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**Lent 2001**

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**Newsletter**

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**Namaste, Pranaam, Swaagatam,**

Happy New Year and a Happy New Millennium; hope that you have all had a wonderful holiday. And we wish all our members a belated Happy Sankranti.

We hope that you enjoyed our various events spread across last term. This term we intend to bring you a similar sprinkling of lively discussion forums on topics that are relevant to us today and ones that we hope you will enjoy discussing.

CUHCS end the term in style with our biggest event of the year by far, and also the largest cultural show in Cambridge – **MASTANA** – a complete showcase of performing arts from the Indian Sub-Continent; last year performances ranged from comedy to poetry, Bharatanatyam to Bollywood, Tabla Trios to Dhol solos. Flick through to page 2 for more information and contact details.

The National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF), who we are affiliated to, will be holding their annual lecture on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Previous speakers have included the likes of Mark Tully. More details will be distributed via email as and when available.

Towards the end of this term we will be holding our AGM and annual elections; if any of you are interested in standing for any of the positions on the committee and would like to know about what is involved then please feel free to contact any of the present committee (see back page for contacts). Details of the elections and how to stand will be sent shortly over email.

As usual, this newsletter contains articles on various aspects of our culture. Many of you may know that the Maha Kumbh Mela is now taking place in Prayaag, India. Seeing as this is an event that happens only once every twelve years, this issue includes and insert with info on the "**Greatest Show on Earth**".

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of my committee – Abi, Dheraj, Mridula, Neil, Nishan, Nishma, Raj, Rewa, Rishika, Tushin and Vijay – for all their hard work which will always be much appreciated. I would like to thank you, members of our society, for your continued support since it is only with your support that CUHCS can continue to grow and develop into an ever stronger and better society.

**Raghu Nandakumara**

*This Terms Events:*

**Discussion forum 4: RITUALS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE** – Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January

**Discussion Forum 5: SANSKRIT AND THE SCRIPTURES** – Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February

**Discussion Forum 6: HINDUISM – RESTRICTIVE RELIGION OR OPEN WAY OF LIFE?** – Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February

**AGM & Elections:** Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March

**Mastana** – Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> March at the University Concert Hall, West Rd (tbc)

(Note: the subjects of the discussion forums are subject to change.)

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<http://www.cuhcs.org.uk>

[info@cuhcs.org.uk](mailto:info@cuhcs.org.uk)

## Makar Sankrant (14<sup>th</sup> January 2001)

**Makar Sankrant is a festival celebrated by Hindus everywhere, although it is called by many names; 'Sankranti' in Maharashtra, 'Maghi' in Punjab, 'Sakarai' in Madhya Pradesh, 'Kicheri' in Uttar Pradesh, and 'Pongal' in the south.**

It is one of the few festivals that is determined by the solar, rather than the lunar, calendar. It marks the day when the sun starts to move northwards, past the tropic of Capricorn (Makar), and so heralds the winter harvest and the end of the cold weather. 'Surya-pooja' (worship of the sun) is performed to give thanks and to welcome the change in season. Therefore it is an auspicious time, a time to give, and to rejoice.

Sesame and sugarcane, which are two of the winter crops in South-East Asia, feature prominently in Sankranti celebrations everywhere. In Maharashtra, sweets made of sesame and jaggery are given with the words '*til-gul ghya, gohd-gohd bola*' - 'accept this sweet, and speak sweet words'. It is an occasion to forget past arguments and to remind ourselves to be more kind and considerate in our thoughts and words. This day is supposed to be particularly auspicious for married women, who are invited into the house and given gifts. Newly married women, especially, are given black sarees to wear- the only time when black clothing is given as a gift.

In other parts of India it is customary to fly kites on this day, and there are often spectacular displays to be seen. Many pilgrims travel to holy places to attend the 'melas' that take place at this time.

'Pongal' as this festival is known in southern India, is celebrated over three or four days. The word 'pongal' is the name of a special dish cooked on this day. 'Ponga' means 'boil', hence 'pongal' means that which is overflowing. It is cooked in a new mud pot, which is decorated, and consists of rice and pulses cooked in ghee (clarified butter) and milk.

Houses are cleaned and decorated, and a bonfire is made of all the old and broken objects to symbolise the fresh start to a New Year. Prayers and thanks are offered to God throughout the festival. Farmers honour their cattle by washing and decorating them, and offering pongal as a way of showing their gratitude for the cows who give them milk and the bullocks who pull the plough.

Makar Sankranti is an important festival because it reminds us of our dependence on the world around us and gives us an opportunity to pause in our humdrum lives to appreciate the magnificence and bounty of nature.

***Mridula Pare***

## CUHCS Are Proud To Present MASTANA

**Mastana-** tantalising music, breathtaking performances and spectacular dances

Annually held by CUHCS.

**SEWA-** the charitable organisation for which the show raises money

**The chance for you to be in the spotlight**

**And help a good cause**

**Nothing can beat this magical night**

**An evening of cultural entertainment from across the Indian Sub-continent.**

If you would like to take part or help with Mastana in any way then please contact Neha Shah (nbs22), Mitul Shah (ms411) or Sveta Alladi (spa24). The show will be held at the end of term.

## Holi

The most famous and interesting of the village festivals is Holi. The festival originates from the story of Prahlad. Hiranyakashipu (the golden-dressed one) was a most powerful king who obtained from Shiva, the sovereignty of the three worlds and persecuted his son Prahlad because he was such a devoted worshipper of Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu believed that the world's devotion should be paid to him alone. So his son's disobedience was a thorn in his side. He commenced to torture his son and after several attempts at his life he resorted to seeking Prahlad's sister's assistance. Holi or Holika, as she was known, had the boon that she could not be burned by fire. So, the plan was for her to take Prahlad into a fire. She would be untouched and Prahlad would be turned to ashes. The plan back-fired and Prahlad left unscathed while Holika was consumed by the fire.

Eventually, Hiranyakashipu was destroyed by an incarnation of Vishnu himself. Narasimha (Half-man, half-lion) comes to rid his devotees of the evilking in the tradition of Avatara (incarnations).

Holi is associated with much symbolism. The lighting of bonfires represents the fire that destroyed Holika. The festival is also called "festival of colour". Coloured and scented water is sprayed while handfuls of coloured powder are thrown as part of the festivities. The festival is very loud and multi-coloured. It represents the onset of spring and celebrates new life.

Celebrations in Bengal differ; there is more emphasis on worship of Krishna and fires are accompanied with a puja.

This year the festival falls on March 10th (month of Falguna according to the Hindu Calendar). Hopefully we can get together with the local community to celebrate this fantastic festival.

**Vijay Chauhan**

## Swadharma

**"Better to do one's own dharma imperfectly than the dharma of another, however well discharged. Better is death in one's own dharma; the dharma of another is fraught with fear" [Bhagavad Gita 3.35]**

"There are many angry people in the world. Everything makes them angry - the children are too noisy, their dinner is overcooked, their boss is incompetent, their subordinates are lazy. They are individuals thwarted from following their dharma. Their natural path of action has been blocked, perhaps by parental, economic or social pressure. In the wrong field of activity they are starved of satisfaction and in constant fear that they cannot do the job properly. Thus they are constantly angry.

There is no single English word which embraces the concept of dharma. It is your essential nature, law, duty, path. The unifying dharma of all of us is the Atman, but each of us has an individual dharma because of our vasanas (unmanifested desires).

The tiger must hunt, the nightingale must sing, the cow must yield. Similarly, there are tigers among men, nightingales among men, cows among men. We must act according to our dharma if we are to have peace in this life. In the words of the Shakesperian character, Polonius, 'Be true to thyself and it must follow as night follows day, thou canst not be false to any man.'

Self-realisation may be many lives away, but if we have been true to ourselves, to our own dharma, we will die having advanced some way towards the Eternal Self." [Purport of BG 3.35 by Swami A. Parthasarathy, in The Essential Teachings of Hinduism, edited by Kerry Brown, 1988. Rider: London et al.]

**Raghu Nandakumara**

## How do you Define a 'Hindu'?

Do we really need to be 'religious' to succeed in life? What does it mean to be religious? If we say our prayers everyday and visit the temple regularly are we going to be blessed and rewarded? Nowadays so many people follow their faith blindly. They have been told to do various things for their own good and yet have no understanding as to why they are doing it. They are limited to follow a set of rules and have their freedom seized. This is why so many youngsters refuse to be involved in religious issues and then become labelled as ignorant and arrogant. But are they truly ignorant?

I think people must be taught that to be a 'Hindu' or to follow any faith, you don't have to surrender your true beliefs to the teachings or accept what is written in a holy book and scriptures immediately. No soul is perfect and in order to ascend in life, you have to start from the essence of the religion. The core values of Hinduism and of many other religions are honesty, positivity, pureness, and non-possessiveness. If one can acquire these basic virtues, then one is already more religious than a person who knows every single word of the 'aarti' and yet has no ounce of generosity in their spirit.

Only after these basic qualities are realized, is one ready to be exposed to the scriptures and the holy book. At this point a person has an open mind and is then ready to understand, believe in and practice certain deep teachings. Just because a person doesn't know the significance of every festival in the Hindu calendar or the name of every God does not mean that they are not religious and more importantly that they are not Hindu. It just means that there is so much more to explore and enjoy in the religion of Hinduism. It may take someone a year to conquer the Gita or it may take someone his or her whole life...but time is irrelevant. Everyone is unique and has different capabilities. This does not mean that they are on a different religious level or that one person is a better Hindu than another. The word 'Hindu' stands alone, with no preceding adjective.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Recently, a young mother in Egdwere was overwhelmed after discovering an image of the 23<sup>rd</sup> God - Nemimath Bhagvan of the Jain Tirthankaras. It was found in a tub of Philadelphia cream cheese. She claims that her family are not practicing Jains and that this 'miracle' was a message stating that God aids **EVERYONE** true at heart.

**Nishma  
Shah**

*If you would like any further information, please feel free to contact any of the following people:*

<b>President:</b> Raghu Nandakumara	(rn223)	Rewa Vaidya	(rdv20)
<b>Vice President:</b> Vijay Chauhan	(vpc21)	Nishan Degnarian	(nd229)
<b>Secretary:</b> Tushin Shah	(ts254)	Neil Sabharwal	(ns259)
<b>Treasurer:</b> Mridula Pore	(mp291)	Abi Patel	(ap282)
<b>Publicity:</b> Nishma Shah	(ns258)	Dhiraj Bisarya	(db277)
Raj Shah	(rns58)	Rishika Sinha	(rs280)