini yoga in Jaabala Darsana Upanishad. Maharishi Patanjali (2nd century BCE) codified different forms of meditation and yoga practices in his treatise Yoga Sutra. Dhyanam is the 7th of 8 stages of yoga according to Yoga Sutra of Patanjali. Chapter 6 of Bhagavat Gita also espouses the practice of Dhyanam.

The word Meditation was introduced into English as a translation of word dhyana from India, the Sanskrit root meaning to meditate. According to Hindu philosophical thought, one can attain enlightenment (or bodhi) by one of the four yogas; namely Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga, Jnana yoga or Raja yoga. Meditation forms part of Raja yoga. A significant revival of these meditative and yogic practices, especially in the west, happened in the last century through the efforts of saints and teachers like Swami Vivekananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Paramhansa Yoganada and Chinmayananda Saraswati. Yoga and meditation techniques are major contributions of India to the world.

Presently, we believe that vigorous exercise is good to keep fit and trim. Running marathon appears to be a fad these days. Aerobics and similar hyper exercises seem to be the norm in order to be healthy these days. Today, even 'yoga' is being taught as vigorous physical exercise, without knowing its original intend and purpose. Media also extol these in vain. In contrast, scientific studies have shown that lowering the heart rate of humans from 70 to 60 increases life expectancy by over 12 years (European heart journal supplement 2003, R. Ferrari), while increasing the heart rate is a risk factor for cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. Thus, the mechanics of meditation directly helps the practicer with abundant health benefits.

I believe rigorous physical exercise is antithesis to good health and longevity. I am not saying we don't need exercise, but we need a balanced physical and mental regimen. I don't see any mentions in our ancient Hindu literature the virtues of vigorous exercise. On the contrary, there are innumerable mentions about the importance of a balance of body & mind and how to do that. Scientific literature also actually supports this view, although the media and the pundits are yet to catch up. In Gita, Krishna says that the balance of body and mind is Yoga (Gita 2.48).

Yogasthakuru karmani sangamtyakthva dhanamjaya
Sidhyaasidhyo samobhutva samathvam yoga uchiate

----- Gita 2.48



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കുട്ടന്റെ നോവ്

അമൃത കോശേരി

രാത്രി എട്ടു മണിയായി. കുട്ടൻ ഉറങ്ങിയിട്ടില്ല. നാളെ അവധിയായതുകൊണ്ടു കുറച്ചു വൈകി കിടന്നാലും കുഴപ്പമില്ല എന്ന് മുത്തശ്ശി പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട്. കുട്ടന്റെ കണ്ണുകൾ വീടിന്റെ പടി കടന്നു ഇടവഴിയിലേക്ക് പോയി. ഇല്ല വരുന്നില്ല. കുട്ടൻ അവന്റെ അച്ഛനെ കാത്തിരിക്കുകയാണ്. ബസ്സ് ഇറങ്ങി മൂന്ന് കിലോമീറ്റർ നടന്നു വേണം വീട് എത്താൻ. കുഞ്ഞൻ തന്ത വിളക്കും കൊണ്ട് പോയിട്ടുണ്ട് അച്ഛനെ കുട്ടി കൊണ്ടു വരാൻ. കുട്ടന്റെ വീട്ടിലെ കാര്യസ്ഥനാണ് കുഞ്ഞൻ തന്ത. പശുവിനു വെള്ളം കൊടുക്കലും, ജാതിക്ക പെറുക്കലും, കവുങ്ങിന് തേവലും എല്ലാം കുഞ്ഞന്റെ പണിയാണ്. വീണ്ടും കുട്ടന്റെ കണ്ണുകൾ ഇടവഴിയിലേക്ക് പോയി. ഇല്ല, വിളക്കിന്റെ വെളിച്ചം കാണുന്നില്ല. ഉറക്കം കണ്ണുകളെ ചെറുതായി തഴുകുന്നുണ്ടെങ്കിലും അച്ഛൻ വന്നിട്ടെ ഉറങ്ങു എന്ന് തീരു മാനിച്ചിരിക്കുകയാണ് കുട്ടൻ. കുറച്ചു ദിവസമായി ഈ കാത്തിരിപ്പു തുടങ്ങിയിട്ട്. അതിനു ഒരു കാരണവും ഉണ്ട്. കുട്ടന്റെ അടുത്ത ചങ്ങാതിയാണ് ആലി. രണ്ടു ആഴ്ച മുൻപ് പള്ളിക്കൂടത്തിൽ പോയപ്പോൾ ആലിയുടെ കാലുകൾ കുട്ടൻ ശ്രദ്ധിച്ചു. ചോദിച്ചപ്പോൾ മനസ്സിലായി ആലിയുടെ വാപ്പ സിലോണിൽ നിന്ന് കൊണ്ട് വന്നതാണ് നല്ല ഭംഗിയുള്ള ചെരുപ്പ്. കുട്ടൻ ചെരുപ്പ് ഇട്ടു നടന്നു നോക്കി. നടക്കാൻ നല്ല സുഖമുണ്ട്. കാലിനടിയിൽ കല്ല് തറക്കില്ല മാത്രമല്ല കാലിൽ ചെളിയും പിടിക്കില്ല. കുട്ടനും ചെരുപ്പ് ഇട്ടുനടന്നാൽ കൊള്ളാം എന്ന് തോന്നി. മുത്തശ്ശി പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട് പട്ടണത്തിൽ എല്ലാം വാങ്ങാൻ കിട്ടും എന്ന്. വീട്ടിൽ വന്നപ്പോൾ കുട്ടൻ മുത്തശ്ശിയോട് ചോദിച്ചു. "മുത്തശ്ശി, പട്ടണത്തിൽ ചെരുപ്പ് കിട്ടുമോ?". "പട്ടണത്തിൽ കിട്ടാത്തത് ഒന്നും ഇല്ല കുട്ടാ, എല്ലാം കിട്ടും". മുത്തശ്ശി പറഞ്ഞു. കുട്ടന് സന്തോഷമായി. ഞായറാഴ്ചയായി, കുട്ടന്റെ അച്ഛൻ പോകാനുള്ള ഒരുക്കത്തിലാണ്. അച്ഛന് ജോലി തുടർ പാറമേക്കാവ് അമ്പലത്തിലാണ്. അവിടെ കണക്കെഴുത്തു വിഭാഗത്തിലാണ് ജോലി. ഞായറാഴ്ച പോയാൽ പിന്നെ വെള്ളിയാഴ്ച രാത്രിയെ വരു. തുണികളും മറ്റും മടക്കി വയ്ക്കുന്നതിനിടയിൽ കുട്ടൻ പതുകെപറഞ്ഞു. "അച്ഛാ, പട്ടണത്തിൽ എല്ലാം കിട്ടും എന്ന് മുത്തശ്ശി പറഞ്ഞു. എനിക്ക് ഒരു ജോഡി ചെരുപ്പ് വാങ്ങി തരോ". കുട്ടനെ നോക്കി ഒന്ന് ചിരിച്ചു കൊണ്ട് അച്ഛൻ പറഞ്ഞു, "ശരി, നോക്കാം". ആ മറുപടി കുട്ടനെ തൃപ്തിപ്പെടുത്തിയില്ല. "ഉറപ്പായിട്ടും വാങ്ങി കൊണ്ട് വരുമോ?" കുട്ടൻ ചോദിച്ചു. "ഉറപ്പായിട്ടും കൊണ്ട് വരാം കുട്ടാ". അച്ഛൻ പറഞ്ഞു. കുട്ടന് സന്തോഷമായി. കുട്ടന്റെ ചെരിപ്പിനായുള്ള കാത്തിരിപ്പു തുടരുകയാണ്. മുത്തശ്ശി രണ്ടു തവണയായി വിളിക്കുന്നു. പിന്നേയും വിളിവന്നു മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ. മനസ്സിലാമനസ്സോടെ കുട്ടൻ കിടക്കാൻ പോയി. മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ അടുത്താണ് കുട്ടൻ കിടക്കാൻ. കുട്ടന് ഒരു പ്രത്യേക ഇഷ്ടമാണ് മുത്തശ്ശിയോട്. കുട്ടന്റെ മനസ്സു വായിക്കാൻ മുത്തശ്ശിക്ക് ഒരു പ്രത്യേക കഴിവുണ്ടെന്ന് കുട്ടന് പലപ്പോഴും തോന്നിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ഒരു ദിവസം പള്ളിക്കൂടം വിട്ടു വീട്ടിലേക്കു നടന്നു വരികയാണ് കുട്ടൻ. കുട്ടിനു ആലിയും ഉണ്ട്. പതിവില്ലാതെ കുട്ടന് വല്ലാതെ വിശക്കുന്നുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. പെട്ടെന്ന് അവൾ കുഴച്ചതു തിന്നാൻ തോന്നി കുട്ടന്. കുട്ടന്റെ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെട്ട പലഹാരമാണ് അവൾ കുഴച്ചത്. നല്ല പഴുത്ത ചെറുപ്പഴവും, തേങ്ങാ ചിരകിയതും, ശർക്കരയും ചേർത്ത് കുഴച്ച അവൻ. കുട്ടന്റെ വായിൽ വെള്ളമുറി. വീട്ടിലെത്തി കയ്യും കാലും മുഖവും കഴുകി അടുക്കളയിൽ ചെന്നിരുന്നു. മുത്തശ്ശി കിണ്ണവും കൊണ്ട് വന്നു. കുട്ടന് വിശ്വസിക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞില്ല. അവൾ കുഴച്ചതായിരുന്നു അന്നത്തെ പലഹാരം. മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ ആ അത്ഭുതസിദ്ധി തെളിയിക്കുന്ന സംഭവങ്ങൾ പറഞ്ഞാൽ തീരില്ല.

രാവിലെ കുട്ടൻ പതിവിലും നേരത്തായ് എണീറ്റു. അച്ഛന്റെ സഞ്ചിയും കൂടയും വെക്കുന്ന സ്ഥലത്തു നോക്കി. ഇല്ല ചെരുപ്പില്ല. ചിലപ്പോൾ 'അമ്മ എടുത്തു വെച്ചിട്ടുണ്ടാകും. കുട്ടന്റെ പ്രതീക്ഷ കുറച്ചു മങ്ങിയെങ്കിലും മുഴുവൻ നഷ്ടപ്പെടുത്താൻ അവൻ തയ്യാറല്ലായിരുന്നു. 'അമ്മ അടുക്കളയിലാണ്. അച്ഛൻ കുളി കഴിഞ്ഞു നാമം ചൊല്ലുകയാണ്. അച്ഛന്റെ വായന കഴിയാൻ അവൻ ക്ഷമയോടെ കാത്തു നിന്നു. വായന കഴിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ കുട്ടൻ അടുത്തേക്ക് ചെന്നു. "അച്ഛാ, ഞാൻ പറഞ്ഞ സാധനം വാങ്ങിച്ചോ?" "എന്ത് സാധനം?" അച്ഛൻ ചോദിച്ചു. കുട്ടന്റെ നെഞ്ചിടിപ്പ് അറിയാതെ കൂടുന്നതായി കുട്ടന് തോന്നി. "ചെരുപ്പ്". കുട്ടൻ പറഞ്ഞു. "നിനക്കെന്തിനാ കുട്ടാ ചെരുപ്പ്? അതുമല്ല, പട്ടണത്തിലെ സാധനങ്ങൾ വെറുതെ എടുത്തു കൊണ്ടു വരാൻ പറ്റില്ല. അതിനു പൈസ കൊടുക്കണ്ടേ? നീ മൂന്നാംതലം ജയിച്ചു നാലാംതലം ആകുമ്പോൾ വാങ്ങാം." അച്ഛൻ പറഞ്ഞു. "അച്ഛൻ ഉറപ്പു പറഞ്ഞതല്ലേ." കുട്ടന്റെ സ്വരം ഒന്ന് ഇടറി. കുട്ടൻ പറഞ്ഞത് അച്ഛൻ കേട്ടില്ലെന്നു തോന്നുന്നു. അവൻ മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ അടുത്തേയ്ക്കു ഓടി. മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ മടിയിൽ കുറേനേരം ഇരുന്നു. അവൻ കരഞ്ഞില്ല. എങ്കിലും നെഞ്ചിൽ ഒരു ഭാരം പോലെ തോന്നി. കുറേ കഴിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ മുത്തശ്ശി പറഞ്ഞു, "മുത്തശ്ശിക്ക് വിശക്കുന്നുണ്ട്, കുട്ടന് പുട്ടു കഴി ക്കാറായോ?" കുട്ടൻ ഒരു ചെറു പുഞ്ചിരിയോടെ പറഞ്ഞു "എനിക്ക് അവൾ കൊഴച്ചതു മതി മുത്തശ്ശി". മുത്തശ്ശിയുടെ കയ്യും പിടിച്ചു അവൻ അടുക്കളയിലേക്കു പോയി. എങ്കിലും മനസ്സിലെവിടെയോ ഒരു കുഞ്ഞു നോവ് ഉള്ളത് പോലെ അവനു തോന്നി.

ഇന്ന് കുട്ടൻ ഒരു മുത്തശ്ശനാണ്. നാലു പേരക്കുട്ടികളുള്ള മുത്തശ്ശൻ. മനസ്സിലെ ആ കുഞ്ഞു നോവിന്റെ ആഴം അറിയാവുന്നതുകൊണ്ടാകാം പേരക്കുട്ടികളുടെ കൊച്ചു കൊച്ചു ആവശ്യങ്ങൾ നിറവേറ്റാൻ ആ പഴയ തറവാട്ടിൽ കൊതിയോടെ കാത്തിരിക്കുകയാണ് മുത്തശ്ശൻ.

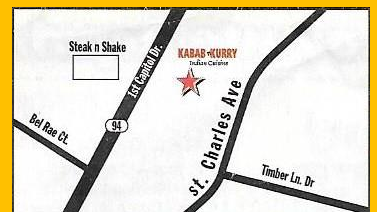
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Karma – The Theory of Cause and Effect

By Kallazhi Sivadasan

Karma theory is perhaps the most discussed subject by common people, thinkers, theologians and philosophers all over the world. Every action has a reaction – whatever happens in the world is due to a cause, and the effect is what we experience. Good actions result in good effects and bad deeds bring about bad results. This is the crux of the philosophy, and it guided mahajanapadas, kings, rishis and thinkers alike of ancient Indian civilization in their day to day activities.

Happiness, Sorrow and Rebirth:

When the soul leaves the body at the time of death of a person, it carries with it an astral body consisting of the unfulfilled desires and karmic burden accumulated by the person in his/her present and past lives. To fulfill the left over desires, the soul needs to take birth again and attain a body in the seed of a plant or womb of an animal or human being, or attain Godhood, or merge with the universal soul based on accumulated balance sheet of good or bad karmic burden. Those who are predominantly of 'Satwik' nature reach the helm of a better strata society, engaged in divine and noble activities. Ones who are predominantly of 'Rajasik' nature, become rulers, administrators, chieftains, etc. of society. Those who are of 'Thamasik' nature, reach the underworld of murderers, usurpers, looters, thieves, plants, heinous animals, etc. The ones who get rid of all the three gunas, reach the abode of Gods and universal soul, the Brahman. This was the basic philosophy and path of life as enunciated in the Swethaswathara Upanishad, Sankhya Philosophy, Bhagavatha Purana and Mahabharata. It was both theory and torch bearer for life of an average Indian. What would be the type of afterlife they will get and what sort of bad deeds they should avoid for a better rebirth, was the moral governing force of the people in the ancient Indian world.

Concept of Karma in evolution of the Universe:

Everything in the universe, including creation, existence, and dissolution, is the effect of Karma – the cycle of cause and effect as per Sankhya Philosophy emanated from the Vedas and accepted by the Uttara Meemamsa (Advaita Philosophy):

- The primordial cause for evolution of the universe is Purusha and Prakriti and their fusion.
- The cause for dissolution is disappearance of Chethna (the power of existence)
- The cause for existence is entanglement of Purusha in Prakriti with Chithavrithi (Thamasik effect of Prakriti on Purusha).

Karmic effect and salvation:

The more we are governed by our desires, the more we are thrown into karma (action), and the more the karma, the more the unfulfilled desires, since all desires can never be fulfilled. It is a vicious circle of samsara that is karma, unfulfilled desires, rebirth and karma. The consequence of all these is the confrontation of life which is sorrowful. Pravarthi Marga and Nivrithi Marga are suggested to face the challenge of the cycle of samsara and to overcome it. Pravarthi Marga is the Karma Yoga. Nivrithi Marga is Jnana Yoga as explicitly enunciated in the Bhagavat Gita.

The chain of Karma and Karma Yoga:

The scriptures enunciate that all are forced to do karma (action) as per natural inclination governed by their purva janma karma vasana (natural desires/ basic instincts) carried forward to this life. So long as the Chitha (mind) exists, sorrow will be there, since the dharma of Chitha (mind) is sorrow and not the dharma of Atma. Atma has no sorrow. Atma is confused as if it is Chitha due to its entanglement with the Thamasik effect of Chithavrithi – and consequently the Atma experiences sorrow.

Chitha has to be extinct leading to cessation of Karma Karma (Karma governed by desire) and to rebirth. This process is possible by endeavoring for Karma Shudhi (cleanliness of karma). Still engaged in Karma, one can get rid of karmic effect by working on Satwik qualities of nature and doing only Nishkama Karma.

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Only do such karma for the preservation and welfare of one's self with minimum desires. Develop an attitude for Karma Bhala Thyagam (non-expectation of rewards). Such karmas do not lead to more desires and thus do not bind us with Karma Bandha (karmic effect).

Nivriti Marga - Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge) is possible for one who cleans his karmic effect by Nishkama Karma. Thus the path for Arjuna as advised by Lord Krishna was Pravarthi Marga. Work on Satwik aspect of our qualities and reach the state of God as Gunatheethan (beyond the three Gunas) and consider that we are in the process of God realization. Those who cross the path of the Gunas are liberated souls and called Nirgunans, and reach the abode of the universal self that is called salvation. In other words, cessation of rebirth and merger with the universal soul.

Sanchitha Karma:

All the previous karmic debts are not suffered or enjoyed in a particular life. It spreads over to many future lives as per the intensity and after effect of our deeds of past lives and that of present. Thus we find lot of people doing good work suffering from misfortunes and diseases and lot of people doing bad work who enjoy wealth and health.

Fate or Karma?

Everyone makes their own fate. Everyone is responsible for their present plight and fortune. Past life Karma makes for today's fate, and present karma makes for future fate. Certain incidents are unavoidable since our past karma is forcing us to undergo that experience. Yudhishtara was confronted and blamed for his karma of weakness for dice play and consequently loosing Indraprashtha and the position of emperor of Bharatha Varsha, by Bhima and Draupadi, during their stay in the forest. Yudhishtara points out that his advancement in the play could have been averted by Bhima, who in fact had threatened to do so while the play was going on. Then why did he not do it? That is fate. They are fated to undergo such an experience due to their Purva (past) Karma.



Karma Theory in the world beyond Bharatha Varsha:

In ancient North Africa, Asia Minor, and in the Middle East, from Anatolia and Egypt to Persia, the belief in transmigration of the souls and rebirth were prevalent. Jews called it Gilgal (wheel, cycle). The ancient Greek philosophers Pythagoras and Plato, and the ancient Roman poets Virgil and Plutarch, believed that the souls of the people will be reborn after death in a new body. The Christian theologian Clement (around 150-214 AD) believed that each birth follows the previous one in process of gradual progression to immortality. His pupil Origen, the founder of systematic Christian theology, said that every soul enters this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the stumbling of its previous life. However, the reincarnation and rebirth theory was removed from the Christian faith by Justinian the Byzantine Eastern Roman emperor of Constantinople, despite reservations by the Pope Vigilius of Rome (AD 553). Paul Brunton opines that the survival of western humanity depends on the reintroduction of the concept of Karma to the minds of the populace at large.

Conclusion:

Karma is the central theme of eastern wisdom. It seems quite rational and logical to almost all thinking people of the world. The prominent western philosopher Baruch Spinoza who laid the groundwork for the 18th century enlightenment observed that everything that has and will happen is a part of a long chain of cause and effect.

‘Tasmad ajnanasambhutam
hrtstham jnanasina tmanah
chitvai nam smsayam yogam
atishto ttistha bharata’

----- (Githa IV – 42)

Arjuna is here called upon to perform action by Lord Krishna with the help of knowledge and concentration. Our experience tells us that what we do is what we reap. Despite our belief that divine intervention and justice comes to our rescue, we are more governed by our efforts and we engage in our day to day activities to improve ourselves. We are pushed by our will to excel in our activities for better results, as we should.

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What is Sanatana Dharma?

#Hinduism #ancientCulture

By Nisha Ashtath

This is an attempt to present an overview of the vast knowledge-based Hindu traditions and culture, with an emphasis on its basic structure and its underlying thoughts and beliefs.

1. Sanatana Dharma - the most ancient tradition:

The original name of Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma.

Sanatana - Eternal, and Dharma, can be understood as Righteousness or noble values. It can be translated as the **Religion of Eternal Values**. By "Eternal" we mean that it is based on "Truth", which is One, Unchanging and Existential. The fundamental Values of Life which are the foundational content of Hinduism are based on a firm and unshakeable grounding in what is "True" about ourselves, and the world around us.

How old is it?

Modern research has unanimously concluded the existence of Bhagavan Veda Vyasa – the compiler of the Vedas and the composer of the Mahabharata and the Puranas, to be more than 5000 years old.

The Vedas and Adi Granthas, like the Ramayana, have existed for a long time even before Veda Vyasa, so that makes ours a very ancient tradition.

2. Hindu Shastras or scriptures:

Our Shastras (scriptures/sacred books) fall under 4 broad categories:

Shrutis: The word 'Shruti' means 'that which is heard'. The Shrutis form the basis of all our scriptures and is considered as "Revealed Knowledge". The four **Vedas (Rig, Saama, Yajur, Atharva)** and the many Upavedas are considered as Shrutis. This sacred knowledge has been passed down through more than 5000 plus years, using a highly revered Teacher-Student structure called the **Guru-Sishya Parampara**.

Smritis: Are the practical application of the Shrutis as interpreted by various seers. The Shrutis are, thus, man-made and the relevance is confined to a particular era, society etc.

The eternal values enshrined in the Vedas and the nature of Paramatman or the Supreme Lord is elaborated in greater detail in the **Itihaasas** and **Puranas**.

Itihaasa: Literally translated, this means history. The two Granthas, or books of literature, the **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** - treasure of knowledge and values, are classified as Itihaasas.

Purana: Like the Itihaasas, the content of the Puranas, is also in the style of stories. However, the emphasis is on "**Siksha**" or **education** as opposed to "**Ghatana**" or **fact-oriented**. There are 18 main Puranas and 46 Upa-Puranas. **Srimad Bhagavatam** is considered to be most important amongst the Puranas.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita: Bhagavad Gita means the **Lord's Song**. It is written by Sage Veda Vyasa and forms part of the Mahabharata. Its universality and versatility makes it the most popular and profound composition of the Sanatana Dharma. The teachings of the Gita are eternal and have inspired many great thinkers and leaders across the world.

3. Four Purusharthas or goals:

Sanatana Dharma, or the Hindu Culture, is a Science of Living. It informs us as to how we should live as Human Beings to achieve the four Purusharthas or Goals, as described below:

(i) **Dharma:** Righteous Actions

(iii) **Kama:** fulfillment and enjoyment of desires

(ii) **Artha:** Acquisition of wealth and worldly possessions

(iv) **Moksha:** liberation from all of these.

Artha and **Kama** are always to be fulfilled through the means of **Dharma** and **Moksha** is the ultimate goal of human life.



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4. Four Ashramas or stages of an individual's life:

During one's life span, each individual is destined to go through these four stages in succession.

(i) **Brahmacharya**: Life as a student or ardent disciple,

(ii) **Grihastha**: Life as a householder,

(iii) **Vaanaprastha**: Life as a hermit ... and

(iv) **Sannyasa**: Life as a renunciate.

5. Six tenets from the Taittiriya Upanishad:

A follower of the Sanatana Dharma is expected to live by these six basic tenets:

(i) **Satyam Vada**: Always speak the truth and live a truthful existence,

(ii) **Dharmam Chara**: Always tread on the path of righteousness,

(iii) **Matru Devo Bhava**: Treat your mother as God,

(iv) **Pitru Devo Bhava**: Treat your father as God,

(v) **Acharya Devo Bhava**: Treat your teacher as God ... and

(vi) **Atithi Devo Bhava**: Treat a guest at your door step as God

6. One God or Many Gods?

Although Hinduism is often misconstrued to be a polytheistic religion with many conflicting beliefs, in reality, Sanatana Dharma propounds the existence of only One changeless Truth or Reality called **Brahman** in philosophical terms and **Ishvara** in common parlance.

So, then why do we have so many Gods that we worship in our tradition?

Just like we have different likes, preferences, the Infinite Lord takes different forms to appeal to our mind. However, these are not different Gods, but different forms, or aspects, of the same Supreme Lord.

Why does God have to take many forms or Avatara?

i) **An idol represents an ideal**. Every aspect of the physical personality of the Lord has deep symbolism for us to learn from. Example: Trishul of Lord Shiva or Mother Durga represent the three powers of **desire (Iccha)**, **knowledge (Gyana)** and **implementation (Kriya)**.

ii) **Leading by example**: By taking a form or an Avatara, Lord demonstrates to us the right way of living, even under the most formidable of circumstances. Example: Lives of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna.

We also consider various plants, animals, the fundamental forces like: sun, moon, air etc., also to be sacred. All forms of life are thus considered as a manifestation of Bhagavan and to be divine. Our forefathers **"Worshipped"** Nature instead of **"Conquering"** her!

7. Om - the most sacred prayer of the Hindus.

Every Hindu sacred chant or prayer starts with the **moola mantra "Om"**. **Om** is the primordial sound - the universal name of the Lord which consists of three sounds **A, U** and **M** (phonetically "A" as in around, "U" as in "put" and M as in mum). All other sound forms have emanated from these basic sounds and therefore, by chanting Om, we are invoking the Lord as the source of all sounds, who Himself is beyond all sounds.

8. What is Namaste?

We greet each other with folded hands and a bowed head saying **Namaste**. This is a universal greeting for elders, those younger than us, friends etc. Namaste means **"Namah Te"** - **"I salute you"** or **"Na Mama"** - **"Not Mine"**. The purpose is to recognize the presence of the same divine presence in every person we greet and to remind us to reduce our ego in the presence of the other. The folded hands represent **"You and I are both the same"**

Conclusion: From the above, we can conclude the following eternal values: Seeing God and recognizing the same spark of divinity in all that we come across, universal love – including love for plant and animal kingdom, adherence to truth and righteousness at all times, leading a life of self-discipline, all of which form the hallmark of our Sanatana Dharma.

Dedicated at the Lotus Feet of my Guru- Param Pujya Swami Chinmayananda and all the Acharyas of Chinmaya Mission and the entire Guru Sishya Parampara. Hari Om!

Acknowledgements and suggested Further Readings:

Hindu Culture- An introduction by Swami Tejomayananda

Hinduism – Frequently asked questions- Chinmaya Mission Publication

Why Do We and Conflicts & Confusions – Swamini Vimalananda



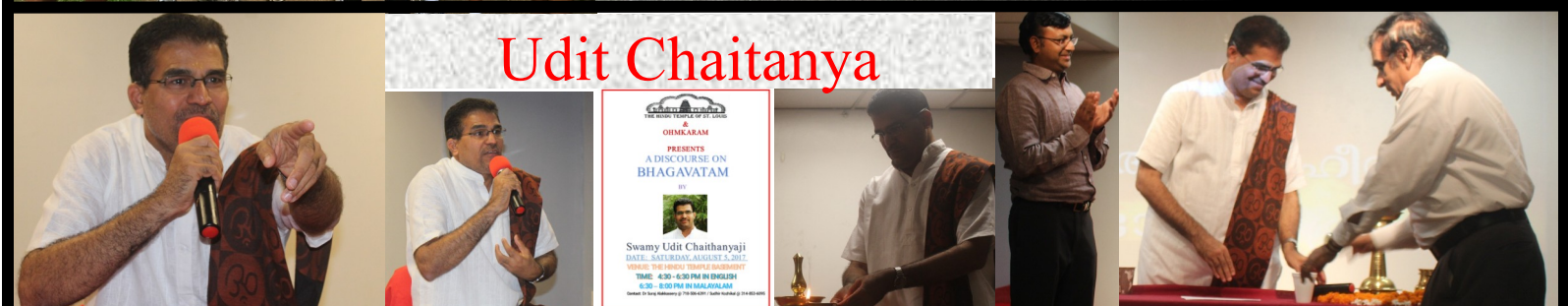
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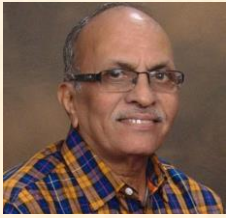


Vallom Kali



നമ്മുടെ രാഷ്ട്രം

E.T. Prabhakaran



സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യലബ്ധിക്കു ശേഷമുള്ള എഴുപതു വർഷത്തെ പുരോഗതി നമ്മൾക്കുണ്ട്. നമ്മൾക്ക് ഒരു നല്ല കാലമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ലോകരാഷ്ട്രങ്ങൾ നമ്മുടെ സംസ്കാരത്തെയും ഐക്യത്തെയും അയൽ രാജ്യങ്ങളോടുള്ള സമീപനത്തെപ്പറ്റിയെല്ലാം പുകഴ്ത്തി സംസാരിക്കുമായിരുന്നു. പഞ്ചശീലതത്വവും സിംലാകരാറും

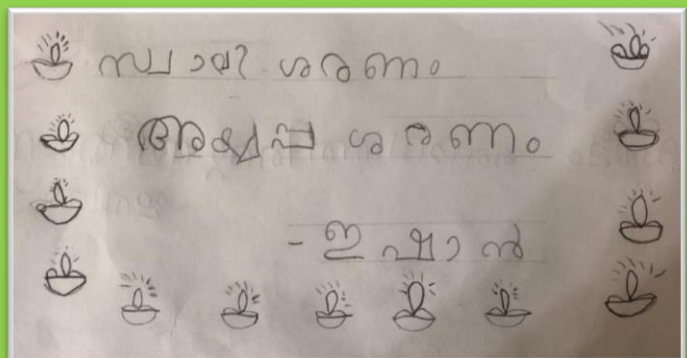
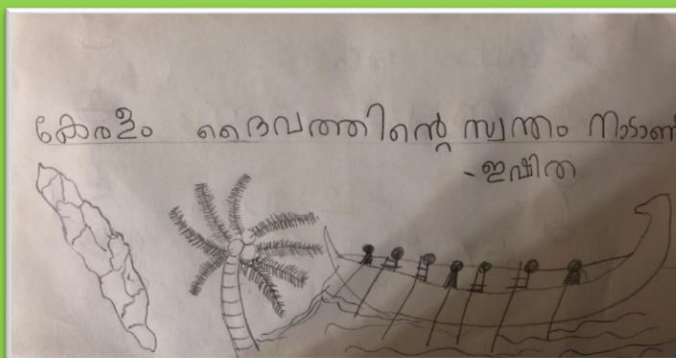
സ്നേഹവും സാഹോദര്യവും പോയി തൻകാര്യം മാത്രം ശ്രദ്ധിക്കുന്ന ഒരു ജനതയെ ആണ് നാം കാണുന്നത്. ചെറിയ കുടുംബമായതോടെ സ്നേഹം വീടുകളിലേക്കു മാത്രം ഒതുങ്ങി.

സത്യം പ്രചരിപ്പിക്കേണ്ട പത്രമാധ്യമങ്ങളും ടിവി ചാനലുകളും മുതലാളിമാർക്ക് പണമുണ്ടാക്കാനുള്ള ഉപാധിയായി മാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. രാഷ്ട്രത്തിന്റെയും ജനതയുടെയും പുരോഗതിക്കു വേണ്ടി ചർച്ച ചെയ്യേണ്ട ഈ മാധ്യമങ്ങൾ അത് പാലിക്കുന്നില്ല. ചാനൽ ചർച്ചകളിൽ നാം കാണുന്നത് പോർവിളികളും തമ്മിൽത്തമ്മിൽ ചീത്ത നിലവാരത്തിലുള്ള അസഭ്യവിളികളുമാണ്. ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് ചാനലുകളാണ് ഇതിൽ മുൻപന്തിയിൽ. പുറംലോകം ഇത് കാണാനും അറിയാനും അതുകൊണ്ടു സഹായകരമാക്കുന്നു. ഇതെല്ലാം നിർത്തി വെച്ചു നമ്മുടെ മഹത്തായ രാഷ്ട്രം മുന്നോട്ടു പോയി ലോകത്തിനു തന്നെ മാതൃകയാ കേണ്ടതാണ്. ജനാതിപത്യം എന്ന മഹത്തായ പദത്തെ കാത്തുസൂക്ഷിക്കേണ്ടത് ഓരോ ഭാരതീയ പൗരനായ നമ്മുടെ കടമയും കർത്തവ്യവുമാണ്.

മെല്ലാം ചില ഉദാഹരണങ്ങൾ മാത്രം. ഇന്ന് നമ്മുടെ രാഷ്ട്രീയത്തിന്റെ ഗതി ആകെ മാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. മഹാത്മാഗാന്ധി വിഭാവനം ചെയ്ത രാമരാജ്യമോ മതസൗഹാർദ്ദമോ കാണാനില്ല. രാഷ്ട്രീയം ചിലർക്കുള്ള സ്വത്തു സമ്പാദിക്കാനും പേരിനും പെരുമയ്ക്കുമുള്ള ഉപാധിയായി മാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. നമ്മുടെ ജനാധിപത്യം അപകടത്തിലേക്ക് പോകുന്ന കാഴ്ചയാണ് കാണുന്നത്. രാഷ്ട്രപുരോഗതിയിലും ജനപുരോഗതിയിലും ശ്രദ്ധിക്കാതെ സ്വന്തം പാർട്ടിക്കും സ്വത്തിനുമായി രാഷ്ട്രീയ കക്ഷികൾ പോരടിക്കുന്നു. ജാതിയുടെയും മതത്തിന്റെയും തമ്മിലുള്ള പോരും കുറവുപല. ഹിംസയും വേറൊരുത്തന്റെ സ്വകാര്യ ജീവിതത്തിലേക്കുള്ള എത്തിനോട്ടവും സർവസാധാരണമാണ്.



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Pranayama and Meditation

By Ganesh Jayaraman

Why is Pranayama and Meditation necessary from medical science's point of view?

From the time of the birth till death, the heart works continuously. Every day the heart pumps 7000 liters of blood, of which 70% blood is pumped to the brain and the remaining 30% to the rest of the body.

How does the heart work so efficiently and effectively?

Heart works effectively because it follows a discipline. In normal conditions, the heart takes 0.3 seconds to contract (systole) and 0.5 seconds to relax (diastole). So $0.3 + 0.5 = 0.8$ seconds is required by the heart to complete one beat (1 cardiac cycle). That means in one minute, the heart beats 72 times, which is considered as normal heart beat. During the relaxing phase of 0.5 seconds the impure blood travels through the lungs and becomes 100% pure.

In some stressful conditions, the body demands more blood in less time and in this situation the heart reduces the relaxing period of 0.5 seconds to 0.4 seconds. Thus in this case the heart beats 82 times in a minute and only 80% of blood gets purified. With more and more demand, the relaxing time is further reduced to 0.3 seconds, resulting in only 60% of blood being purified. Imagine the consequences of the lesser oxygenated blood circulating in our arteries.

Deep Breathing is the key to ensure better oxygenation of the blood. Thus, to calm the brain and reduce the demand on the heart to pump more and more blood, brain needs to be given a rest.

Meditation is the most useful tool to calm an agitated mind. When we sit with eyes closed and meditate, the brain gets calmer; heart gets rested, thus insulating us from the diseases of heart & brain.

Benefits of Meditation:

By practicing meditation, one can lead a total stress-free life. The mind will be under total control. Blood pressure is well controlled and heart health improves. One can overcome emotions. Regular practice of meditation can be very helpful in controlling and overcoming emotional weakness, along with reduced risk for various diseases, improved well-being and a rewired brain etc.

Here is a short list:

- ✓ Diseases heal fast
- ✓ Memory power is increased and sharpened
- ✓ Wasteful habits die a natural death
- ✓ Mind stays in a peaceful and joyful state
- ✓ Work gets done with greater focus and efficiency
- ✓ Sleep-time requirements get reduced
- ✓ Relationships become more qualitative
- ✓ Will-power gets tremendously increased
- ✓ Ability to discern right/wrong gets sharpened
- ✓ Purpose of life is thoroughly understood

Meditation and Music:

- Meditation music is the music performed to aid in the practice of meditation.
- Music enhances the overall experience and helps the meditator attain a clear mind easily.
- For beginners, music (instrumental) during meditation is a great tool.

Group Sadhana:

When 100 people do meditation together, its vibrations spread to a region of 5 kilometers around it and the negativity in this area is destroyed. Einstein had scientifically explained how if we break one atom, it breaks all other atoms around it. Our Rishis and Munis had said the same thing thousands of years ago - that if even 4% of people on this planet do meditation, then the rest 96% will automatically come to bliss. **Meditate Daily.... Namaskaram!**

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Meditation Procedure:

1. Sit comfortably in any posture. Sitting cross-legged (Sukhasana) is the best posture; you could also stretch your legs & cross them. Sitting on a chair is fine too but keep your legs crossed. Also, keep your back straight.
2. Clasp your hands; fingers into fingers and close your eyes. Do not open your eyes for the duration of meditation.
3. Chant AUM 3 times. Inhale deeply and while exhaling chant AUM. One for self, one for the group, and one for the Supreme.
4. Now breathe normally. Observe your breath. You can do this in two ways – either by observing your breath going in and coming out through the nostrils, or by observing your diaphragm rising and falling.
5. Focus your attention and concentrate on the calm, easy & natural breath.
6. Do not repeat any mantra or name. Do not imagine anything.
7. Now slowly bring your attention towards your forehead region, in between your eyebrows, *Ajna chakra*, the soul center or the spiritual eye.
8. There may be a *tingling* sensation, or an *itching* sensation, or a *vibration* or *pulsation* around your forehead region or at the top of your head. This is normal. Just focus on your breath.
9. If you drift away by thoughts, bring your attention back towards your breath.
10. The goal is to have no thoughts, a *thought free* mind. This can be achieved by focusing on your breath.
11. Breath is divine, breath is the key. You are not breathing, a Divine higher power is breathing through you.
12. Be thankful to your breath. Say thank you for nurturing my life, bless me, guide me, lead me, love you, thank you.
13. Please don't open your eyes; enjoy the silence; be thankful to your breath; be grateful.
14. Now rub your hands and place them on your eyes for a few seconds, and gently open your eyes and look at your own body.

Note: Long, deep breaths (5 or 6 at least) before meditation enhances the quality of meditation.

St Louis Global Meditation Initiative

St. Louis based Global Meditation is an initiative started by Maitri Sabha, with the intention of spreading global peace through the art of meditation. The organization name was coined by Sairamprasad Sabnavis a.k.a Sai Sabnavis, and its main focus since inception in February, 2006, has been the teaching of meditation and yoga. These practices help with relaxation and reducing stress, and allows one to live a life of good health, harmony and peace. Global Meditation classes are absolutely free and all are welcome.

Global Meditation also addresses self-help and healing techniques, utilizing ancient and new age wisdom. Focal points are a combination of both Prayer and Meditation and how it brings about greater shift in the overall consciousness of each and every individual involved in the process.

Global Meditation sessions can be attended via free conference call or web from any part of the globe. The hour long sessions are conducted every Friday evenings, except holiday weekends. One can ask questions before or after the meditation session. Since inception, the group has grown globally, taking advantage of great teachings from the masters of wisdom. Starting with a small group, it has grown to over 300 members worldwide and has resulted in improvement of physical, emotional, mental, intellectual and spiritual health. In essence, it is a tool for holistic health and abundance.



Can you twist your Tongue around these Twisters??

1. I love the feeling I feel when I feel I am going to feel a feeling I have never felt before.
2. If you notice this notice, you will notice that this notice is not worth noticing.
3. What noise annoys a noisy oyster? A noisy noise annoys a noisy oyster.

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Company Report Summary Analysis

Lakshita Senthil, 6th Grade

In my class, we were studying about the Stock Market and how it works. This Essay was assigned as one of the projects in the unit. In this Essay, I compare five different companies based on their stock price and 52-week range, growth percentage, analyst recommendations, EPS (earning per share), P/E compare for sector, beta, yield, dividend rate and some news. A dividend yield is the financial ratio that indicates how much a company pays out in dividends each year

relative to its share price. A dividend rate is the total amount of the unexpected dividend payment from an investment, fund, or portfolio expressed on an analyzed basis plus any non-recurring dividends that may be received during that period.

This is my report:

The five companies I've chosen for this project are Monsanto, Citi, Delta Airlines, American Airlines, and United Airlines. Monsanto is a company that works with agricultural chemicals. It provides agricultural products for farmers worldwide. I was interested in this company because my dad works here and usually talks about it at home. The second company I picked was Citi. It provides various financial products for consumers, corporations, governments, and institutions worldwide. I was interested in this company because my mom works here and I wanted to learn more about it. Next on my list is Delta Airlines which is a major airline. It provides scheduled air transportation for passengers and cargo in the United States and internationally. The reason why I chose this company is because during class in school, we stumbled upon a topic about someone who was working for Delta Airlines kicked out a doctor, off of a flight. Ever since, I was wondering how this company is doing now. My last two companies are American Airlines and United Airlines. Just like Delta airlines these companies are also major airlines. American Airlines is a network air carrier. United Airlines provides air transportation services in North America, the Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. I was interested in these two airlines because I was hoping to relate at least two similar companies with Delta Airlines.

When I researched and compared the companies, I discovered that all of my five companies had a high stock price. The highest stock price out of all my companies was Monsanto's with \$117.59 and a 52 week range of \$97.35 - \$118.97. Out of all the airline companies, United Airlines had the highest stock price of \$61.66 and a 52 week range of \$42.28 - \$83.04. I was surprised to see that Monsanto and American Airlines had the same growth percentage (-15.50%). Let's talk about my ranking for the five companies. The company I ranked as number 1 was Monsanto. I did this for a variety of reasons, but my main reason for this move was the fact that its analyst recommendations were a number 1 strong buy (there was no red on the graph I referred to). Next, I ranked Delta Airlines as number 2. A few reasons I did this were because its analyst recommendations were to buy, it had the best debt/ equity ratio(0.43), highest dividends rate/ yield percentage(1.22 and 2.57%), and the second highest EPS(5.05). The company that I ranked as number 3 was Citigroup Inc. Three reasons why I did this are - it had the second highest stock price (\$69.39), it had the 3rd highest EPS (4.99), and it had the worst beta. I rated United Airlines as number 4 because it had the lowest P/E compare for sector (8.07), it had the lowest market cap (17.76 billion), it had the 3rd best analyst recommendation, and it had the 3rd best stock price (\$61.66). The company I rated last was American Airlines. Some reasons why I made this move are because it had the 2nd worst debt/equity ratio (0.68), it had the worst analyst recommendation, it had the worst stock price (\$47.00), it had the worst EPS (4.03), and it had the second worst beta (1.34). My ranking system was very simple. I saw which company was the best in each category (beta, EPS) and then saw how many good points each company had.

My top-rated company is **Monsanto**. I think investing in this company would be a wise investment because its beta is 0.99, telling us that if we do invest in Monsanto, then it wouldn't be too risky at all. Its P/E compare for sector is also high (25.39), which shows us that it could expect higher growth in the future and that Monsanto isn't losing any money. Its stock price is also pretty high (\$117.59) with a 52 week range of \$97.35-\$118.97. It also has a 1.87% dividend yield and \$2.16 dividend rate and has a number 1 analyst recommendation for strong buy. Though some people say that Monsanto is evil, I still think it is better than its competitors for a variety of reasons. First, it is the key to golden rice development which provides vitamin A keeping people healthy. Other than that, it saved people from starvation and influenced many agricultural scientists by producing

wheat, it introduced BT crops (BT is a natural pesticide that controls worm pests), and discovered a molecule called glyphosate that allowed farmers to kill all types weeds. Though Monsanto has done many bad deeds its good deeds outweigh the bad and make it an outstanding agricultural company.

P.S: This article was written by Lakshitha as a part of the GATE (Gifted & Talented Education) program, & it was picked as one of the best in her class.



Why Professional Athletes have a Practical Salary?

Snigdha Nair, 7th Grade

And the crowd goes wild! As the MVP of the winning team jogs off the court, sweating and panting, he finds himself surrounded by mobbing fans left and right. Dodging the slightly more intense fans holding up vials to collect his sweat, he plasters a smile on his face and autographs various kinds of trinkets, including numerous foreheads, all while silently grumbling about how he doesn't get paid enough for this. This thought has run through the heads of LeBron James, Steph Curry, Shaquille O'Neal, and so many other athletes. There are many who oppose the supposedly large incomes that athletes make. But they are blinded by the trail the public is leaving behind for them, saying that athletes are overpaid. They forget about how much these athletes do for us and how

they deserve the number written on their paychecks. Professional athletes are not paid too much because their careers are uncertain, they risk their safety, and they are constantly exerting themselves.

The careers of athletes are short-lived. The briefness and brevity of their careers is a weight that constantly lies on the player's back, and it's in their contracts that their coaches have the right to dismiss a player from the team when necessary. Every one of their games is vital towards the potential length of their careers and after their paychecks stop coming in, they have to find work elsewhere. Pro Athletes' salaries aren't overly exorbitant states *"The historical argument for paying exorbitant salaries to athletes is the brevity of their careers. All of these athletes are a busted knee, concussion, or torn rotator cuff away from the end of their career, and very few sports offer guaranteed contracts that go beyond the season when the injury occurs."* (Singletary 963)

These superstars need the money stored in advance to support them and their families in the scenario that they receive an injury or are dismissed from the team. Their income is the only thing they have to support them until they can find a way to keep their heads afloat. This demonstrates how they never know when their careers might come to an end, and need enough money to support themselves afterwards.

Why have sports at all, if we're going to make athletes risk their safety for a near-to-nothing wage? Should superstar athletes make more money and run their leagues? *"Boxing has had more near deaths than Fred Sanford, and after McGregor's laughable training videos began to leak online, he looked like a Wall Streeter sorting out some rage issues - it seemed possible for a moment that this bout might finally be the indignity that causes the sport to keel over into its grave."* (Kang 2) There are so many sports out there that have athletes risking their lives, and all for what? A salary that isn't worth a life, that's for sure. Having athletes putting their lives on the line for our entertainment is definitely a job that deserves a better salary.

Athletes are so diligent and productive with their training for such little remuneration. Should superstar athletes make more money and run their leagues? *"The N.F.L. season has to last at least 16 games, because that's the way it has been for decades. N.B.A. teams have to play on back-to-back nights because that's the only way to fit in all 82 games, a number set decades ago."* (Kang 3) They work 24/7 and are constantly over-exerting themselves, so the amount they receive is negligible comparatively to the hours they work. Not only does overexertion tire them out, but it distracts from precious time that they could be spending doing other activities. Yet, there are some who disagree.

This world unfortunately carries certain athletes who may act arrogant and appear entitled to the large sums of money they receive. However, not all athletes are that egotistical and want to blow off all their hard-earned money. In Pro Athletes' Finances, a Defensive Line Pays claims *"But the reality is that most professional players do not get huge paychecks. Even among*

those who do, the savviest ones are not buying Bentleys and mansions for their families. They are renting apartments and driving modest cars, looking at the long term instead of the immediate.” (Sullivan 1) All these athletes come from middle-class families, and it’s in their work ethic to be modest and to save for a better cause, not to boast about the paycheck they receive. These athletes are human beings just like us, and through hard work, they stand where they are today.

Professional athletes work hard, risk their safety and their careers don’t last long. On top of all this, they are best friends with their teammates, facing defeats, celebrating victory, and training hard on a daily basis. They are modest, they risk their lives, never knowing when their careers could meet an end. We are back to the game, this time on the losing team. The crowd started thinning out, but the players clapped each other on the back consoling one another. It would be hard, because there was the chance that they wouldn’t make it to next season. What they didn’t know was that they would have the support of their fans. It’s now up to the public to take a stand and say that professional athletes must be paid more!

P.S: This was written by Snigdha as one side in a debate where she had to argue in favor of why athletes were justified in earning the big bucks. In a tongue-in-cheek humorous manner she later goes on to suggest that they should be paid even more.



Is the Travel Ban Really Helping Us?

Anushka Rawat, 7th Grade

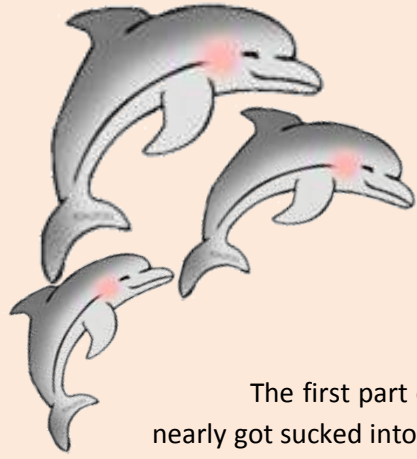
You may think that the travel ban is pious, but have you uncovered all of the secrets the US government is ‘forgetting’ to tell us, US civilians about? Well you are just in luck, I am going to reveal some of those pesky secrets. Exactly, how many lives has the travel ban saved? You may wonder? When you hear about the travel ban, you think of some brilliant amazing thing that is pushing United States forward towards prosperity, but is it really?

The whole travel ban is out of this world. We all know that there are tons of terrorists in the world and we can’t possibly prevent them from entering our united country. It is just impractical for the United States of America to be terrorist-free. With all of the terrorist attacks in the last 20 years, none of them could have been blocked or prevented with the travel ban. For example 9/11, the Las Vegas shooting, and many more. 9/11 couldn’t be prevented because the terrorists were from Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. None of those countries are on the travel ban list. The mass shooting in Las Vegas also couldn’t be impeded because the perpetrator was US citizen. These are only a couple of examples. Majority of terrorist attacks in US have been implemented by US citizens. Since 2001, 391 terrorist attack cases have been examined by US intelligence and 80% cases were identified to be planned by US citizens. The travel ban is moving us nowhere.

Why are we even doing this to our own society? We will lose money in our economy greatly. We are already in debt. We owe approximately 1.3 trillion dollars to China; 1.1 trillion dollars to Japan; 2.6 trillion dollars to the rest of the world; 5 trillion dollars to the Federal Government, and many more! We owe approximately 17 trillion dollars. Do you think the US can afford to spare more money? Out of all the countries, US is 3rd in debt as percentage of GDP. Currently, we get 250 billion dollars into our society every year because of tourism. The travel ban is estimated to lower that by 18 billion dollars because tourists from those countries can't visit us. Also, from other tourists who decide not to come to the US because of being against the unjust travel ban. This will cause some of top tourist attractions to possibly go into bankruptcy. It will also cause attractions to cost more money and the unemployment rate will increase. We should be focused on paying them back, not spending more money. Statistics show that 5% of university students will be lost. This will impact the society because 1,020,000 students will be lost costing US approximately 35,434,800,000 dollars... and remember this is per year. This is how the travel ban will affect the economy and we may regret it in future.

So, now do you think the travel ban really serves its purpose or is just a waste of money from US economy? Has your opinion on this topic changed? We are not reducing terrorist attacks and steadily moving towards deeper debts. What could be worse? In the next 50 years, will US be a country filled with diversity, where you would want to live? Be true to yourself.

P.S: Anushka picked this topic by choice from among a variety of others. She likes to write about social issues that are close to the heart. She once wrote a letter to President Obama expressing her concerns.



How Dolphins Got Their Tails?

Arshya Pillai, 5th Grade

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom named Rosafina. Their ruler was Princess Leona. She was very beautiful and smart. One day, Princess Leona sent for her dolphin explorers. "Go to the kingdom of Iceloria to search for the Heart of the Sea" ordered Princess Leona. "Of course, Your Majesty" said one of the dolphin explorers. Then they started their journey.

The first part of their journey on the map was to go to Whirly Whirlpools. When they arrived, they nearly got sucked into one of the whirlpools. Suddenly, they saw a seahorse getting sucked into a whirlpool. "Help!" shouted the seahorse. "Don't worry, we'll help you" said one of the dolphin explorers. They all tugged with their fins on the seahorse's tail. Finally, she popped out of the whirlpool. "Thank you" said the seahorse. "In reward for helping me, I will give you some rare magic sand to make you swim faster so you can swim next to the whirlpools without getting sucked in" the seahorse said. The dolphins sprinkled the sand on their flippers and zoomed by the whirlpools and the whirlpools couldn't catch them.

After waving a quick goodbye to the seahorse, they were on the way to the second part of their journey on the map, the Magic Quicksand Sea. Soon they arrived there. Suddenly, they felt themselves getting sucked in by the quicksand. Then they heard a scream coming from the other side. "Help! I'm getting sucked in" yelled a faraway voice. "Don't worry, we'll help you" said one of the dolphin explorers. She grabbed a piece of seaweed to get out of the quicksand. Then using all her might she pulled herself out of the quicksand with the seaweed. Then she plucked a piece of seaweed from the ground. Then all of the dolphins made a big rope of seaweed to help the creature that was far away. The creature got the rope and they pulled. Finally, they saw it was a glowing red crab. "Thank you for saving me" said the crab. "In honor of helping me, I will give you glittering dust that we glowing crabs produce!" exclaimed the crab.



After a quick good bye, the dolphins carried on. The next journey on the map was Dark Dreary Castle. So, they journeyed there. When they got to the huge castle, they nearly got spotted by the guards. They needed a distraction for the guards to sneak in the castle. Then they saw a little icy blue gem. They threw the gem towards the guards. The guards then started to bicker over who should get it. While they were bickering, the dolphins sneaked into the castle. When they were in the castle, they went in the nearest room. The dolphins found several knights' clothes and put them on. Once they were disguised, they went out of the room to the Ice Princess' chamber. The one dolphin accidentally tripped on the carpet and bumped into the wall. To their surprise, it opened a secret passage. They started to go into it. The dolphins suddenly stopped. Up ahead, there were sharp spikes jutting out. They went through them but they pulled on the dolphin's tails and made them longer. Finally, they came to Crystal Cove. There they found 3 crystals. One was icy blue, another was black and the third one was white. They picked the white one. Then they found the Heart of the Sea and went back to Princess Leona's castle. That is why to this day dolphins have tails.

The Pony Express

Ankita Nair, 5th Grade

The pony's hooves under you. The mail behind you. The vast trail in front of you. The rhythm of the horse goes up and down, bumpety-bump, never breaking pace, not once. You know you must get to the next station with all the mail there, and intact. This is the fierce loyalty that the people working in the pony express felt. In this article you'll

read all about how the pony express got started, how it ended, and the challenges along the trail. So just sit back and enjoy the ride!

How would one of the greatest legends in the West get started, you ask? Well it all started with these three men,



William Hepburn Russell; William Bradford Weddell; and Alexander Majors. The pony express (their Idea) started on April 3, 1860, and ended October 24, 1861. Their main goal was to prove that mail carried by horse was faster. They succeeded because mail carried by horses took 10 days, while mail carried by stagecoach took twice as much.

Think about bandits, Buffalo stampedes, and robbers. Then think about hail, sleet, snow, rain, thunder, and lightning. Now think about all that, together. On some days their letter delivering was peaceful

with sunny days.

But on most days they had one or two of those problems staring right at them. Plus they had to deal with those problems while racing 1,966 miles between Missouri and California. Sprinting at top speed through Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada. Horrible right? Not so much. The pony express wouldn't have gotten through nineteen months of mail delivering like that. This legendary business bought and built relay stations only twenty miles apart, so that the horse and rider wouldn't get tired, or worn out.

You still have a few questions about the pony express I bet. Let me answer a few repeatedly asked questions for you.

Question: What kind of news did the pony express deliver?

Answer: The pony express delivered news of Abraham Lincoln's election, the first shots fired at Fort Sumter marking the beginning of the civil war, and basic family letters.

Question: Was the pony express just mail delivery? If so, why is it such a great legend?

Answer: The pony express wasn't just a mail delivery service. The pony express connected citizens in the West with people in the East, when the threat of the civil war threatened to pull the nation apart. Here is a quote from a San Francisco reporter to help convince you, "One by one the chains of darkness and desert were broken, and we are brought closer and closer to our brother kin on the other side"

Question: How did you know Pony express workers were faithful and would not betray you?

Answer: All the employees had to take an oath. The oath went like this...

"I (your name), do hereby swear before the great and living God, that during my engagement, and while employee of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, I will, under no circumstances, use profane language, that I will drink no intoxicating liquors, that I will not fight or quarrel with any members of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence of my employers, so help me God."

Sadly, all things must come to an end, and the Pony express was no exception. Soon W H Russell transferred ownership to the Wells Fargo Company and the Wells Fargo company reduced postage rates immediately. Soon after the Telegraph Act for a transcontinental telegraph was approved. While they were building it, the Pony Express went on as normal. But on October 24, 1861 the transcontinental telegraph was finished and the Pony express was no longer needed. The Pony Express officially ended. The pony express finished delivering the last few letters. The



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day the pony express ended was an ending and a beginning for with the telegraph, communications became almost instant. During its time the pony express had delivered almost 35,000 letters.

Overall, the pony express faced many challenges and bumps along the trail, but it succeeded through 19 months. So that wasn't that bad right? From this article you know now all about how the Pony Express started, and how the challenges along the trail helped make the Pony Express stronger. I answered some questions for you, and you learned how this great story ended. As all things must come to an end so must this article. I'll just let you off knowing that the pony express was a larger than life, Western legend.

My India

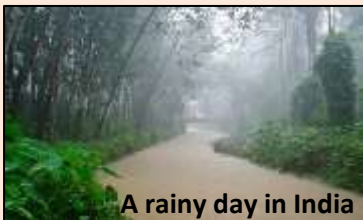
Mythili Alankaar, 5th Grade

Twenty-Two Official Languages in India:

There are twenty-two languages in India and there may be some that you have heard of. There are many different states, so there are different languages. Mostly because each state has its own language or languages. The languages are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Meitei, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu (and English). Sanskrit is special because it is one of the oldest languages in India. Many prayers and religious books are written in Sanskrit.



Map of India showing the spoken languages



A rainy day in India

Climate of India:

Did you know that India has four seasons? Winters are mild, except in Northern India where there can be snowfall too. Summers are very severe and it can get as hot as the center of the Earth! After summer, comes monsoon. Monsoon is also known as the rainy season, and after that is post monsoon season. Winter happens in December, January and February, summer happens in March, April and May, monsoon happens in June, July, August, and September, and finally post monsoon happens in the month of October to the month of November.

The Four Religions That Started in India:

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are four religions that started in India, but there are more than four religions that are practiced in India. Hinduism and Buddhism are followed by a large number of people compared to Jainism and Sikhism. Hinduism has the largest number of followers in India. Even though Islam and Christianity didn't start in India, they are the second and third most common religion followed in India now! Each religion has different cultures and different gods. Even though each religion is different, we are all Indians.



Hindu Temple



Buddhist Temple



Sikh Temple



Jain Temple



Friendship Lasts Forever

Hrithika Malugu, 4th Grade

One winter night, as the snow was falling, wind blowing, a sudden sound came from the moorland cottage. Dr. Crawford had arrived to check the ill boy who had been ill for 10 years. The boy always was in bed- sick. Until his cousin - Avanthika had arrived. Avanthika would feed him, nurture him, and even help him walk!

This place they lived in was Yorkshire, England. Avanthika was not born in England, she was born in India. But, she picked up the Yorkshire accent pretty quickly. The boy was afraid of sun and never wanted to come outside. This boy's name is Jack. Nobody ever wanted to see him. They never had faith in him.

Then, one day a sudden peep came from the outside, a breezy wind was blowing through the trees, finally spring had arrived. The flowers were budding. Hooray! Hooray! That morning Avanthika came running down the halls through the corridor to Jack's room. "Jack, Jack! Spring has arrived, it is the time and we need to go outside every single day. I'll teach you how to walk, jump, and run! Please come out, will you?" "Yes, I must come." Jack said. "Let's go, get in your chair and we'll go to the place I want to show." said Avanthika. They quickly put on their shoes and went outside.



"Now let me just find it. It should be around here somewhere." Jack was being led into a garden. Quite a secret garden. Then, Jack asked "Where are we? This place has no plant or life. It is all dead." "See, that's why are we here... to help all the plants come to life." "I thought I was going to learn to walk. Will I ever be able to walk?" Then, Avanthika took Jack to a shady spot and they both were happy for the rest of the day.

The next morning was not as exciting as the day before. Both of the kids woke up at 11:00 and did nothing the whole day! Both of them thought "Why is today so boring, no fun, nothing?" The rest of the day was very gloomy. Nobody did anything. But when the night came the magic had happened, Jack was walking by himself for a long time with Avanthika. And he never was sad again.

And their friendship lasted forever.



Mural Artwork

"A mural is a picture painted on a wall. Historians have traced its presence to the pre-historic cave paintings. In Kerala, mural paintings are predominantly found in temples. Natural colors made from leaves and stones are used. The main colors are red, green, yellow, black and white known as Panchavarna. The iconography of most murals is based on the Dhyana shloka of the deity."

As a first attempt, I chose a painting of Ganesha holding broken tusk, modaka and noose in three hands and the fourth hand held up in the abhaya mudra. Acrylic paints are mixed in a particular proportion to get the natural look on a canvas.

Artist: Souparnika Sreelatha

Surprise at the Beach

Meenakshi Kadungath, 4th Grade



Once upon a time, there was a girl named Clara. She had two sisters Maggie and Jessica. Clara was the oldest of them all. Maggie and Jessica spent all of their time plotting and planning something which they didn't tell Clara. But Clara did not care.

It was summer and Clara and her family was going to the beach in Hawaii. Clara was really excited as she had not been to the beach in a long time. Maggie and Jessica were really excited because it was the second time they went to the beach. They were hoping to see mermaids. Clara, of course, did not believe in mermaids. She was eleven years old. Maggie and Jessica were both 7 years old. Yes, they were twins.

When it was time to get ready to go to the beach, Clara was really responsible and packed up both hers and her sisters' clothes and things while Maggie and Jessica continued to plan something that they still didn't tell Clara.

Clara was now getting curious about what they might be planning. So when Clara was there to pack their things, she looked over Maggie and Jessica's back. Then she saw what they were planning – they had a mermaid friend named Oona. They were going to run away because Oona had promised them that she would change them to mermaids – FOREVER!

Clara was alarmed. She could not tell her mom or dad because they would not believe her. Even if they believed her, she did not want to worry their parents. And they had lot of work to do. Clara decided to solve the problem on her own. She would keep an eye on her sisters and would tell her parents in private during the trip to Hawaii.

The day finally came. Everyone was excited when they got in the car. Maggie and Jessica were whispering excitedly. They didn't tell Clara or their parents. But this time Clara knew what they were talking about. She was worried about her sisters turning into mermaids. She often heard tales that there were sea fairies that were a trouble to mermaids. Even if sea fairies were not true, there were other creatures like sharks and whales. Were mermaids and Oona real in the first place? Clara did not know!

"We are here!" said Clara's mom interrupting her thought. "We are?" asked Maggie and Jessica in unison. They laughed and jumped out of the car. Clara jumped after them and smiled. Her mischievous sisters were something! Then she frowned when she remembered that that her sisters were going to turn into mermaids.

"Maggie! Jessica!" Clara called racing, trying to catch up with them, "Wait". Maggie and Jessica waited until Clara caught up. Then Clara revealed to them that she knew the whole story. Maggie and Jessica looked at each other. And smiled! Without a word, they took Clara's hand and ran to the beach.

"Oona! It is us Maggie and Jessica". They waited and waited. After an hour or so, a mermaid's head came bobbing out of the water. Clara gasped. The mermaid smiled. She did not seem scared around humans.

"I am Oona", said the mermaid. "I am going to turn Maggie and Jessica to mermaids. Are you ok with that?" "Can you turn me into a mermaid as well?" Clara blurted out. Oona smiled. "Of course!" she said. And then she disappeared in to the water.

She came out after a few moments and said "You will have to wade into the water". Maggie, Jessica, and Clara did what they were told. Then Oona closed her eyes and chanted a spell. After the spell, she opened her eyes. Within a minute or two, Maggie, Jessica and Clara felt their legs turning into tails. Their clothes changed. They were all mermaids now! They dove into the water.

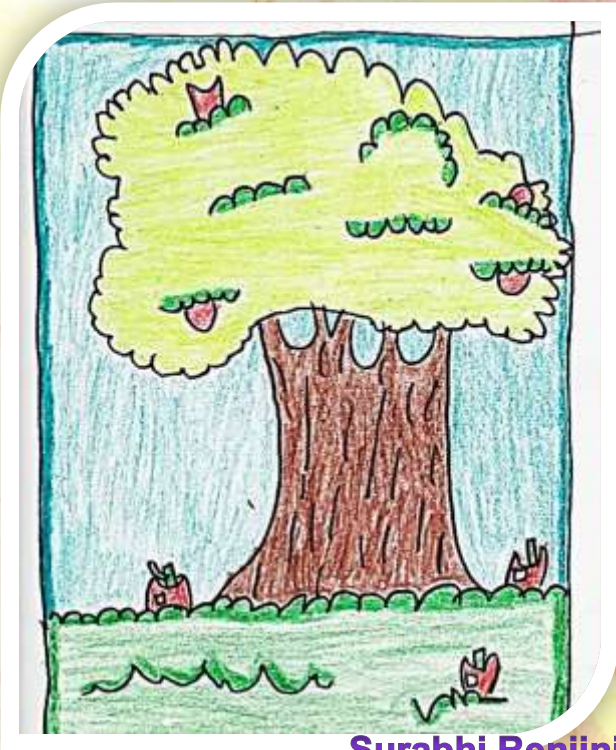
Their adventures had just begun.

Art by Ohmkaram Kids

This page by our 6-year old
budding artists...



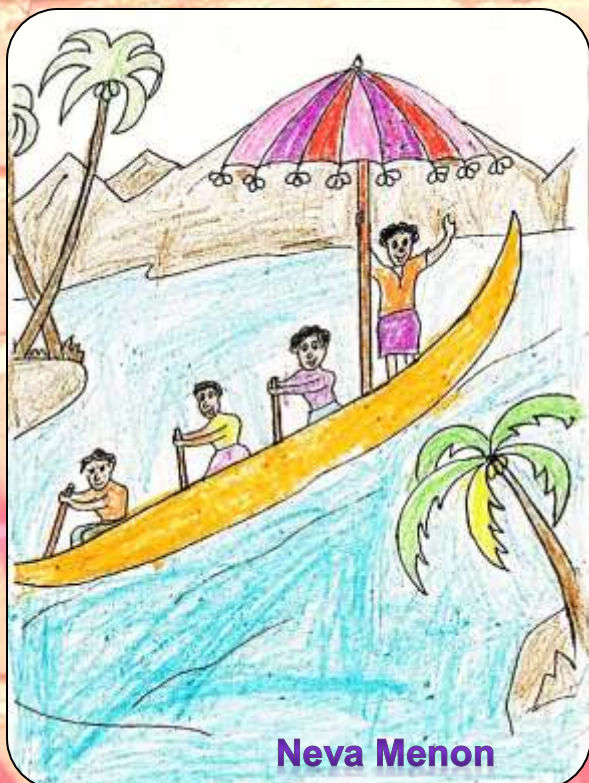
Madhulika Jinu



Surabhi Renjini



Kalakriti Art Contest Winner



Neva Menon



Rama Alakkassery



Hrithika Malugu, 9 years



**Aromal Kozhikal,
11 years**



Arav Kozhikal, 8 years



1017 Golden Orchard Drive
O'Fallon, MO 63368
November 7, 2017

Dear Farmer Brown,
Please don't eat me! I am an old
business manager who wants to have peace.
If you eat me, then who will run my
company? If the business survives, then
anyways it will be doomed when it
has no one in charge. All the workers will
be poor and have to beg on the streets.
If you don't want to cause a business depression,
then eat the crops you worked so hard to
grow! Again, please don't eat me or other
innocent turkeys!



Sincerely,
Ward Turkster

Gingerbread Queen!

There once lived a gingerbread Queen. She was baked by a real Queen. The gingerbread Queen was living in a gingerbread Castle and the gingerbread castle was in a real castle. So they were happy. But one day a fox came in to the castle. Then the gingerbread Queen got eaten by the fox. So the gingerbread Queen was gone. But then the gingerbread Queen escaped from the fox's mouth. Oh yay everyone shouted! The end.

by - Anvika Malugu



Anvika Malugu, 6 years

UNICORN'S CHRISTMAS
It was Christmas.
There was a unicorn
and it was three
years old. The
unicorn couldn't fly.
Santa gave the Unicorn
a present. Santa gave magic
powers to fly. The
Unicorn was happy!



Lakshmi Kadungath, 5 years



Photo credit: www.dare.com via Wikimedia Commons

MY DARE

Vaibhav Nair, 5th Grade

Have you ever heard of D.A.R.E? It stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education. We have been learning about DARE at our school for seven weeks. We learnt about ways to make good choices and these have helped me think about things I probably

never would have thought about until DARE. An officer (Officer Riter) came to our school and explained everything from their experience and knowledge and I am going to share with you what I learnt... like, how DARE helped stay aware and away, to not choose the wrong decision and know right from wrong and that taking choices to smoke or to take drugs can damage your life.

Using drugs can cause a lot of problems like teeth rotting and it would hurt your mouth every time you take a deep breath in. It would feel like shards of ice in your mouth. Staying drug free can make you a better person and save you from a lot of disease such as Stroke, Cancer, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and C, Lung disease, and mental disorders. These are just a few of the many diseases you can get.

Once you start taking Drugs you become addicted to it and it is not only your health that gets affected. Your family, friends and all your near and dear ones too get affected. Moreover if caught using drugs, you can get in serious trouble and you may even not get a job because of how bad it will be and how it will harm you in so many ways. This is a habit forming addiction and it is very difficult to come out of it if you get hooked. Cigarettes, for example, have something called nicotine that will get you addicted. It is very important to stay drug free. It could damage your hard earned record and a lot of famous people took drugs and they lost their life, their fame and everything just by getting hooked. It is hard to get in any jobs if you take drugs and get caught. Consuming drugs is illegal. Selling Drugs is also illegal. You could go to jail for selling or taking drugs. That is just as bad for you as smoking or using them. Your life will be way better if you stay away from drugs and be safe.

Someday I hope I might get to teach about DARE and my experience to others who need to know what will happen if you just take one bad decision. I want to make a difference to people who are young and don't know much how to handle this. All it needs is 30 seconds to make the right choice. Personally, I am going to try to stay away from people who are doing anything suspicious but also encourage people to make a good decision. Most people who are influenced by drugs or smoking are people who do not know that there are side effects. I feel educating them will make a big difference as I have just found out.

DARE also taught me to be confident and that helped a lot. DARE has taught me a lot of other things that I hope I will remember when I become older. These are things that I value at DARE and I hope others will be taught this lesson on how to be drug and violence free, and to make good choices. In the seven weeks, DARE has taught me to look at things from a different perspective and to take things more seriously and to understand the downstream affects that wrong choices can have in life and think about things more deeply than usual. I think everyone should be introduced to programs like DARE at an early age or at least some point of life. I would like to thank Officer Riter who took time to explain and inspired me to write this article. I would also like to thank you for taking time to read this article.

P.S: The D.A.R.E. program was introduced in school to teach students good decision-making skills which would help them make healthy choices and lead safe & responsible drug-free lives. The D.A.R.E. program was founded in 1983 by Los Angeles Police Department and today has more than 15,000 D.A.R.E. officers & deputies in over 10,000 communities nationwide.

The Science behind Solar Eclipse

Dhruv Menon, 5th Grade

What is a Solar Eclipse?

Some people think that a Solar Eclipse is when the moon gets in front of the sun throwing its shadow on the earth. Well, it kind of is. But there is more to it like the types of Solar Eclipses, and other facts about it. For a Solar Eclipse to happen, the sun has to be covered by the moon shadowing on to the Earth.

There are three types of Solar Eclipses – Total Solar Eclipse, Partial Solar Eclipse, and Annular Solar Eclipse.

- A **Total Solar Eclipse** is when the sun, moon, and earth are in a perfect line. A total solar eclipse is also only seen by a small spot on Earth. When there is a Total Solar Eclipse the sky becomes dark as if it is nighttime. The animals and birds get confused by this change in the atmosphere.
- The second type of eclipse is a **Partial Solar Eclipse**. This happens when the sun, moon, and earth are not exactly lined up and the sun casts a dark shadow on a small part of the earth's surface.
- The third type is an **Annular Eclipse**, and this happens when the moon is the farthest from the Earth. So it makes the moon look smaller. It also doesn't block the entire view of the sun. But if you look close the moon in front of the sun looks like a dark disk on top of a larger sun colored disk. This creates what looks like a ring around the moon.

Now here are some facts about the Solar Eclipse. During a Solar Eclipse, the moon casts 2 shadows. The first is called an Umbra, and the second is Penumbra. The Umbra gets smaller as it reaches the Earth and is the darker part of the moon's shadow. The Penumbra gets larger as it reaches the Earth, and if you stand in the penumbra you see a partial eclipse.



A Pin-hole Camera

It is very important to view the eclipse safely or it can permanently damage your eyes. When you look at the sun during an eclipse you have to wear glasses designed for looking at it. Another option would be to make a pinhole camera through which you could view it safely. You could search online for instructions on how to make

pinhole camera or for more ideas on how to view eclipse safely.

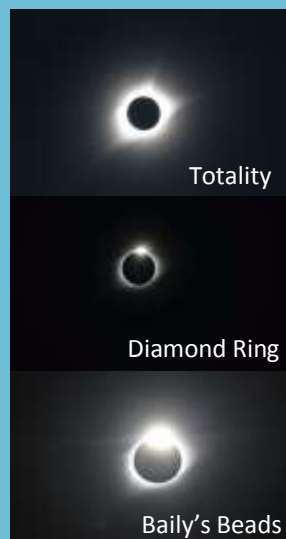
This year we had a Solar Eclipse on August 21, 2017. It was on school day, and our school had activities around it. It was also a Total Solar Eclipse and was visible for about 1 minute & 47 seconds. We were also in the Path of Totality.

So there I was waiting for the most breathtaking moment of my life. I was experiencing something that not everyone in the world could experience! I was at home with my parents because they brought me home from school to watch the eclipse with them. Ten minutes later it started. Slowly you could see the sun getting covered up. It was as if the light had all disappeared and there was only darkness. And then there it was – the Totality!! It was so cool.

As the darkness started to uncover the sun, we could see the Diamond Ring. The Diamond Ring effect is caused as the last rays of sunshine are visible before and after totality - when it all goes black. As the sun shines through the gaps of the Lunar Mountains they look like dots of light or beads. This is also referred to as Baily's Beads. It was spectacular. The pictures really don't do justice to this amazing phenomenon.



A Solar Eclipse in progress...



Totality

Diamond Ring

Baily's Beads

So that was my experience of the Solar Eclipse and I really enjoyed it. You can look forward to the next Total Solar Eclipse in the United States in 2024 on April 8th.

Sources: Nasa.gov

Special Terms: The word Lunar refers to the moon and Solar refers to the sun.



My Favorite Character in the 'Mahabharata'

Omkaar Alakkassery, 6th Grade

I like the Indian Itihaasas ('iti' means 'this' while 'haasa' means 'happened'). Among them I like the epic of Mahabharata the most. I like Mahabharata because it is very interesting and it has many lessons combined with a good storyline. In the Mahabharata my favorite character is Arjuna. Arjuna is a

son of Kunti born to her by Indra. He is one of the five Pandavas. I like Arjuna the most because he is always the person who has to face all the challenges. For example he is the person who has the task of killing Karna, his older brother. Arjuna does not back down from these challenges even when he thinks that he will not be able to overcome the challenge. He always does his best to face whatever comes his way.

My favorite story in the Mahabharata is the 'Draupadi Swayamvar' where all the princes try to string the bow and shoot at the eye of the fish on the revolving wheel by only looking at the oil reflection of the fish. All the princes and kings try to string the bow and shoot the fish but most of them can't even string the bow. The few that string the bow fail at shooting the eye of the fish. At last Arjuna comes. At that time Arjuna is dressed as a Brahmin. He comes and first prays to Lord Vishnu before he begins stringing the bow. He then picks up the bow and easily strings it. After doing so he goes and shoots the eye of the fish. As soon as he does all the Brahmins celebrate and all the kings and princes erupt in protest. They draw swords and charge at Arjuna but Arjuna defeats them all and wins the hand of Draupadi.

Value of Tissue Paper!!! 😊

Kashinathun Manoj, 8th Grade

Hey guys I'm Kashi. I am an Indian. My dad, Binoy Sankar is a citizen here. He is working as Lead Developer at Barry-Wehmler Companies Inc. He has been here for eighteen years. Whoa... that's a really loooong time. I am 13 years now. My mom, Divya Chandran is a lawyer. We were in India and were trying to get a Visa since 2012. It took a long time for the paper-work and all. We kept trying and trying to reach here, longing to join my dad and sisters Sameera and Nyomi.

Atlast... in the month of September 2017 we got our visa. Yayyyyyy.... Then I realised the fact that we were going to America leaving behind my dear most Appoose, Ammoose, Chitta, Kochu, Sankari, Pammu, my dear Kuttan Chetan, and all the other dears & nears in Kerala. Then we spent one month with all of them and enjoyed a lottt... And finally on 4th of November we started our travel to USA from Trivandrum



International Airport. I was very excited as it was my first flight journey in my whole life. Ah... was a little bit tensed too. Finally we reached USA on 4th of November after nineteen hours long journey. My dad and sisters welcomed us at St. Louis Airport and we had our first dinner in USA from Paradise Biryani Point, Ballwin. The food was indeed delicious. And after a Walmart shopping trip we reached our home at midnight.

An unforgettable incident occurred thereafter which actually became a turning point in my life, I must say... So when I first used the bathroom I was like aww... I was confused about using toilet paper instead of water. I was totally embarrassed, and the bathroom had tiles. So I thought that we could use water as well. Then I washed my legs using water. The next day while we were sitting in our hall, there was some water ~~like thing~~ started oozing from the corner edge of ceiling. OMG!!! I felt like running away from home. You know I am still trembling thinking about that day. We thought that we could call someone and fix it later. But the next day itself a hairline crack was found at the edge and immediately all the water fell down. There was a sofa down there so the water didn't fall onto the floor. Mom and dad were looking at me like I was crazy and I felt like YELLING out of fear... was like aaaaaaww... what to do? That's when I came to know that as the house is wooden we must be careful enough not to use water as we did when we were in India... Anyhow dad had to pay a lot of money, a lot of money means a LOT OF MONEY to get the ceiling repaired (I am SORRY achaa...) I came to know the VALUE of tissue paper after that incident!!! Ha Ha Ha!!!



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Gnanadeepam

Satsangha tve nisangha twam
Nisangha tve nirmoha twam.
Nirmoha tve nischala ta twam
Nischala ta tve, jivamukti

*When you are in good company, you are **not** in bad company*
*When you are not in bad company, you **don't** fall into delusion*
*When you **don't** fall into delusion, the mind becomes steady*
When the mind becomes steady, you are liberated

-- Adi Shankaracharya

Satsang is a Sanskrit word which means 'association with the good'. This year, with the blessings of Swami Udit Chaitanyaji, Ohmkaram has started 'Gnanadeepam', a monthly Satsang program. Gnanadeepam is a great opportunity for each of us to discuss and understand more about Hinduism, our scriptures, epics and to experience the power of group meditation. Many of us, who spent their early years in Kerala, were able to gather such information through elders in the family, books, temple festivals etc. Since our younger generation is devoid of many such opportunities, Gnanadeepam would be an informative and enlightening experience for them. A session of Gnanadeepam starts with an interpretation of few shlokas from the Bhagavat Gita or Bhagavatham. Followed by an interactive storytelling session from Ramayanam or Mahabharatham, for the kids. Group meditation and bhajans helps improve concentration levels and eliminate negative thoughts. And finally, a potluck of simple delicious homemade food. Furthermore, we have initiated a daily meditation session over phone conference. So, let's all be part of this initiative and spend some time with good people and good thoughts. We had three sessions of Gnanadeepam in 2017.

Our hosts:

1. Suresh and Savitha;
2. Sudhir and Anjana;
3. Suraj and Binu



Scholarship Program 2017

Ohmkaram supports many voluntary and charitable activities. In addition to supporting its own members Ohmkaram strives to help the needy who struggle with meeting the cost of an academic education. Ohmkaram scholarship fund was established to help poor and deserving bright students with financial need in Kerala.

There are two types of Scholarships - donor sponsored Scholarship & scholarship provided by the general fund. In donor sponsored scholarship, fund is fully generated or provided by the donor. So the donor can select a candidate for Scholarship and decide on the amount of award. Fund for the other type of scholarship is collected by fund raising or by member contribution. Selection of the scholar and the amount of the award are decided by the Scholarship committee. You can be a part of this activity by volunteering to run the program or donating some money to the fund. For more information please check the scholarship tab in Ohmkaram.org

Eligibility for awarding the scholarship:

1. Student should be domiciled in Kerala.
2. Student should attend a professional course of any year.
3. Student should be enrolled in any institute in Kerala.
4. Scholarship will be awarded to a student only once in life time.

This year's scholarship was awarded to Ms. Amrutha G Nair from Mavelikara in Alappuzha district. She is currently a student at UIT (University Institute of Technology) Adoor, Pathanamthitta. Below is her appreciation letter to the Ohmkaram Scholarship committee.



"My name is Amrutha G Nair. I am a third semester student pursuing BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration). I belong to a middle class family. The expense incurred for my studies and other miscellaneous costs have been a huge burden on my family. My parents managed it with much difficulty.

I and my family wish to express our gratitude for granting me this year's Ohmkaram Scholarship. I feel completely blessed to get this much appreciated financial support from Ohmkaram.

I consider myself fortunate to receive this gift, and am thankful to God. This Scholarship is an encouragement and great help for my further studies".



മലയാളം സ്കൂൾ

Malayalam School of Saint Louis

Malayalam School of Saint Louis Entering 11th Year of Service to Community

Malayalam School of Saint Louis is entering 11th year of service to the community. Malayalam School of Saint Louis is a voluntary organization open to public and free to attend. It is an affiliate program sponsored by Ohmkaram, a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayalees in St Louis, Missouri, USA. Malayalam School was started with the perception for the need to educate our next generation of Malayalees growing up in St Louis. But we also have some adults taking Malayalam classes.

The School meet twice a month for 2 hours each and runs from September through May every year. This year we have 27 students enrolled in Malayalam School. All classes are run by dedicated volunteer teachers. Course structure is developed into four levels, from entry level to proficient. Graduates of Malayalam School are proficient in reading, writing, and speaking in Malayalam.

Photo taken on Malayalam School Annual Day held in May 14, 2017 at Mahatma Gandhi Center



More information about the school is available on its website <http://www.ohmkaram.org/MalayalamSchool.html>
Email: malayalamschool@yahoo.com or call Anjana Prayaga at 636-293-1174



OHMKARAM

...a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayali Hindus in the Greater St.Louis area.

Ohmkaram is created with a **vision** to encourage active participation in the **Hindu culture**, foster **cooperation** and **unity** among **Kerala Hindus** throughout St. Louis and adjoining cities. In the midst of a collage of cultures, it is easy to forget and even lose track of many subtleties of our tradition that give a meaning to our identity. The **mission** of this organization will be to **rejuvenate** and **reinforce** the Kerala Hindu **traditions**. Participation and **Involvement** of our **youth** will be facilitated enabling them to appreciate our **cultural roots**. This Organization will also serve as a platform for effective **networking** of Hindus from Kerala or anyone interested in Kerala Hindu culture. This association will try to provide **Hindu cultural resources** not available through other sources in the Greater St. Louis area.

2017 Office Bearers

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~ Rajagopalan Unni

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