



# newsletter

Easter Term 2002

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## Namaste From The New President

**\*By Sveta Alladi\***

**Vannakam,**

**A warm welcome back to Cambridge from the new committee!**

Firstly, I would like to thank last years' committee for all their hard work and enthusiasm.

The new committee are ready and raring to go and hope to bring you a diverse and high standard of events in the following year.

Last term ended spectacularly with "MASTANA 2002". For the 6<sup>th</sup> year running it was an amazing evening and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. Over £3000 pounds was raised for SEWA International confirming the success of the event. Thank you to all those that were involved both on and behind stage. It was a pleasure working with you all. Those who didn't manage to attend can find out more in the Mastana Review.

Also during the term were sev-

eral other well-attended events. During One World Week we joined forces with other religious societies in order to represent Hindu Culture in a Religions of the World fair and participate in a debate. Mr. Glover, a teacher came from London to enlighten us all with his knowledge of Vedic Mathematics. I will never need to reach for my calculator again! Read our article on Vedic mathematics to find out more.

During this term there will be a Ganesh Pooja held prior to the exams to which you are all invited to attend. (See our term card for details.) May Week will see the return of DHAMAKA. What better way to celebrate the end of the exam period than with an evening of garbha rhythm and bhangra beats to have you all on the dance floor! We hope to see you all there.

Until then, I wish you all the best with forthcoming exams. If anyone would like to contribute to future newsletters or have any suggestions please email us. Details are given below.

## The New CUHCS Committee

The CUHCS AGM was held on Tuesday 12th March, and the committee for 2002/2003 was elected. Please feel free to contact us if you have any queries, problems or suggestions.

<b>President:</b>	Sveta Alladi	(New Hall, spa24)	<b>Other committee members:</b>	
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Gaurav Prinja	(Churchill, gkp25)	Prakash Bhudia	(Clare, pb282)
<b>Secretary:</b>	Kshiti Vora	(Emmanuel, kv217)	Sujata Biswas	(New Hall, sb409)
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Mitul Shah	(Christ's, ms411)	Mitul Kanzaria	(Catz, mk386)
<b>Publicity:</b>	Gaya Rabindra	(Pembroke, gr236)	Reema Mathur	(New Hall, rm354)
			Deepika Yerrakalva	(Newnham, dy205)

# Holi and Ugadi

**\*By Deepika Yerrakalva\***

Over the Easter vacation, there were two major festivals, Holi (28th. March) and Ugadi (13th. April). Both are very happy, joyous days celebrated widely in North and South India respectively. So what are we celebrating?

**Holi** announces the arrival of spring and the passing of winter. Holi is celebrated throughout India but it is more predominant in North India. Preparations for the festival begin a week ahead. Houses are given a fresh coat of colour, floral patterns are drawn at the entrance, and powdered colours and spraying pistons are bought. Usually people burn the Holika tree on the eve of Holi. Folklore and dances are performed around the fire to welcome the new season. On the morning of Holi, people have fun with coloured water. In the evening, youngsters play with dry colours and seek elders' blessings.



The mythological origins of this festival vary in different parts of the country. According to one popular legend, the word Holi is derived from the demoness, Holika. She was the sister of Hiranyakashyap, a demon king, who having defeated the Gods, proclaimed his own supremacy over everyone else in the Universe. Enraged over his son, Prahlad's ardent devotion to Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakashyap decides to punish him. He takes the help of his sister, Holika, who is immune to any damage from fire. Holika carries Prahlad into the fire but a divine intervention destroys her and saves Prahlad from getting burned. Thus Holi is celebrated to mark the burning of the evil Holika. It is a celebration of the triumph of good over evil. In North India and Uttar Pradesh, this victory is celebrated, effigies of Holika are burnt in the huge bonfires that are lit. This tradition is also followed in Gujarat and Orissa. To render grateful-

ness to Agni, god of Fire, gram and stalks from the harvest are also offered to Agni.

Lord Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Lord Vishnu is also worshipped during the Holi festival. Putana, the she-demon was sent by the cruel king Kamsa to kill the child Krishna. In guise of a beautiful woman, Putana went about in the village of Nandgaon suckling every child to death. But the infant Krishna sucked her breasts till blood started flowing and she succumbed to her death. Hence, on the previous evening of the Holi day, bonfires are lighted to celebrate the victory of Krishna and the death of Putana. Those who attribute the origin of festivals to seasonal cycles maintain that Putana represents winter and her death the cessation and end of winter.

Krishna's love-play with gopi's is known all over the country. Hence, in places like Mathura and Vrindawan, this Holi festival is celebrated with songs, music, plays and dances and coloured waters are thrown on each other. Holi solemnises the love of Radha and Krishna. The young Krishna would complain to his mother, Yashoda, about why Radha was so fair and he so dark. Yashoda advised him to apply colour on Radha's face and see how her complexion would change. Holi is spread over 16 days in Vrindavan as well as Mathura - two cities with which Lord Krishna shared a deep affiliation.

The New year festival or **Ugadi**, which is a combination of the words *yuga* (era) and *aadi* (beginning), comes close on the heels of Holi.

In Andhra Pradesh, it is believed that the creator of the Hindu pantheon Lord Brahma started creation on this day - Chaitra suddha padhyami or the Ugadi day. Also the great Indian mathematician Bhaskaracharya's calculations proclaimed the Ugadi day from the sunrise on as the beginning of the new year, new month and new day. The onset of spring also marks a beginning of new life with plants (barren until now) acquiring new life, shoots and leaves. Spring is considered the first season of the year hence also heralding a new year and a new beginning. The vibrancy of life, fields and meadows full

of colourful blossoms signifies growth, prosperity and well-being.

On this day, people chant mantras and the pandits make predictions for the coming year. According to an ancient tradition, people used to flock to the temples to listen to the yearly calendar (panchangasravanam). Large garlands of jasmine are offered to Gods in homes and temples, and jasmine flowers are woven in clusters in the plaits of women.

People prepare for Ugadi by cleaning and washing their houses and buying new clothes. On Ugadi day, people wake up before dawn and take a head bath after which they decorate the entrance of their houses with fresh mango leaves and rangolis. Then, they perform the ritualistic worship to God invoking his blessings before they start off with the new year. They pray for their health, wealth and prosperity and success in business too. It has become a custom to hold Kavi Sammelans (Poetry recitals) this day. The Ugadi day is also considered to be an auspicious time to begin any new ventures.

The significance of tying mango leaves relates to a legend. It is said that Kartik (or Subramanya or Kumara Swamy) and Ganesha, the two sons of Lord Shiva and Parvati were very fond of mangoes. As the legend goes Kartik exhorted people to tie green mango leaves to the doorway signifying a good crop and general well-being.



The traditional cuisine of this festival includes dishes like Pulihora and Bobbatlu, though the Ugadi Pachchadi is the typical dish associated with the festival. This dish is prepared with jaggery, raw mangoes, neem flowers and raw tamarind - all coming into season at this time of year.

# The Feminine Aspect Of The Trinity

**\*By Kshiti Vora\***

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva constitute the divine Trinity that is one of the principle tenets of Hinduism, and through their respective roles of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer fulfil the main functions of the Godhead. However, each of these three gods has his feminine counterpart, who symbolises crucial aspects of creation.



Saraswati, the wife of Brahma, personifies learning and wisdom. She holds the *vina*, which symbolises *R'ta* or

the order in the Cosmic Universe, as well as *Nada-Brahman*, the rhythm of the universe. The beads in her fingers emphasise the importance of prayer and meditation, while the palm leaf scrolls she holds emphasise that of learning and wisdom. Her white saree and the lotus she sometimes sits on are reminiscent of the value of truth. At times she is also portrayed sitting on a peacock, which represents the ego that must be suppressed.

Lakshmi is one of the feminine counterparts of Vishnu, the Preserver, and she is said to bring prosperity. One of her hands is held open with the palm facing the devotee and the fingers facing upwards – this is the *abhaya mudra* that means, “Do not fear”. Another hand is held open with the palm facing the devotee but the fingers facing downwards, in the *varada mudra*, symbolising the prosperity and grace she gives to human beings. She sits on a lotus and holds lotus flowers in her hand, which

represents the importance of a pure life, without which prosperity is nothing.

Shakti, the World Mother is the power and energy that propels the processes of Creation, Preservation and Destruction. She is portrayed in many forms, Parvati (the wife of Shiva) being one of them. As Kamakshi, the noose that she holds in one of her hands reminds us that we should liberate ourselves from worldly attachments, and the hook in another hand pushes us towards righteous deeds. The five arrows she holds symbolise our five sense-perceptions that we must conquer. As Durga, she rides the Tiger, representative of the ego and arrogance that Man must crush. As Kali she embodies Time and destroys the demon Mahishasura, who personifies ignorance. The skull she wears warns that Man is mortal and her dark hue is indicative of the future that is unknown to us. She tells us as well that Kala, or Time, is unalterable and omnipotent.

## Vedic Mathematics

**\*By Gaurav Prinja\***

In the UK, teachers have generally noticed the skill of students with roots in India. Students display great talent and many of them are exceptionally good with numbers. This is not too surprising, after all it was their ancestors who developed the Vedic system of mathematics, perhaps there is a mathematical gene!

The Vedas are vast and contain very much about science. The *upa-veda* of the Atharva veda is *Sthaapatyaveda*, which contains knowledge of architecture, engineering, all mathematically related sciences in general. Unfortunately the teaching of the Vedas had all but died out, but His Holiness Jagadguru Shankaraacharya Sri Bhaaratī Krishna Tirthaji Maharaja revived Vedic Mathematics in the last century after years of study and research on these sections of the Vedas. He compiled a *Parishishta* (or

appendix section) for the Atharva Veda in which he included sixteen sutras as memory aids to the mathematics he had discovered, which upon first glance seem rather confused, nonsensical and unrelated to mathematics for instance two of the sutra simply say ‘by one more than the one before’, and ‘vertically and crosswise’. However these have turned out to be very powerful memory aids to mathematical formulae. Many researchers passed over these sutras as irrelevant, but memory aids are useless if you don’t know what they are reminding you!

Although Jagadguruji initially wrote sixteen volumes, each one covering a single sutra, they were lost and only an introductory text remained which briefly covered all 16 sutras and their sub-sutras was published. Even the power of what is covered shortly in this book is still mind boggling. The Vedic ideal is simply to look at a question and write down the answer. After all, in Vedic times there were no calculators

and the less space wasted working out the answer to a question the better. Multiplication and division can both be done quickly in one line. Inverting numbers to find their decimal equivalent is particularly neat. Usually to find the whole decimal form of  $1/19$  we would do 18 divisions by 19, however, with the Vedic method, you can simply write out the answer whilst doing a simple calculation in your head, as if you were writing it from memory! There are also geometric and algebraic tips and tricks.

Vedic mathematics should be thought of as a system of mathematics, not just a collection of methods, it is a way of approaching problems, if one studies these sutras properly then it is said they will be able to solve problems in any field of mathematics by their application. There are now many more books and resources available for learning Vedic Mathematics. I recommend anyone with the slightest interest in number to check out this ancient system.

## Upanayanam

### By Ranjan Vasudevan

The *Upanayanam* or sacred thread ceremony is often said to be the samskara which gives a person *dvija* or 'twice born' status. This term refers to a 'spiritual re-birth' – a second birth for the purpose of God realization. This idea of a re-birth to dedicate one's life to God is present in Christianity also: Jesus Christ teaches, "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (New Testament, John 3:3). The most important part of this re-birth for Hindus is the initiation into use of the exalted *Gaayatri mantra*, found in the *Rig Veda*. This has been described as the most important mantra in Hinduism, and the essence of all Veda - Lord Krishna Himself states, "of all mantras I am the Gaayatri" (Bhagavad Gita, 10:35). The mantra itself is meant to embody the *shakti* of the Supreme Divinity, and is often personified as the goddess of the same name. The words of the Gaayatri mantra roughly translate as "We meditate on the divine radiance of God, creator of the Earth, Sky and Heavens; immanent in the sacred sound AUM and the Sun who we revere. May He impel our intellects in the right direction". The prayer is sometimes interpreted as merely a means of bringing greater concentration

and peace of mind to the one who chants it, but in fact chanting of the Gaayatri mantra is the duty of the individual to the whole of humankind and is a call for universal, not just individual spiritual development. Since the initiation is such an important event, the process of imparting the mantra to the initiate is shrouded with mystery and symbolism. The sacred thread itself consists of three strands, each serving as reminders of one's duties to God, one's teacher and one's parents.

While the observance of such traditions is not so prevalent in modern Hindu society - indeed, practices such as these seem to be followed only by a select few, usually Brahmin males - scriptures indicate that the chanting of the Gaayatri may have been open to all peoples in Vedic times. The Vedas mention the names of at least 27 women sages, indicating that women too would have undergone the sacrament of Upanayanam and chanted the Gaayatri mantra.

Nowadays the spiritual landscape is obviously vastly different to that in Vedic times, and blind application of Vedic injunctions would not seem to be the answer to all of the

world's problems. What is perhaps more useful is the Gaayatri mantra's central principle of yearning for the highest truth - extremely valuable in all manner of situations, and readily applicable by people of any or no spiritual persuasion. In times where instability and conflict are taking root in so many parts of the world, this universal principle is perhaps the most powerful tool in helping people to understand each other regardless of their religious and cultural differences.



## Lent Term Highlights

### By Sujata Biswas and Mitul Kanzaria

Lent term was jam-packed for CUHCS, culminating with our annual cultural showpiece, "Mastana 2002".

Earlier in the term, "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", shown in association with Christ's Films, was a light-hearted introduction to Bollywood for many. The film was a sell out and gave a glimpse of the magic of the world's largest film industry. Stunning dance moves, colourful outfits, incredible singing, emotional outbursts... and that was just the audience!

Mastana 2002 was a fitting conclusion to our termly programme. Over £3000 was raised for SEWA international. At the new, grand venue of Guild-

hall this year, over 500 tickets were sold, helping to create an air of expectancy matched only by the exuberant atmosphere. People were not to be disappointed! Starting from tabla players, and ranging from classical singing to modern Bollywood dance, the spectrum of talent that Cambridge has to offer was on full view.

Highlights included contemporary dances to classic Hindi film songs like Taal and Urvashi. There was a Bharat Natyam piece from students trained in the Bhavan in London. The demonstration of Dand Yudh by members of HHS was both frightening and compelling. Beautiful instrumental pieces were also heard, the soothing sounds of the bansari leading

to the mid show break.

After the interval, where mouth-watering food was served, the outstanding "Hare-sons" paid a fitting tribute to George Harrison with "My Sweet Lord". There was an exquisite rendition of a Mujra dance and a superb classical dance to a song from the film "Lagaan," with live singers. Humour was provided by the students' version of the Blind Date TV show, fittingly entitled: "Blind Wedding!" And not forgetting the spectacular finale, where the committee dance gave an opportunity for the hard working people behind the scenes to strut their stuff on stage! Many thanks to everyone who made Mastana possible, and the best one yet!

### Events This Term

**GANESH POOJA:** Tuesday 7th May, 7.30pm, Venue to be confirmed.

**DHAMAKA:** Saturday 15th June, Details to be confirmed by email.