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Arsha Vidya Newsletter

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O Bhagawan!
Our Swamiji is your gift!
His presence is your grace!
May your gift be ours forever!
May your grace be a perennial river!
May Swamiji's healthy presence amidst
us be continuous!
May you continue to bestow your grace!
May you shower your love further!
May you show your presence!
May you grant our prayers through Swamiji!
May we offer this flower, at your Lotus feet,
as our humble prayer!

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*Arsha Vidya
Newsletter*

In fearless voice may
we proclaim

The Rishi's message
from all house-tops

And bring the men
of different claim

To a fold of Love
where oneness lasts!

Prayer Meeting for Pujya Swamiji's Speedy Recovery



A prayer meeting for Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarasvati's speedy recovery was held on Jan 12, 2014 at Kikani School , Coimbatore.

Swamini Brahmaprakashananda, during the meeting said that all the vital parameters

of Pujya Swamiji were good. He was admitted to the hospital a few weeks before for pneumonia. Fluids from his lungs were removed. He was responding well for treatment. This prayer meeting is by the devotees for speedy recovery of Pujya





Swamiji so that he could bounce back to health and continue teaching us.

Vedic Prayers: The meeting started with chanting of Vedic prayers by Swami Omkarananda of Theni for a full life of one hundred years for Pujya Swamiji.

Bhajans: Swami Atmatriptananda of Kolkata chanted Vedic prayers for good health of Pujya Swamiji. Swami Atmatriptananda conducted bhajans for Pujya Swamiji's good health. All the devotees participated enthusiastically in the bhajans.

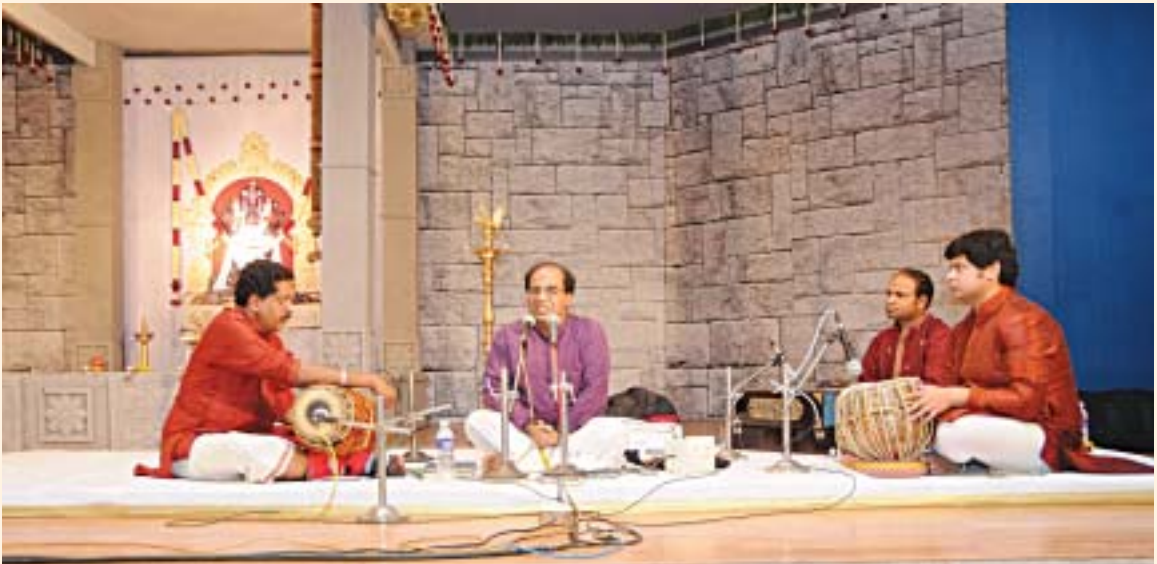
Dr. Sriram Parasuram said that Pujya Swamiji was an embodiment of Lord Dakshinamurthy. He had said that there was nothing as beautiful as prayers to Isvara in the form of singing. Our prayers would go a long way to make Pujya Swamiji recover fast. Prayers never go in vain. During the music programme that followed, Dr. Sriram explained the meaning for the lyrics rendered which exhibited that all the saints viewed the entire universe as a manifestation of Isvara.

Dr. Sriram Parasuram gave a prayer music programme. The following compositions were rendered:

Saint Gnanasambandar's Kathalaki Kasinthu,
Saint Surdas's Giridhara Muralidhara,
Saint Purandardas's Laxmi Barama,
Saint Arunagirinathar's Erumayil Eri,
Sant Thukaram's Ananda Sagara,
Pujya Swamiji's Mahalinga Viboo,
Swami Brahmananda's Jai Durge,
Saint Siva Guru's Jnana Chadi,
Saint Arunagirinathar's Sivanar Manam Kulira,







Pujya Swamiji's Bho Shambo and Sant Namadev's Tirtha Vittal, Shethra Vittal.

GROUP PRAYER:

Led by CA T.R.Ramanathan, the following group prayer was made:

"O Bhagawan!

Our Swamiji is your gift!

His presence is your grace!

May your gift be ours forever!

May your grace be a perennial river!

May Swamiji's healthy presence amidst us be continuous!

May you continue to bestow your grace!

May you shower your love further!

May you show your presence!

May you grant our prayers through Swamiji!

May we offer this flower, at your Lotus feet, as our humble prayer!"

PUJA TO LORD DAKSHINAMURTHY:

Flowers were collected from all the devotees present. Sri Swami Omkaranandaji performed puja to Lord Dakshinamurthy on behalf of all the devotees.

Report by N. Avinashilingam



Summing up Message to Long Term Course Students

Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarasvati during Oct 2013 gave summing up message to the fourth long term course students at Anaikatti on how the students should live their life and share the Vedanta knowledge. A brief summary of the same is presented.

ON SHARING KNOWLEDGE:

"1" Why to teach?

Teaching is a means to improve clarity on the subject, as teaching enables one to remove all vagueness. Swami Taranandaji was a very learned person. He told that he taught for his own learning. Swami Poornananda and Swami Govindananda told that they taught and wrote on the Sastra for their own antakarana suddhi. When one starts teaching, one's own understanding of the subject matter becomes firm. The more one teaches, the more one gains clarity. What is sravanam for the Students is niddiyasanam for the Teacher .

"2" How to teach?

Sastra can be taught in every language. One should look for the appropriate words and choose the right words to communicate. Teacher should understand that he is wielding a pramana. Sastra speaks. The Teacher only communicates. Ethnic jokes, cultural jokes and gender jokes should be

avoided. When something positive is to be communicated, second person could be used. When something negative is to be communicated, first person can be used. For generalized statement, third person can be used. One should not cover everything one knows. Then listening would not be easy. If there is a question, one can answer. Classes should be started and concluded as scheduled. When people still want a little more, it should be stopped. It works. One understands and teaches. Audience understands.

"3" What to teach?

People get enchanted by chant. One can teach chanting and also give the meaning. Smoothly and quietly, one can teach Vedanta. If the students ask for Vedanta, one is effective.

People are oriented towards doing and love to learn meditation as there is doing involved. By doing meditation, tangible benefits are experienced by the Meditator.

Forming a study group for Gita Home Study Programme could be otherwise a starting point.

If one is confident enough, one can start teaching Gita verse by verse in his own words. After second chapter one can start Tattva Bodha. After that, Gita third chapter

can be continued. After completion of Gita, Upanisad class can be commenced.

One should teach a text. It is better to confine to a topic. One should not stay in one verse. People want progress.

The emphasis should be on values, religious life and attitude. One should not say anything to destroy religious life. For youngsters, one may teach meditation, values, attitudes and how to do puja.

ON "HOW TO SPEAK?"

The talk should be slow. Every sentence should be completed. The lowest pitch should be audible. There can be voice modulation. There should be no unnecessary hands movement or body movement while teaching.

ON TEACHING SANSKRIT

After 3 years study, Sanskrit becomes one's own language. One should continue to keep the familiarity with Sanskrit. One can teach basic Sanskrit. Vadhyar & Sons books help. People should be made comfortable to read Sanskrit. Only when the Students are ready to learn, Panini grammar should be taught.

ON ATTITUDE TO STUDENTS

There is no captive audience. Only the Students' understanding can make them captivated. There should be respect for the audience. If the Teacher knows, then Students also can know. Preparation for each class is important. Taking class without preparation is disrespect to the audience. If Teacher does not know, he should be

honest. Teacher should not think that people are dumb. Teacher should think that people are more intelligent. No one in the audience should be publicly admonished, as it creates permanent damage. One should talk to that person privately to correct the person. Teacher should not be judgmental.

ON EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

There is a tendency to judge oneself on the basis of one's own emotions and feelings. At times, there may be feeling of loneliness, rejection and need for approval. One may have viparitha bhavana. There may be impediments to enjoy the fruits of knowledge. Self judgment on the basis of one's mind is not right and unwarranted. Nididyasanam is for viparita bhavana nivrtiyartam. One should have a settled emotional life. One should be settled with Iswara. One should be free inside. One should follow the norms outside. One should not make judgment about himself. One should be kind to himself. One cannot control all situations. One can plan and prepare for an act, but at the same time one should be ready to accept whatever comes as prasada. One can have control over action, but not over the results. This knowledge prepares one to face and accept any failure gracefully and then one always wins.

ON VALUES IN LIFE

Vedanta Students cannot afford to use abusive or swear words. Tongue which is used as an instrument to utter Vedanta, cannot be used to utter swear words or abusive words. One should not engage in gossip and talking about others. What one

does, should be guided by Sastra and assimilated wisdom. One should not go by emotional dictates. The more one knows, the more happily he can accommodate others with their mind, thinking, beliefs, forms of worship, etc. One should live a life of least resistance. One should not be a person to be dealt with. One should set boundaries, this far and no further. In Iswara's order, everything is perfect. Nishta takes place.

ON LIFE STYLE

If required one can work. Individual conditions are different. One can teach at least on Saturdays and Sundays. Everyone should be well informed about the use of computer. No one can afford to remain electronically illiterate. One should continue to remain as vegetarian for rest of his life. One should do daily rituals and remain connected to Iswara. One can always ask help from Iswara. During ordinary conversation, one should not use Vedanta. In the beginning of teaching, the Teacher should take care of the Students and then later, Students will take care of the Teacher.

There is chemistry. One can conduct pujas on festival days. One should not hesitate to ask for any help for conducting puja, etc. from Students as Students should be made to feel part of the entire proceeding.

ON LIVING A SADHU LIFE

What makes a person sattvic, is explained in the Bhagawad Gita. If those verses are chanted daily, one would become saintly over a period of time. Compassion is one virtue to be cultivated. All other virtues would automatically follow. One can become a Saint by developing sattvic qualities of compassion, sympathy and understanding. One can write down verses on sattvic qualities from Chapters 14, 17, and 18 of Bhagawad Gita, and read it daily to cultivate them. It may take time to cultivate these qualities as one cannot become spiritual overnight. Sadhu life means owning least that is required for survival and not living a luxurious life. Sadhu life is living a life of ahimsa and helping others.

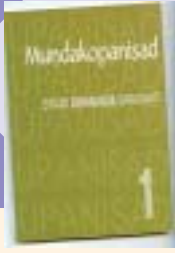
Report by N. Avinashilingam

subhāṣitam

न कर्मयोगः सुलभो यथोऽस्मिन् फलाभिसन्धिःपरिवर्जनीयः ।
फलऽधिकारो न ममेति जानन् कः कर्म कुर्यादिह नागराज ॥

na karmayogaḥ sulabho yatho'smin phalabhisandhiḥ parivarjanīyaḥ ।
phala'dhikāro na mameti jānan kaḥ karma kuryādiha nāgarāja ॥

Karma Yoga is not easy because the desire for the fruit of action should be eschewed in it. Who performs Karmas if he is aware that he has no right for its result?



मुण्डकोपनिषद् Muṇḍakopaniṣad



इष्टापूर्तं मन्यमाना वरिष्ठं वरिष्ठं
नान्यच्छ्रेयो वेदयन्ते प्रमूढाः ।
नाकस्य पृष्ठे ते सुकृतेऽनुभूत्वा
इमं लोकं हीनतरं वा विशन्ति ॥ १।२।१०
iṣṭāpūrttaṁ manyamānā varīṣṭhaṁ
nānyacchreyo vedayante pramūḍhāḥ ।
nākasya pṛṣṭhe te sukṛte' nubhūtvā
imaṁ lokam hīnataram vā viśanti ॥ 1|2|10

pramūḍhāḥ – deluded ones; iṣṭāpūrttaṁ – rituals enjoined by the Veda and karmas originating in the smṛtis; varīṣṭhaṁ – to be exalted; manyamānāḥ considering; anyat – another; śreyaḥ – means of mokṣa; na vedayante – do not know; anubhūtvā – having enjoyed; nākasya – of heaven; pṛṣṭhe – in the middle; sukṛte – gained through good actions; te – they; imam – this; lokam – the form of human being; hīnataram vā – or any other lower form; viśanti – enter

‘Those deluded ones who consider the performance of rituals enjoined by the Veda and actions enjoined by the smṛtis to be exalted, do not know the right means of mokṣa. Having enjoyed the heaven gained through good actions, they enter the human form or any other lower form.’

Iṣṭā here does not mean ‘what is desired’; it refers to rituals etc. It is derived from the root yaj to worship. iṣṭā_karmas are those enjoined by the Veda. They include performance of karmas like agnihotra, practice of tapas, self-discipline, the study and teaching of the Vedas involving how to recite the Vedic mantras, and so on. All smārta-karmas, karmas enjoined by smṛtis are called pūrta. Pūrta is mainly charity. Examples of pūrta-karma are making reservoirs, digging wells, making cattle ponds, constructing temples for worship, building a choultry where people can rest and distributing food to the needy.

In our culture, the practice of selling food was not there. Food was always distributed free. In the village where I was growing up, one woman began selling ghee. It became a big topic of gossip for the whole village. I remember another instance very well. One woman from our village refused to give her

girl in marriage to a boy whose father was running a big restaurant in a nearby town. She said, "I will not give my girl to that family where they are earning money by selling food". Making money through selling food was considered as pāpa.

One can improve upon the above list of actions of charity. Building a hospital for the public, building a school for the society, providing water to thirsty people in summer, putting up an umbrella for the traffic police, making a bus shelter – these are all pūrta-karmas. Indians do a lot of charitable works. In doing charitable works, without any strings attached, India perhaps stands first in the world.

Variṣṭhm̐ _ manyamānāḥ : these people consider iṣṭa pūrta as exalted and enough. They also think that this alone is the means for mokṣa and there is no other means. They do not have the vision of the śāstra and so they commit themselves to iṣṭa pūrta.

Nānyacchreyo vedayante pramūḍhāḥ: these deluded people do not know any other means for mokṣa. This is due to their conviction that these actions alone are great and the only means for mokṣa. It is not that iṣṭa pūrta - karmas are criticized here. They are good actions. They are highly praised as yoga, a secondary means for mokṣa. They can bring puṇya to the person who performs them. If they are done for the sake of purification of the mind, they can create the desire for mokṣa. One should, therefore, make use of these karmas. The pay-off of these karmas should result in the pursuit of mokṣa. That is being told here. Otherwise, if one stops with the iṣṭapūrta, no doubt one will get highly desirable results, but one will miss the ultimate end, the mokṣa. Having done iṣṭa pūrta and not opting for mokṣa is like cooking food and not eating it.

I hear this argument all the time: "Nara sevā, service to other human beings, is Nārāyana sevā, equivalent to service to the Lord, and it is the best means for mokṣa. There is no other means for freedom." Every human being who does sevā to others also requires sevā. A number of people have a role to play in everyone's living. Many people are required to provide food, shelter, clothes and so on, to keep a person going. Everybody requires sevā from others. So, it is a question of sharing. It is not anything big. If this is understood very well, then one will find that all these actions are meant for one's own growth. In another śruti, Yājñavalkya says. " Oh Maitreyî, ātman has to be known; to know ātman one has to listen." So, all actions are meant for one's own growth and self-discovery. One has to pursue knowledge; otherwise one cooks the food and goes hungry, because one has no time.

They are pramūḍāḥ deluded, without a chance of being convinced otherwise. It is not they will not get karma-phala, but there is no mokṣa for them. They miss out on that. It is a loss really. When they could get mokṣa by making use of the karmas, they settle for a small result. One has to choose mokṣa; otherwise, these karmas do not become yoga. They become simple karma and produce limited results. What a loss it is! The loss is infinite because the infinite is missed. What happens to these people is told now.

Nākasya prṣṭhe te sukṛte anubhūtvā: having enjoyed the result of rituals in heaven. sukṛte is the karma-phala. The word nāka is derived thus: ka means sukha, happiness. So, aka is the opposite of sukha, that is duḥkha, pain. Nāka means that which is free from aka, free from sorrow and pain. So, nāka is a place of consistent pleasures, without any pain, relatively. There again, he gets an exalted place where the degree of pleasure is higher. Nākasya prṣṭhe, in the middle of the heaven, or in the worlds beyond heaven. One can go up to tapo-loka, but to go to brahma-loka, iṣṭā pūrta is not enough. One has to have upāsana-phala also. So nākasyap[cm_he means in the lokas which are in the form of results of one's actions. They reach such a place and enjoy the results of actions in the form of heavenly pleasures. Then what happens to them?

Imaṁ lokaṁ hīnataram vā viśanti: they come down to this earth again to take another human body or enter lower wombs. This is the lot of heaven-bound people. Hīnataram means that which is something lower, a lower yoni, womb, like that of an animal body. In Sanskrit, an animal is called tiryac because it grows in an order that is opposed to the growth of a human body. Tira means bent or reverse. You grow vertically, but animals grow horizontally. Therefore an animal is called tiryanc. A yoni in naraka, hell, also is a lower yoni because there is a predominance of pain. These people after having enjoyed heaven enter lower wombs also.

After having performed such great actions that took them to heaven, how can they go to lower wombs or lower region of birth? Śaṅkara makes it clear here. This is because their sañcita -karma piled up past karma, is waiting and a set of karmas out of that can order for them, either a human body or even a better body or an animal body also. We do not know what is in store. Sañcita -karma is countless. Therefore, the possibilities are infinite. One cannot always expect a human body. Then what should one do? One has to look into śāstra to find out the means for destroying sañcita -karmas.

The previous mantra talked about the result of kevala-karma. Now, the result of karma done along with upāsanā is being told. If one does upāsanā, meditation also, along with karma, he will go to brahma-loka. It is very difficult to go to brahma-loka. That is the last thing one can accomplish in saṁsāra. Reaching brahma-loka means that one cannot be promoted further, and so one has reached one's maximum inefficiency. Up to brahma-lok one can be promoted. A person who is promoted is both efficient and inefficient. He is inefficient, so he is not promoted further, but he is efficient enough to be promoted up to this point. You have to understand this particular logic. When he reaches a point from where he cannot be promoted at all, that means he has reached the maximum inefficiency. That is the gain of brahma-loka. From brahma-loka also one will come back, unless one gains self-knowledge taught by Brahmaji. Then alone one has mokṣa. Otherwise one will come back like a bad coin. That is being said here now.

तपःश्रद्धे ये ह्युपवसन्त्यरण्ये
 शान्ता विद्वांसो भैक्ष्यचर्यं चरन्तः ।
 सूर्यद्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति
 यत्रामृतः स पुरुषो ह्यव्ययात्मा ॥ १।२।११
 tapaḥśradde yehyupavasantyarāṇye
 śāntā vidvāṁso bhaikṣyacaryāṁ carantaḥ ।
 sūryadvāreṇa te virajāḥ prayānti
 yatrāmṛtaḥ sa puruṣo hyavyayātmā ॥ 1|2|11

te – those; vidvāṁsaḥ – meditators; śāntaḥ – of resolved mind; ye – who; bhaikṣyacaryāṁ carantaḥ – subsisting on alms; hi upavasanti – pursue; tapaśradde duties along with meditation; arāṇye – (dwelling) in the forest; virajāḥ – those who are free from papā; prayānti – enter; sūrya dvāreṇa – through the solar path; yatra hi – (that world) where indeed; saḥ – he; amṛtaḥ – the immortal; puruṣaḥ -hiraṇyagarbhaḥ avyayātmā – of imperishable nature is.

Those meditators of resolved mind, who live on alms, who pursue their duties along with meditation dwelling in the forest, are freed from papā and through the solar path they enter the world where the immortal hiraṇyagarbha of imperishable nature dwells.

The karma-phala of those who perform their duties in keeping with their stage of life and do meditation is stated here. Between sannyāsa and

gṛhasthāśrama there is a stage of life called vānaprasthā. In this stage, a householder resorts to a forest having handed over the management of the home to the younger generation. He is called vanin, one who dwells in a forest. What is meant by 'forest' here is not a place where there is dense vegetation and wild life. It is a place away from the din and bustle of the market place. It is an upalakṣaṇa, figurative reference for a quiet place. It is a more wooded place, usually next to a village, where there are not many people. A vanin retires to such a place because he wants to spend the whole day in meditation. In this mantra these vanins are talked about. This mantra also covers a type of sannyāsins who are committed to upāsana.

Tapahśradde yehi upavasanti: those people who perform karmas and do meditation. Tapas refers to karma enjoined according to one's stage of life. They perform those karmas and other religious disciplines that they decide to follow. They do not give up their gṛhasthāśrama karmas, but perform them mostly mentally. Śraddha means upāsana, meditation, here because of the presence of the word 'upavasanti'. It stands for a certain meditation upon Īśvara with form.

They continue to perform their nitya-karmas in a deliberate fashion and with diligence, coupled with upāsana. Previously they were playing many roles, now they have a minimum number of roles. They do not have any emotional entanglement with the family, and thus, they live a retired life. This is the retirement of the religious person who was playing various roles. It is purely a life of religious commitments. Then one takes to sannyāsa which is the fourth stage in life.

According to the Vedas, there are four stages in one's life. The first stage is the brahmacaryāśrama, bachelorhood, in which one is committed to education. Once that Vedic education is over, he is called snāta, graduated. After the valediction he takes a religious bath called avabhṛta-snāna, and becomes a snāta. For him, the first āśrama is over and he is now without an āśrama. The śāstra does not allow him to live like that for long because when one is neither a brahmacārin nor a gṛhastha, one does not know what karma one has to do. He should arrange to offer guru-dakṣiṇā to his teacher, and then get married, not before that. The śāstra seems to know that once he gets married he cannot pay anything. That is what is said in Taittirīyopaniṣad, "Giving adequate money to the teacher as dakṣiṇā, gift, which is pleasing to him, one should get married in order

to have progeny. One is supposed to collect that money from the king or any other source. A small period of time is given for this purpose. One should get married as early as one can, because one should not snap the lineage.

The second stage is gr̥hasthāśrama, married life, where a person, along with role-playing, prepares himself for a spiritual life. He performs the enjoined ritual called nitya-naimittika-karmas. The family life is lived with healthy attitudes to gain maturity. Then he becomes a vinin, a retired person. This is the third stage. Finally he takes to a life of a sannyāsin, renunciate. Sannyāsa is the fourth stage. This is the order in general. When there is an order, we have an exception. The exception is that one may take to sannyāsa from brahmacaryāśrama or from gr̥hasthāśrama also. The exception is not the rule, however, and we must always adhere to the rule, not the exception. Here, the vanins who take to tapas and śraddhā are talked about. They are further described.

Śāntā vidvāmsaḥ: they are resolved in mind and they have knowledge. Vidvāmsaḥ means those who know śāstra. They do not know Vedanta, because upāsanā is pointed out here. They have lived a meaningful life, and thereby they have gained a certain resolution of mind with reference to rāga dveṣās. Their senses and mind are quietened. They are committed only to meditation.

They can also take to a life of vividiṣā sannyāsa, renunciation for gaining knowledge. Then, they can give up all karmas, but continue to do saḡuṇa brahma upāsanā, meditation on Īśvara. In sannyās sannyāsa a, external religious disciplines like rituals are given up. One cannot be a sannyāsin and at the same time perform karmas like agnihotra, but the ritual that one was performing earlier can be converted into upāsanā. If they die away without gaining the knowledge, they take to solar path.

To be continued...

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श्री रुद्रम् Śrī Rudram

नमो अग्रेवधाय च दूरेवधाय च

namo agrevadhāya ca dūrevadhāya ca

The Lord protects the devotees from dangers, near and far. When Arjuna entered the battlefield Lord Krishna became his protector by being Arjuna's charioteer. All the arrows had to pass through Krishna. There is another interesting episode in the Mahabharata.

The context was Arjuna's battle with Drona. As we know, Drona was the archery guru of Arjuna and therefore Arjuna was inhibited by his respect for his teacher while fighting against Drona. But Arjuna found that he had an ally fighting for him right in front of him standing in the opposite camp, neutralizing all the fighters.

He says, "In the battlefield, as I attack the opposite army with my countless arrows, I see in front a person moving, shining and effulgent like fire, raising his hand with his spear and to whichever direction he moves in those places the enemies, O Lord, stand powerless. I only follow him and hit these people who are already rendered powerless. While they are already destroyed by this person, people think that I had killed them".

Later in the Mahabharata, in the section of mokṣa dharma in the Śānti parva, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, "The one who moves around in front of you when you are engaged in the battlefield fighting, understand him to be, O Arjuna, as Rudra. He continues to say that the enemies were already made powerless by Rudra, Arjuna's life of dharma besides his respect for his guru protects him even in the battlefield."¹

A śatru, enemy, can be within or outside. According to śāstra, the real enemy is only inside. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "jahī śatruṃ mahābāho kāmarūpaṃ durāsadam"—O mighty armed! Destroy this powerful enemy who is in the form of want". There cannot be an enemy outside without one being there inside. What is outside is only an object of enmity whereas the enemy within is difficult to eliminate. Anger, for instance, robs the will of a person. One who is under the spell of anger has no choice really speaking and requires help.

¹ यस्तु ते ह्यग्रतो याति युद्धे संप्रत्युपस्थिते । तं विद्धि रुद्रं कौन्तेय
निहतान् तेन वै पूर्वं हतवान् असि वै रिपून् ॥ महाभारत शान्तिपर्व

Śatru is one who works against you. While kāma, desire is not śatru, greed is. But kāma also is an enemy if it is against dharma. One cannot even accomplish artha and kāma when the śāstras are there inside. Mokṣa is too far away for such a person.

One certainly requires help to win over inner enemies and that help can only be from the Lord. The Lord becomes the protector for the one who surrenders to Him. There is no better victory than destroying the inner śatrus; the jayahetu, the cause of victory over enemies is also the Lord.

Dūre-vadha is one who protects from a distance. Arjuna did not want to fight the war. In the course of teaching him, Kṛṣṇa showed his viśvarūpa, the cosmic form. Arjuna saw everyone in the jaws of death. The Lord said to him, 'Even before you start the war, these warriors had already been destroyed by me. You are only a nimitta, medium.' What makes the difference between success and failure is the grace of Bhagāvan alone.

Hantre ca hanīyase ca — Hanṭṛ is one who resolves everything unto himself, the saṁhāra kartā. Even if saṁsāra goes away in the pralaya, dissolution, it will come back when the creation begins. I you need to totally destroy saṁsāra, mere pralaya is not adequate. You have to invoke the real hanṭṛ, who is the adhiṣṭhāna, the basis of pralaya. You invoke Him as hanīyas to destroy the saṁsāra. Since He is anartha- hanṭṛ, I invoke Him as upāsya for removing the anatha; the Lord become artha-hetu. Salutation to the one who resolves everything unto himself and who destroys saṁsāra totally.

Namaḥ vṛkṣebhyaḥ harikeśebhyaḥ ² —The Lord in the form of trees is a source of life for human being. They provide oxygen and food—a source of protection and source of shade. Salutations unto the one who is manifest in the form of trees with green leaves.

Namastārāya - Tāra means Om, which is a means for mokṣa. Om, which is a means for mokṣa. Om is at the beginning of the Vedas as well as its end. Om is the name for Brahman, the cause and effect of everything. Therefore all that is here is Om. What was, what is and what will be is Om. What transcends all the three periods of time is also Om. The śruti says ayam ātma (oṅkārahidheyah) brahma, this self (which is the meaning of the word Om) is Brahman. Salutations to the Lord who is the self-revealing, self-evident ātmā that is Brahman, that is Om.

² हारति-वारणाह पालब्रम्हारहपाह केन्द्रब्रह्म येश्वरप्र ते हारकिंभाह तेवहयाह वन्नकश्वेवहयाहंतहखसे थहचिह हावे गरेन हारिनि तहे डखरम खड लोवेस रे चाललेद हारकिंभाह । नतख चतहे लखरद नि तहे डखरम खडफ तहखसे तरेस ॥

Namaḥ tārātārāya – Tārā means Om, which is a means for mokṣa. Om is at the beginning of the Veda as well as at the end. Om is the name for Brahman, the cause and effect of everything. Therefore all that is here is Om. What was, what is and what will be is Om. What transcends all the three periods of time is also Om. The śruti says, ayam ātmā (oṅkārahidheyah) brahma, this self (which is the meaning of the word Om) is Brahman. Salutation to the Lord who is the self-revealing, self-evident ātmā that is Brahman, that is Om.

In addition to being abhidhāna, name for Brahman, Om is also a pratīka, sound symbol for Brahman. (Pratimā is a form symbol). There are temples with altars for all religions, wherein the altar for Hinduism is just Om. But Om is not a form symbol, pratimā. Om is meant for oral and mental repetition. One does not repeat a form symbol; one worships it. Om encompasses everything and the Vedic tradition has no hostility towards anyone. We need not do any patchwork of Bhagavān by bringing together all symbols either. Śāstra gives the vision of the total which includes the entire jagat. Therefore, the śruti says, namaḥ tārātārāya ca—salutation to the one who is in the form of the means of crossing the saṃsāra.

Namaśśambhave¹ ca mayobhave ca - The Lord is the source of happiness, sukha. Therefore it is said here, śambhave ca. Sukha can be gained here and in the hereafter. Both are karma-phala. Sukha is born here due to situations that are conducive and sukha hereafter is born of situations in heaven. Svarga-sukha is greater and more consistent. The Lord is the sukha-hetu. Śam refers to sukha here and mayas is sukha hereafter. Any sukha is due to the Lord alone, he being the karma-phala-dātā, Salutation to the one who gives happiness on earth and other worlds such as heaven and so on.

Namaḥ śaṅkarāya² ca mayaskarāya ca – In the previous line the Lord was praised as karma phala dātā, the giver of fruits of action here and in the hereafter. In this line he is praised as the very hetu, source, of happiness here and hereafter; he is Śaṅkarā and mayaskara respectively. Whenever

¹ śam sukham bhavati asmāt iti śambhuḥ tasmai—the one from whom happiness is gained is called śambhuḥ, unto him.

² śam karoti iti śaṅkaraḥ tasmai—the one who is the source of happiness, unto him.

one is happy, one is not alienated from the Lord. His svarūpa is oneself as ānanda. Salutation to the Lord who is the sukha-hetu.

Namaḥ śivāya ca śivatārāya ca - One who bestows happiness all the way is Śivā. He is also mokṣa sukha hetu, the cause of happiness that is freedom.

Śruti gives you the means for happiness here and in the hereafter and is therefore given an exalted status.

The Śata Rudrīya in the Śruti gains more importance as it has everything to give. The pañcākṣarī mantra, the five-syllabled mantra, namaḥ śivāya is as good as chanting the whole Veda. Furthermore, in the pañcākṣarī, the word Śivā, consisting of two syllables, is the greatest. Śivā means maṅgala, happy end, the grand finale.

Śivā also means śuddha, pure, that which removes all pāpa. He is the hetu for sarva-karma- nivṛtti, freedom from all karmas. He removes all the puṇya and pāpa-karmas by giving knowledge. He also gives the blessing which is the cause for knowledge. Śivā also means śānta, the one in whom the whole world resolves.

Śivā, happiness, is also caused by other devatās. We find statements like pāvaka asmabhyam śivo bhava, O fire, be auspicious to us. But Śivā here is śivatara, atīśayena śivaṁ karoti, one who gives more and lasting happiness. Any happiness you get from anywhere is Lord Śivā alone. Salutation to Lord Śivā who gives absolute happiness.

To be continued.....

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Retreat at Rishikesh Ashram, November 30-December 4, 2013

On the banks of Ganga, in Rishikesh, Pujya Swamiji unfolded “pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidamin” at a special retreat for invited participants, from November 30 to December 4, 2013. Testimonials in the valedictory function indicated that many were deeply impacted by Pujya Swamiji’s profound unfoldment of this śānti mantra of the Īśāvāsya upaniṣad.

The participants were also taught chanting of pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ and other Veda mantras, along with the meanings, by Svāmini Śāradānandā and Svāmini Vedārthānandā. Smt. Devi and Sri Sujit Choudhury provided daily classes in yoga, as well their expert personal therapeutic guidance. Smt. Sheela Balaji gave two presentations on AIM for Seva, Pujya Swamiji’s far-sighted movement to bring education and basic amenities to the underserved in India.

The first one presented a macro picture, showing the reach of more than 100 free student homes in 15 states, serving 14,000 students. She also touched on the impact of these students on their families and communities, extending the reach to an estimated 10 million people.

In the second, she focused on one village, Manjakkudi, as a model for bringing children through their entire education,

from pre-school to post graduation, and into the work force as contributors to society. Participants were warmly invited to join this movement for the betterment of the children and, India.

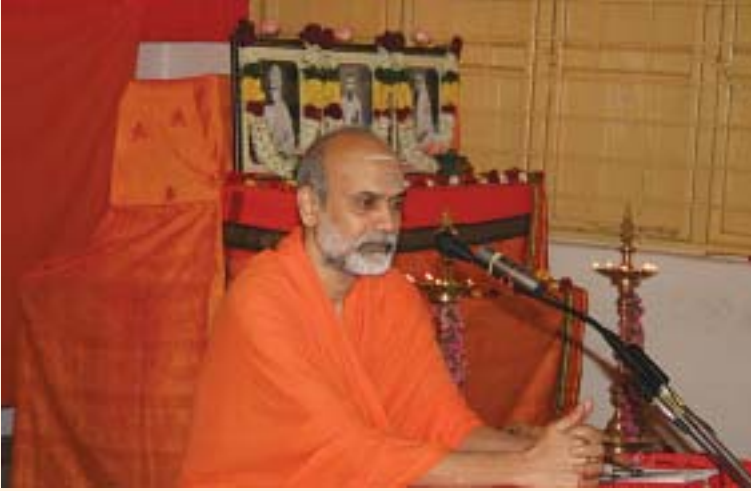
Br. Śivātmā gave daily presentations on the ‘Relevance of Ancient Indian Knowledge in the Contemporary Society’. He spoke about the Indian education system, circumstances under which English education was introduced, disadvantages of western education, and the Indian knowledge base in subjects like mathematics, astronomy, language, phonetics, etc., showing their relevance to the world we live in.

In the satsangs, Pūjya Svāmiji answered questions and participants introduced themselves, with moving accounts of the impact on Pujya Swamiji on their lives.

Beginning with a samaṣṭi bhaṇḍārā for 2000 sādhus, sponsored by SASTRA University, the retreat participants enthusiastically participated in the unique opportunity of being in Rishikesh, and sponsored a bhaṇḍārā at the ashram every day of the retreat.

The retreat concluded with a valedictory function in which the participants expressed deep appreciation for Pujya Swamiji’s teachings.

Swami Guruparananda's Talks on Kasi Panchakam



SWAMI GURUPARANANDA: Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarasvati has initiated Swami Guruparananda into the Sannyasa order. Swami Guruparananda has stayed with Swami Paramarthananda for six years and studied Vedanta and Sanskrit. He has been teaching Vedantic texts in Tamil in Chennai since 1992. He elucidates these texts in a methodical and elaborate manner and drives home the relevance of this knowledge in our daily life.

WEB SITE: In the website www.poornalayam.org his talks in Tamil on all important Vedantic texts are available online. A few books that he has authored are available online, both in English and Tamil.

TALKS AT TIRUPUR: Swami Guruparanda gave a talk on "KASI PANCHAKAM" at Sri Ramakrishna Vidyalaya Higher Secondary School, Tirupur on Dec 29, 2013. KASI PANCHAKAM is a niddiyasana grantha.

BENEFITS OF PILGRIMAGE: Swamiji told that we get many benefits from pilgrimage like experiencing a quiet mind at the

place of tapas of Mahatamas, reduction in papa karma, purification of mind, cultivating values due to sat sangha and getting rid of fear.

VERSE 1: To reach the Ganga, we use Manikarnika ghat of Kashi. Similarly for



getting atma jnana, we use a quiet mind, which is free from longing for worldly objects. Kasi is our atma swarupa.

VERSE 2: Brahma Satyam, Jagat mitya. From which Ishwara, the jagat has manifested is Kasi or atma swarupa. From that atma swarupa, this moving and non-moving life forms and the mind have manifested.

VERSE 3: Bhavani is our buddhi. Siva is our atma. Kasi is our atmaswarupa. Bhavani as maya tatvam is present in the buddhi of all living beings. Siva as sakshi chaitanyam is present in all living beings. With our buddhi, we should understand Siva.

VERSE 4: In the sthula sarira, which is Kasi, atma which is also Kasi resides and shines. The Sadaka who understands the atma, which is Kasi gains moksha, which is also Kasi.

VERSE 5: Kasi is the sarira. Ganga is the mind. Gaya is bakthi and sraddha. Prayaga is Guru seva. When all the pilgrim centres are there in our sarira, there is no need to go for pilgrimage anywhere else.

LAST SADANA: The last sadana is growing out of the need to do any sadana, due to understanding atma tatvam.

Report by N. Avinashilingam



5th National Conference

Organised by Ārsha Vidyā Vikās Kendra
February 7th (Friday), 8th (Saturday) and 9th (Sunday), 2014

In order to appreciate the richness and diversity of Indian Culture in the contemporary society, ĀVVK is organising yet another Conference.

'Dimensions of Indian Philosophy, Literature and Culture'

1)The Vedas, 2)The Vedāngas, 3)The Upanic ads, 4)Buddhism, 5)Sanskrit Literature,6)The Epics - *Rāmāyaṅa* and *Mahābhārata*,7)*Bhagavadgītā*, 8).Women in India, 9)The Purāṅas,10) Dharmasāstras,11)Indian Philosophical Systems,12) Essential of Vedānta,13)Vaicava Vedānta14) Ethics and Values,15) Indian Hymnology, 16) Bhakti Movement,17) Religious/Philosophical Literature,18)Odia Literature

Participation details

Faculties of the Universities, Research Scholars, Independent Researchers, Scholars, Authors, Poets are invited to participate in the Conference.

Submission of Papers

The final paper in around 3,000 words (10 pages) may be sent by **1st February 2014** by email to atmaprajna@gmail.com, followed by the hard copy and the CD/DVD through Speed Post.

Tentative Schedule		
7th February 2014 (Friday)	Pre-Lunch	Inaugural Session Book Release
	Post-Lunch	Session I,II
8th February 2014 (Saturday)	Pre-Lunch	Session III, IV
	Post-Lunch	Poetry Reading Session V
9th February 2014 (Sunday)	Pre-Lunch	Session VI, VII Panel Discussion
	Post-Lunch	Session VIII Valedictory Session

Convener

Swāmini Ātmaprajnānanda Saraswati

Founder Ācāryā, Ārsha Vidyā Vikās Kendra

A 1/1 Palaspalli, Bhubaneswar - 751 020

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website - www.arshavidya.net

Blog - www.atmaprajnananda.blogspot.com

<http://www.speakingtree.in/public/atmaprajnanandasaraswati/profile>

Venue

Kalinga Convention Hall, Panthanivas, Lewis Road, Bhubaneswar - 751 014

Sri Brahmavidyanandaji's visit to AVT Jaipur

Arsha Vidya Teertha was sanctified by the visit of the eminent Acarya, Sri Swami Brahmavidyananda Saraswatiji. It was a happy occasion for the Ashrama devotees. He was welcomed with Poorna Kumbha at the City Centre. Sri Swamiji also visited the Chhaatraalaya, to be welcomed by the boys with chants. Swamiji spent the evening with them and told them a beautiful suĀi;tm and expounded its meaning.:

सत्यं माता पिता ज्ञानं धर्मो माता दया सखा ।
शन्तिः पत्नी क्षमा पुत्रः षडेते मम बान्धावाः ॥

These are the six close members of my family:- Truth is Mother and Knowledge, my Father- I must revere them and reflect them in my life, by ever upholding truth and seeking knowledge. Dharma is my brother (born with me, of the same parents) whom I must always love and follow. Compassion is my friend whom I will never leave. I must be wedded to peace, Shantih, for life, for that will bring fulfillment. That will beget Khama, forgiveness - my beloved son!

Swamiji sang a bhajan, took the evening prasadam with them and stayed overnight, joining the boys in the morning Pooja and abhishekam.

Swamiji's Satsanga at the Ashrama was, likewise, very enlightening.

Wisdom says, what is 'Tucchaam', non-existent (like 'human horns'), I must not waste my energies upon. Yet I do! How much I dwell in the bitter experiences of the past and the fantasies of the future.. both non-existent as of now. Take a lesson from the past experience, if any, but leave the useless 'reliving' of the experience! It is good to plan for the future but unwise to worry about it or day-dream all the time. 'Now' is the truth - do what is your duty - now!

He shared what he had found very inspiring as a meditation from the Panchadasi of Sri Vidyananda. He said that it was indeed a very simple way to bring Vedanta into day-to-day life and is enshrined in the 15th Chapter thereof.

There are three Gunas in us, which are manifest in the form of three kinds of Vrttis. The Shanta-vrttis, Ahimsa, Daya, Satyam etc. all born of Sattva-guna. The Ghora-vrttis - desires and fancies, anger, worries, ambitions, competition etc. born of Rajas, 'activity'. And finally Moodha-vrttis, laziness, procrastination, inaction, sloth, excessive sleepiness and the like born of Tamas.

One's Vrttis, thoughts, are like a constantly flowing stream - a 'Sarit'. It could be Shubha Sarit or Ashubha Sarit. Shubha, the

'auspicious' is all the positive vrttis of Daya, Dharma, Kshama, seva, self-restraint and the like - the Shatka-sampatti.... all that results in shubham - Shanti and fulfillment. Ashubha is Jealousy, anger, hatred and the like, which result in 'Ashubha', turbulence. One must gently nudge on the Shubha Sarit and avoid the Ashubha.

One must deal with thoughts, experiences, etc. as one deals with visitors to our home. Most of them are packed off from the drawing room, after 'due' attention or courtesies...with no regret or longing for, once they leave. A few are not even let into one's home, sent off from the gate itself. Very few close ones (family), is entertained in the inner chambers. So too with the Vrttis, should one deal, if peace is sought, and we must escape the stranglehold of Vishayas and Chinta.

A very simple meditation is described to recognise that all that is, is Brahman, Sacchidaananda!

Whenever we encounter any object, animate or inanimate, we recognise that

it exists, and we perceive it. The common fact behind all these diverse perceptions - like the chair is, or stone is, or cow is, or man is or tree is is the 'IS' or 'Isness', the 'SAT'.

When encountering in the world of experience, living beings, from trees to humans - a Cat runs, a bud opens, child plays, bird flies, hunger, thirst...we must recognise that it is expression of consciousness in various degrees, the CHIT".

When there is the recognition of joy, say a person laughing at a joke, or enjoying ice-cream/food, or Cinema, or the beauty of the mountains, a Mother cuddling her baby fondly, a calf jumping and frolicking, children playing.... see that it is the expression of fullness, it is 'ANANDA'.

All that is, this Jagat, is only SAT-CHIT-ANANDA, Brahman! One does not need to set aside any special time for this meditation, it is as fluid as we live, every moment, everywhere... one can effortlessly see....and know.. Sacchidananda

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Century - Old Temple Conflict Ends



(HPI Adds: Following is a complete report on this important decision. India's Supreme Court ruled on January 6, 2014 that the famous Nataraja temple in the town of Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu will continue to be managed by priests and not taken over the state government. In 2009, the Madras High Court had transferred the administration of the 1000-year-old-temple dedicated to Lord Shiva to the government. That verdict was based on the allegation that the temple's considerable wealth was being mismanaged. The decision was challenged by the temple's priests who belong to the Dikshathar sect.)

CHENNAI, INDIA, January 6, 2014 (The Hindu): The Supreme Court judgment on Chidambaram Natarajar temple brings to an end more than a century-old tussle between the State and priests over temple

administration. One of the earliest documented incidents relating to the status of Chidambaram Natarajar temple or Sabanayagar temple as it is officially known dates back to 1885. The Dikshitar or the priest community who administered the temple approached the Madras High Court to designate the temple as a private one. The judges, after hearing the arguments, made it clear that the Chidambaram temple was a place of public worship and not a private property of the Dikshitar.

When the Hindu Religious Endowments Board was created and the relevant Act was passed in 1925, the Dikshitar appealed to the government to exempt the temple from the Board schemes. Though the government accepted the appeal, it informed the dikshitar that sections of the Act relating to submission of accounts and formulation



of administrative schemes would apply. In 1933, the government tried to streamline the management of the temple by proposing a committee comprising nine Dikshitar. This committee, in turn, was to appoint a manager subject to the approval of the HR and CE board, maintain accounts, properties, and account for cash offerings.

The Dikshitar challenged this scheme, but the High Court Bench upheld it in 1939. In 1951, the government wanted to abolish private temples in the State. It appointed an executive officer to oversee the Natarajar temple administration. The Dikshitar challenged this. The Madras High Court, in its judgment in 1959, held that the Natarajar temple belongs to a religious denomination, and, hence the appointment of an executive officer was “opposed to the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 26 and 27 of the constitution.”

In 1982, the government, citing claims of mismanagement, issued notice to the temple and proposed to appoint an executive officer to manage its affairs. When the Dikshitar appealed, the government

defended its decision stating that the appointment of an officer was only to administer the properties. It would not interfere in religious rights of the priests, it argued. The Dikshitar moved the court in 1984. When the court dismissed their petition in 1997, they filed an appeal.

The court then directed them to file a revision petition with the government. When the petition was rejected in 2006, the Dikshitar approached the court again. After hearing both sides, the single judge of the High Court, in 2009, passed orders upholding the appointment of executive officer. Citing the Supreme Court cases since the 1950s, the court ruled that the Dikshitar “are not entitled to the protection” as a denomination temple in the matter of administration. It also held that the State can intervene and regulate administration. The Dikshitar appealed against this judgment. The Madras High Court Bench heard the appeal and upheld the orders of the Single Judge. The Dikshitar then appealed to the Supreme Court. Subramaniam Swamy served as their lawyer in that winning case.



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Maha Sivaratri Puja

We welcome you to participate in the Maha Sivaratri Puja at the Gurukulam on Thursday, February 27, 2014. We begin with the Nitya-puja in the morning, which will be followed by Ekadasa-Rudrabhiseka, Special Puja & Maha-arati in the evening.

P R O G R A M E

Nitya-puja	...	5.00 AM
Akhanda-nama-japa	...	7.00 AM to 3.00 PM
Ekadasa-Rudrabhiseka	...	4.00 PM
Maha-arati	...	7.30 PM
Maha Prasadam	...	8.00 PM

P.S. Please send your offering Rs.251/- to reach us on or before 26.2.2014. Use the form given below. Please make your Cheque or DD payable to Sruti Seva Trust, Coimbatore. Electronic transfers can also be directly made to the account of Sruti Seva Trust, with Indian Overseas Bank, Chinna Thadagam Branch, Account No. 064301000007129, IFS Code IOBA0000643.

You may also be one of the sponsors of the day by offering Rs.1000/- or more.

PUJA OFFERING

Enclosed is my offering for the special Puja on the day of Maha Sivaratri on 27.2.2014

Name (in Block Letters) Naksatra Gotra

1.

2.

3.

4.

My Address (in BLOCK LETTERS)

.....

Phone Mobile E-mail

Cheque/DD No. Bank Date

Hindu Devotees Celebrate Makar Sankranti Harvest Festival

INDIA, January 14, 2014 (NY Daily News): Makar Sankranti is a major Hindu harvest festival celebrated in almost all parts of India. It marks the transition of the Sun into the zodiac sign of Makara rashi (Capricorn) on its celestial path. The day is also believed to mark the arrival of spring in India. Makar Sankranti is a solar event making one of the few Indian festivals which fall on the same date in the Gregorian calendar every year: January 14th.

Museum On Ayurveda Ready For Inauguration Near Thrissur

KOCHI, INDIA, December 22, 2014 (The Hindu Business Line): Vaidyaratnam has set up a museum on ayurveda to enlighten the public on its rich heritage and evolution. Set up with an investment close to US\$809,000 at Thaikkattussery near Thrissur, the museum, the first of its kind, will be inaugurated by former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on December 27.

Astavaidyan E.T. Narayanan Mooss, who supervised the setting up of museum, said the idea is to link the ancient tradition of ayurveda with its promising future as a safe medicinal system. The past and contemporary treatment, medicine preparation and impart of education are shown at a 3D gallery.

The exhibits in the museum include authoritative texts, description of various ancient practices of black magic, study of Vedas, Yaagas and Yajnas, Gurukula system, Rasasalas or pharmacies of ancient times etc

Sugar is “the New Tobacco”

UNITED KINGDOM, January 8, 2014 (Daily Mail): “Sugar is the new tobacco,” said Simon Capewell, professor of clinical epidemiology at the University of Liverpool. Professor Capewell is part of a new US-UK campaign group — Action on Sugar — that says asking firms to make voluntary changes has failed.

The typical Briton consumes 12 teaspoons of sugar a day and some adults consume as many as 46. The maximum intake recommended by the World Health Organisation is ten, although this guideline is likely to be halved.

The UN agency says there is overwhelming evidence coming out about sugar-sweetened beverages and other sugar consumption being linked to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

A study by Action on Sugar found surprisingly high levels of sugar in many foods, including savory products and healthy options. A Mars bar has eight teaspoons of sugar, a can of Heinz tomato soup has four teaspoons of sugar, even Glaceau Vitamin Water, which is owned by Coca-Cola, has the equivalent of four teaspoons of sugar in a 500ml bottle.

Action of Sugar said food firms should be able to reduce the amount of sugar they add to products by 20 to 30 percent within three to five years, taking 100 calories a day out of the typical diet. This would be enough to halt or even reverse rising levels of obesity and associated ill-health, it claimed.

Graham MacGregor, a professor at the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine in London and chairman of Action on Sugar, said: “We must now tackle the obesity epidemic both in the UK and worldwide. We must start a coherent and structured plan to slowly reduce the amount of calories people consume by slowly taking out added sugar from foods and soft drinks.” Dr Aseem, the group’s science director, said: “Added sugar has no nutritional value whatsoever, and causes no feeling of satiety.”

Uncertainty Looms over Kailash Mansarovar Yatra

DEHRADUN, INDIA, January 21, 2014 (Times Of India): Only a few months are left for the Kailash Mansarovar yatra to begin. But Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN), the nodal agency for the ministry of external affairs-organized yatra, is still undecided about the route that the yatriis will take through Uttarakhand this year. [HPI note: this is for pilgrims going into Tibet from India, a different route than those going there via Nepal.] The main route of the pilgrimage — which is scheduled to begin from June 8 this year — was badly affected during the flash floods last year leading to the yatra being called off. Repair work in this area is progressing at a slow pace and it is unclear whether the route would be ready before the yatra commences.

Shirish Kumar, general manager, KMVN, told TOI that they were hopeful that the main route will open before the yatra begins but added they were also exploring the possibility of using two alternative routes as a backup plan this year. However, sources add that the alternative routes being considered could be “risky and unsafe for pilgrims.”

The yatra passes through Almora, Dania, Pithoragarh, Dharchula, Tawaghat and Narayan Ashram on a motorable road. The stretch between Dharchula and Narayan Ashram is presently being repaired. A 60-meter-long road bridge at Kanchyoti village between Dharchula and Narayan Ashram and large portions of road in the nearby Tawaghat area were washed away in the flash-floods last year. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and PWD are handling the repair and construction work in the area along with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police.

The recent announcement of the yatra dates by the ministry of external affairs, though, has put the state government under pressure to expedite the ongoing repair work. “We have now taken up construction of Kanchyoti road bridge and damaged roads near Tawaghat as a “special case.” With the help of BRO and PWD, we hope to clear the entire route by March end or April this year,” says Neeraj Khairwal, DM, Pithoragarh.

Pantheerayiram Celebrated In Kerala

KERALA, INDIA, January 12, 2014 (New India Express): It is the beginning of the year and Namboothiri families in Kerala are getting ready to conduct Vettakkoru Makan

Pattu (the song to worship Lord Vettakkoru Makan) or pantheerayiram. It is a popular but challenging ritual in which the chief priest has to break 12,000 coconuts continuously in one sitting.

Manoj Kumar Kandamangalam is one of the few priests in the state who excels in conducting pantheerayiram. Coming from a noted priest family in north Kerala, Manoj has conducted this ritual at various temples and households since 1996 and is probably the fastest at it. He holds the Limca Book record of breaking 12,000 coconuts in 2 hours and 13 minutes.

Pantheerayiram is carried out as an offering to Lord Vettakkoru Makan and Lord Ayyappan. “In Kerala it is conducted for Lord Vettakkoru Makan while in other south Indian states, the ritual is conducted for Lord Ayyappan,” says Manoj. Vettakkoru Makan is regarded as the son of Lord Siva. He was born to Siva and Parvathi while they were wandering through a forest in guise of tribal warriors. Soon after his birth, the infant was left in the forest and raised and trained in war strategies by tribal leaders.

Madurai Temple Reservoirs Fight For Survival

MADURAI, INDIA, January 6, 2014 (The Hindu): One look at the sprawling Mariamman Teppakulam, and it is the buzz of humanity inside the tank (a line water reservoir) that first catches your attention — boys playing cricket, people walking across the tank to go to the other side and few wheeling bicycles through patches of the dry brown and grassy green tank bed.

Many temple tanks in the city which were once brimming with water and where beautiful float festivals were held are bone dry now. The tanks found either inside or outside the temple premises are replete with rich history and fine architecture.

A source of water is something of great importance to a temple. “For most sprawling temples which bears the brunt of a hot sun, a tank ensures that some parts of the temple are always kept cool,” points out Sridhar Bhattar from the Narasingam Perumal Temple. The presence of a temple tank also results in groundwater table getting charged, says A. Gurunathan, Head, Vayalagam Movement of the Dhan Foundation. It has published a book on four prominent temple tanks in Madurai.

“Owing to scarce rainfall and channels that supplied water from a main source going defunct, either a concrete floor or tiles are laid on the tank bed to retain at least the little water that the tank manages to get since it cannot support percolation and groundwater recharge,” he explains.

While the channels need attention, sustained maintenance of the tank is needed, say experts. Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department officials say Mariamman Teppakulam is to be renovated at a cost of Rs. 40 lakh. It will ensure that the cracked walls are repaired. “People must be aware of the history of old tanks so that they will understand the importance of conserving them. A systematic approach in upkeep of these ancient temple tanks will make a world of difference,” says official.

US Returns Missing Sculptures to India

UNITED KINGDOM, January 15, 2014 (BBC): The US has returned to India three ancient sculptures that had been smuggled into the US by art dealers and accomplices. The 11th-12th Century sandstone sculptures had been stolen from temples in India and offered for sale in the US.

India's consul general in New York, Dnyaneshwar Mulay, expressed gratitude to US.

"I'd really like to express very heartfelt gratitude to US authorities for having invested so much time, energy and resources in obtaining, securing and now helping us repatriate these [statues] to the place where they belong," Mr. Mulay was quoted as saying by The Hindu newspaper.

James Dinkins, executive associate director of Homeland Security Investigations, said "excellent cooperation" between the two countries had "led to the recovery and return of these priceless antiquities". "The pilfering of a nation's cultural patrimony cannot and will not be tolerated," he said.

500,000 Saplings Planted On Vaishnodevi Hills

JAMMU, INDIA, December 14, 2013 (Business Standard): As a result of the directions issued by Chairman of Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board N. N. Vohra, Shri Mata Vaishnodevi Shrine Board (SMVDB) has planted over 550,000 saplings, including forest, horticulture, floriculture, medicinal and ornamental species of plants during the last 4 years, a spokesman of SMVD said.

The initiative is aimed at conserving the environment and ecology and greening the Trikuta Hills and the tracks leading to the shrine.

In addition, 150,000 saplings of different species of plants were planted during the monsoon plantation season of 2013, spokesman said, adding that as many as 150,000 plants are being planted during the present winter plantation season, which will raise the number of plants put in the ground to 700,000.

CEO of SMVD Mandeep Bhandari said to generate in-house production of indigenous species of plants compatible to the local climatic conditions in the Trikuta Hills area, a multi-purpose nursery with a capacity to produce more than 200,000 seedlings per year is being set up at Kunkuniyallan village, near Panthal by the Board.

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