



CU Hindu Cultural Society

Newsletter for Lent Term 2000

AUM JAI MATA DEE

A message from the president:

Namaste,

Welcome back; hope you have all had a good holiday.

We also very much hope that you enjoyed our events last term; we will certainly be trying to bring you more quality and varied events this term. Our informal and lively discussion forums on aspects of Hinduism will be continuing and there will be a special forum on February 8, when in conjunction with and as part of One World Week, CUHCS will be holding a Pooja followed by a discussion forum on the importance and significance of Hindu ritual today.

Also to look forward to this term is our classical dance evening; those performing are very talented students having trained at the Bharat Vidya Bhavan in London. The dances promise to be really breathtaking whilst all money raised from the event will be going to help SEWA International's Appeal for the Orissa cyclone victims.

And then, of course, not to forget our biggest event of the year - MASTANA, our massive variety show featuring a wide range of Indian dance and music from classical to contemporary as we pay tribute to culture on the Indian subcontinent. If anyone is interested in helping out, please contact Abi Patel (ap282) or if you would like to perform, Raghu Nandakumara (rn223).

The National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF) will also be holding a couple of big events this term which may be of interest; firstly, there will be "Ragiliraat", an Indian show including dance, music, drama, fashion show and dinner. The event will be hosted by LSE and UCL although Cambridge will also be involved as a South Zone university. Secondly, NHSF will be holding their annual lecture towards the end of term which is always worth attending; previous speakers have included the likes of Mark Tully whilst Sonia Gandhi is rumoured to be speaking this year. More details will be provided over email as and when available.

The forthcoming term will further see our AGM and annual elections; if you are interested in standing for any of the positions on the committee and would perhaps like to know more about what they involve, please feel free to contact any of the present committee (*details on back page*). Details of the elections and how to stand will follow over email.

As this is thus my last message, I would like to take this opportunity thank all of my committee – Soumitra, Tushin, Khush, Nitin, Anu, Rishika, Rewa and Souj – for all their much appreciated hard work. I would also like to thank all of you, the members, for your support and it is only with that support that we can continue to try and take the society from strength to strength. Thank you.

Rajan S. Jain

Event Calendar – Lent Term 2000

5 th February	Classical Dance Evening	New Court Theatre, Christs
8 th February	Pooja Discussion Forum V	Fisher Buiding, St. Johns
22 nd February	Discussion Forum VI	Fisher Building, St. Johns
7 th March	AGM & Elections	Fisher Building, St. Johns
TBA	Mastana	TBA

HOLI

Holi is the spring festival that is celebrated on the full moon day or Purnima of Phalguna (the month from mid-February to mid-March). Known as the festival of colours, participants throw coloured water and powder on one another during Holi. Men and women of all ages offer prayers, sing and dance while splashing each other with washable colours. They smear powdered paints over each other's faces and laugh and hug one another in a joyous mood. This is the one time in the whole calendar when the restrictions of caste, sex, status and age are disregarded. Even enemies put aside their differences. The activities of the festival are designed to break down the barriers that people tend to build around them.

The worshippers of Krishna particularly enjoy the festival, as the proceedings and atmosphere under which they take place are thought to be imitations of Krishna's dance and play with the gopis (the wives and daughters of the cowherds).

During this festival, Hindu temples are decorated brightly and on display are plenty of pictures and statues with glittering jewels and garments. The intention of using such bright colours is to create a sensation of delight. The idea of Holi is to convert this external happiness into an inner sense of well being.

The Dolayatra (or swinging of the god) festival also takes place during Holi. Images of the gods are placed on platforms that have been specially decorated, and then they are swung to the accompaniment of songs.

At Holi, there is a custom of lighting a bonfire and roasting grains, corn, etc. as offerings for eating. When gram, wheat and other grains are roasted, they are called Holuk, one of the reasons for the name Holi. The story of a female demon called Holika provides one of the other reasons. Holika was a sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu. His son, Prahalada, was a great devotee of God. Hiranyakashipu resented this as he thought of himself as the lord of the universe. He attempted to kill his son and persuaded Holika to help him. Holika was supposed to be unaffected by fire, so she took Prahalada into a fire with the intention of burning him to death. Instead, Holika was burned to death for misusing her powers and Prahalada was saved.

Holi reminds Hindus of the devotee Prahalada and it provides the inspiration to destroy the evil that dwells within oneself. Holi also renews the spirit of unity and brotherhood among families and in the community. It is a prelude to the approaching spring, and the increased variety of colours and light that comes with it.

Tushin Shah

HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

In a previous newsletter, there was a brief introduction to Sikhism and its relationship to Hinduism. In this newsletter, we hope to do the same with Buddhism.

There has, of late, been a renaissance of Buddhism with the faith becoming increasingly popular in the West where it has attracted many celebrity followers such as Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. Perhaps, one reason for this upsurge of popularity is Buddha's emphasis on rationality rather than blind faith, which is increasingly striking a chord with people in today's scientific world. Indeed, Buddhism is based on reason and experience of life rather than metaphysical subtleties. Whether there is a God or an Absolute, Buddha does not say nor does he deny or affirm the existence of the soul. What he does emphasise is the law of karma and the ideal of self-discipline: "One may overcome a thousand men in battle, but he who conquers himself is the greatest victor". Buddha lays down the "Four Noble Truths" which deal with suffering, its cause, the possibility of ending it and the way to do it; the end of the state of suffering is known as "nirvana". Buddhism stresses the role of the individual in following the right paths and taking responsibility for his or her own life. Buddha's message is one of universal benevolence: "... the poor and the lowly, the rich and high, are all one and that all castes unite in this religion as do the rivers in the sea". Barth writes "Buddha is the finished model of calm and sweet majesty, of infinite tenderness for all that breathes and compassion for all that suffers, of perfect moral freedom and exemption from every prejudice".

Buddhism developed during the reign of Ashoka (273 –232 BC). Ashoka devoted himself to the spread of Buddha's teachings, to righteousness and goodwill, and to public works for the good of the people. Under Ashoka, Buddhism spread rapidly in India from Kashmir to Ceylon and from here, it penetrated into Nepal and later reached Tibet and China and Mongolia.

It is often said that despite its origins, Buddhism was ultimately rejected by India. However, if we examine its principles and core values, we find that there is nothing there which cannot be reconciled or integrated with Hinduism. Hinduism like Buddhism preaches that all are one; Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* says to Arjuna, "See now the whole universe with all things that move and move not, and whatever thy soul may yearn to see. See it all as one in me". The law of karma is obvious common ground and Lord Krishna also urges man to follow the right path by performing his Dharma for the benefit of society as a whole. Furthermore, neither Hinduism nor Buddhism claim a monopoly of the truth, believing that all religions should be respected, "... I have given you a handful of truths, but besides these there are many thousands of other truths" (Buddha). According to Jawarhlal Nehru, "Buddhism was not only entirely a product of India; its philosophy was in line with previous Indian thought and the philosophy of the Vedanta (*The Upanishads*)".

Mrs Rhys Davids writes, "Gautama (the founder of Buddhism) was born and brought up and lived and died as a Hindu ... a great deal of his morality could be matched from earlier or later Hindu books. Such originality as Gautama possessed lay in the way in which he adapted, enlarged, enobled, and systematized that which had already been well said by others" (Sir S. Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy*). Where Buddhism separated from Hinduism was not with its theory or philosophy, but its interference with the social life and organisation of the people; "The old system was free and flexible in thought, allowing for every variety of opinion, but in practice it was rigid, and non-conformity of practice was not approved" (Nehru). Buddha probably did not see himself as the founder of a new religion but a reformer only did not claim to be an uprooter of the existing social order or economic system; he accepted their basic premises and only attacked the evils that had grown under them.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Although there is no central tenet of authority in Hinduism, such as *The Bible* in Christianity or *The Koran* in Islam, there are nevertheless three main scriptures: *The Vedas*, *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad Gita*.

The Bhagavad Gita translates as the song of the lord and is a dialogue by Lord Krishna on the battlefield as he urges the warrior, Arjuna, to perform his “dharma” (duty) by picking up his bow and fighting to restore order and civilisation in an anarchic and divided kingdom.

What follows is some commentary and quotations from scholars around the world on this important and popular Hindu text:

“ Krishna’s argument in sum is as follows. Every class of men has *dharma*, a code of social-religious works (*karma*) incumbent upon it. On the other hand, the paramount religious duty of man is to ‘save his soul’, to bring the conditioned or individual soul into unity with the Supreme Self or Vasudeva, who is represented in incarnate form by Krishna himself; and the way to this consummation lies through *knowledge* (*jnana yoga*) of the fundamental distinction between self and not-self (soul and matter) , and through *devotion* to the Supreme, *bhakti*. Now, such enlightenment can be reached .. by two roads. One is that of *sannyasin*, or recluse who has cast off all social ties and dwells alone in a forest or wilderness strictly meditating upon the two opposite categories of soul and matter. The other is the ‘Rule of Works’, *karma yoga*, the performance of all the social and religious duties of caste and class in a spirit of absolute selflessness, solely for the love of God, and without the least regard for the direct or indirect results that accrue from them. This is the more natural and convenient way, and it is infallible; therefore it should be followed by Arjuna. The corollary is that, as Arjuna’s caste-duty is to be a fighting man, he ought now to fight without repining, but to fight in a spirit of perfect selflessness ”. (*Dr L. D. Barnett*)

“ ..whilst the war in *The Mahabharata* may be meant as a real war it is obvious that the war in the *Bhagavad Gita* has a symbolic meaning ... We find in the *Gita* that there is going to be a great battle for the rule of a Kingdom; and how can we doubt that this is the Kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of the soul?...Arjuna becomes the soul of man and Krishna the charioteer of the soul ”. (*Professor Juan Mascaro*)

“ It is a call to action to meet the obligations and duties of life but always keeping in view that spiritual background and the larger purpose of the universe ”. (*Jawahrlal Nehru*)

“ When doubts haunt, when disappointment stares me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to console me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the Gita will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it everyday ”. (*Mahatma Gandhi*)

“ I owed a magnificent day to The Bhagavad Gita. It was the first of books; as if it were an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but (the) large serene consistent voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us ”. (*Ralph Waldo Emerson*)

“ In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Gita in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial ”. (*Henry Thoreau*)

“ The Gita is one of the clearest and most comprehensive summaries of the Perennial Philosophy ever to have been made. Hence its enduring value, not only for Indians, but to all mankind ”. (*Aldous Huxley*)

“ There is something in it which seems to be capable of being constantly renewed, which does not become out of date with the passing of time – an inner quality of earnest inquiry and search, of contemplation and action, of balance and equilibrium in spite of conflict and contradiction. There is a poise in it and a unity in the midst of disparity, and its temper is one of supremacy over the changing environment, not by seeking escape from it but by fitting in with it .. Indian humanity has gone repeatedly through the process of change .. but it has always found something living in the Gita, something that fitted into the developing thought and had a freshness and applicability to the spiritual problems that afflict the mind”. (*Jawahrlal Nehru*)

English translations of *The Bhagavad Gita* are available for loan from the CUHCS library. Please contact Soumitra Mukerji (skm21) to loan a copy.

Rajan S. Jain

WHAT IS YOGA?

“Yoga is like a huge majestic tree that stands for expansion of heart, mind and Self. Rooted in Nature, it branches out into innumerable realms of creativity, blossoming with bliss and the fulfilment of all human potential.” (Dr Swami Purna)

Thousands of years ago highly evolved humanists and sages created the system of yoga, a scientific method whereby one is able to develop physically, mentally and psychologically into a more complete human being. The word “yoga” itself is derived from the Sanskrit *yuk* meaning “union” or “discipline”. Indeed, it is a discipline which can lead to inner and outer harmony whilst helping one to achieve union with God. Lord Shiva is regarded as the source of the entire system of yoga, the description of the 8,400,000 postures being derived from his instructions.

Although there are many different forms of yoga practice (Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga, Tantra Yoga), the most popular understanding of yoga, especially in the West, is that exemplified by physical or *hatha* yoga which combines *asanas* (postures) with breath control and meditation. The syllables *ha* and *tha* signify respectively the sun and the moon, the flux of positive and negative energies. Balance of these energies results in perfect health. The benefits of hatha yoga are not exclusively physical; by stimulating endocrine activity (endocrine secretions play a large part in the creation of our emotions), Hatha yoga also becomes a valuable aid in the regulation and stabilization of emotion whilst it can also help to develop concentration. Dr Swami Purna writes, “If practised conscientiously, it will uplift your mind as well as your emotions, it will raise your consciousness, and it will bring you into harmony with the whole of nature”. Swamiji points out that *hatha* also translates as “force” and suggests that it is a “tremendous force which you can harness to help overcome many negative manifestations both around you and within you”.

A little regular practice of *hatha* yoga can lead to immense benefits. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* informs us that “the first fruits of the practice of Yoga are: Health, little waste matter, and a clear complexion, lightness of the body, a pleasant scent and a sweet voice - and an absence of greedy desires..”.

An excellent way to learn more about the exercises themselves and yoga in general would be to consult Dr. Swami Purna’s *Yoga: A Practical Introduction* which is available for loan from the CUHCS library. Alternatively, you can purchase the book directly from Element Books (Tel: 01747 851 339). Anyone wanting more information is requested to contact Rajan Jain (rajanjain_uk@yahoo.com).

Rajan S. Jain

GURU GOBIND SINGH

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the son of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur, and the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs. He was born in Patna, now the capital of Bihar. Throughout his life, he worked for the upliftment of the downtrodden irrespective of caste, creed, race or sect. He stood for national unity and emotional integration of the Indian people. The Guru travelled the length and breadth of India in order to fulfil his mission, sometimes spending a number of years at any one place. At Nahan (now part of Himachal Pradesh), for example, the Guru constructed a fort, Paunta, where he led a quiet, peaceful life, composing poetry and meditating along the river bank. However, he was a warrior as well as a saint, and enlisted many Hindus and Muslims into his army during his lifetime, a force which enabled him to fight many battles and thereby defeat oppressors such as the Mughal ruler, Aurungzeb, who wished to convert the entire nation to Islam. Two of his courageous sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, assisted him in a number of these battles.

On the 1st of Baisakh (April 13, 1699), the young Guru assembled his Sikhs at Anandpur (where now stands the famous Gurudwara called Sri Keshgarh). He baptized five of them as the “Punj Pyaras” or the Five Beloved members of a fighting fraternity. This brotherhood he named as the “Khalsa” or the pure ones. He gave them a new surname “Singh” (lion) to be attached to their first name, and made them take an oath to observe the five Ks, namely Khash (hair), Kangha (comb), Kirpan (dagger), Kachha (short drawers), and Kara (steel bracelet). Subsequently, many others were baptized. Thus was born the “Khalsa”, a nation of saint-soldiers amongst whom there was no distinction of caste, creed or sex.

Upon his death on 7th October 1708, Sri Guru Gobind Singh appointed the Guru Granth Sahib as his successor. This has thereafter been regarded as the living Guru.

Jay (Jujhar) Singh Sahota

This article is by way of a tribute from CU Hindu Cultural Society to Guru Gobind Singh on his birthday (14th January)

LORD SHIVA

Lord Shiva is depicted in many different forms. However, the most popular depictions are of Lord Shiva as *Yogiraj* (King of Yoga) or *Nataraj* (King of Dance). His colour is blue conveying his infinite stature, as blue is associated with immeasurable entities like the ocean and sky. The Yogiraj pose sees Lord Shiva in meditation with his eyes half closed indicating peace and perfect inner harmony. As Nataraj, Lord Shiva is representing the endless cosmic dance, the natural cycle of creation and destruction. Nataraj has four hands: one holding the drum to announce the “Big Bang” at the beginning of the Universe, the second holding the flame of destruction and purity, the third is raised to bless, the fourth pointing to the uplifted foot to show how to rise above ignorance. The small figure under his second foot symbolises ignorance. The whole figure of Nataraj represents the movement within one circle of fire. The circle represents the universe without a beginning (anadi) and without an end (anta). He is fulfilling both roles of being a Benefactor and a Destroyer. He can perform these functions like fire, which can destroy but which is also essential for sustaining life.

This article was extracted from a press release by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Council of Hindus)

HINDUISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

One of the modern challenges confronted by humanity is that of our preserving our endangered environment. Indeed, deforestation stands at around 17 million hectares a year, there are problems with the Ozone Layer and thanks to global warming, the last few years have been the hottest in recorded history. Significantly enough, if the polar ice caps were to melt, Cambridge would be one of the first places to disappear.

The Hindu perspective on the environment is a very interesting one for the ancient seers seem to have recognised the importance of environmental issues and almost seem to have anticipated some of the problems we are encountering today, the *Rig Veda* stating such simple principles as “Do not cut the trees because they remove pollution” (6-48-17). Hinduism has always emphasised man’s dependence on nature and the planet in what is a holistic, cosmic vision. Nature is seen as God’s gift to mankind and its elements are worshipped in Hindu prayers and scriptures. For example, the *Atharva Veda* contains “Prithvi Sukta” (Vedic Hymn to the Earth), the *Rig Veda* contains prayers to Surya (The Sun), the Dawn and the Waters whilst *The Mundakapanishad* describes the moon and sun as God’s eyes, the wind as His breath and the Earth as His feet. We are further told that the whole world is God’s heart and that He is “truly the inner soul of all”. The idea is very similar to that expressed in *The Bhagavad Gita* whereby Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to see everything in God and God in everything. H. V. Shah writes, “The gift of Hindu thought to the World Peace is light spiritual, slow and silent, calm and potent, yet producing a tremendous result like the gentle dew that covers the whole earth in the morning. That which was perceived as pagan through the worship of mountains, rivers, trees, animate and inanimate, the earth and the universe, is now acknowledged as a scientific, logical and eco-friendly way of life by scholars, scientists and philosophers all over the world”.

Hinduism stresses the interdependence of man both on each other and the planet it inhabits and it is thus that *The Atharva Veda* says, “We may believe in different religions ... yet we share the same home – Our Earth ... we must learn to happily progress together or miserably perish together. For man can live individually but can only survive collectively”. Indeed, the Hindu texts seem to suggest that we all owe a responsibility to the environment not only for ourselves but also for the sake of those around us. Dr L. M. Singhvi, the former Indian High Commissioner, has said, “The soul of the Vedic tradition is Peace and Harmony, Dharma and Rta, Restraint and Responsibility, based on Ahimsa (non-violence) and Karuna (compassion). These ideas and precepts are the elements of the Vedic heritage which have the capacity and potential to catalyse and enliven a deeper feeling of reverence for Life and Nature” (The Summit on Religions and Conservation, Atami, Japan, 7th April 1995).

It should also be noted that one of the main forms of Hindu worship, Yajna (sacrificial fire), performed to purify the mind and spirit also serves to purify the air and the surroundings through the use of antiseptic and fragrant materials spread by the use of fire. This is a natural way of air purification in contrast to the use of toxic germicides or CFC containing air-freshners.

It is also notable that the very common Hindu prayer, “Shanti Paath” (Prayer for Peace) is essentially a prayer for peace to nature and everything around us. It seems apt to close on this prayer [see prayer].

Rajan S. Jain



CU Hindu Cultural Society Committee Members

<i>President</i>	Rajan Jain, Trinity Hall	rajanjain_uk@yahoo.com
<i>Vice President</i>	Soumitra Mukerji, Peterhouse	skm21@cam.ac.uk
<i>Treasurer</i>	Tushin Shah, Jesus	ts254@cam.ac.uk
<i>Publicity</i>	Nitin Kumar Goel, Fitzwilliam	nkg25@cam.ac.uk
<i>Committee Posts</i>	Rishika Sinha, Kings	rs280@cam.ac.uk
	Rewa Vaidya, New Hall	rdv20@cam.ac.uk
	Anurag Sharma, Clare	as332@cam.ac.uk
	Soujit Ghosh, St Johns	sg229@cam.ac.uk

**Anyone wishing to get involved with the activities of the CU Hindu Cultural Society is advised to contact Rajan Jain.*

Notice:-

The National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF) also have their own termly publication, "Hum". The magazine is highly recommended and contains a wide range of articles on Hinduism and topical issues affecting Hindu students. The subsidised subscription rate is £3.50 per year. Subscription forms are available from Rajan Jain or alternatively, you can write directly to the National Hindu Students Forum, 46-48 Loughborough Road, Leicester, LE4 5LD.

CUHS has a library, containing a wide range of books on Hinduism. For more information please contact Soumitra Mukerji (skm21).

CUHCS is also **online** at:
<http://www.cam.ac.uk/CambUniv/Societies/cuhcs/>