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THE CONCEPT OF RAM RAJYA

RIGHT UNDERSTANDING



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Readers' views are welcome. For feedback on the journal, contribution and membership enquiries, please contact:

Secretariat:

Chamber No.10, o/o CPM-5, DMRC, Airport Express Metro Station, Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi 110021

Phone: 95996 97643

Website: <http://www.valuefoundation.in>

Email: frnv@valuefoundation.in, frnv@outlook.com

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Content

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|--|
| 06 | <i>Contributors</i> | 30 | <i>Book Review
Lords of the Deccan</i> |
| 08 | <i>Swami Bhoomananda
Tirtha</i> | 34 | <i>Swami Vivekananda</i> |
| 10 | <i>From The President's
Desk</i> | 36 | <i>Childrens Corner</i> |
| 12 | <i>Subhashitam</i> | 38 | <i>Two brothers</i> |
| 14 | <i>The Concept of Ram Rajya</i> | 40 | <i>FRNV News and Events</i> |
| 18 | <i>The Right Understanding</i> | 42 | <i>Subscription</i> |
| 24 | <i>The Relevance of
Dussehra and Diwali</i> | | |

CONTRIBUTORS



Jishnu Devvarma

Jishnu Devvarma is currently the Deputy Chief Minister of Tripura State. He is a direct descendant of the Manikya dynasty, the ruling house of the erstwhile Twipra Kingdom which is now the Indian State of Tripura.



Srinivasan Radhika

Srinivasan Radhika, author of four books on Indian art and culture is an ardent disciple of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswathi. She runs a Girls' Home for underprivileged children in Manjakkudi.



R. Dasarathy

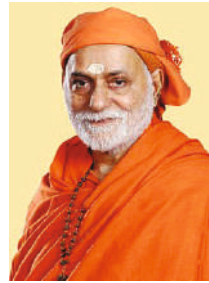
R. Dasarathy is former banker, who worked in the areas of Banking Operations, Information Technology, Risk and Project Management.



Aruna Srinivasan

Aruna Srinivasan is a bi-lingual writer-columnist-journalist, who writes in both English and Tamil. Widely travelled she has contributed to publications in South east Asia and India. Aruna has woven her wide range of interests and experiences into her debut novel, The Cosmic Dots. She lives in Chennai.

Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha, a well-known exponent of spiritual treasures like Bhagavad Gita, is the head of Narayanashrama Tapovanam, Trichur, Kerala. He has provided inspiration to people across the globe including corporate leaders on ethical practices



Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

An Understanding of Our Literary Heritage Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha Our Vedas, Upanishads and such other writings are everlasting. Even now they are alive, they don't die. Man is mortal; but he can produce immortal literature. Do you know why? It is not the merit of the body, it is the greatness and grandeur of what he contains in the form of the mind and the intelligence! It is his Gurutva!

We have a wealth and a treasure by virtue of which we can float ecstatically in the pairs of opposites of the world. We have a treasure! In Bhagavad Gita (2.50) Krishna says –

बद्धयिक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते।

One who adopts Samatva-buddhi-yoga abandons both virtue and vice.

My dear souls, think for a moment! If you can say, “I don't want even virtue, sukṛta”, how noble and great should be the inner attainment? This is what the 'I' can give you! This is what it represents. This is what the 'I' beckons you to accomplish.

A Guru is one who reflects upon this 'I', understands and realizes it, and lives in its light. He alone can disseminate its greatness and grandeur! The call of Knowledge.

I left Calcutta. Do you know how I left? I was reading

Māṇḍūkya Upanishad. In the Kārikā, Gaudapada has said (2.37):

निस्ततिर्निर्ममस्कारो निःस्वधाकार एव
च ।
चलाचलनिकेतश्च यतिर्यादृच्छिको
भवेत् ॥

Stop praising anybody. Stop prostrating before any God or Goddess. Do not perform any post-death ceremony for anybody. Have only a two-fold refuge – the moving body and the immovable Soul!

Understand the fleeting nature of the body. Comprehend the immortal nature of the Soul – realise it. Become an ascetic and live upon chance and providence. What a wonderful statement!

Whenever I have read, I have read only to understand. Whenever I have understood, I have understood only to become. So, when I read this, it was an exhortation, a persuasion, a compulsion, a beckoning.

After reading it, I could not remain where I was. I went and submitted my resignation: “The time has come for me to retire from professional life. Please allow me.” I shaved off my hair, got gerua (Ochre) cloth, went to my Guru and asked him to give it to me. I received it. His eyes were tearful when he gave me this. I wore it and left.

Knowledge is the greatest persuasion in human life. Nothing else. And this Knowledge is such that it immerses you in the ecstasy of the Soul. When a man is able to enjoy this ecstasy, what does he do? Shankara says in Kaupīna Pañcakam:

वेदान्तवाक्येषु सदा रमन्तः
भिक्षान्नमात्रेण च तष्टिष्टि मन्तः ।
विशोकमन्तःकरणे चरन्तः कौपीनवन्तः
खलु भाग्यवन्तः ॥

Most fortunate are those who wear only a loin cloth and wander freely without any concern. They rejoice in contemplating on the words of Vedānta, contented with

the food offered by others (bhikṣā).

I read this verse. For me it was not just reading. It was realising. Experiencing. Thereafter, streets of India welcomed me, and the invisible Providence graced me. I have been carrying on.

I tell God: “My dear God, I think of you and am happy with you. I do not know whether you are pleased with me or not. If you are pleased with me, well and good. If you are displeased with me, it is your affair.” This kind of a nothingness I have been able to enjoy. Ecstasy of nothingness I have nothing and I want nothing. Our whole Ashram is built on nothingness! Nothing belongs to us. And I like to recite (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.14.17):

निष्किञ्चना मयनरुक्चेतसः शान्ता
महान्तोऽखिलजीववत्सलाः ।
कामरैनालब्धधियो जषुन्ति यत्
तन्नैरपेक्ष्यं विदुः सखुं मम ॥

Those exalted souls, who possess nothing, whose minds are lost in the romance of devotion to Me, who are composed, magnanimous and are full of affection towards all creatures, and whose minds cannot be polluted by desires – incessantly taste the bliss emerging from the state of non-expectation. How can others get to know of this unique bliss born of me. Krishna told Uddhava, “Leave, before I leave. Your problem is my leaving! You are not able to bear the impact of separation. So, leave before I leave, throwing the impact to me. Go to Badarikashrama. Remain there. See me everywhere. One day, by the passage of time your body was born, another day by the passage of time the body will fall. Never think of either birth or death. Death is but a sleep from which you will never wake up.” My dear souls, our country is great!

In the service of the Nation,
Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

From The President's Desk



We are now in what is called the Festival season...not only are there many traditional Hindu festivals celebrated in this period, many dates that reiterate the values cherished by our nation are also celebrated. The first one in September is the celebration of Teacher's Day on the 5th of the month. A teacher is the person worthy of the most respect. We meet teachers all our lives, some who come as teachers in schools and colleges and others who teach us, in whatever role they play in our lives. On the 5th comes this great reminder with Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan's birthday.

FRNV too responded to the call of the day since it believes

that teacher training is the originating point for the process of imparting values. FRNV organized a teacher's training workshop in Delhi. Teachers from 24 schools participated in the first workshop. Many more schools have lined up for future workshops. What is gratifying is that many schools outside Delhi have also shown interest.

The Annual General Body meeting online was successfully completed. Many members participated actively in the proceedings of the meeting.

We concluded an agreement with Knimbus, which is a worldwide online organization

dealing with libraries and huge collections of books. This way we have found new and strong arms to reach out to different parts of the world with our message. Their support is a message in itself.

The Chennai chapter has translated many FRNV publications in regional languages with the support of sponsors. It is also translating our manuals in Tamil. The Cochin chapter is taking the lead in spearheading the pilot project with Knimbus. Regional chapters of Karnataka, Odisha and Hissar are expanding their membership base.

With the dawn of October, the nation observed the birthdays of Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri, two great sons of India.

On the religious front we celebrated the triumph of truth, a constant value reinforced with every festival. The birth of Prophet Mohammad added to the festivities. In this issue an article on why we celebrate festivals is included to appreciate their meaning and importance. I conclude my message with a fervent hope that FRNV has plenty of activities to report upon, every month.

S. Regunathan
President (FRNV)

To understand the heart and mind of a person, look not at what he has already achieved, but at what he aspires to."

(Kahlil Gibran)

SUBHASHITAM

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।
बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेत्ति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥
(Bhagavad Gita 18.30)

हे पार्थ, जो बुद्धि उलझाने वाले और उन्मुक्त रखने वाले कार्यो में भेद कर पाए, जो उचित और अनुचित कार्य के अन्तर को समझे, किससे भय हो और कैसे अभय की प्राप्ति हो यह जान ले, जिसे बन्धन के अर्थ और मुक्ति के उपाय का ज्ञान हो जाए, ऐसी बुद्धि ही सात्त्विक बुद्धि है।

O Partha, that intelligence, which is able to distinguish between ‘involvemental action’ and ‘freedom from action’, what is ‘to be done’ and ‘not to be done’, what is ‘to be feared’ and wherein lies ‘fearlessness’, what is ‘bondage’ and where lies ‘liberation’, is sattvika.

(Sanjay: Translation from “Insights into Bhagavad Gita” by Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha)

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The Concept of Ram Rajya

Jishnu Devvarma

The author talks of Ramarajya as governance that is imbued with values.

Justice for all, exclusion of none, is fundamental to the concept of Ram Rajya. Justice for all naturally implies that there should be appeasement of none. Appeasement suggests inequality and is a form of injustice, and those to whom it is dispensed, it hinders and stunts, while politically turning them into dependent vote banks. Appeasement based on religion is an injustice as grave as any other as it violates the promise of equality and equal opportunity for all citizens in a just and secular polity.

The turn in Indian politics in the past few decades has proved that the communal angle of the

religion-based policy of appeasement has not been missed by the masses. And yet it is amusing to see the finger-pointing that goes on in the public discourse of this country these days. It is abundantly clear now who these pseudo secularists are and what their motive is. Much of their support base has deserted them, leaving them gasping for relevance. From the Political Left, they have made themselves the left-outs in politics and completely out of place as far as aspirational India is concerned. It is also interesting to find the other so-called secular parties and their leaders now joining meekly in the mainstream chorus of “Jai Siya Ram”. This is, however, due to their survival instinct rather than a late but ultimate realisation of the truth.

There is an anecdote, someone from Kolkata once told me. It was on Valentine's Day that a young couple was sitting in an overcrowded park. The exasperated girl asked her boyfriend, "Can't we go to a lonely place, with no one around to disturb us?" The boy thought for quite some time and replied, "Do you mean the local political office on Alimuddin Street?"

That is the only place that fits your description in this busy city." This is just a pointer to the reality of how the so-called left has made itself irrelevant in one of its only extant bastions. They have alienated themselves from the young citizens who, with greater access to facts and realities, are questioning at every step the propaganda fed to them earlier. The new generation is assertive and not willing to digest anything at face value any more.

More significantly it is confident of its roots and identity, and can discern the value of its cultural heritage which leftist politics has derided for long.

It is only justified that the Indian aspiration for a New India be rooted in the Indian value system. To try and plant values from elsewhere, be it the Chinese, Russian, French, Cuban Revolutions or any other, on Indian soil only indicates ideological bankruptcy. Being the oldest living civilization and yet unwilling to find an indigenous aspirational model sprouting from the historical and cultural wisdom of the nation says a lot about those who pretend to be a part of an international movement. They perhaps know but deliberately fail to accept that the concept of a global family first emerged from India. India loudly proclaimed millennia ago the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. "The entire world is one family."

In comparison, the West has merely treated the world as a marketplace. The best example is the East India Company, that came to this region to trade but stayed on, simply on account of its brute power to kill the indigenous industry of this

country and drain it of its immense wealth. There is no doubt that the industrial revolution filling their European nation's exchequer was at the cost of many colonies that they mercilessly enslaved. In comparison, India has always been known for sending out monks and traders who never conquered but only assimilated. India has sent abroad people like Swami Vivekananda, and Tagore, not to conquer or enslave, but only to promote brotherhood and the search for truth. Indian culture has always taught that what affects the world will also affect us, that the pain of the other cannot be distinguished from the pain of the self. In these difficult times of a global pandemic, this wisdom has become the ultimate truth. The same coronavirus travels swiftly from one nation to the other affecting all in one way or another. No country, no matter how powerful or rich, can manage to stay quarantined or insulated. There are many such challenges that will require humanity to act

as one. This is the Indian worldview that has been bequeathed to us by the wise men and women of India down the ages.

The idea of Ram Rajya is the culmination of these timeless cultural values of India. Sri Ram is an embodiment of these values since time immemorial and is thus worshipped not only in India but even across boundaries.

Ram Rajya is the collective wisdom put to practise by the unerring ruler Sri Ram. In the holy text Ramayana, it is said that Laxmana, after the iconic battle, had innocently asked, "Why don't we shift our capital here to Swarna Lanka, it is a land covered with gold?" Sri Ram had replied, "This golden Lanka does not fascinate me as my motherland is more glorious than heaven." Janani Janmabhoomi swargadapi gariyoshi.

Sri Ram then anoints Vibhishana, Ravana's younger

brother as the ruler of Lanka and returns to his Ayodhya.

The war of Ramayana was to establish dharma, an Indian word that even today has no close synonym or an equivalent in any language elsewhere. Dharma is all these attributes that can lead humanity forward with equality and in harmony. Sri Ram is and

will always remain the embodiment of Dharma.

Ram Rajya is the righteous ideal of an aspirational India, an India that moves forward and reasserts itself in the parliament of nations as a Vishwaguru, a leader of humanity.





The Right Understanding

Aruna Srinivasan

The author traces human despair and anguish to our preconceived notions and lack of understanding of the reality, the inherent truths of life

. Opening after a long weekend, the crowd of customers waiting at that bank's gate was significant. Ranjana went inside along with the other employees and sat at her counter. The security at the door closed the door briefly for the employees to settle down at their desks. When he opened again after a few minutes, the crowd buzzed in. Each had their own urgency. One elderly man was in a great hurry and was murmuring about the crowd and about the employees too who, in his perception, were lethargic. Ranjana noticed him as the second person in line in front of her counter, but she didn't pay attention to his grumbings. Her

mind was engrossed with her toddler daughter left at home. The child was having high fever and her husband was taking care of her taking a day off from his work. By now, he would have taken the child to the clinic and was waiting for his call to get the update about the child's condition.

The queue at her counter moved and now it was the turn of that elderly person who was grumbling from the start. He continued in the same mood and pushed her to work faster. "Hurry...madam... If you can't keep up with customers' needs, why do you come for work at

all?" he was restless and harsh. That was the last straw. Ranjana lost her patience too and she shouted back at him. What ensued was a series of accusations from the rest of the customers also about the way the employees at the bank worked. The work was interrupted. The manager appeared at the scene to resolve the issue. She pacified the customers and whispered to Ranjana to be more customer friendly and mind her manners with customers. Ranjana was upset. On the one hand, her child's health was bothering her and on the other, the manager finds fault with her for the unruly behaviour of a customer. Even after returning home, she went about her chores with a disturbing mind. Her manager's words kept echoing in her. At that moment the landline phone rang. She picked it up. "Can I talk to Ranjana madam?" the voice on the other end asked. She answered in a listless voice.

"Yes."

"I am Anandharaman madam.... the person who kicked off a fight with you at the bank in the morning." The person continued.

Ranjana was irritated. What does he want now?

"Whatever you want, come and talk to me at the bank. Don't trouble me at home like this. My daughter is sick and I can't talk to you now." She was irritated and was about to put the receiver down when his voice continued.

"Don't put the phone down madam...", he pleaded. "Is your child sick? Oh, what's bothering her...can I be of some help...I am a pediatrician."

The tone in his voice somehow was soothing and she couldn't slam down the receiver. "I live close by. Can I come to your house?" he asked further.

Grudgingly she allowed him.

As soon as he arrived, he checked the child and looked at the prescriptions the doctor had given and comforted the parents and explained about the illness. "Don't worry, she will be fine in a day or two." Later over a cup of coffee, he profusely apologized for his behaviour in the morning at the bank and explained about his urgency at that time.

As Ranjana listened to his explanations she became more relaxed and was already warming up to him. Considering his age and the urgency of his work, she had already accepted his apologies and felt it was natural given his circumstances.

When Anandharaman left their home, the camaraderie between the bank employee and customer was palpable. Next morning, when Ranjana went back to the bank, she embarked

on the work that she refused to do the previous day. Anandharaman, who insisted on Ranjana completing his work that very moment in the morning, now told her to take care of her child and not to bother about getting his work done.

One cannot envisage such cordial endings for every rough encounter that we face each day at the workplace or elsewhere. However, situations like this do happen everywhere and with every one of us. The scene at the bank in the morning was a result of preconceived notions and lack of understanding of the reality. In the morning they were a nameless bank employee and a random customer. By evening, after an informal chat, they were individual human beings with their own set of hassles in life.

When we approach any problem with the right understanding of other human

minds involved in those issues, the resolution may be smoother.

Everything in life, every matter in the universe – human beings, animals, animate and inanimate objects – has inherent nature. Getting the right understanding of that inherent nature and making our reactions and decisions accordingly is what life is all about.

Well, what is the right understanding? It is the awareness of a situation or of anything in its real or true form. Seeing it as it IS – without any preconceived notions, emotions, prejudice or favour. Many of our lives' problems emerge from our perception of what really is.

Fire burns. Nothing more; nothing less. It is the basic fact. The Truth. There is no perception or assumption here. Hot and burning is its inherent quality and will burn anything that comes into

its contact. When a child is not aware of that and when she touches the fire, she learns. The knowledge of truth often comes through experience.

When we look at a flower, we don't simply look at the flower as it is. We start looking at it with our own judgement of likes and dislikes. Either it is beautiful or not beautiful. Our thoughts run amok with just looking at the flower. The flower is least bothered about your thoughts. It remains as it IS. The rest are all in your mind. Similarly, we approach a situation or people with our own judgements and notions of good and bad; wise and unwise. And there emerges the conflict.

In Buddhism, the right understanding is the first tenet among the eight commands for leading a virtuous life. Vedic scriptures emphasize on the right understanding of life; that

nothing is permanent. Nothing - no object, emotions, or just anything - stays forever. Venerated puja flowers of today are just garbage of tomorrow. Today's leaders are forgotten tomorrow. Buddhists say "All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing."

If we explore this understanding and acceptance of Truth as it is, we will find that human despair and anguish stem from our ignorance of the Truth or lack of understanding the inherent truths of life. When a problem arises, let us go to the bottom of it. Let's take a look at the real issues involved. Often the misery traces back to our own understanding or the lack of it about the crux of the matter.

Is it possible to develop the right understanding? Yes; by practicing to realize the Truth of

life; trying to understand the root of desires and emotions and the impact they have on our lives. For, whatever or wherever the conflict is – be it at the workplace, at home, among nations, in the environment we live, or even inside one's body – the cause lies in individual choices and decisions made at some point. When the choices and decisions are made with the awareness of reality and with the right understanding of the Truth, the conflict disappears and peace prevails.

As the American theologist Reinhold Niebuhr's serenity prayer goes, let us have the serenity to accept the things we can't change and courage to change the things we can, and have the wisdom to know the difference.



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The Relevance of Dussehra and Diwali

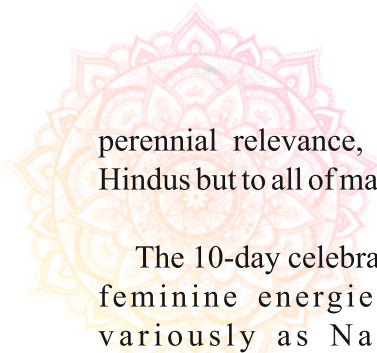
Radhika Srinivasan

Dussehra is one of the most significant festivals that lends an insight into our age-old value system.

Any festival is a time of revelry, social gathering, sharing and caring, and all that mankind cherishes as a value to uphold and celebrate. Religion merely adds another dimension to those values. And myths make the occasion more memorable, for they lend us a peek into the minds that created them! The Indian tradition celebrates the feminine

principle in all the manifested forms, as well as the Unmanifest. It is perhaps the only tradition that reveres the woman in various stages of her life and beyond, as the seed source, called Maya.

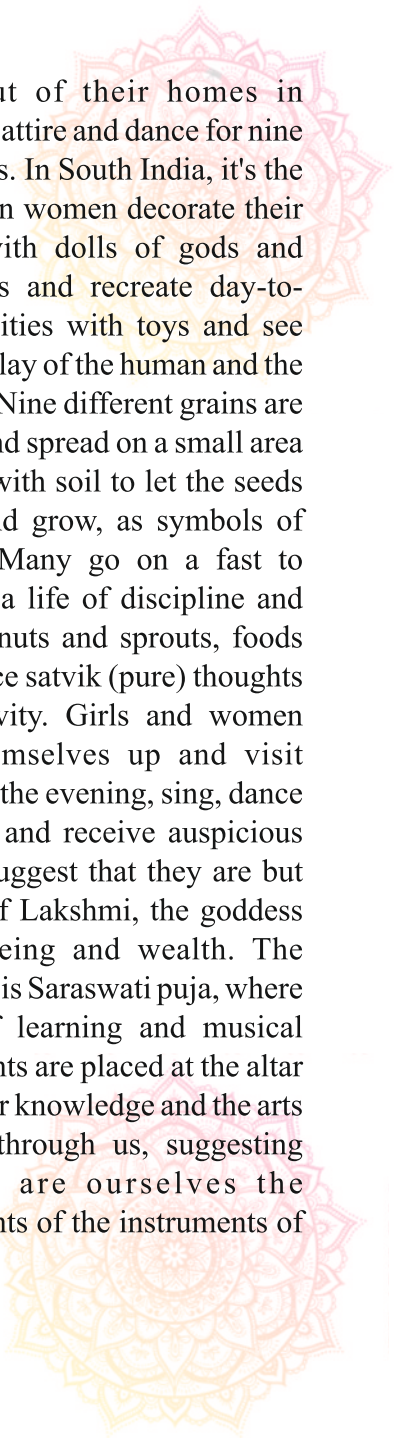
Dussehra is one of the most significant festivals that lends an insight into our age-old value system, even as it points to its

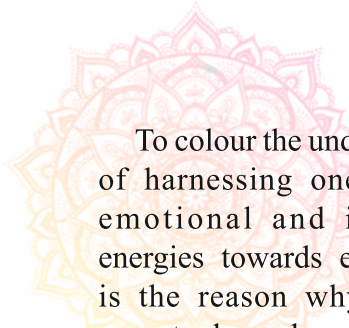


perennial relevance, not just to Hindus but to all of mankind.

The 10-day celebrations of the feminine energies, known variously as Navarathri, Navarathra, Durga pujo, and Amba puja, reminds us to look reverentially at Motherhood, the source of Creation, Protection, and Preservation of all life. It focuses on the value of recognizing and empowering our own mothers, sisters and daughters and ensuring respect for the feminine energy called Nari Shakti. “Yat pindam tad Brhmandam”, goes an ancient Sanskrit adage; as it is at the individuated level, so is it at the universal level. It reiterates the perfect balance we find in Nature's scheme; Yin-Yang, Purusha- Prakriti, masculine-feminine energies of the world; a hard reminder when more regions of the world are seeing gender imbalance and curtailing of women's liberties in this day and age! In Gujarat, the nine nights are dedicated to Ambe or Mother Goddess, when men and women

come out of their homes in gorgeous attire and dance for nine full nights. In South India, it's the time when women decorate their homes with dolls of gods and goddesses and recreate day-to-day activities with toys and see the interplay of the human and the sublime. Nine different grains are soaked and spread on a small area covered with soil to let the seeds sprout and grow, as symbols of fertility. Many go on a fast to cultivate a life of discipline and eat only nuts and sprouts, foods that induce satvik (pure) thoughts of positivity. Girls and women deck themselves up and visit homes in the evening, sing, dance and give and receive auspicious gifts to suggest that they are but aspects of Lakshmi, the goddess of wellbeing and wealth. The ninth day is Saraswati puja, where books of learning and musical instruments are placed at the altar to pray for knowledge and the arts to flow through us, suggesting that we are ourselves the instruments of the instruments of Wisdom.

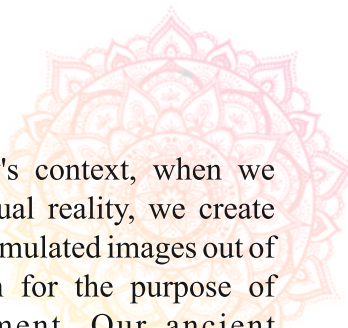




To colour the underlying value of harnessing one's physical, emotional and intellectual energies towards enlightenment is the reason why myths are created and prayers and celebrations happen in the darkness of nights; darkness signifying ignorance. The 10th day is the culmination of all three powers; the gross, subtle and causal, symbolised by Goddess Durga, who ensures success or siddhi in all our pursuits.

This day is significant, for it is Vijayadashami, the Day of achievement as well as a fresh beginning. The division of energy into three goddesses is merely to allocate three different roles for the Mother. The combined energy of the three states is the Uncreate seed source, the feminine Principle called Maya shakti celebrated on the last day, when the icon of Durga is immersed, the dolls are put away and fresh beginnings are made in acquiring knowledge and the arts. Friends and relatives, food and fun, music and dance add more sanctity to

the event.



In today's context, when we talk of virtual reality, we create computer simulated images out of imagination for the purpose of entertainment. Our ancient religious system created an elaborate process of rituals and prayers to bring to life icons of faith through the process of visualization. Both may be virtual reality in a sense; the former is born of imagination (kalpana), at best creative, at times counterproductive, while the latter is born of a vision, evoking a deep ineffable emotion of surrender and oneness with the object of worship (bhavana). One may be informative, but the other is transformative. That's why the Mother is known as Bhavani. (Bhu bhav is to Be. Bhavani is the Mother of Existence). This isn't just about relationship. It isn't about male or female. It is about a tradition that celebrates the manifested energies of the universe. It is also a glorious tribute to the selfless, caring and nurturing qualities enshrined in

Motherhood; Dussehra gives life and limb to this enduring and endearing value in the Indian tradition.

And when it's the time to celebrate Deepavali, another metaphor comes alive through our time-tested tradition. Deepa is a lamp, avali a row. Deepavali follows a month after Dussehra and is again symbolic of the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, success over struggle. Tradition ascribes this day to the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana and his return to Ayodhya. It is also the day when Naraka, the wicked king is killed by Lord Krishna, to establish the virtue of righteousness on earth (Dharma).

Interestingly, Deepavali is also celebrated on a new moon night to highlight that darkness is wiped out with a row of lights. The lamp is our own inner light of knowledge, which conquers ignorance. "Appa Deepo Bhava", says the Buddha, which means, "Be thy own light". Lots of

charity is accompanied with gaiety to suggest it is only when you give that you gain and grow (inwardly). We throw out the old and wear new clothes to suggest that the body (which itself clothes the Spirit) with its old habits and conditioning is cast off symbolically and new beginnings are made in thought, speech and deed. To a few others, it marks the beginning of a New Year, with fresh account books opened and entries of acquisition of spiritual wealth made, again through charity.

Edification without the accompanying sweet celebrations can make it a dull and dry exercise, especially if you are not a renunciate. But, when every value is blended with culture, tradition, myth and social revelry, the value gets reiterated and becomes a part of one's own psyche. And that is the lasting message of our festivals.



Decoding Divine Energies and their Working

Anandmurti Gurumaa

There is a famous Sanskrit aphorism registered in the Puranas: Yat Pindhe Tat Brahmande. It can be interpreted as, 'All that is outside you is within you. "Durg" means the 'fort', and Durga is the one that resides inside this fort. On the micro level, our body is like a durg, a fortress. And in this body, the Shakti – the energy that dwells – is called Durga. The entire creation is also a durg, albeit on the macrocosmic level. And the Shakti making the universe work is Durga.

Unaware of many facets and limited by our sphere of knowledge, when we start giving meaning to the things around us, the interpretations turn out rather diminutive. In the simplest terms,

Shakti is the power that creates.

You put a tiny seed in the earth, and that seed becomes a sapling in six to eight weeks. In another one to two years, it turns into a full-fledged dense tree. From where did it all begin? A tiny seed. And Shakti is that intelligence that made that seed sprout and grow up into a full-bloomed tree.

So, constricting Durga to a fixed Swarup, or specific gestures, is a pretty naive understanding of a much bigger phenomenon. Durga is not merely a murti. She is that intelligence which changes a drop of semen into a living, pulsating human being. And the amazing thing is if the nose of the father is long, so is the sons'. Even the colour of parents is imbibed by their

offspring. Congenital ailments are passed on. Who is relaying this information? Just x and y chromosomes? Or is there something more than that? Even if one tries to understand the marvels and complexity of the human body medically, the intellect is bound to go crazy.

For instance, if we flatten the lung tissues and spread them out on the ground, they will take up the size of a tennis court. The weight of your brain is roughly between 1.25 to 1.50 kg, and yet it houses trillions of neurons. The nervous system laid across your body is a bigger network than any LAN network in the world.

It is so intricate that even an attempt to replicate a single organ is going to be a mammoth task. This body is that factory in which you put milk, veggies and other consumables, but only blood is manufactured. How? Can a

factory put up outside ever accomplish a feat as marvelous as this? Do we even stand a chance to develop such a level of intelligence? The answer is no. This very intelligence with which the consumed meal is being converted into the blood is Shakti.

So, Durga is not just a murti or piece of the picture that gets worn out after a few years, and you get another one. These are mere symbolism created by our sagacious rishis to make the people understand the energies that are making this samsara work.

And the nine sacred nights of Shakti worshipping, honouring, remembering and re-energizing our system with that divine power and intelligence – that's Navratri.

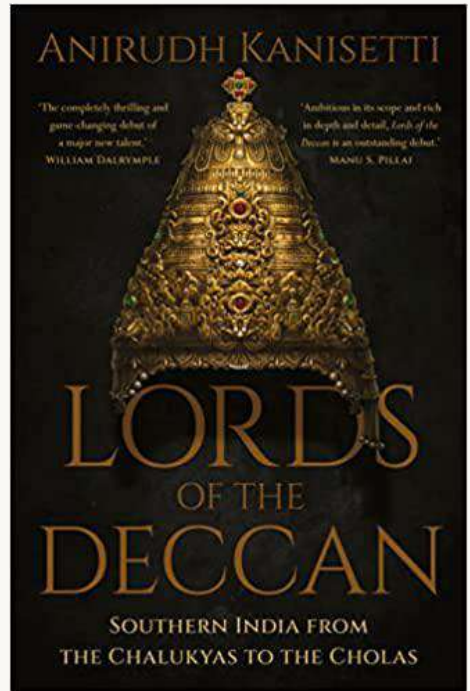
(From Speaking Tree, TOI, Sep 26, 2022)

Book Review

Lords of the Deccan

by Anirudh Kanisetty

R. Dasarathy reads a book which draws attention to the significant contribution of the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas and Cholas to the making of India



Comparison across historical periods can be invidious and can even be meaningless sometimes. But, still consider this - that the Mughals ruled from Delhi as an imperial power for less than 350 years and the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas were an imperial power for over 500 years in the Deccan, and consider their respective space in our history text-books! During this period of Chalukya Rule, Hinduism witnessed a revival, borrowing

many religious practices from Buddhism and Jainism, making them precursors of Hinduism in some ways. The best example would be the practice of temple worship. Prior to this period, Hinduism was mainly a religion of rituals and sacrifices (yagyas and homas). Temple building and worship in Hinduism started as an imitative and competitive gesture (these temples were 'excavated', not built). The use of religion and religious symbols to consolidate

power and garner political support through propaganda for the ruler has been practiced from ancient times.

“Lords of the Deccan - Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas” by Anirudh Kanisetty is a new book (2022) in the genre of 'popular history' or 'narrative history'. The book is rigorous in terms of historiography and research, but the author is not a professional historian, but as the author speaks of himself as a 'historian-in-the-making'. The book is certainly very readable. The book is divided into 3 parts – Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas and Cholas.

The story starts with the famous encounter between Emperor Harsha Vardhan and Pulakesin II across the river Narmada. Pulakesin II manages to push back the invaders from Kannauj, ensuring his place in history. The Chalukyas from the beginning had a long-term view for example they took on the title “Sri-Prithvi-Vallabha” i.e. favoured by fortune and Earth's

beloved (instead of usual 'Maharaja'). By taking the 'wild boar' on the royal insignia, the rulers managed to on-board the Vaishnavites. The Bhakti Cults of Shiva developed under the Chalukya Rule and caused the fading out of Buddhism and Jainism, across India.

A vassal Chalukya state emerged in the Eastern Deccan. Over the years, the Chalukya empire had military successes in northern India, thereby extracting tribute from parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. There was also income to the state from trade to West Asia and China.

One of the revelatory sections details the imperial role of queens in the Deccan. The queens, at least some of them, enjoyed authority second only to the king. The most famous queen from the Deccan, Loka-Mahadevi, is credited with commissioning the Lokeshvara temple at Pattadakal in the seventh century CE, a modern UNESCO World Heritage Site.

But whatever the Chalukyas did, the Rashtrakutas could do better. The rock-cut Kailashanatha or Krishneshavara temple at Ellora Caves, commissioned and completed by the Rashtrakutas in the eighth century CE, is considered one of the most remarkable cave temples in the world. If the Chalukyas solidified their dominance over the Southern peninsula by warding off threats from North Indian rulers, then the Rashtrakutas went one step further. Under Dhruva's reign, they bulldozed the Pratiharas and the Palas of the Gangetic and Yamuna plains, respectively, and cemented their overlordship in all of North India.

Around the mid-eighth century, the Rashtrakutas seized power from Chalukyas at Vatapi (modern-day Badami). The Ajantha and Ellora caves, with their superb art and architecture, were created during this period. This period also witnessed an apogee in political power and flourishing international trade. Many of the Vallabhas during this

period encouraged learning and some of them, themselves were highly learned e.g. Vallabha Amoghavarsha. Kannada grammar was codified and literature flourished.

The most captivating account in Kanisetti's book is reserved for Vallabha Amoghavarsha, perhaps the most iconic of all Deccan emperors. Ascending to the throne as a teenager, Amoghavarsha dominated the Deccan for over 60 years in the ninth century CE, a feat no other monarch before him had managed and none after him would be able to repeat. He not only used militia aggression to cement his sovereignty but also wisely relied on diplomacy and trade to propel his ambitions. Under him, the Deccan witnessed its most glorious trade period with local and international merchants.

The Arabs considered Amoghavarsha one of the Four Great Kings of the World, his only other rivals being the Byzantine emperor, the emperor of China, and the Abbasid caliphate. He

brought together an unprecedented concentration of poets and teachers to decorate his court at Manyakheta. But the most outstanding achievement of the Vallabha lies in his pioneering endeavour to elevate the status of the vernacular Kannada language at par with the cosmopolitan Sanskrit, the domain of urban and courtly elites.

The third part of the book relates to the Cholas and starts in the 10th Century. The Cholas of Thanjavur subjugated the Pallavas, Pandyas and Cherans and also conquered Lanka. The Emperor Rajaraja Chola prospered through International trade spanning the West and the East, including Arabs, China and South-East Asia. Rajaraja Chola built the gigantic Rajarajeswaram (Brihadeshwara or Big) Temple in Thanjavur. He defeated the remaining Chalukya Kings in a series of Chola-Chalukya wars and destroyed the new capital of the Chalukyas, Manyakheta. Rajendra Chola's forces defeated regions to the East, including

Bengal.

Apart from the power dynamics, Anirudha Kanisetty also explores the cultural achievements of the period and discusses the legacy of these influential dynasties – the impact of which can be found even today in the art, architecture and literature that they have left behind.

The book has considerable photographs/ maps which makes the narrative come alive. On the whole a very readable book, which fills a gap in our education for most of us.

Lords of the Deccan :
Southern India from the
Chalukyas to the Cholas

Author: Anirudh Kanisetty
480 Pages
Publisher: Juggernaut
Price Rs. 424/- (Hard-cover)

Swami Vivekananda

with his Eye on the Truth

S. Regunathan

In the last issue we saw how Narendra, as Vivekananda was called in his young years, was so naughty that his mother in sheer exasperation threw up her hands one day exclaiming, “I had prayed for Shiva but not the demon beside him!”

We also read how her attempt to keep Narendra away from Saints and Sadhus failed. His maternal grandmother's stories about Rama had influenced him.

Narendra, right from childhood, had proclivity towards meditation and prayers. The power of Lord Ram had influenced him even in childhood. He once purchased images of Sita and Rama and installed them in his room

upstairs. He and his friend sat down and meditated in front of the Sita-Rama idols. Not finding Narendra and his friends anywhere, the people of the house went around searching for him and finally reached the room in which they were meditating. Repeated knocks did not evoke any response from inside and they had to forcefully open the door. His friend got up and ran away but Narendra was in deep meditation. His parents had to shake him to come out of meditation. This tendency to go into deep meditation had been noted many times. Once he was in deep meditation with his friends in the backyard of his house. One of his friends who was not so immersed, noticed a cobra slithering towards Narendra. Everyone ran helter

skelter in panic. They kept calling out to Narendra to awaken from his state of stillness and absorption. But he was unaware of what was happening, he was deep in meditation. His parents came out hearing the commotion and saw a cobra with this hood spread out in front of him. Afraid to disturb the cobra they kept quiet and to everyone's amazement the cobra quietly slithered away. While the onlookers heaved a sigh of relief, Narendra continued to meditate! Later he told them he had not been aware of either the snake or the commotion.

Another characteristic noticed in Narendra was his strong conviction and sincerity. His devotion to Rama was so deep that he took any reference to the Lord very seriously. One day he heard disparaging remarks about marriage from the syce in the

stable. That man was deriding the institution of marriage and in that context Rama being married to Sita also came into focus. Somehow what he had heard bothered him. He was still too young to decide whether he should give the comments any importance. So he ran to his mother and sobbed, asking her, "Was Rama married to Sita?". His mother replied in the affirmative but could not solve his anxiety so she suggested he pray to Lord Siva. There began his worship of Siva. His love for Rama always remained. But significantly, he did not take a moment to displace his favourite God whom he revered so much for he believed anything that did not adhere to truth should not be worshipped. From that age onwards Truth was his singular goal.

Childrens Corner

The Cow Dung Beetle

A bee was buzzing around the garden. It was a garden that belonged to the king. The best flowers grew there. The bee was heady with so many perfumes. He was happily dancing around when he spotted a beetle. The beetle was one that lived in cow dung. "What fun this is!" the beetle was saying, "So much dung to enjoy!" Sometimes he just inhaled the smell which he loved or made little patterns on the dung and played by himself.

The bee was repulsed when he saw the beetle. The beetle saw the bee looking at him.

"Hi," said the beetle.

"Hi there," said the bee.

"Let us be friends. Can we?"

asked the beetle, very excited.

The bee was shocked with the suggestion. "Friends? You and me?"

It thought of how kindly it could tell the beetle that it lived in dung while the bee himself lived in riches. He tried hard but when he did finally tell the beetle, it did sound rude.

The beetle did not get upset though. "Oh, it is so nice to hear of flowers you describe and the perfumes you inhale. Do you think you can show me that world? You know it is said that great people take others to greatness too."

The honesty and sincerity of

the beetle's request touched the bee. He also wanted to show off the beauty in which he lived. So the beetle climbed on to the bee's back and they went flying into the picturesque garden.

They went from flower to flower and the beetle was stunned. "I never knew such beauty existed!" he exclaimed.

The bee was getting a little tired of carrying the beetle for so long. He put him down in a flower. "Come let us leave," he said to the beetle after some time. "Just a minute, the flower is very soft and the pollen is comforting. Can I take another two minutes?"

The bee nodded and meanwhile went to the next flower. But suddenly a cloud hid the sun and the flower, thinking it was night, closed its petals. The beetle was trapped inside the flower.

The next day, before sunrise, a

priest came and plucked the flower. He offered it to the temple deity. The beetle was still inside, now inhaling the incense in the temple. The next morning the priest threw the flower into the river flowing by.

As the flower wilted and opened, the beetle came out... He sat quiet, watching the world.

"There is so much to see, so much to learn and I had thought dung was all that there was in the world," he mused. "When the flower petals closed, I met God. When the priest threw the flower away, I got freedom...but all this thanks to my friend who took me flying with him."

Then the beetle started moving around trying to find his friend the bee and thank him.

Try to help others. Be caring, thoughtful and respectful.

Two brothers

How it is to be caring and thoughtful of others....



Once there were two brothers who inherited their father's land. The two brothers divided the land in half and each one farmed his own section.

Over time, the older brother married and had six children, while the younger brother never married.

One night, the younger brother lay awake. "It's not fair that each of us has half the land to farm," he thought. "My brother has six children to feed and I have none. He should have more grain than I have."

That night the younger brother

went to his barn and gathered a large bundle of wheat. He climbed the hill that separated the two farms and over to his brother's farm. Leaving the wheat in his brother's barn, the younger brother returned home, feeling pleased with himself. Earlier that very same night, the older brother was also lying awake. "It's not fair that each of us has half the land to farm," he thought. "In my old age my wife and I will have our grown children to take care of us, not to mention grandchildren, while my brother will probably have none. He should at least sell more grain from the fields now so he can provide for himself with dignity in his old age."

So that night, too, he secretly gathered a large bundle of wheat and climbed the hill. He left the grain in his brother's barn and returned home, feeling pleased with himself.

The next morning, when the younger brother went into his barn he was surprised to see the amount of grain was unchanged. "I must not have taken as much wheat as I thought," he said, bemused. "Tonight I'll be sure to take more."

That very same moment, his older brother was also standing in his barn, musing much the same thoughts.

After night fell, each brother gathered a greater amount of wheat from his barn and in the dark, secretly delivered it to his brother's barn. The next morning, the brothers were again puzzled and perplexed.

"How can I be mistaken?" each one scratched his head.

"There's the same amount of grain here as there was before I cleared the pile for my brother. This is impossible! Tonight I'll make no mistake - I'll take the pile down to the very floor. That way I'll be sure the grain gets delivered to my brother."

The third night, more determined than ever, each brother gathered a large pile of wheat from his barn, loaded it onto a cart, and slowly pulled his haul through the fields and up the hill to his brother's barn. At the top of the hill, under the shadow of a moon, each brother noticed a figure in the distance. Who could it be?

When the two brothers recognized the form of the other brother and the load he was pulling behind, they realized what had happened. Without a word, they dropped the ropes to their carts, and embraced.

FRNV NEWS AND EVENTS

1. Annual General Meeting of FRNV

The 14th Annual General Meeting [AGM] of the Foundation for Restoration of National Values [The Society] held on Sunday, the 4th September 2022 at 4.00 pm at the Registered Office of the Society i.e. at M-75 Greater Kailash, Part-I, New Delhi - 110048.

Meeting was held in Hybrid Mode and the meeting transacted listed agenda.

2. Values Based Education Workshop

FRNV in association with Balvantray Mehta Vidya Bhawan (BMVB) organized one day workshop on Values Based Education on 17th September 2022. The Workshop was organized in BMVB Auditorium, Greater Kailash, New Delhi. About 50 Primary Class Teachers from various Schools participated. Dr. Sharda Kumari, former Joint Director/SCERT moderated the workshop.





SUBSCRIPTION

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