

## Puri temple land sale report false and motivated: SJTA

Bhubaneswar: Even as the State government is scurrying for cover over the controversial decision to sell landed property belonging to Lord Jagannath, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) has come to its rescue by claiming that reports published in a section of the press are false and motivated.

As the Opposition BJP launched a scathing attack on the government on the emotive issue, SJTA Chief Administrator Krishan Kumar urged the people of the State and millions of devotees of Lord Jagannath not to be misguided by such malicious lies and false reporting.

Taking to the official twitter handle of the temple administration, SJTA chief said, "It has been falsely reported that 35,000 acre of land of Lord Jagannath is being sold. This is complete distortion of facts and is blatantly false and motivated." The temple administrator said lands, which are occupied or are under possession of various persons since long but belongs to Shree Jagannath Mahaprabhu, are being settled by temple committee as per the 'Unified Policy' framed for the purpose in 2003 with an objective to protect the temple land. This policy also aimed to



bring transparency and uniformity in the processes to be followed for settlement of land to the eligible persons. The SJTA chief further said.

## | USA | Chinese govt should have no role in succession process of Dalai Lama: US

Bhubaneswar: The Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, the Biden Administration said on Tuesday.

"Beijing's interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by 'disappearing' the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC (People's Republic

of China) government-chosen successor, it remains an outrageous abuse of religious freedom," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference.

The previous president Donald Trump had signed into law, a bill which called for establishing a US consulate in Tibet and building an international coalition to ensure that the next Dalai Lama is appointed

solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community without China's interference.

It is the policy of the United States to take all appropriate measures to hold accountable senior officials of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party who directly interfere with the identification and installation of the future 15th Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism, the successor to the 14th Dalai Lama, the act said.



## Spirituality is What Modern World Lacks | KAZAKHSTAN

Bhubaneswar: "Spirituality is what the current world lacks and everyone today tries to instill spiritual values among the youth. It is very important. If a person is spiritually rich, then she or he will bring good to society", said Bulat Sarsenbayev, the Chair of Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev Centre for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue.

Established in 2019 at the initiative of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the centre works to preserve interfaith and inter-

civilization dialogue, promote the ideas of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions at the international level.

The idea to convene the congress was put forward in 2003 by Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev when the world was witnessing the consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The last congress was held in October 2018 gathering more than

80 delegations, representatives of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism, representatives of religious and public organisations and high-level officials.

"Only by being united, will our common goals and all integration processes for the well-being of the entire global community be achieved," said Sarsenbayev.

Kazakhstan, with its cultural and spiritual diversity, can share its experience of maintaining peace and harmony with other countries.



Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

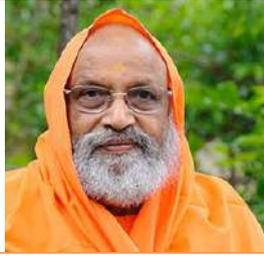


Bulat Sarsenbayev (Chair of Nazarbayev Center)



“Silently hear everyone. Accept what is good. Reject and forget what is not. This is intelligent living”

Swami Chinmayananda



“It is not wrong to be ignorant. It is an error to continue to be ignorant.”

Swami Dayananda Saraswati



“Maintaining silence is definitely a Discipline. Whereas speaking appropriate words appropriately at appropriate times is an Art.”

Swami Ananda Saraswati

## How fancies of Politicians spoil Hindu Religious Festivals

In 2020, Central government of India waited for Namaste Trump event from 24th to 25th February to complete in Gujarat before announcing Covid-19 restrictions and Janata Curfews. Gujarat then went on to become the first Covid-19 infected state in the country, “exporting” Covid-19 to the rest of the country. Covid-19 spread to other states like wildfire after that, touching a peak in Sep 2020, at 1133 deaths per day.

Following this, on the eve of Rama Navami in April 2020, a number of restrictions were imposed by the Uttar Pradesh government. Pilgrims were banned from entering Ayodhya for Ram Navami Mela. On Oct 2020, similar restrictions were placed to Navratri celebrations. Authorities in different states laid down strict social distancing laws. Durga Puja pandals were not allowed, and Garba events were cancelled in many places.

Similarly, in February 2021, the then Uttarakhand CM Trivendra Singh Rawat’s government announced that a negative Covid-19 certificate is necessary for anyone wanting to attend the 2021 Kumbh Mela from 5 states in India. However, this decision was reversed within one month by the government of Tirath Sing Rawat in March. Though, both politicians belong to the same party, each came up with their own orders for Kumbh Mela, without any logic or reason.

Similarly, from 9th to 12th March 2021, Section 144 was imposed in a number of ancient Shiva temples in Odisha on the event of Shivrathri, including Akhandalamani in Bhadrak, Dhabaleswar in Cuttack and Kapileswar in Dhenkanal, citing Covid-19 restrictions. However, just a week earlier on 5th March, the BJD party which runs the government in Odisha, organized a grand celebration of Biju Patnaik’s 104th Birth Anniversary. The party organized a week long programme in Bali Jatra ground to pay tribute to Biju Patnaik. A memorial meeting was also held at BJD party headquarters on 5th March, and a voluntary blood donation camp was organized. No Covid-19 restrictions were applied for this celebration.

For the ongoing assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, massive crowds of more than one lakh gather regularly during election rallies. No Covid-19 restrictions are applied for these rallies. On 7th March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a rally of more than 8 lakh people in Brigade Grounds, Kolkata. Narendra Modi is expected to address 20 more such rallies in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu for the assembly elections. On the other hand, Archanas are no longer permitted in the ancient Kapalishwar temple in Chennai citing Covid-19 restrictions. Prasadam and Theertham (holy water) are also not allowed to be offered to devotees.

A number of Sannadhis have also been closed for public view. Similar restrictions are in force for the last 10 months in all major temples in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, in Maharashtra, the state government enforced a rule that no more than 50 people were allowed in the temple at any point in time for Maha Shivarathri. People were also advised by the state government to celebrate the festival at home. It is therefore evident that Covid-19 restrictions are selectively applied to Hindu festivals, whereas no such restrictions are applied for political rallies and party events. This also shows some type of intolerance to Hinduism and Hindu festivals in the name of secularism by our politicians.

Guest Editor Gautham Kumar

## Identity Crisis

My inspiration towards penning this article was the vivid observation of the demeanour and changing attitudes of my fellow countrymen who have settled on foreign soil. The observation was rendered to me with pain by my Guru Swami Ananda Saraswati after one of his overseas trips to Italy.

A part of the damage was already done, thanks to the colonization of our country by first the Moguls and later the British Raj. What I call this as ‘Colonial hangover’ is deeply prevalent and spreading amidst the upcoming generations too. The people of our country have started to take pride in the things which belong to the West.

The emphasis to understand our roots and practise our culture through lifestyle is dwindling at an unprecedented rate. In fact, shamefully our culture is being looked down upon too. The next logical step is to grossly cut off one’s own self from this highly rich culture to settle down in the West. Despite India showing significant growth from a GDP (or) NDP perspective, the other side of the coin reveals interesting statistics - The percentage of Indians taking Permanent Resident permits or even renouncing their Citizenships is on the rise. There are millions of reasons cited such as lack of security, infrastructure, health care, quality education and more in our cities. While these grosser aspects may be true to an extent, the big hole in the logic is lack of appreciation of the ‘Subtle beauty’ of this country. And this comprises of rich Culture and Tradition.

Clinging strongly to the decision made, our people settled in the West, to passionately embrace the western lifestyle. However in the long run only to identify a big personal void – with No sense of belonging either with the roots back home or in the new found foreign home. This is the traumatic state of most Indians who have fallen into this trap.

Such is the case of a Punjabi couple settled in Italy now from a generation ago and owing an Indian restaurant. Their sense of identity crisis is evident from the decor of their restaurant where they had placed an idol of Lord Ganesha amidst an arrangement of alcoholic beverages.

Lord Ganesha – the God of beginnings, remover of obstacles, a patron of intellect and wisdom has been adorned here not with a garland of flowers but variety of alcohol, the consumption of which is a sin according to the Shastras of Hinduism.



वक्रतुंड महाकाय सूर्य कोटि समप्रभ ।  
निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव सर्वकार्येषु सर्वदा ॥

*vakratuṇḍa mahākāya sūrya koṭi samaprabha.  
nirvighnaṃ kuru me deva sarvakāryeṣu sarvadā..*

Guest Editor Karthik Ganesan

## Kumbh Mela 2021 to be held only for 30 days



Bhubaneswar/Haridwar: Kumbh Mela is probably the largest religious gathering anywhere around the world. Although millions of pilgrims visit Kumbh Melas from around the world, the Kumbh Mela of Haridwar is the most visited of all other pilgrimages in India.

This year the Kumbh Mela will be held for a shorter span than previous years due

to Covid-19 situation. The Uttarakhand government has issued that the Maha Kumbh will be held only for 30 days. It will be organized from April 1 to April 30, 2021. The last Kumbh Mela was celebrated in Haridwar from (Makar Sankranti) January 14, 2010 to (Shakh Purnima Snan) April 28, 2010. On the occasion of Kumbh Mela, Hindu devotees come to take a holy dip in the sacred waters of the rivers.

Chief Secretary Omprakash said that given Mahakumbh, there was a demand for the vaccine from the central government under which 1,46,000 vaccines have been received. The employees of Mahakumbh along with the employees working in Kumbh will be vaccinated.

As the time for Kumbh Mela has been reduced, therefore the number of Shahi Snan have also been reduced from four to three. The First royal bath will be on April 12 (Somvati Amavasya), second on April 14 (Baisakhi) and the third Shahi Snan will be held on April 27 (Full moon day).

## Cave-dwelling 83-year-old seer donates Rs 1 crore for Ayodhya Ram Temple



Bhubaneswar/Rishikesh: An 83-year-old seer has donated ₹1 crore to the Visva Hindu Parishad (VHP) for the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The seer has been living in a cave for over half a century. “I’ve been living in the cave for over half a century. As a seer, I live on donations from the devotees visiting the cave. When I came to know about the VHP campaign, I decided to donate the amount for Ram Mandir for which we all have been dreaming for long,” said Swami Shankar Das while speaking to the media.

The bank officials were surprised when the seer offered the cheque for ₹1 crore. Upon checking, they found that his account had the requisite balance. The officials then contacted the local RSS functionaries who reached the bank and helped Das donate the amount in the Ram Mandir Trust.

According to Das, it was at the cave of his guru Taat wale Baba that he received donations from devotees that added up to the amount that he donated.

## ‘Pogaru’ movie removes scenes insulting Brahmins

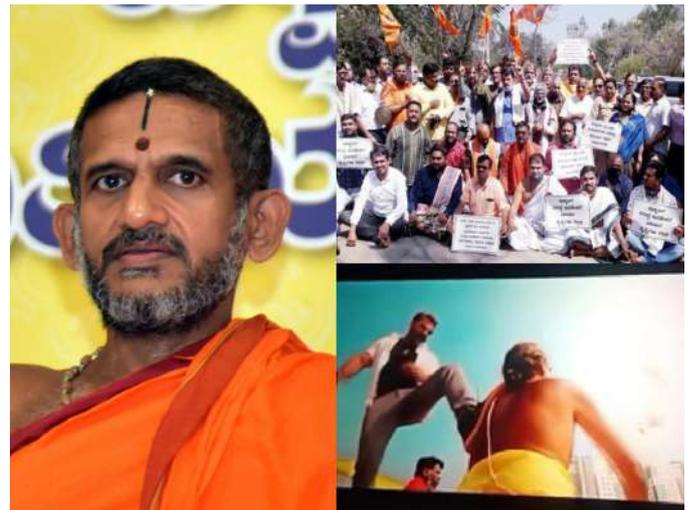
Bhubaneswar: ‘Pogaru’, the first big-scale Kannada film in the post Covid-era, has drawn the ire of the Brahmin community over many scenes in the film.

Karnataka State Brahmin Development Board criticised the ‘demeaning of priests’ in the film. “We demand an apology from the film’s team and removal of all the objectionable scenes,” said Board president HS Sachidananda Murthy.

One of the scenes that have drawn flak from Brahmins involves the antagonist placing his leg on a Brahmin priest’s shoulder

and threatening him. People have shown displeasure towards scenes which show the hero mocking the community’s beliefs and disrupting one of its religious programme.

Sri Viswaprasanna Theertha Swamiji, the peetadhipathi of the Pejavara Mutt had also spoken to the authorities of the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce, expressing his disapproval and called for the removal of the controversial scenes from the film. Pejavara Mutt Swamiji stressed that, to achieve a peaceful society no one should mock any community.



## Temple of the month - Kodandarama Temple, Karnataka

Kodandaramaswami Temple is a Hindu shrine located at Hiremagalur near Chikkamagaluru, in Chikkamagaluru district, Karnataka, (South) India. The temple deity is called Kodandarama, as Rama, and his brother Lakshmana are depicted holding arrows. The temple was built around 14th century.

In the garbhagrha on a common Hanuman pedestal, 1.5 ft high, there are *mūrtis* of Kodandarama with Sita to his right and Lakshmana to his left. Rama and Lakshmana carry the arrows in their right hands and strung bows in their left hands.

According to sthalapurana, or local legend, proud Parashurama was subdued at Hiremagalur by Rama. Parashurama requested Rama to show him the scene of his (Rama's) marriage. Therefore, Sita stands to Rama's right side and Lakshmana to his left, as per the tradition in Hindu marriage ceremonies. Perhaps this is the only temple where



Sita and Lakshmana are positioned like this, as popular renderings of the trio (Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita) depict Sita to Rama's left.

Legends say that the place was the residence of nine siddhas who performed

penance near a pond in the village known as Siddha Pushkarni and that as Parashurama too lived here, it was called Bhargavapuri, or "town of Bhargava" (Parashurama).

## Festival of the month - Rama Navami



*Lord Rama and Goddess Sita with other Gods*

Ram Navami is a festival that celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, the son of King Dasharath. It was a joyous occasion in Ayodhya all those centuries ago when King Dasharath's heir was finally born. It was like a dream come true for the king as the lack of an heir had troubled him sorely for many years.

Lord Rama is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who came down to earth to battle the invincible Ravana in human form. Lord Brahma had been receiving complaints from all the gods about the havoc that Ravana was wreaking on earth, but because Lord Brahma had granted Ravana so many boons, he could not be killed by a god. But Ravana had become so overconfident that he would

never expect an attack from a human being. So Lord Vishnu agreed to go to earth in the guise of Prince Ram, the son of King Dasharath and Queen Kaushalya.

The story of Lord Rama as told in the great epic Ramayana is one that most Indians know irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Lord Rama is the epitome of all that is good and true. He is the man who vanquished the demon king, Ravana. Lord Rama has been given the status of a god by the Hindus. Hence his birth is celebrated year after year with great pomp and enjoyment on the ninth day after the new moon in *śukla pakṣa* (the waxing moon), which falls in the month of April. This year Ram Navami will be celebrated on 21st April 2021.

### 'Neivedyam' offered to Lord Ram on Rama Navami

It is mentioned in our Hindu literatures that Sri Rama and Lakshmana used to drink "Neer Mor" (Spiced Buttermilk) and "Panagam" for quenching their thirst when they lived in forest with Sage Vishwamitra. That's the reason, the people in South India make Neer Mor, Panagam and offer to Lord Shri Rama on this auspicious day of Rama Navami. Some people also have a tradition to prepare "Kosumalli" and "Paal Payasam" on this day.



**Panagam**

*A beverage made with Jaggery, Lemon, dry Ginger powder and cardamom*



**Neer Mor**

*Spiced Buttermilk flavoured with Coriander leaves and green chilli*



**Kosumalli**

*Salad made with grated Carrot, Small yellow Lentils and flavoured with lemon and green chilli*



**Paal Payasam**

*Rice sweet pudding flavoured with ghee, cardamom, cashews and saffron*

## Yudhistira's Charity | *Time for good actions is now. Do not postpone the good you can do today*

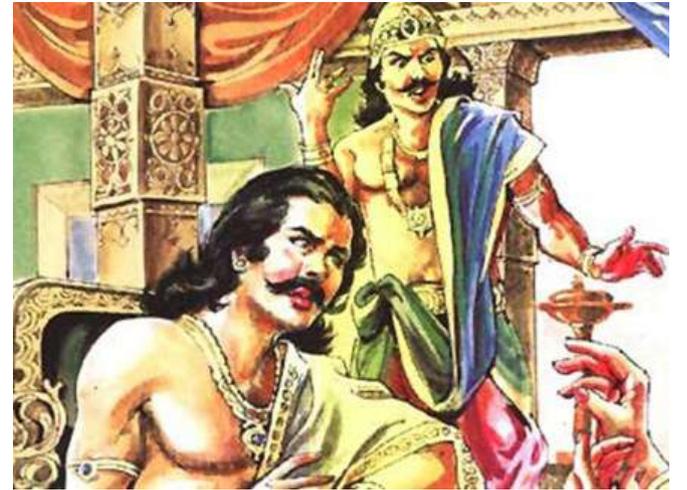
Based on the book "Perennial Wisdom through Stories" by Swami Ananda Saraswati

King Yudhistira had allocated specific hours every day towards charity. One fine day, a poor woman visited him outside the specified hours. Following guidelines the King refused & requested her to visit the next day at the specified hours. As she was leaving the palace, thoroughly disappointed she encountered Bhima – Yudhistira's younger brother. Bhima enquired the reason of her sadness and after doing so asked her to wait.

The palace had a huge drum which was used only on celebratory occasions. Bhima went straight to the drum and started beating it. As the palace reverberated with the sound, Yudhistira sent his guards to enquire and his surprise grew larger as they returned with Bhima. An emergency court was called for.

Yudhistira asked "Dear brother Bhima

– what is the occasion we are celebrating today"? Bhima replied – "Oh King, we have gained a great victory today – Victory over Death". Everyone in attendance were perplexed. Bhima went on to explain – "A poor woman was turned away today by Dharmaraja (Yudhistira). She was asked to come tomorrow at the specified hours, without even an enquiry whether her need was urgent. This means that the King knew the woman would be alive tomorrow, more importantly the King himself will live to see the next day. Is this not a great victory? An ultimate victory over Death itself?" Bhima concluded. Dharmaraja understood his error. Bhima was indeed right – little do we know when our lives end. King Yudhistira invited the woman back to the court, enquired about



*Yudhistira and Bhima*

her needs and ensured the charity was completed immediately. Everyone in attendance learnt the lesson. Yudhistira thanked Bhima. The court dispersed.

Compiled by Anantha Padmanabhan

## The Value of Values

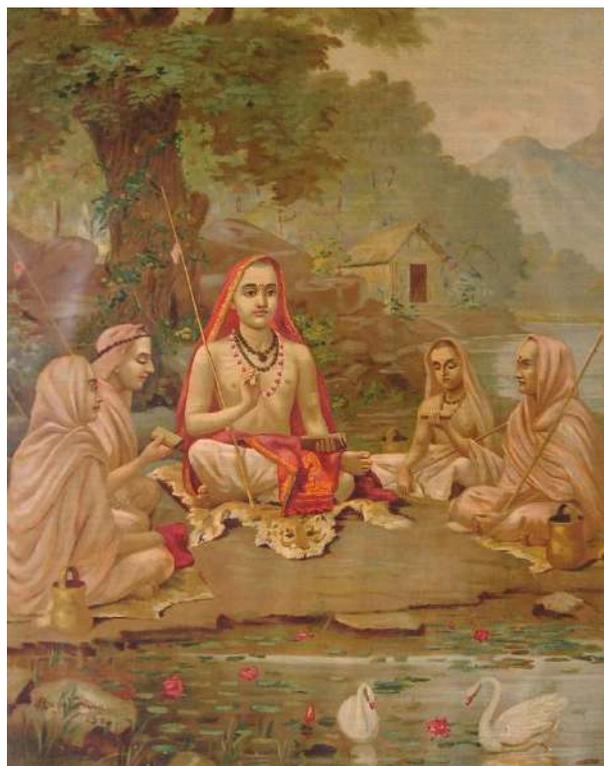
In our last article, we reflected on how knowledge in its simplest sense takes place. We identified that there are 3 key factors (the knower, the object to be known and the means of knowing or sense organs) along with an attentive mind are prerequisites for knowledge to happen. However, this is applicable only in the case of simple perceptual knowledge.

Assume you are interested in learning Carnatic music, a classical form of Indian Music. You have been audience to many great Carnatic songs, you have enjoyed and have a deep interest to learn it. You want to learn the classical form because it really appeals to you. You seek yourself a Guru in Carnatic Music and enroll for classes. The Guru speaks your language, and you recognize the words. You inform him about the songs you have heard and appreciated, and express your interest in learning them directly. The Guru heeds to your request and starts teaching. Within the first few minutes you realise that you do not have the ability to sing what is being taught. The Guru's rendition of the same song you have heard is so complex that you start to feel out of place immediately.

So despite, you being present (the knower), the Guru teaching the songs (the object of knowledge) and your sense organs, the eyes and ears along with a very capable, attentive mind (the means of knowledge) being present, the knowledge of Carnatic music does not take

Based on the book "The Value of Values" by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati

place. That is because there was something more that was required in this case; something that needed to be added to the means of knowledge for the knowledge of Carnatic music to happen.



*ādi Shankarācharya with his disciples*

Thus, we must add something more to our understanding of an adequate means of knowledge. It has been seen that a means of knowledge must be appropriate, capable, and backed by an attentive mind. Now another qualification must be added: the mind, at least

in some instance, must not only be capable and attentive but must also be prepared. In order to be ready for Carnatic music knowledge, a संस्कार (*Samskāra*), a certain discipline in Carnatic music must be established. Only then can Carnatic music knowledge be obtained.

For simple perceptual knowledge, no particular preparation may be necessary other than, perhaps, calling the mind to attention. When the object is there, when the eyes are open, when the mind is behind the eyes, the object is seen and visual knowledge of that object obtains without any special preparation. However, for a knowledge such as Carnatic music, which is gained not from simple perception but from words wielded by a competent Guru exercising certain training, unfolding certain reasoning, some basic preparation is always necessary. For a Guru's words to work as a Pramana, a valid means of knowledge, the words must be properly handled by the teacher and the mind of the student must be ready.

Vedanta is a प्रमाण (*Pramāṇa*), a शब्द प्रमाण (*śabda pramāṇa*) i.e., a verbal means of knowledge. It is a प्रमाण (*Pramāṇa*) in the form of words and sentences which, wielded by a competent teacher, are meant to throw light on the Self. Words can give direct or indirect knowledge depending on the object involved.

If the object is away from our range of experience, words can give rise only to indirect knowledge. If the object is within our range

*Continued in Page 6...*

Dear Readers, this section is aimed at a simple and refreshing way to learn and recollect some of the interesting aspects of 'Hinduism' through a series of 10 trivia questions covering diverse aspects of the religion such as Philosophy, Religious Literature & Puranas to name a few.

1. By whom was the illustrious epic 'Mahabharata' written while the great sage Vyasa was dictating?

- (a) Narada (b) Vishwakarma (c) Ganesha (d) Shiva

2. During their 13th year of exile at King Virata's Kingdom, as who was the great Arjuna in disguise as?

- (a) Uttara (b) Brihannala (c) Urvashi (d) Sathyavathi

3. Goddess 'Sati' was the 'Wife of' and 'Daughter of' whom?

- (a) Lord Vishnu & Kubera (b) Lord Shiva & Daksha Prajapathi  
(c) Lord Shiva & Himavan (d) None of the above

4. Who blessed our 'Bhoomi' (i.e. Earth) by bringing the River Goddess Ganga from the heavens?

- (a) Shree Rama (b) Lord Krishna (c) Bhagiratha  
(d) Raja Harischandra

5. In the 13th year of exile at King Virata's Kingdom, Arjuna was in disguise as ...

- (a) Uttara (b) Brihannala (c) Urvashi (d) Sathyavathi

6. By taking which feminine form did help the Devas to retain their immortality?

- (a) Aditi (b) Mohini (c) Lakshmi (d) Padma

7. What is name of the river which the great sage Adi Shankaracharya re-coursed by stepping his foot into to ensure that his ailing mother could take bath in?

- (a) Periyar (b) Kaveri (c) Poorna (d) Padma

8. As per our Hindu Mythology, the popular musical instrument Veena was invented by?

- (a) Lord Vishnu (b) Lord Narada (c) Goddess Saraswati  
(d) Lord Krishna

9. Which great seer was responsible for identifying 'Venkat Raman' who became 'Ramana' and eventually transformed himself into 'Ramana Maharishi'?

- (a) Ramakrishna Paramahansa (b) Swami Vivekandana  
(c) Sesadhriyal Swamigal (d) Paramahansa Yogananda

10. Just before the fierce battle with Ravana, which hymn did Lord Rama recite in his quest to save goddess Sita?

- (a) Bhagavatham (b) Soundarya Lahiri  
(c) Lalitha Sahasnamam (d) Aditya Hridayam

For answers please look into the last page of this edition!!!

Compiled by Karthik Ganesan



## The Value of Values (Contd.)

Based on the book "The Value of Values" by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati

of experience, words can bring about direct knowledge. Vedanta is about me, about which is indicated by the first person singular "I". I am always available to myself; therefore, words can give me direct knowledge about myself.

For the words of any teaching to convey knowledge, they must be understood in the same sense as they are understood by the teacher who uses them - by the one who is using the words to impart a certain vision of the subject taught. General definitions are not sufficient but carry, inherent in their generality, subjective interpretations. For words to serve as a प्रमाण (Pramāṇa), their precise intended meaning must be released, the unintended possible meanings must be negated.

How does a teacher accomplish this? He

establishes a context in which other possible meanings of the words are ruled out. When a teacher fails to create a context of the words he uses, he cannot convey knowledge by their use. Words, then, only become another form of conditioning. This commonly happens when the subject matter is Self. Frequently, in a teaching attempting to reveal Self. Words such as "infinite", "Brahman", "Eternal" are used but not unfolded. Such words, so used, only become a new conditioning adding to the confusion and vagueness in the mind of the student. However, even when you have both a qualified Guru of Vedanta, learned in the methodology of teaching, one who knows how to unfold the precise meaning of the words used, and a dedicated student who is seeking knowledge of

the Self, the knowledge that is Vedanta cannot take place unless the student's mind is prepared.

For the one with an unprepared mind, Vedanta becomes like a complex Carnatic song for a person still learning to master basic स्वर (svara). This does not mean that the Carnatic song cannot be learnt. It simply means that the preparation of the mind is required. The अन्तःकरण (antaḥkaraṇa), the mind, is the place where knowledge takes place. If knowledge does not take place when both the knowledge and an appropriate means of knowledge are available to the one who wants the knowledge, there must be present some obstacle which is responsible for knowledge not occurring. The only such obstacle is the lack of preparation of the mind.

Compiled by Karthik Sundaram



## Stefania Rossitto

Yoga Teacher  
Founding President,  
Yoga Vidya ONLUS, Italy

### How did you get introduced to Yoga and Vedanta?

Namaste! First of all let me thank 'The Light of East' editorial team for this interview.

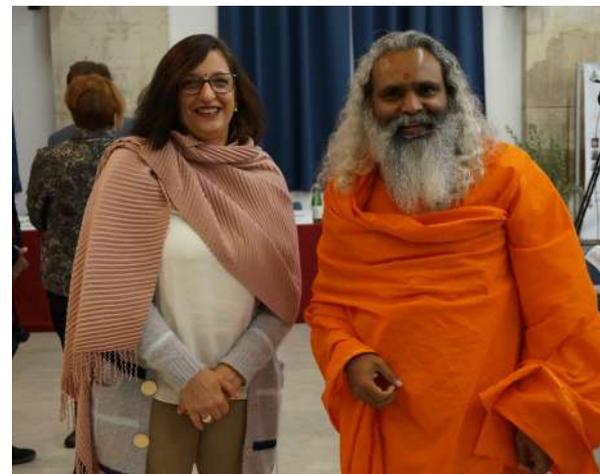
I was introduced to Yoga through a Hatha Yoga course I joined in the year 1998. At that time, I was a young woman, a wife and a mother of two little children. I live in Siracusa, a small town in an Sicily Island of south Italy. In order to attend the course I had to drive twice a week for about 50 km to reach another town (Catania), as in those days the best yoga courses were available only in Catania.

**My idea of yoga was nothing more than a form of exercise which could lead to an overall well being, also involving some mental benefits.** Little did I know that joining that course will mark a new beginning in my life. I started developing interest in Yoga and Vedanta. After few months of Yoga practise my friends started seeing some changes in me. They asked me to teach them yoga. Hence I decided to join a four-years teacher training course to start Yoga as a profession.

As my quest for Truth was increasing, I met Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, President of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, India. During his visit to Italy, I had an opportunity

to meet him and talk to him personally. In fact, because of him, my interest for Yoga and Vedanta started growing, I started travelling regularly to India. I used to take a group of yoga teachers and yoga students with me. The aim of these trips to India was to explore the country from a spiritual point of view. I keep visiting these places till date especially the Ganges, Himalaya, East and South India.

In 2008, during one of those travels to India, that too because of Swami Ramswarupanandaji Maharaj of Uttarashi, I came in contact with my Guru Swami Ananda Saraswati. This was another turning point in my Yoga sadhana and spiritual path. Thanks to Swamiji, I became more connected to the lineage of Vedantic teaching and knowledge. I adopted a Vedic lifestyle, my sadhana became systematic and integrated this into my daily life. Swamiji's teachings inspired many people in my circle to attend his satsangs and courses on Yoga and Vedanta. Swamiji's visit to Italy in 2011 helped us start the first Yoga Vidya Teacher's Training Course (TTC) for Italians in Chennai. After the first successful TTC, many other courses on Yoga and Vedanta followed.



### How Vedantic and Yogic teaching has helped you in your personal life?

Adopting a Vedic lifestyle, practising Yoga and studying Vedanta have immensely helped become the person I am today. Yoga has helped me understand and manage my body and mind. Vedanta has provided a new perspective of myself and has helped me deal with the external world. Vedanta has given a great impetus to my need to know God and how to relate with God. My deepest gratitude goes to the teaching tradition of my Guru Swami Ananda Saraswati.

### How different is Vedantic teaching from the western school education?

Vedantic approach to teaching focuses on the overall growth of the student. It takes into account the lifestyle and discipline as fundamental values. Vedantic teaching allows a person to imbibe a value system which will be helpful while dealing with the inherent problems of life. As for the western school, it is focused only on intellectual growth of a person, neglecting the emotional and spiritual aspects. It causes a lack of understanding about one's own self and lack of understanding of life.

### What are the initiatives you have taken in Italy and how successful are they?

Following the vision of our Guru, Swami Ananda Saraswati, two organisations Yoga Vidya Italia and Yoga Vidya Onlus have been established. We organise Yoga Vidya teacher training courses, residential courses on Vedanta in India and in Italy. At the moment due to the pandemic our activities are continuing through online teachings.

### What are the value outcomes of these initiatives?

In our initiatives we provide a platform and exposure for people to delve into the traditional teaching of Yoga and Vedanta. We also collaborate with local organisations to conduct focused training programs. For example, Yoga Vidya Onlus has conducted a research study applying Yoga Vidya methodologies (a package based on the traditional yoga created by Swamiji) to psychiatric patients. This successful research has demonstrated that Yoga works with people from all walks of life.

### Do you think that Vedantic teaching and Guru, Sishya Parampara is needed for the West?

I can say that Vedantic teaching and Guru can add meaning to everyone's life. The West is no exception. The good part is that many Westerners have an inner call for spiritual knowledge and are open-minded to learn. I am a living example of it.





## Chapter I Sloka 1

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच -

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥

*dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca -*

*dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ.*

*māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya..*

*Kurukṣetra* is a place where many wars have happened for instance, the Panipat War during British Time, in recent history. Similar to how each one of us have our own *Prārabdha*, every place has its own *Prārabdha*.

In this first verse, King *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* highlights, that the place where Mahabharata war is going to happen, belongs to *Dharma*.

*Dharma-kṣetra* refers to a place where lots of rituals have happened. The next word of the

*ślokā* says *kuru-kṣetre*. A contradiction takes place here as the King thinks that this place belongs to the Kuru clan (i.e. his own family). He feels that even though justice has to be delivered in this place, since it is his own place, justice may work in his favour. Every statement becomes contradictory when a person is blind (mentally).

King *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* does not consider the Pandavas to be his own family. The desire to retain his throne and his attachment and love towards his son Duryodhana made him blind.

Even though the Pandavas respected the King like their own father, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* maintained a distance because of his blindness.

When you are deluded, you are blinded with your emotions, whatever the emotions they may be. The moment you are a blind person you distance yourself from others.

When a blind person asks a question, it is not to clarify, but just to strengthen or clarify one's hope. Because of his blindness, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* never trusted anybody. If you observe yourself, whenever you are blind with reference to any

emotion in life, it is impossible to trust anyone. When you are blind with any emotion you know the consequences of that. Despite that you still look for hope. You always expect some miracle to happen. That's why blind people go crazy with the miracles and promises. Religious people do utilise their miracles just to attract blind people in their life, as the blind people always sustain on hope. Whoever addresses their hopes they give much importance. In life, whoever addresses your hopes, you like that person and if the same person doesn't care and destroys your hopes you will not like that person.

*Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is hoping that being the place of *Dharma*, some negotiation may take place between Arjuna and his group with the help of Krishna, which will help stop the war. He is also aware that his son Duryodhana will be easily defeated by the Pandavas lead by Lord Krishna.

Whenever you are in delusion, you know what is right and what is wrong. But you are trapped under the spell of that and you don't have courage to come out of it. That's why you need somebody's help and grace to come out of it.

## सुभाषितानि । *Subhāṣitāni*

पुस्तकस्था तु या विद्या परहस्तगतं धनम् ।

कार्यकाले समुत्पन्ने न सा विद्या न तद्धनम् ॥

*pustakasthā tu yā vidyā parahastagataṃ dhanam.*

*kāryakāle samutpanne na sā vidyā na taddhanam..*

The knowledge which is residing in the book and one's wealth which is in possession of some other person is of no use at all. At the time of their need, they will not be of any help for the person.

अधमाः धनमिच्छन्ति धनम् मानम् च मध्यमाः ।

उत्तमाः मानमिच्छन्ति मानो हि महताम् धनम् ॥

*adhamāḥ dhanamicchanti dhanam mānam ca madhyamāḥ.*

*uttamāḥ mānamicchanti māno hi mahatām dhanam..*

An ordinary person's desire is money. An average person will have a desire for money and respect. A great person desires respect (and not money). Respect is superior to money.

### Answers to Our 'Hinduism' & 'Mythology' - Trivia

1. (c) 2. (b) 3. (b) 4. (c) 5. (b) 6. (b) 7. (c) 8. (b) 9. (c) 10. (d)