

Value Insight

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Bi-Monthly

Devotion

- Strains of Devotion
- The Supreme Refuge
- Between Immensity and Eternity



A bi-monthly magazine of
Foundation for Restoration of National Values (FRNV)
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THEMES FOR THE NEXT ISSUES OF THE JOURNAL

Month	Theme	Deadline for articles
December 2024	Love	October 1, 2024

BRIEF GUIDELINES FOR THE ARTICLES

1. Write up may include original articles / short stories. In case of extracts / excerpts / photographs, due credit by way of acknowledgment is to be given.
2. About 900-1400 words.
3. Not political and / or religious.
4. Student(s) are encouraged to send through their school(s).
5. Brief profile of about 70 words and a photograph along with the write up may be sent to frnv@valuefoundation.in and / or frnvindia@gmail.com
6. Honorarium, if any, may be considered by FRNV Editorial Board for articles published.
7. The decision of the FRNV Editorial Board shall be final and binding.



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Readers Write

This month two of our young readers have sent their thoughts in lines and colours: Jagriti Shah from Class 5 and Tanvi from Class 3 from Riverdale School, Naogong, Assam.

It is 'Durga Puja' Dussehra time!



Our topic for the December issue is love. The planning for this issue will be guided by the following words:

The first emotional enrichment you should have is fondness. Have love for people, including those you disagree with. Again, it is not enough to have love alone. Express it with concern. Love with a proper concern becomes sympathy. Further, in pursuit of love and sympathy, you must be able to sacrifice willingly and lovingly. Others should feel and know that you are fond of them. Only then individual saadhana begets the societal dimension to become collective saadhana as well.

<https://www.Bhoomananda.org>

(Source: Vicharasethu- Feb 2007, Vol. 42 No.



Picture: Courtesy Claude Bibeau

“It is while living that we need the help, strength and support of devotion. Dear children, understand that this devotion is always mind-based. It is always mind-preserved. And when preserved well, pursued properly, loved and honoured in a befitting manner, it will enrich and empower your very being.”

Poojya Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

DEVOTION

The Supreme Refuge

बालस्य नेह शरणं पितरौ नृसिंह नार्तस्य

चागदमुदुन्वति मज्जतो नौः ।

तप्तस्य तत्प्रतिविधिर्य इहाञ्जसेष्ट-

स्तावद्विभो तनुभृतां त्वदुपेक्षितानाम् ॥

(Srimad Bhagavatam 7.9.19)



Pooja Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

Harih Om Tat Sat. Jai Guru.

Devotion and religion have always been the backbone of our culture. Devotion is held in such a wholesome and all-enfolding manner, that it becomes potent, a mighty creative force. Just as food and nourishment are to the body, so too devotion, devotional reliance and devotional resignation are to the mind and heart.

Through devotion, we have instances when even physical situations have been redressed. A question may now arise: Is mind capable of acting on matter? The answer is that the whole material world has come from the mind substance alone.

Matter in different formations may have interactions between themselves. But mind is far superior to, and transcends the range of materiality. It can act on matter conclusively, with finality. It is this message that is conveyed through

various conversations, stories, episodes and examples in our religious and mythological texts.

Prahlada praises Narasimha and the praise, which is in exquisite poetry, is highly metaphysical, yet very devotional and immensely moving. What I recited is a verse from the Prahlada stuti in Srimad Bhagavatam, which records the praise of Prahlada, the little boy with immense Shraddha, standing reverentially before Lord Narasimha.

bālasya neha śaraṇaṃ pitarau nṛsiṃha....
– ‘For the child, parents are no refuge!’ says Prahlada. When I came across this statement I became deeply reflective and imaginative. What a great and revealing statement! For a child parents are not real refuge!

nārtasya cāgadā mudanvati majjato nau:

– For a man suffering from diseases,

medicines are not the final answer. And for one drowning in water, a boat is not the ultimate redress.

taptasya tatpratividhirya ihāñjaseṣṭa-

stāvadvibho tanubhṛtām

tvadupekṣitānām

– For those suffering from any kind of illness or difficulty, whatever measures of redress are thought of, they can only be transitory if they are disowned by You.

So the supreme refuge is in surrender. If the mind can develop this sense of reliance and resignation on the Supreme, then that Supreme comes to redress, protect and support. I think you will do well to reflect repeatedly on the profound statement made by Prahlada.

How boldly he says that for children, parents are no refuge! In spite of parents being around, have not children sometimes lost their lives? The other day S came here and narrated her sad story. Her child, four and half years old, who used to cling to the mother while crossing roads, wriggled out of her grasp that fateful day, and ran across the road, only to be run over by a speeding truck.

How can a mother excuse herself for this? Can she ever remember the scene with any poise? Why did this happen?

It is true that in this material world, we have got material causes and their effects

and relationships. All these relationships are within a broad framework, vyavasthaa, of Nature. And the vyavasthaa maker is something or someone, supra-material, divine. Where should your reliance then be? On material resources or on the vyavasthaa maker?

If you rely upon material measures alone, will not the outcome be limited? Were there not numerous instances when your efforts had become ineffective? So the Supreme refuge, the Supreme redress, succour and strength – where will it come from? It is in the reliance that mind is able to cultivate and preserve on the Supreme. This is a fact. This is an evaluation. This is also a clue.

Will the devotional and pious mind be able to work on this finding, and make it a tower of strength and support? That is where individuals differ widely, unpredictably. Meera drank the poison given by her mother-in-law. It would have been enough to end her life instantly. The poison was a chemical substance, a material. The body is a biophysical, biochemical aggregate. But the chemical effect of the poison got nullified by Meera's supreme devotion!

You can evade the truth by saying that Krishna came and protected her. But that is only a mythological proposition. Whether he came or not – what happened to the chemical effect of the poison taken by her? That effect was

neutralized by the mind, a more powerful presence within the body. All biochemical actions and reactions in the body are governed by the supra-material substance called mind. That mind is indeed the Creator of matter, material causes and their effects. In this particular case, there sprang a new sequence, as a result of which the chemical effect of the poison was neutralized! Very rarely does this happen, because, people always rely on matter, on materiality alone. They don't depend upon the Supreme or the Divine. But none prevents you from relying upon the Supreme and looking up to Him for protection.

We need the Supreme only when we live in the world. Suppose our body falls, then, nothing further is needed. It is while living that we need the help, strength and support of devotion. Dear children, understand that this devotion is always mind-based. It is always mind-preserved. And when preserved well, pursued properly, loved and honoured in a befitting manner, it will enrich and

empower your very being.

Remember this statement of Pahlada: For a child, the parents are no refuge. For a drowning man, the boat is no security. For people suffering from diseases, all medicinal cures are but temporary. They are ephemeral. What we always want is a hand of protection from the Supreme. When that hand is not there, all other supports are flimsy and fleeting. They are not dependable.

I wonder again and again. How did Pahlada make this broad declaration, that parents are no refuge to the children?! What a lofty statement it is!

Harih Om Tat Sat. Jai Guru!

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SUBHASHITAM

Vivekachudamani 31

मोक्षकारणसामग्र्यां भक्तिरेव गरीयसी ।
स्वस्वरूपानुसन्धानं भक्तिरित्यभिधीयते ॥

मुक्ति की ओर ले जाने वाले कारकों में भक्ति का स्थान सर्वोच्च है।
अपने सच्चे स्वरूप को जानने की
निरंतर जिज्ञासा ही भक्ति का सार कहा गया है।

Among the factors leading to liberation,
devotion has the supreme place. Enquiring
constantly into one's own true nature is said
to be the content of devotion.

From the President's Desk



Two great sports events celebrated their finale recently; the Olympics and the Para Olympics, both held in Paris. Considering the population of India, the performance of our sports person was nothing to write home about.

One of the major reasons is that most of our sports persons come from the poorer sections of society. It is rarely that we see anybody from the middle or upper middle class take up sports at a professional level. The reasons for this are many. One of course is that, in general, we are averse to taking the risk of training our children as sports persons. If they do not succeed, the avenues open to them to earn their livelihood, without an academic degree, would be very few. However, this is changing fast. Today there are many related areas in which the person will be able to build a career even if he or she is unable to pursue his or her preferred sports due to some unfortunate circumstance. This awareness has to be spread.

Secondly, most of our sports persons, with few exceptions, are from the economically underprivileged sections of society. The reason for this is related to the first point. Most middle-class people place emphasis on studies and not as much on physical well-being and fitness. On the contrary, as Vivekananda has said, for a healthy mind you need a healthy body also. If this becomes important in the parents' minds, they will encourage their children to partake in sports events at the school level and this will have a snowballing effect, highlighting talent and inspiration. Sports should also be considered a form of education and necessary for development as well-rounded human beings. As long as we get sports persons from families which do not give adequate nutrition and health care in their growing years, it will be very difficult for us to contest in the international arena.

This is also my personal experience, when I have met and led sports persons. Sports activities teaches us many values, which are well known as the sportsman spirit. Among them are, dedication to the sport, respect for other sportspersons and acceptance of losing. This is the need of the day. In a very thought-provoking article, Dr Karan Singh wrote in the Times of India, that the world is in turmoil: Cruel wars are being waged, threats from our environment are causing havoc, not to mention other unrests, natural and manmade. The only solution to this, he says, is to have collective consciousness to oppose those which are not good for the world. 'Compassionate and dedicated individuals remain our only hope in the dystopian world that surrounds us', he has observed. Somehow, both these thoughts came to me as a message for FRNV, for they seem related at some level. Even if we take them as unrelated, they both reassert that we have to strengthen our national values for bringing about changes that would be beneficial to all.

S. Regunathan
President (FRNV)

Devotion Bhakti

*The only thing that is unlimited in us is devotion.
Therefore it is the only path to understand or comprehend infinity and eternity
says **Jishnu Devvarma**.*



The Bhagvad Gita talks of “Karma Yoga - the way of selfless work, Janan Yoga - the way of wisdom, Bhakti Yoga – the way of exclusive devotion and Raja Yoga - Supreme knowledge.” Lord Krishna says, these are there to take you

forward. The term bhakti or devotion is used very frequently to denote all sorts of mechanical rituals and a person is said to be devoted if one visits places of pilgrimage and does all sorts of activities.

I once asked, “What is the difference between a *sadhak* (spiritual aspirant) and a devotee ? The explanation was, “You see a *sadhak* aspires to reach a destination, *bhaktas* surrender to their attachment.”

A *sadhak* through his efforts - *sadhana*, has steps to climb; a person immersed in devotion has none, for they admit defeat to love - *bhakti*. The word *bhakti* therefore has no English equivalent, for it denotes love, devotion and sacrifice. We know that the greater the effort, the greater the result. In other words, you get out of something what you put into it. Using this logic, if we exert a limited effort, we will get a limited result. So what kind of effort is required to comprehend the supreme divine power? Based on our experience of other accomplishments, it would have to be an unlimited effort. How can a limited human being produce an effort to achieve what is unending or unlimited? It's not possible for us to match the limitlessness of God with our material and limited efforts. The *Shvetvashtra Upanishad* states, “God can be known only through His grace.” The only thing that is unlimited in us is devotion. Therefore it is the only path to understand or comprehend infinity and eternity. This is the power of *bhakti* or devotion.

These lines from a poem by Emily Bronte, written shortly before her death perhaps explains or puts across the idea of the power of *bhakti* or devotion:

*...The steadfast rock of Immortality.
With wide-embracing love,
Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates,
and rears.
Though earth and moon were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.
There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render
void
Since thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be
destroyed.*

I am surprised that Bronte has so eloquently summed up what Adi Sankara said, “*Aham Brahma Asmi* - I am inseparable from Brahma.” It is only through devotion or *bhakti* that this is attainable because what is unlimited and indestructible in the human experience is devotion or love. Faith, devotion, attraction, adoration, and all that, which is called 'bhakti' is imperishable. It transcends all barriers of time, space and boundaries. It makes one wonder. Victory was always splendid and sought after, but *bhakti* and devotion say glory lies in surrender to love; through defeat of one's ego. What is important is to recognize that there is no basic difference between the human

The process of
cleansing the
heart is devotion
- bhakti

and the Divine. It is devotion that makes one realize that they are integrally related to each other like the object and its image. Take for instance, a seed. There are two halves in it. It is only when the two halves are unbroken, that the seed can sprout when planted in the soil. Likewise the tree of Creation comes into existence when the worshipped and the devotee are integrated. *Paramatma* (pure consciousness) and the *Jivatma* (shakti-soul) come together. Bhaktas try to unite these two through devotion. Without God, there can be no Bhakta. Without devotee, there is no God. Even as God creates devotees, devotees also 'create'.

The simple rustic *gopikas* (milkmaids) of Vrindavan knew devotion in this exalted form and exemplified it in all their actions. They experienced the divine every moment of their lives and showed to the world what bliss can be got from pure devotion to God. The *gopikas* looked upon bhakti as greater than *moksha* (liberation). They regarded the love of God as the means to immortality. The bliss experienced from bhakti is beyond words. Bhakti does not call for arduous spiritual practices or severe disciplines of any kind. There is no need to perform *yagas* or *yajnas* (religious sacrifices). The path of *karma* (action) or *Jnana* (knowledge) is rigorous and hard for common folk. The only easy and sure means for ordinary people to realize God, without regard to their caste, nationality, sex or any other qualification, and without their having to

practice various austerities and penances, is intense devotion and love of God. The *gopikas* experienced the continuous presence of God within them



and outside them. They showed that such sublime love was possible for ordinary persons with little knowledge of the scriptures or spiritual disciplines. They demonstrated the inextricable link between the Divine and the individual. Where there is deep faith, there is intense love. Where there is love, there is *sraddha* (earnestness). Through earnestness, the *Jnana* (higher knowledge) is gained. This knowledge enables the practice of *Sadhana*. Hence, without devotion, it is not possible to realize the Self.

(The views expressed here are solely personal and are that of the author in his personal capacity)

“True devotion is motivated by love alone and is devoid of selfish entanglements”. - Rick Hocker

Photos courtesy sharmila Biswas

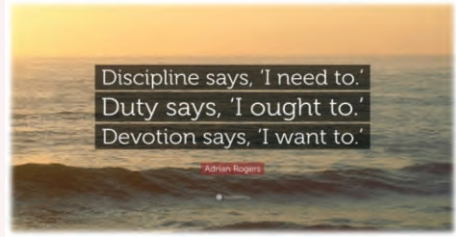
Empowering Virtues

Devotion and commitment are indispensable virtues that empower individuals to pursue their passions, strengthen their relationships, and deepen their spiritual connections
says **Prema Raghavan**

When I started thinking of devotion, I realized devotion takes many forms. It is not just the form of the ascetic or the devout devotee. Devotion is a strong emotion in every conscientious human being. For instance, in our recent past we heard of a lady called Tulasi Gowda. Tulasi Gowda carries forward the legacy of her ancestors through her devoted service to the environment.



Let me tell you her story. Tulasi Gowda was born in a poor tribal family in Uttara Kannada. Her father died when she was just about 2 years old. Her mother could



not afford to send her to school. So, she had to work alongside her mother in a nursery as a day labourer.

At the nursery, Tulasi was given the responsibility of caring for seeds to be grown and harvested for the state's Forestry Department. She continued working in the nursery as a daily worker till she was about 35 years old. Her in-depth knowledge of plants and efforts towards conservation earned her a permanent position at the nursery until she retired. During this time, she cared for land covering 5 tiger reserves, 30 wildlife sanctuaries, 15 conservation reserves and 1 community reserve.

In addition to planting saplings, she worked towards protecting the forests from forest fires and poachers. She is known for her innate ability to identify mother trees in a forest and her expertise in harvesting seeds from these mother trees required to regrow entire plant species.

One of the distinctive features of devotion is that sooner or later it comes to be recognized by all. Gowda has been

felicitated with many awards during her life. The world knows her as the 'Encyclopedia of the Forests' while her tribe gave her the moniker, 'Tree Goddess'. She has received the Indira Priyadarshini Vrikshamitra Award, the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award. And was given the Padma Shri award by the Government of India.

Tulasi is believed to have planted over 1 lakh saplings on her own. She has invaluable knowledge about plants and has identified over 300 medicinal plants that have since been used to treat ailments within their village. She continues to share her knowledge with children in the village. Let me now take you back in time with the story of Pusalar. Pusalar was an eighth-century Nayanar saint, venerated in the Hindu



sect of Shaivism. He is generally counted as the fifty-eighth in the list of 63 Nayanars.

He wanted to create a grand temple for Shiva but did not have the money to do so. Thus, Pusalar decided to build a temple to Shiva in his mind with his

imagination. He followed the rituals of temple-building, sanctified the ground and laid the first stone of his mind temple on an auspicious day. Over the course of time, he completed his mind temple and selected a holy day for the Kumbhabhishekam ceremony, when the temple is consecrated and the image of God installed in the garbhagriha.

The Pallava king Kadavarkon had just completed a grand Shiva temple in the capital Kanchipuram and selected the same day for consecration of his temple. Shiva appeared in the king's dream and instructed him to postpone the date of consecration as he would be journeying to Thiruninravur for the consecration of his devotee Pusalar's temple on the same day. The king postponed the date as per the divine decree and hastened to see the

magnificent temple of Pusalar, which Shiva favoured over his own. However, on reaching Thiruninravur, the king could not find any stone temple visible in the town and was perplexed. He reached Pusalar's house and informed Pusalar about his dream. The saint revealed that the temple existed in his heart. The king was astonished by Pusalar's devotion and bowed down to him and worshipped him. Pusalar consecrated the temple on an ordained day and continued his worship until his death when he is said to have attained Kailash, the abode of Shiva. There is a temple built at the place where

Pusalar attained mukti. The statue of Pusalar is inside the shrine next to the Lingam. I visited the Samadhi and sat there for half an hour. It left me in a state of effortless bliss. I spent the rest of the day sitting there, absorbing the energy and devotion of Pusalar.

Devotion is not a passive sentiment but an active force that propels us towards our highest ideals. The common threads in these examples are a relentless drive, willingness to overcome obstacles, and a sense of higher purpose that transcends personal interests - hallmarks of truly

devoted and committed individuals in their respective fields. The journey of true devotion requires patience, humility, and a willingness to transcend the ego. But the rewards - a life of purpose, meaning, and transformation - make it a most profound and worthwhile path. These stories serve as inspiring examples of the transformative power of devotion.

Devotion brings meaning to life, clarity to thoughts, synchrony within, positivity in relationships and eventually spiritual growth.

True devotion refers to a deep, sincere, and unwavering commitment to a person, cause, or belief. It involves a complete dedication of one's heart, mind, and actions towards the object of devotion. Some key aspects of true devotion include:

- Selflessness - Putting the needs and interests of the object of devotion above one's own. Willingly making sacrifices for their sake.
- Consistency - Maintaining the same level of fervent commitment over the long term, through good times and bad. Not wavering or becoming disinterested.
- Authenticity - The devotion arises from a genuine, heartfelt place, not mere obligation or external expectations. It is an expression of one's deepest values and beliefs.
- Whole-hearted Engagement - Fully immersing oneself in the object of devotion, with an intense focus and passion that permeates one's thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Indifferent to rewards, but rather stemming from a pure desire to serve, support, and uplift the object of one's devotion

Devotion is a powerful emotion that is rooted in deep love, loyalty, and commitment. It is an essential part of many relationships and is an important component of a strong and lasting connection. Devotion is expressed through acts of kindness and selflessness.



Strains of Devotion

Selina Sharma says devotion does not differentiate between culture and borders. It can be deep and accepting.

I think nothing can match the bliss and fulfilment I would experience when performing the raga-seva of Shri Radharaman at Vrindaban, when rendering kirtan in front of the lord. The string of musical notes establishes a direct bond with the divinity,” says Selina Thielmann Sharma. Born to musicians, Selina was pursuing research in music when she came to India for her research work. She stayed in Vrindaban, married Acharya Shri Shashank Sharma, who belongs to a family of hereditary priests of the ancient temple of Shri Radharaman at Vrindaban.

Terms are many, and so are connotations. Religion, faith, conviction, creed, belief – each one bears different implications defined by an understanding that is shaped by a variety of conditions such as cultural context, social background and personal experience. So how do we differentiate between one term and another, how do we arrive at a definition that is based on a common denominator to connect the various approaches?

First of all, let us sort some of the terms.

As we discuss the subject from an Indian perspective, alongside the English terminology, some fundamental



Selina Sharma with her baul guru

Sanskrit terms shall also be of relevance. Religion as understood in the English language commonly refers to a certain creed or conviction adhered to by a person, which reflects the individual's belief in the existence of an abstract reality beyond the limits of those phenomena that can be perceived by the human senses, and his belief and trust in the one or other concrete or abstract manifestation of that imperceptible reality. Religion thus implies the acceptance of a Supreme Truth that is

beyond the limits of both human consciousness and the material world, whereas faith and belief relate to the individual path taken by man to attain to this Supreme Reality.

In the Indian context, on the other hand, the term commonly used to denote religion is *dharma*, which is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *dhri-*, literally 'to (up)hold', and refers to the upholding of cosmic law and universal righteousness. This etymology already indicates that the scope of *dharma* is much broader than that of religion, which latter relates to only religious respectively spiritual matters, while *dharma* acts on the religious, social and personal levels so as to not only characterize a person's beliefs and convictions, but to define his social behavior and individual choices as well. On the spiritual level, we may therefore well equate *dharma* with religion, whereas on the social and personal levels, *dharma* relates to man's duties and responsibilities towards mankind and society.

Religion manifests itself in a variety of faiths based upon the belief in one or another representation of the unseen reality that man perceives as the Supreme Principle. Man's quest to attain to this Supreme Reality, is shared by all religions, whereas the ways taken to attain to this ultimate goal differ between different faiths and creeds, each of them defining its own path most suitable according to its individual views.

Another most important aspect is that of devotion - *bhakti* in the Indian tradition – which runs through all religions as a common thread. Devotion implies an emotional bond that man establishes between himself and his aspired divinity, and the relationship between devotee and divinity is an intrinsically personal one, based upon unconditional trust and love. Strains of devotion do exist in every faith, in every religion, because devotional religion is based upon the essentially human tendency of relating oneself to one's beloved divinity, of regarding one's aspired reality as closest to oneself.

While the quest for attainment to the Supreme Reality is common to all



Radharaman temple in Vrindavan

religions, the views as to how to achieve this goal do differ between different traditions of faith. Three principal ways are evident on which seekers across religions pursue their spiritual quest: *saguna*, ('manifest'), i.e. the Supreme Reality is represented by a concrete manifestation such as the image of a deity, *nirguna* ('non-manifest'), i.e. the Supreme Being is perceived as an

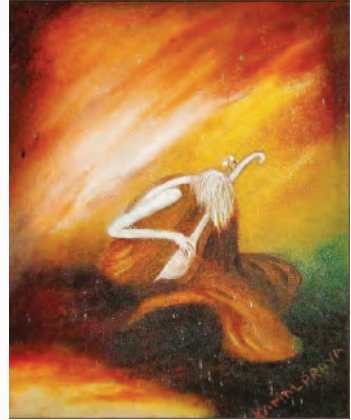
abstract reality without outward manifestation, and a combination of both *saguna* and *nirguna* which does acknowledge the abstract nature of the Supreme Reality but does take recourse to concrete manifestations in order to facilitate the spiritual journey. Thus Buddhism, which does not advocate faith in God or deities but rather strives for *moksha*, for salvation from the cycles of births and deaths through attainment to the Absolute Reality, does acknowledge the necessity to provide ritual and worship of manifest images to assist its followers on the path of their spiritual quest.

Devotional religion may amalgamate both *saguna* and *nirguna* approaches as the bond between man and his aspired divinity is essentially personal in its character, allowing for both conception of the divine truth within as part of man's inner emotions, and for outward expression of these feelings directed towards a concrete manifestation of the divinity. The great mediaeval poet-singer Sūradāsa, for example, who rendered his devotional songs before the deity of Śrī Nātha Jī at Govardhan, was blind by birth and hence could not see the image of the deity. However, he did take the vision of his lord with his inner sight, enshrining him in the temple of his heart as an image of beauty that arises before the inner eye but remains invisible to the outward senses. In the same manner, Sūradāsa's contemporary Mīrābāī did worship an image of Lord Krishna, whereas she perceived her

beloved lord through her inner vision.

The interaction of the manifest and the non-manifest finds one of its most extreme expressions in the spiritual thinki

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Painting by Kamal Prava Devi

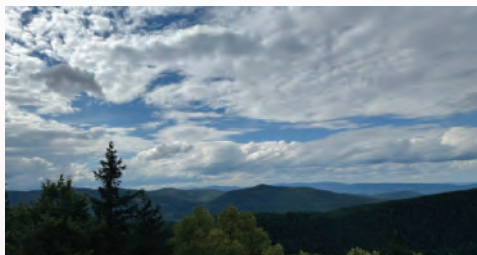
immense body of spiritual knowledge through the medium of simple but heart-touching songs. The Bāul, who professes what is best described as the religion of humanity, believes in the Supreme Reality as the divine energy that is seated in the heart of man, and he calls it the moner mānush or 'Man of the Heart', an imperceptible being that cannot be captured by ordinary senses. The Bāul's spiritual search is directed at the non-manifest reality, hence *nirguna* in its character, whereas his worship is *saguna* as he worships man, the human being as the concrete manifestation of the abstract, non-manifest truth. Both his spiritual search and his outward worship are joined together by an intense emotional bond that speaks of the Bāuls innate devotion.

Eyes that See and lips that tell

*Sudhamahi Regunathan visits
the cloister at Mount St Odile
to feel the presence of the divine.*

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.
...He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

The above poem by Cecil Francis Alexander is well known. Its words came to life when I travelled up the Vosges Mountains in Alsace in France. Mist rose up from the mountains far away. Various shades of green spread out before us in welcome. The sky showed its many moods...one side was fresh blue with white clouds while the other was blue too, but with



huge dark clouds spreading their threat and shadow as they raced towards us.

We were at Mont. St. Odile which stands 753 metres above sea level and had a story to tell. A story that even the tall 100-120ft high conifers growing densely on and around it, seemed eager to hear. Only the rocks and stones that have stood strong since the 7th century AD knew the story.

“This is the boulder that she struck into, to let a spring flow out,” said one side of the mountains. “This is the rock she struck into to hide when she was being chased. And the rock cleaved to give her refuge,” said another boulder.



I went up to the Sanctuary of Mont Sainte Odile, entered an arched gateway and sat down in the large courtyard of the cloister to hear the story from its beginning. A café served tea and coffee while curio shop catered to the visitor's desires to take something back home. The quiet of nature was punctuated by peels from the church bells...and their voice wafted long distances.

I sat on one of the benches that overlooked the plains of Alsace. It is the story of her devotion, whispered a wisp of cloud that came to sit by me. In 600 AD, a child was born to Duke Aldrich of Alsace. The Duke had long been praying for an heir. When he found a girl had been born to him, he was disappointed. Girls could not be heirs, could they? And

then, he found in addition to being a girl, the baby was visually challenged. That enraged him. He ordered that the infant be killed. What use is a blind offspring? The anguished mother named Bethswinda, hid her precious daughter in the house of some peasants, who looked after her.

Time wore on. The child grew close to the local monastery. Her faith led to her being baptized when she was about 11 or 12 years of age. As she closed her eyes in sincere prayer, light came into her eyes and she began to see. People marvelled at this miracle her devotion had wrought. That is why she was named Odile or the child of light.

By then Duke Aldrich had got what he had wanted; a son. When the little boy heard his sister's eyesight had been restored, he ran to bring her home, to Hohenberg. The father saw in this an opportunity. He would get Odile married to a rich noble thus strengthening his position further. But Odile refused to marry. Her life was with God. She did not want to get into worldly transactions. Once again, the father was enraged and adamant. So, Odile just ran away from home.

She fled across the Rhine to a cave or cavern somewhere in the forest that surrounded Hohenberg. The father followed swift footed on his horse. When Odile saw him close, she touched a rock with her staff and it cleaved to let



her hide within. Her father tried to follow her, but a landslide stopped and injured him.

Odile's devotion was so intense and complete that when her father fell ill later in life, she went to nurse him. She did not hold any grudges against the man who never seemed to love her. Her love brought its rewards. The father realized he was the one who had lost his vision. He turned his palace into an Abbey, the Mont Sanit Odile Abbey is how it is known today. Odile was the first abbess of the abbey.

Her nursing and service to the people did not stop with her father. She served people all around and in fact set up a

hospital near the Abbey. Her devotion to her Lord translated into devotion to the people. Stories of many miracles performed by Odile are told here. One is the rock she pierced with her staff to release a spring that flowed out with water to quench one of her patient's thirst. People, believers and non-believers come to the abbey and wash their eyes with the water from the spring in the belief that it is good for their eyes. These are the devout. Then there are hikers who hike around in the forest around the mountain.

We met two of the three nuns living there. All three were from Kerala at that time. We met knowing that we all believe in One, calling it by different names. Sister Gensey took my hands in hers as she said, "The beauty of this place is its calmness. Many tourists and visitors come, but that calm is never disturbed. Even today the prayer that St Odile initiated continues till today, all 24 hours. The community of followers take turns to come and pray, all through the day and all through the night. The twenty-four-hour adoration is special to Mont. St Odile. Perhaps it is the reverberations of the continuous prayer that keeps an impenetrable calm in this place."

The essence of the prayer is simple. When Odile let spirituality enter her, she gained vision, symbolic as it is, of the true vision. When Odile forgave her father, she left the world with a

magnificent vision of her vision. In this is a lesson for social camaraderie and love for every other being.

As calm envelopes the mountains, the prayer that reverberates is a thanksgiving for the eyes which we take so much for granted. And to see that which we do not see despite having eyes. To marvel at, and be grateful for, all that which we do not realize are the true miracles in this life. The words are thus, "Thank you Lord for my eyes. Keep them open to your wonders, to the world and to my neighbour."

The calm is a deafening call for devotion in the Higher Self.



Naturally Devoted

Maya Ganesh delves into the sacred connection between humanity and the natural world where reverence becomes a transformative word.

While devotion is frequently associated with religious fervor or marital bonds, there exists a profound form of devotion – one that extends beyond human relationships. This devotion is directed towards nature itself, the very fabric of our existence.

In India, the Sanskrit word *bhakti* translates in English to devotion, where there is an intense love, respect, dedication and faith in any endeavor. I first encountered and learnt about *bhakti* when I worked with Govardhan Ecovillage at Palghar district, Maharashtra, an ISKCON initiative, to research and document their rural outreach program. Devotion or *bhakti* is more than just loyalty. It is loyalty with a deep love for something or someone. A form of sincere love, with intense emotion. We live in a capitalist neoliberal era, where career decisions are often shaped by how lucrative they will be. Instead, if we simply choose what we love and feel deeply for, then we would be truly devoted to it. Success, monetarily or otherwise as a change-maker, will then automatically happen. As the saying goes, “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” My second career in the socio-environmental sector is what I can say I am devoted to.



The author with parsley harvest

While I did well in my first career, in the corporate sector, it wasn't something I loved intensely or felt for from deep within. I wasn't devoted to it as a cause that I felt intensely about! Transitioning into my second career when I was 40 years old, after completing a second masters in Environment & Sustainable Development, a course that I loved, was the turning point in my life. After I graduated at 40, I didn't have a clue as to what I would do, though I felt deeply about the course that I just completed and knew I would work in the socio-environmental sector. Not wanting to work in an 'office' environment again, staring at computer, doing administrative tasks, as part of a 9 to 5 job, I had a burning desire to do



Sunrise by the lake in Kodaikanal



Sunset at Mulshi Lake, Pune

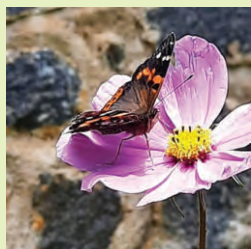
something that would make a transformative change to the way we think and live. Devoted to such a cause, with no firm plans yet, I simply started meeting and writing about other change-makers in the socio-environmental space, who had made a difference with their initiatives. My first paid project on

commercial waste management came along, followed by other interesting projects, and then my dream of starting a school garden also became a reality. One thing led to another, and all my projects came based on goodwill and as a reference from my earlier projects. I would now like to delve deeper into the subject of devotion in nature.

Historically, nature has been revered and personified, so that we worship Mother Nature, and be devoted to her upkeep and conservation. 'Mother Nature' personifies the nurturing or life-giving properties of nature, just like a mother would.

All religions say that all living things are sacred - flora and fauna, even non-living life-giving entities like the sun and the moon. We are just small threads woven into the larger tapestry of nature. Everything is interconnected and interdependent. Hence, as humans, we bear the responsibility of being good guardians of the Earth. As Chief Seattle, leader of the Duwamish and Suquamish peoples in the 1800s, who advocated accommodation to the white settlers, says, "The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth." Conversely, capitalism and neoliberalism treat nature like a commodity - some 'thing' to be controlled, exploited and made money off. Not just enough to live comfortably but it advocates capital accumulation, which means one must be greedy for more and there is no end to the avariciousness it brings with it. This is

the exact opposite of being 'devoted' towards nature, when nature is personified with intense love and reverence. To truly honor our connection with the Earth, we must shift our thinking and lifestyle. A new order – one that prioritizes reverence over exploitation – is essential. By recognizing that we belong to the Earth,



Butterfly pollinator on a cosmos flower

not the other way around, we can cultivate a genuine devotion to nature that transcends mere profit-seeking. As we explore the wonders of nature, we discover that our own lives mirror its seasons – sometimes stormy, sometimes serene. While emotions can take a positive form, it can also take a negative form like anger and hate. Relationships with another human could go wrong and may lead to anger and hate. However, relationships with animals, for example, a pet dog who is always devoted to its human, is a stable, loving relationship. I find animals to be of a much higher emotional intellect, hence more devoted, either to their human or to their role of doing their part to keep this beautiful interconnected tapestry of life alive and functioning. For example, pollinators such as insects, bees, butterflies, birds, the wind, rain and more, are all devoted towards their duty of pollination, without which, us humans and other life

forms, would have no food and we would cease to exist! Many would say, technology could do the job of the pollinators. But that's just emotionless, devotion-less and lifeless, and sticks out like a sore thumb in the interconnected tapestry of the holistic part of life; engineered by humans for purely anthropocentric reasons without looking at the 'ecocentric' part and the wholeness of the universe. We see examples of devotion everywhere in nature. The sun shines everyday devotedly, since the Earth came into existence. The sun has also been personified and revered by all cultures since time immemorial. A solar deity is usually associated with power and strength, as a male gender. The moon has also been personified, devoted to her duty (female gender) of being the Earth's only natural satellite, by orbiting around Earth and responsible for our tidal forces, again important for sustenance of several life forms on Earth.

Devotion is full of intense love, respect and fervency, where you give your all, with no expectations. Somehow, we need to find ways to get that back into our now regressed, material world, that is so busy on its voyage towards unending avariciousness, like quicksand in an abyss, that we forget to live a truly happy and successful life.

Pictures: Courtesy Maya Ganesh

When we immerse ourselves in Nature, we encounter more than scenic landscapes; we draw closer to the heart of the One who crafted it all.



Picture Courtesy Monica Lalzad

When you catch a glimpse of perfection in this imperfect world, know that a hand of devotion lies somewhere behind it. A beautiful bed of flowers has been tended to by a dedicated gardener. His devotion to duty. A tasty nuanced *kheer* comes with the chef's skill learnt with devotion. A bhajan rendered by the epitome of devotion, M.S. Subbulakshmi or yet another, Bismillah Khan, has the power to cleanse and refresh your mind. Devotion is the secret of that exhilaration.

One of the worldly manifestations of devotion is seen in our commitment towards an art, a cause or a person. When the commitment is towards an artform or a cause, it is generally of one's own volition. So, it is a happy expression of devotion and more commonly called

A Pathways to Devotion The Hand of Devotion

The editorial team discovers that devotion is the secret potion for all that is beautiful.



dedication. Like that of singers and artists, for that matter any talent that is honed with dedication. What turns this dedication into devotion is seen from what all these maestros have said at one time or other, "I don't

know what happens when I start singing, it just comes." They have dropped the "I" ascribing their prowess to the Muse or Saraswati, or the power that be. But when we commit ourselves to look after a person, we turn into caregivers, the transformation happens often even without our knowing. An ailing parent or a spouse, not to mention a child, whose physical condition calls for help and support, awakens our love and soon years go by and when the fatigue begins to tell on our body, then we realise we are the caregivers. Again, caregivers do not have the choice of stopping or giving up. They have to walk with the ailing one, constantly reminding themselves of the love they have or had for the person they are caring for. They are so involved in giving care, that for them too, the 'I' has dropped! A story is told of a man who became a monk, rejected as he was in love. He was actually going to kill

himself when a meditating saint saw him. He stopped him and invited him to the spiritual path. The dejected lover, tried to learn the texts and become a learned monk, but it just did not happen. Nothing got into his head. It was only the thought of how he had been rejected by his love that kept coming back to him though he was now a monk to the world. Then his teacher gently veered him towards service. The student could empathise with people since he too had suffered. Soon he became an excellent caregiver. He spent the rest of his life helping ailing people. God, it is said, was so pleased with him that he held up his example as one of supreme devotion.

Another story which is told in the Ramayana is of a young lad called Shravan Kumar. He was a late born child and he was still in his youth when both his parents, quite frail and aged by now, also lost their eyesight. His service to them is held as a supreme example of devotion. Though he became an ascetic, what is told about him, from generation to generation is how he looked after his parents. He made two baskets and tied them to two edges of a stick. He carried his frail parents seated on the two baskets by carrying the stick on his shoulder.

In all religions, caring for a fellow human being is given very high spiritual merit. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan said, "I am experiencing miracles every day," he said, "every minute." I was not surprised, but that was because I did not know what was to follow. "It was

Thursday morning, 17th June 1999. I was in Manchester, England, staying in the house of an Arab brother. While I was sitting in my room on the upper floor, I heard a gentle knock on the door. When I opened it, I found a child of about five years of age. She asked in all innocence and gentleness, "Do you need anything?" Perhaps it was her mother who had sent her, and although this was a simple question, I was quite overwhelmed by this innocent voice; to the extent that I could not utter a single word in reply. This was a normal incident, but in my mind, it became transformed into a supra-normal event. Children are like the flowers of God and little angels. I felt as if God Himself had sent me an angel to discover and meet my needs. At this moment, a famous hadith came to mind: "Your Lord descends to this worldly haven every day, looks at His servants and says, 'Is there anyone who has a need and asks Me, that I may give it to him?'"

Maulana then says gently that what we call miracles are actually, "a glimpse of the perfect in this imperfect world... in a state of keen awareness one sees the Creator in the creatures." That is devotion.

"True devotion means becoming the hand of the divine. Whatever comes your way, you will know how to transform it into something beautiful."

- Sadhguru



Love and Hug the Alzheimer-Stricken

Humra Quraishi describes a personal experience where she says while the ailment itself has no cure, it is very demanding to be a caregiver.

To most, Alzheimer's is just another of those disorders/diseases which has yet to find a cure, although it was diagnosed as far back as 1906, by a German pathologist, Dr Alois Alzheimer, who had noticed changes in the brain tissue of a woman who had died of an unusual mental illness. Her symptoms included memory loss, language problems, and unpredictable behavior.

AD is progressive and degenerative and those affected by it change drastically. Beyond recognition. The memory becomes 'polka dotted'. Only 'little islands of memory' remain. With pathological changes in the brain beginning to take place, the affected person undergoes a sharp transformation. He or she may get into a shell or turn aggressive...It is said to be an age-related disorder. Persons over 60 years of age are more prone to be affected by it. An estimated 26.6 million people worldwide were afflicted with Alzheimer's in 2006; this number may quadruple by 2050. And some of the common symptoms include a gradual loss of memory, decline in the ability to perform routine tasks, disorientation, impairment of judgement, loss of language and communication skills.

It is a complex neurological disease which could strike anyone. Though countless theories and explanations have come up to the 'whys' to it, but till date



there is no proven fact why the numbers of the AD- stricken are on the increase and what can be done in terms of prevention and treatment. Researchers and specialists are putting forth a list of diets and preventive measures but there is no real breakthrough.

Together with awareness the role of the caregivers has got to be highlighted. It is so crucial that experts comment that the actual victim of the Alzheimer's is not the patient but the caregiver! Why? Because the patient isn't really aware of what's been happening and is solely dependent on the caregiver. Today with joint families on the verge of extinction and nuclear families caught up in the midst of varying challenges, special Alzheimer's Homes have come up in the metropolitans and here again the patients are solely dependent on caregivers. My late father battled with this disorder for over seven years, till he

passed away in the mid- 90s. Soon after retirement, my father had started showing the initial symptoms of the Alzheimer's Disorder, but we thought his depression and slight traces of forgetfulness were along the strain of the typical post-retirement blues. But when he and my mother travelled to London to be with my sister's family, they realized that something was more than amiss. That is, much more than the routine bouts of depression. More so, as one evening he got lost on his way back from the Hyde Park and when he was finally traced he showed no signs of anxiety, as though he wasn't even aware that he got lost!

It's then that the family decided to show him to a specialist in London, who came up with the diagnosis: My father was struck with the Alzheimer's Disorder and there wasn't much that could be done in terms of medical treatment to harness the deteriorating memory cells. But, yes, ample advice was given to treat the patient with much patience and love. Prominent amongst the 'dos' was a caring-gentle caretaker and also that the patient ought to be living in familiar settings, with an unchanging atmosphere and routine. And when my parents got back, we showed him to several neurologists in New Delhi and Lucknow but there was nothing very much in terms of treatment, to harness the dying or decaying memory cells.

His depression paved way for more of those obvious signs of AD. He started forgetting mundane things, whether he ate his breakfast or changed his clothes or bathed. More changes followed. He

couldn't co-ordinate dates with days. And though he had been driving for decades but suddenly couldn't drive with the same level of confidence and then he lost sense of destinations and had difficulty following directions to the places he'd been frequently visiting. Within months, my handsome and well-dressed father looked all too changed. His memory shrank with each passing day. In effect, this is what Alzheimer's is roughly all about: shrinkage of the memory cells and consequent degeneration.

Worse was to come...he couldn't recognize his friends or family. It gets difficult to describe how painful it was to realize that he couldn't even recognize us, his own children. All that he would utter was: '*aap kaun hain...aapka kya naam hai?*' Together with that, his eyes relayed much restlessness, as though he wanted to utter something significant to us. Though we would be sitting next to him he seemed oblivious of that. I remember one particular incident that shattered us. We saw him looking for something he seemed to have lost. He moved about, peering under beds, behind sofas and doors. When we asked him what the matter was, he spoke with nervous impatience, 'Where are my children? I'm looking for them. They're lost! Search for my children...they are lost or what!'

As I have earlier mentioned that though till date there is no actual cure for AD but the very basic essentials to take care of the AD affected are - an abundance of gentle handling and emotional support and loving care. As one would treat or handle a very young child.

Telling Tales

The Dust of Devotion



Painting by Kamal Prava Devi

In the serene village of Vrindavan, the air was filled with the sweet melodies of Krishna's flute. The gopis, enchanted by the divine music, gathered around, their hearts brimming with love and devotion. Among them, Radha stood out, her eyes reflecting the depth of her unwavering love for Krishna.

One day, a sudden hush fell over Vrindavan. Krishna, the beloved of all, was struck by a severe headache. His radiant face was marred by pain, and his devotees were distressed to see him suffer. Despite the efforts of many skilled physicians and the anxious ministrations of his wives, Krishna's pain persisted.

In his moment of suffering, Krishna revealed that only the dust from the feet of a true devotee could cure his headache. His wives, though devoted, hesitated. How could they, mere mortals, offer the dust of their feet to the Lord of the universe? They feared the consequences of such an act, believing it to be a grave insult.

Narada, the celestial sage, was sent to Vrindavan with Krishna's plea. As he approached the village, the gopis, ever attentive to Krishna's well-being, immediately inquired about their beloved Kanha. Narada explained Krishna's condition and his unusual request.

Without a moment's hesitation, Radha stepped forward. Her love for Krishna was pure and selfless, transcending all fears and societal norms. She bent down, scooping up the dust from her feet, and handed it to Narada with a serene smile. "Take this to Krishna," she said, her voice filled with unwavering faith. "If it can ease his pain, I am blessed."

Narada returned to Krishna with the precious dust. As soon as it touched Krishna's forehead, the pain vanished, replaced by a serene smile. The divine connection between Radha and Krishna was reaffirmed, showcasing the power of true devotion.

Radha's act of offering the dust from her feet was not just a gesture of love; it was a testament to her boundless devotion. Her willingness to sacrifice her own spiritual standing for Krishna's well-being exemplified the highest form of bhakti. In that moment, the world witnessed the profound bond between Radha and Krishna, a bond that

transcended the physical and touched the divine.

Radha's devotion to Krishna is a beautiful reminder of the power of selfless love and the deep spiritual connection that can exist between a devotee and the divine.

Casabianca



The boy stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck,
Shone round him o'er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud, though childlike form.
The flames rolled on - he would not go,
Without his father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
His voice no longer heard.

He called aloud - 'Say, father, say
If yet my task is done?'
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his son.

'Speak, father!' once again he cried,
'If I may yet be gone!'
- And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath
And in his waving hair;
And look'd from that lone post of death,

In still yet brave despair.
And shouted but once more aloud,
 'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and
 shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.
They wrapped the ship in splendour
 wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
 Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound -
 The boy - oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
 With fragments strewed the sea!
With mast, and helm and pennon fair,
 That well had borne their part,
But the noblest thing which perished
 there,
Was that young faithful heart.

Felicia Hemans

Power of Devotion

Hiranyakashipu was a demon king. He was very powerful and invincible, or so he thought, because of the many boons he had received from Brahma Himself. Soon he began to think he was God. Hiranyakashipu had a son named Prahlad who refused to worship his father as a god; he believed only in Lord Vishnu. This made Hiranyakashipu very angry, and he set up many death traps for his son, throwing him off a mountain, crushing him with elephants, mixing poison in his food, and even attempting to burn him alive with the help of his sister Holika. But nothing harmed Prahlad.

One day Hiranyakashipu got very angry and exasperated. "Kwa asow?" he roared. It meant, "Where is He? Where is your God you keep talking about? Is he in this pillar?" Asking thus he kicked the pillar and there was a deafening noise.

The pillar cracked and parted sideways. The whole earth trembled. From the pillar emerged the most frightening and wrathful God, known as Narasimha. He had a lion's face and a human body. He was neither man nor beast for either of them could not have harmed

Hiranyakashipu as per the boons he had received. Hiranyakashipu could not be killed inside or outside of a house. So, Lord Narasimha grabbed Hiranyakashipu, took him to the palace threshold, not inside or outside, and with his sharp claws, defeated him.

Prahlad's true devotion pleased god. He granted Prahlad a boon. "May I always keep my devotion to you," prayed Prahlad. He grew up and became a king, but always remained devoted to God and thus ruled justly with detachment and commitment.

Navigating Spiritual Realms...

A Thought

*What is the purpose of our life? Asks **Radha Burnier** ... Is it merely to eat, sleep, enjoy, procreate, struggle and die?*



Photo: Courtesy Vikram Bhalla

If so, it is hardly human for all lesser creatures do much the same. They live unthinkingly and act according to Nature's dictates, but they do it with innocence, grace and charm. Human beings living that kind of physically-centred life, but acting consciously with selfish motives and giving organized expression to their cruelty and greed, pollute the earth with evil and introduce an element of ugliness into Nature's operations. Evil is said to exist only at the level of the human mind for it is here that harm is done knowingly and selfishness is wilfully practised. Unfortunately very few people ponder the purpose of their own lives and life in general...

Most men and women live

mechanically, unreflectingly, largely conforming to the aims and ethos of their environment making physical pleasure and egoistic satisfaction the centre of their activities... The quality of a person's life changes when there is a deeply felt impulse to know the truth, to discover all that existence means and the human individual is capable of, is to make merry and fill the brain (or nowadays the computer) with information.

For millennia there has been no essential change in society because the urge to enquire into the deeper content of life does not arise from within, and generally people listen only by rote to religious teachings. External conditions have

changed but not the psyche of humankind... For change to take place, the life of the senses and the craving for excitements of the mind must actually die down and be replaced by a yearning to understand and discover, first hand, the truth about life.

William Blake's simple poem awakens us to the question with which every form of life confronts us:

*Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life and bid thee feed,
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight.
Softest clothing, wooly and bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little lamb who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?*

...Since the human mind is capable of asking such questions, it must turn seriously to answer them. We ought to be compelled from within to explore why ideas of justice, beauty and truth have an importance in human consciousness and culture, even though they have nothing to do with the struggle for survival, which is said to characterize the process of evolution....people realise through the lives of pure and noble souls that truth has transformative power. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," so said Jesus...only by discovering life's deeper significance and cosmic purpose underlying the manifested world can human nature elevate itself to its destined dignity.

What is Truth? Learning to answer it has paramount importance for humanity and is closely connected to dealing wisely with everyday problems...but to hear words which cloak the truth is not the same as realizing that truth....J. Krishnamurti spoke many times about word not being the thing...He said: When you hear the words, 'love your neighbour' is that a truth to you? It is truth only when you love your neighbour..." this implies that truth cannot be passed from one to another. No guru can act as a proxy. Just as medicine cannot be swallowed by proxy...

Unless it is known inwardly, it is not truth - only a deceptive shadow. Only an enquiring mind can make itself free...and perceive that human advancement is essentially a growth into a realization of the values which harmonize and unify...learning to be at one with all living things and to embody the values like kindness and compassion, non -acquisitiveness, simplicity, absence of pride and conceit...when the mind becomes free of internal disorders, harmony comes into being. The whole world would change if people realized the importance of discovering the truth about the self....
(Excerpted from the article 'There is no Religion Higher than Truth' from Creeds of Our Times, The Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.)

Devotional Crafts

Devotion finds many expressions. Charu Smita Gupta describes how Painting on cloth was used to communicate sacred stories.



Crafts, in the ancient civilization of Hindustan revolved around the Court, the Bazaar, Sacred Rituals and Temple and Domestic Quarters.

Temples, in Ancient India and even today, continue to be the major premises for the utilization of various crafts in different ways. The principal deity in the temples and the shrines are produced by the Crafts persons using various materials like fabric, stone, metal, clay, wood, pigment etc. The painted Folk/Tribal/ Traditional Religious narratives on wall, paper, fabric and other mediums continue to be strong visual depictions adorning temple premises. Many a time devotees are not able to visit a particular shrine or the place of worship because of physical or financial constraints. The place of worship is painted on the fabric and hung on the wall of the Community Hall or the local Temple so as to represent that Temple within their area. The devotees then offer worship to that painting. Shatrunjaya Patas of the Jain

community are important references in this regard.

Fabrics play a vital role in the ceremonies that mark every stage of religious, cultural and social life in India. Artisans, weavers in the villages and towns produced the finest narratives in textiles. These were either the mobile shrines, shrines created for specific worship or the narratives describing various episodes from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana or the Puranas. Several textile crafts sprang up around the main religious centers fulfilling the needs for the temples and the pilgrims visiting the shrine.

Sacred Textiles may be divided into various categories. The mobile shrines such as Pabuji ka Phad or Devnarayan Phad; the periodic shrine like Mata Ni Pachedi; the mobile pilgrimage like Shatrunjaya Pata; the narrative backdrops hung in the temples; the backdrops adorning the deity like pichwai/hangings in the wooden chariot;

the offerings in textiles offered to the shrine or the graves of the Sufi saints; the dresses of the deities; the flags on the temples , gurudwaras etc. and some miscellaneous objects.

We begin with the Phad painting of Rajasthan.

Phad are long horizontal hand painted scrolls painted by the Joshi community of Bhilwara, Rajasthan using mineral colours. Traditionally these Phad were painted only when commissioned by Bhopa the priest singers of the Rabari tribe. These mobile shrines were rolled, kept in a bag ,hung on the shoulder ,while travelling from one village to another. Phad in the local dialect means folds. The Bhopa along with his wife, Bhopi would perform at a particular village through the entire night, narrating the religious stories of local deities, heroes and gods.

The narrative performance would begin by unrolling the Phad and tying the two ends to the wooden posts or two men would hold the Phad from two sides. The Bhopa would sing narrations of the story depicted on the Phad and play on Ravanhatta- a two string instrument. His wife Bhopi would accompany by dancing, but with her face fully covered. In between, she would highlight that section of the Phad which is being sung to or danced to, by taking a lamp near the relevant part.

This legacy of Phad painting is said to

have emerged about 700 hundred years ago and passed down in a single family in Shahpura near Bhilwara, Rajasthan over the generations. Two painted Phad scrolls are for the local deities Devnarayanji (a reincarnation of Vishnu) and Pabuji (a local hero). 'Devnarayan' Phad being nearly 30 feet long. 'Pabuji ki Phad', being 13 arm lengths long. If we look at the artistic aspect of the Phad, there was not much commercial scope in earlier days, when these Phads were used strictly for the religious narrations. When not travelling, the Bhopa would keep them safely and one Phad would be repeatedly used till it was completely torn because of the wear and tear. Before commissioning the new Phad the Bhopa would invite the Joshi family and a feast would be thrown. The old Phad would be venerated by immersing it in Pushkar Lake.

The first stroke of paint on the religious Phad was always drawn by a virgin girl from the artist's family. The painter would then divide the canvas into various sections according to the narrative sequence. The intricacies of making the colours for the Phad painting were taught only to those remaining in the family . Therefore only the daughters- in- law were taught the skills of the painting but daughters were kept away from learning how to prepare colour or paint a Phad . As and when the daughter would get married, she could learn the art if she was married into Phad

painter family .Otherwise she would not learn.

Today the Phad painting is surviving at two levels. The old tradition of religious story telling is continuing in some villages but Phad painting has simultaneously emerged as the folk art form with the sustained efforts of several members of the Joshi clan. Shree Lal Joshi , Nand Kishor Joshi, Shanti Lal Joshi, Kalyan Joshi, Gopal Joshi, Prakash Joshi, and Vijay Joshi, to increase appreciation for Phad as an art form. Pradeep Mukherjee an artist outside the Joshi clan brought the narrative images in other mediums like wood.

Hand woven coarse cotton cloth is soaked overnight to make the fabric thick. The fabric is then starched with wheat or rice starch, stretched and sun dried . The fabric surface is smoothened by rubbing it with moonstone. Rubbing also brings shine on the surface. The natural colours are sourced from semi-precious stones, flowers etc. The stones are powdered, rubbed ,mixed with gum and water. Each artist knows how to make the colours.

Typical colours seen in a Phad painting are yellow, orange, green, brown, red, blue and black. Each colour is used for specific purposes – yellow for creating the initial outline and in ornaments and clothing, orange for limbs and the torso, green for trees and vegetation, brown for

architectural structures, red for royal clothing and flags as well as a thick border, and blue for water or curtains. Black is applied at the end as outlines.

The most important detail in the paintings, the eyes is added last. Once the main deity's eyes are painted, the artwork comes alive, and is ready for worship. After this, the artist cannot sit on the artwork (which they would otherwise do, owing to the size of the paintings). The artist signs the artwork close to the image of the main deity, which is typically placed in the centre of the painting.

While figures are harmoniously distributed throughout the canvas in a Phad painting, the scale of each figure is determined by their social status, and the role they play in the story that is being narrated. A unique aspect of Phad paintings is that the construction of the figures is flat, and they all face each other, instead of facing the audience (viewer) of the painting.

Revival, Survival and Change in Modern Times

Since the tradition of Phad art was so closely guarded, it was natural for the art form to face the threat of fading away. With a desire to preserve and revive the art form, Shree Lal Ji Joshi, a renowned Phad painter and Padma Shri Awardee, challenged all the orthodox ideas associated with the Phad tradition, and decided to set up Joshi Kala Kunj in

Bhilwara, Rajasthan in 1960 - a school where artists from outside the Joshi family were taught the art of Phad. Under the patronage of his sons, Gopal and Kalyan Joshi, this revival effort expanded, with the rebranding of the school to Chitrashala, in 1990. Over the years, more than 3,000 artists have been trained at Chitrashala. Similar efforts were also made by other members of the extended Joshi family. Not only did all these revival effort focus on preserving the art form, but also the painstaking processes of making natural paints and following traditional techniques.

Since the very core of Phad paintings was storytelling, Kalyanji Joshi started depicting characters besides Devnarayanji and Pabuji in Phad paintings. Stories and characters from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Hanuman Chalisa and even the Panchatantra, were introduced, making the paintings more appealing to a larger audience.

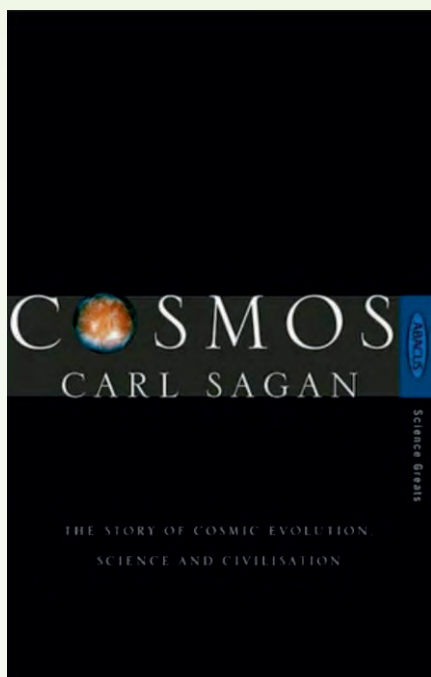
Artists from Chitrashala started adding their own unique style to the tradition and were encouraged to do so. Keeping up with the demands and limitations of space in modern homes, the size of Phad paintings was reduced significantly, and today, they are made as small as 2, 4, or 6 feet. Since the original paintings consisted of several individual stories or episodes that made up the entire tale, Kalyan Joshi spurred the innovation of



painting just one of the mini-stories in smaller Phad paintings. He also introduced written text in the artworks, which wasn't seen in traditional Phad paintings.

Attempts by different members of the Joshi family, as well as other renowned Phad artists such as Pradeep Mukherjee, have helped sustain and revive this incredible art form to some extent, enhancing its commercial value, and generating employment for Phad artists. But despite these efforts, there are less than twenty artists who practice the art of Phad painting full time today.

In the modern world, there is a need to promote such rich artistic traditions from the past. Their visual appeal, aside, art forms like Phad preserve folklore and stories that have travelled through centuries and reflect India's glorious association of culture with religion.



Book Review

Between Immensity and Eternity A Tribute to Science and the Scientific Method

*R.Dasarathy revisits
Carl Sagan's book **Cosmos**,
to tell us, among other things,
that cosmos is the
Greek word for order.*

The question foremost in most people's minds with regard to space exploration is – “Is the exploration of the Cosmos a lot of wasteful expenditure just to satisfy our curiosity?” Carl Sagan attempts to answer that concern up-front in his

They remind us that humans have evolved to wonder, that understanding is a joy, that knowledge is prerequisite to survival

famous book “Cosmos”, first published in the 1980's and still relevant, making it a modern classic. Right at the beginning, it is stated clearly:

“The size and age of the Cosmos are beyond ordinary human understanding. Lost somewhere between immensity and eternity is our tiny planetary home. In a cosmic perspective, most human concerns seem insignificant, even petty. And yet our species is young and curious and brave and shows much promise. In the last few millennia we have made the most astonishing and unexpected discoveries about the Cosmos and our place within it, explorations that are exhilarating to consider. They remind us that humans have evolved to wonder, that understanding is a joy, that knowledge is prerequisite to survival. I believe our future depends on how well we know this Cosmos in which we float like a mote of dust in the morning sky.”

Exactly forty years ago, the TV Series “Cosmos: A Personal Journey” written and hosted by, Carl Sagan (1934-1996) was broadcast for the first time. Almost immediately, the show became one of the most widely-watched TV series, thanks to its insight and ability to simplify complex scientific concepts. The book under discussion, is based on the TV series. Carl Sagan was basically an astronomer at Cornell University and a consultant to NASA during the happening period of 60's and 70's. The book however, is not only about astronomy, but multi-disciplinary – it gives us an insight into physics, chemistry, history, geography, genetics, astrology, ...

The other constant refrain in the book is the comparison with expenditure on arms and armaments, especially in the period of the Cold War. “Our intelligence has recently provided us with awesome powers. It is not yet clear that we have the wisdom to avoid our own self-destruction.” If only a fraction of the resources is diverted to the study of the Cosmos, we could be better prepared to face and/or prevent the cosmic calamities and catastrophes, which is an inevitable part of the long term. The book can also be seen as a tribute to science and scientific method. The origins of Western science can be traced back to the Greeks. It implies the deep interconnectedness of all things. It conveys awe for the intricate and subtle way in which the universe is put

Cosmos is a Greek word for the order of the universe. It is, in a way, the opposite of Chaos.

together. There was a community of scholars, exploring physics, literature, medicine, astronomy, geography, philosophy, mathematics, biology, and engineering.” In most cultures across the world, there was a god or goddess in the sky for every human concern. “Gods ran Nature. If they were happy, there was plenty of food, and humans were happy. But if something displeased the gods - and sometimes it took very little - the consequences were awesome: droughts, storms, wars, earthquakes, volcanoes, epidemics. The gods had to be propitiated, and a vast industry of priests and oracles arose to make the gods less angry. But because the gods were capricious, you could not be sure what they would do. Nature was a mystery. It was hard to understand the world.”

This background also helps us to understand the origin and evolution of astrology, as well, again across multiple cultures. In fact, the early Astronomers (or Astro-physicists) were originally Astrologers.

When we understand the laws of Nature through the study of science, it can lead to an improvement in our lives. Thus Science became the new language to understand Nature – instead of the superstitions and/or myths from

religion. Furthermore as Science demanded rigorous evidence, before accepting an hypotheses, it became “self-correcting”.

Ancient Greeks, as the founders of the scientific method, “believed the underlying harmony of the universe to be accessible through observation and experiment.” However, a section of the Greeks, led by the mathematician, Pythagoras believed that the “laws of Nature could be deduced by pure thoughts”. “They did not advocate the free confrontation of conflicting points of view. Instead, like all orthodox religions, they practiced a rigidity that prevented them from correcting their errors”. This attitude curbed the growth of Science, later in Christianity and through the Dark Ages.

The book underscores that search for life elsewhere in the Universe, is closely

“ ... the Cosmos is rich beyond measure: the total number of stars in the universe is greater than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the planet Earth.”

linked to the question of origin and nature of life on the Earth – in fact that these are two sides of the same question. Given the size of the Universe, there is a significant probability of life elsewhere, according to Carl Sagan. Carl Sagan draws lessons from history – the

European explorers in the 15th and 16th centuries, who discovered new lands and new sea routes in a spirit of adventure (besides the lust for gold). The subsequent generations have to thank these adventurers for the opportunities that it created. Similarly, Carl Sagan visualises that future generations will thank us for the exploration of space and the nearby planets. However, again using the parallel of earlier adventurers, given the uneven development of technology, developing a mutually beneficial relationship between strangers across planets will not be easy.

The book traces the evolution of our understanding of the two near-by planets Venus and Mars. Venus is the closest to our conception of “hell”, where due to the 'green-house effect' the heat is trapped in, causing very high temperatures. This is a lesson for the Earth, with its depleting ozone layer. Mars on other hand is most earth-like and a “potential human colony”. Though popular imagination and fiction has exaggerated this likelihood far too much !

The book then discusses Einstein's discoveries related to Light in a seemingly simple manner, resulting in the maxim “Thou shalt not travel at or beyond the speed of light”. This insight into the nature of Light is necessary, when we try and understand the Stars – as the Light we perceive could be a million years old – the time the light

takes to reach our eyes. We can only wonder as the author says: “... the Cosmos is rich beyond measure: the total number of stars in the universe is greater than all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the planet Earth.” Chemical reactions are taking place continuously in the stars, starting from the lightest atom, hydrogen – which are then 'cooked' into heavier atoms. The most interesting aspect is that finally these molecules constitute us – our body, our food, our environment i.e. we are made of 'stardust'.

The well-known structure of the Atom, with Protons and Neutrons in the centre and the electrically charged electron cloud around it, as the basic unit of matter (discovered in early 20th Century) is described in detail. The various stages in the lifetime of a star is detailed. Many of the terms related to the study of the universe like Quasar, Quarks, Black Hole, Supernova ... are explained in context.

Towards the end, the structure of the Brain is explained – consisting of the reptilian, limbic (corresponding to mammals) and finally two-thirds of the brain the cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex is the newest part of the brain of a human and the seat of intuition and critical analysis. The hope is that the trend towards 'enlightened self-interest' will continue and cooperation will flourish.

Ancient Indian thought and philosophy on the Cosmos is acknowledged, evidence is this quotation below:

“Some foolish men declare that a Creator made the world. The doctrine that the world was created is ill-advised, and should be rejected. If God created the world, where was He before creation? . . . How could God have made the world without any raw material? If you say He made this first, and then the world, you are faced with an endless regression . . . Know that the world is uncreated, as time itself is, without beginning and end. And it is based on the principles . . . “

- *The Mahapurana (The Great Legend), Jinasena (India, ninth century)*

However the advancement and contribution of Indian science is not mentioned – for unfortunately this fact is not well-established and documented systematically.

Title: Cosmos
Author: Carl Sagan
Publishers: Abacus
No. of Pages:
Price Rs 411 (paperback)

Swami Vivekananda

The Universal man

S. Regunathan

Thus far: The story is of an ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who, donning saffron, emerged as a leader after his master left his bodily abode. His name was Narendranath. He institutionalized his master's legacy by setting up a Mutt and developing the routine for spiritual seekers. This episode continues to tell us how.



Swami Vividishananda

Though the Mutt was full of spiritual fervour and the residents were following, in great measure, what their Guru Sri Ramakrishna had taught them, there were some constraints and some distractions. Many of them felt guilty at times for neglecting their families and parents. Even Narendranath, who had taken the name of Vividishananda, and addressed by all as Swamiji, was torn between the activities of the Mutt and his own family's demands. By this time, though, his legal affairs had been decided in his family's favour, yet his mother and family were left in penury.

The pull of renunciation was stronger. It was very strong and yet he had to struggle to develop detachment. He often said this was the play of Maya. He

faced yet another struggle. It was his desire to undertake pilgrimages as is the wont of a Hindu monk. However, for the first four years he could not leave the Mutt because of the assurance he had given to his master that he would take care of his brother monks.

Soon a time came when he was able to undertake many pilgrimages. In the initial stage, he would go to Varanasi, Allahabad and Vaidyanath, sometimes alone and at other times with his brother monks. But he would return after a short sojourn.

One of the reasons was that he felt some of the brother monks had not yet matured enough and he was very concerned about them. On one occasion, one of the youngest brother monks left the mutt

without telling anyone. When Swamiji came to know of this, he agonized and chided the other brother monks for having let that young monk, who had no knowledge of the world and its ways, to go alone. Fortunately, in a couple of days the young monk returned and Swamiji was relieved.

It was in 1890 that Swami Vividishananda left the mutt visiting far off places up to Rishikesh. Though he wanted to go to Badrinath because of the illness of one of his brother monks and also a lay disciple he could not go. He stayed on either in Rishikesh or Haridwar. He travelled this time for a duration of seven years.

During these years he also journeyed extensively in some parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

As a wanderer, he carried only a staff, a water pot, a copy of the Gita and the Imitation of Christ. He did not carry any cash but travelled occasionally by trains with tickets purchased by some of his admirers.

There were also interesting episodes during his wanderings. He was attached to his brother monks. And his brother monks too were equally attached to him. In fact, some of them were too attached. They did not want to leave him alone and took the responsibility of taking care of his needs, much to his annoyance. Sometimes Swamiji would find them

following him or landing up where he least expected them. Swamiji would chide them. Another aspect of his travels was that he met many scholars and spiritual masters at Varanasi and other places.

He also went through certain personal experiences which to an ordinary man could look supernatural or mere coincidence. One such incident was at Brindavan when Swamiji decided to go around the Govardhan hill. He also vowed that he would not beg for his food from anyone. On the very first day he felt acute pangs of hunger.

The weather was also harsh with heavy rains. At that time, he heard someone calling him from behind. He felt maybe his desire for food is making him hear that person. Without answering he continued. But the voice drew closer. Then the Swamiji started running from the voice, but the voice still called out to him. Swamiji started running faster till at one point the person chasing him overtook him, stopped him and asked him why he was running away from him when all that he wanted to do was to give him food. No sooner had Swamiji accepted it, the man disappeared. He was full of wonder and joy.

He felt Krishna and his Guru were taking care of him.

Children's Corner

The Best Musician




An old lady walked into a village. She walked from village to village telling stories to children. As soon as the children of the village saw her coming, they ran forward to greet her. They loved her stories. After she finished telling them their stories the women of the village would welcome her to their homes and offer her food and clothing and whatever else she needed.

Today as she came in, she said, "I have a very nice story to tell you." The children were excited. They all sat around her. She began... "Narada and Tumburu

were celestial musicians. They were known for their prowess in singing. One day they started discussing between themselves as to who was better. Narada felt he was the best and Tumburu felt he was. They both decided to go to a judge. Now, whom should they go to? They thought for a while and the answer came to their minds without doubt. "We should ask Hanuman, he is the best," they both agreed.

The two of them went to Hanuman. "We want you to decide which of us makes the sweeter music," they said to him.



“Sure,” said Hanuman, “but first listen to me sing. Place your *veen*as on this hard stone and hear me sing. Veenas are musical instruments. They have a long handle and pumpkin shaped base. With strings and frets that you play with your fingers they make sweet music like that from a lute

Hanuman sang beautifully. Birds stopped flying to listen to his music. The breeze started blowing pleasantly and even wild animals stopped, enchanted by his music. Narada and Tumburu listened too but they were, you know, full of themselves so they each thought they could play better. They closed their eyes and listened. Hanuman was playing *Raaga Gundukriya*. When he finished, there was silence all around for some time. And then Narada and Tumburu realized he had stopped singing. They complimented him profusely. “Now you perform,” said Hanuman.

Narada turned towards and rock on which he had placed his veena. Oh! It was not there! Even Tumburu's veena was not there. An edge of their veena was peeping out of the rock! Hanuman's music had melted even the rock and the veenas had got stuck inside the rock! Hanuman smiled as he saw them looking distraught. “Now, sing and retrieve your veenas,” he said. So Narada began

singing. He sang and sang as well as he could. The rock did not melt. It was Tumburu's turn. He too sang with all his might. The rock still did not melt. They looked askance at Hanuman. “What do we do? Why is our singing not good enough to melt the rock?” asked Narada. They both then sang together. Even then the rock did not melt.

“Do not worry,” said Hanuman, “I will sing again and you dive into the liquid rock and pick up your veenas.” So, Hanuman sang the melody in the tune of *Gundakriya* again. The stone began to melt. Narada and Tumburu dived into the liquid and pulled out their veenas. This time they listened to Hanuman's music with greater humility. When Hanuman stopped singing the rock became solid again. “Both of you are good,” said Hanuman for he had to give his judgement. But they both knew they were still not the best. Then the secret that made Hanuman the best musician was told to them by God Himself.

The old lady held the hands of the children listening to her and said, “It is his complete devotion to his Lord Rama that made his music so sweet. So sweet that it could melt even the rock. Narada and Tumburu then understood that, when you drop your ego and sing for Him, of Him, then He will sing through you and nothing can be sweeter.

Children's Corner

Think Beyond the Obvious

Sudhamahi Regunathan

A small town was well known for two reasons: its benevolent king and the beautiful tree that stood in the forest that surrounded the town. The king was kind and considerate to humans and animals and plants. So the land was fertile and there was harmony and peace in the town.

The king lived in a palace made completely of wood. The palace had been built by his ancestors and had withstood many hundreds of years. It was extraordinarily beautiful.

The tree was beautiful in that it had leaves of every imaginable colour. A whole bunch of green leaves stood alongside orange, red, purple, blue, ones. People from far and wide came to see and touch it. There was no other tree like that anywhere in the world. The tree was also very gentle, it gave those who came to see it, a lot of joy. Every once in a while the king himself would go and look at the tree, caress its trunk and whisper, "Take care. Your cheer gives me strength."

One day when the king was sitting down for lunch, something fell on his plate. He looked up to see a crack in the ceiling of



Illustration: Raaga Chaudhary (9yrs)


the palace. Something had fallen from the crevice in the wooden ceiling. The king immediately called his chief architect and wanted the palace ceiling to be repaired. Many engineers were put on the task and soon they all came to the king saying they needed strong wood of a certain thickness.

"What stops you?" asked the king, "go get any tree that will serve the purpose and repair it before it is too late."

The king's men searched the forests completely and came to a rather sad conclusion. They hesitated to tell the king but the king commanded them to do so.

"Sir, the only tree that fits the bill is our beautiful tree."

Now the king was in a quandry. He could



not get that tree cut nor could he let the palace fall. He thought over it all night and finally instructed that the tree be cut. Sorrow spread like wildfire in the city. No one wanted the tree to be cut. Birds cried, animals wept. Each one tried to give some solution. Nothing worked. The king was sad too, but his engineers told him that was the only way out.. The tree was also sad.

As night fell, the tree wept in solitude. At that time she felt someone nudging her at her foot. The tree looked down to see a small blade of grass poking her. "Yes," said the tree," do you want to say something?"

"I have an idea," said the blade of grass, so scrawny and so tiny. The blade of grass whispered something to the tall and beautiful tree.

The next day when the woodcutters went into the forest with a heavy heart, they raised their axe and held the beautiful tree, all set to bring her down. But, they recoiled! They were shocked to find it all pulpy and soft...

"It is rotten!" they exclaimed.

"Rotten?" asked the people

"Rotten?" asked the king.

No one could believe it. Only yesterday the tree had been very healthy and today it was rotten? They all came and touched the bark...it felt so soft and gooey! Panic held the kingdom in its grip. What will

happen now? The king thought hard. How will he restore the palace? He ordered,"There are the logs from three trees in our godown. Add them up and make up the thickness required," he said. The engineers were very happy with his decision. Such a simple idea had not struck anyone as they were thinking only about the beautiful tree. Soon the palace was repaired.

Everyone waited with sorrow for the day the beautiful tree would fall. One day went into another, but the tree blossomed even more. When someone touched its bark, it did not feel rotten any longer. What had happened?

"Well," replied the beautiful tree," the blade of grass suggested we call all the chameleons to fix themselves on my trunk and change their colour to look like me. We did that and so my trunk felt soft. Now that my cutting has been averted, the chameleons have gone back and the blade of grass, my hero, is smiling."

The normally-ignored blade of grass felt so proud. The beautiful tree was beautiful because it was humble enough to listen to the smallest of creatures, mused the grass. The beautiful tree was beautiful because it gently told me to look for alternatives that suits everyone, reflected the king. The people of the kingdom were very happy with their king and their beautiful tree, once again.

FRNV NEWS AND EVENTS

Regional Chapters Review Meeting

The regional chapters review meeting was held on 31st August 2024 in virtual mode. Shri S Regunathan, President/FRNV and Shri Ashwani Kumar, General Secretary/FRNV attended from FRNV HQ. Dr. Arun Kumar Rath, Chairman, Odisha (Bhubaneswar) Chapter, Dr. T S Sridhar, Chairman, Tamil Nadu (Chennai) Chapter, Shri S L Gangadharappa, Chairman, Karnataka (Bengaluru) Chapter, Shri Jagadeep Bhargava, Chairman, Haryana (Hisar) Chapter attended the meeting. Shri Samarendra Dash, Secretary, Odisha Chapter, Shri Ashis Panda, Secretary, Delhi Chapter, Shri R S Krishnan, Chennai Chapter also participated in the meeting. Shri M Rajaram entrepreneur and IT expert attended the meeting as a special invitee.



Meeting decided :-

- To strengthen the organization in every region.
- To celebrate National Days in befitting way.
- To organize Values Based Education Workshop to Teachers.
- To spread awareness on the need for reforms in electoral, judicial and governance in the country.
- To distribute complimentary copies of the FRNV bi-monthly journal “Value Insight” to schools in Chennai and Bhubaneswar. Bengaluru and Hisar Chapters will follow in the next cycle. Chapters were requested to find sponsors for the journal and also advertisement sponsorship from the corporates.
- To raise funds for regional chapter activities

National Seminar on Electoral Reforms – The Role of Money & Muscle Power Advisory Board meeting held on 7 th September 2024

FRNV is planning to hold a National Seminar on Electoral Reforms – The Role of Money & amp; Muscle Power in Delhi. The topics to be covered are :-

- Criminalization of politics, power of money and muscle
- The protracted judicial dispensation system
- © How to bring more youth in politics
- The safety of women

Virtual meeting of meeting of Advisory Board members held on 7 th September 2024.

After detailed discussions, it was decided that initially, FRNV should focus on the following:-
How to ensure criminals do not enter politics and get positions of power. For this a background note is to be prepared with the inputs from all the Members with focus on

- What are the available means to deter criminals entering politics?
- Why are they ineffective?
- What steps are required to make it effective?



(L-R Shri Ashwani Kumar, Shri Satyananda Mishra, Shri Ravi Prakash Mehrotra, Shri S Regunathan, Dr. N Subramanian, Shri O P Rawat and Shri Sunil Kumar Sinha)

16 th Annual General Meeting : The 16 th Annual General Meeting of the Members of Foundation for Restoration of National Values (FRNV) will be held in HYBRID mode on 14 th September 2024 at the Secretariat Office in Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi.

Meeting was attended to by Shri S Regunathan, President/FRNV, Shri PremArora/Treasurer, Shri Ashwani Kumar/General Secretary, Dr. N Subramanian, Member/Governing Body (in person) and Members Shri Ravi Prakash Mehrotra, Shri O P Rawat, Shri Hiralal Wangnoo, Dr. Manoj Kumar Singh/Chairman/FRNV Delhi Chapter, Shri Ajai Chawla, Shri Ashis Panda, Dr. Sarita Nagpal, Shri Samarendra Dash, Major General P Rajagopal, PVSM, VSM, Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai, Adv. N S Gopakumar all in virtual presence. Shri Sachin Singh, Student Chapter, Prayagraj attended in person as a Special Invitee.

After transacting the listed agenda items, it was discussed in the meeting, strengthening the organization with more active members was required. Meeting sought the support in enrolling more members. Similarly, more regional chapter(s) was to be set up. It was requested to refer/suggest your known contacts who could set up and lead the regional chapters in every State(s) of our country.

Based Education Workshop: The next Values Based Education workshop will be held at DAV Public School, Jasola Vihar, New Delhi on 28 th September 2024.

State Level Seminar on Role of Youth in National Building organised by FRNV, Odisha Chapter on 14/8/2024:

The Seminar was organized by FRNV Odisha Chapter jointly with Citizens for Collection Action for Education & Social Change under the Chairmanship of Dr Arun Kumar Rath, Chairman, FRNV, Odisha Chapter. Seminar was held at Buddha Mandir Auditorium, Bhubaneswar on 14 th August 2024 on the eve of Independence Day. Over 70 participants including 30 school students and FRNV members attended. The program was covered in Odia Daily Samaj.



Life Members joined since 2nd April 2024

Name	Membership No.	From
Shri Sanjaya Kumar Pattanayak Odisha Chapter	FRNVFRNV/LM/092	14.08.2024
Shri Sanjay Pradhan Odisha Chapter	FRNVFRNV/LM/093	29.08.2024
Major Genl. P Rajagopal, AVSM, VSM Kochi Chapter	FRNVFRNV/LM/094	31.08.2024
Shri Jugal Kishore Mishra Odisha Chapter	FRNVFRNV/LM/095	06.08.2024

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