
Michaelmas 2000

Newsletter



Namaste, Pranaam, Swaagatam,

CUHCS is back for another year filled with spirituality, culture and entertainment. Those members still around from last year will need no reminding about Mastana 2000 and Dhamaka (see inside for reviews). Add to that the Diwali Pooja and Dinner, various discussion forums on different aspects of Hindu Culture and regular Raas Garbha nights and it's quite clear that we are a very happening society.

That was then, this is now. By the time you read this we will have already had 3 Raas Garbha nights with the local community. So what have we got lined for the rest of this term?

Discussion forums: are a platform to express your views and discuss ideas on all aspects of Hindu Culture. The more viewpoints that are presented, the more we learn.

Diwali Pooja and Dinner: Our feature event for Michaelmas 2000. Traditional pooja to Lakshmi (the Goddess of Wealth) will be followed by quality Indian food supplied by one of London's finest caterers.

CUHCS prides itself on attracting a wide diversity to its events. We look forward to welcoming you

Raghu Nandakumara

Mastana (12th March 2000)

West Road Music Hall. Theatre of Dreams. Few will forget 12th March 2000 (not least because it was Mauritian Independence Day). M2K as the day was later to be known, went down as the biggest Mastana to date, in terms of audience (all 500 seats sold out one week before the performance with a waiting list to match), performers (over 70 varying from Bollywood to Bharat Natyam, Urdu Poetry to Comedy Sketches) and in terms of money raised for *सुभद्रा* charity SEWA international (£1500). The *सुभद्रा* Committee would like to thank all the performers who took part as well as those backstage and helpers with the food, technical support and moral support. We hoped the audience enjoyed it. What more can we say? Get your tickets early this year! Prepare to be blasted - MastanaMMI is coming your way ...

Dhamaka (17th June 2000)

सुभद्रा ended Lent term with Mastana. After 3 months holiday, I can still hear the Dhol reverberating in my ears reminding me of how Easter term was ended. In a break from the past, *सुभद्रा* replaced the traditional Cambridge garden party with something a little more Eastern. Cups of Tea and crumpets were cleared away for mango juice and samosas. The day England beat Germany in Euro 2000 was the day 70 + people crammed the ICCA Centre in Mill Road for a night of Garba, Bhangra, and Mahem! Even those with stamina (and blackened feet) cringed at the vocal skills of former and current committee members' efforts, until the sun was high in the sky the following day. A big Dhanyavad (thank you) to all who helped with food, transport and havoc that night... you know how to end this year!

Nishan Degnarian

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

info@cuhcs.org.uk

Gaumukh: the source of the Ganges

Gangotri Trek – by Nishan Degnarain

Summer 2000: 4 bold undergrads pushed to extremes by Tripos, voyaged to Gaumukh, the source of the Ganges in the Himalayas. This is their story

Gangotri is one of the holiest sites of pilgrimage in the Himalayas. The River Gang is the holiest river in Hinduism for she is considered to be a goddess and is one of the consorts of Lord Siva. The River Ganges, popularly known as Mother Ganges, was the mother of Bhishma, the great hero of the Mahabharata. The Ganges is known as the river of heaven because she agreed to come down from there to earth. She flowed through the matted locks of Lord Siva in order to break down her force; otherwise the earth would have been shattered by her direct impact. According to mythology, she was brought down from heaven by a king named Bhagiratha in order to purify the ashes of his ancestors. Gangotri is significant as this is where Bhagiratha performed his austerities to bring down Mother Ganges. Over the past 5000 years, the glacier has receded 19 km from Gangotri to present day Gaumukha (Cow's Mouth).

We arrived in Gangotri within a week of the end of the monsoons. Having been shaken by the 300km Indian bus journey (à la 'Romancing The Stone') where the road was washed out in several places, we were left breath-taken by the beauty of Gangotri and the rushing waterfalls next to our tourist bungalow. The air, crystal clear and so pure, was only broken by the smell of breakfast – piping hot tomato soup. Before embarking on the trek to Gaumukha you pass the temple dedicated to the Goddess Ganges (Ganga Mata). Its age is lost in myth and its constant renovation but the Murti (statue) of the Goddess Ganga within was over 2000 years old.

Beyond temple was a series of concrete steps leading up to the main trail. From here on, the trail was well defined with stonemarkers every km (even though the present trail has only been upgraded in the last 20 to 30 years). After the first four km there are some dhabas at Raj Ghat (3250m) where a tributary flows into the valley. Here we stopped for much needed Garam Chai, made from boiled glacial water (one place the water was actually purer than Indian bottled water!). Beyond Raj Ghat the glacial valley begins to widen, and just before Chirbasa you gain the first views of the Bhagirathi peaks. These are triple peaks together (snow capped to enhance their beauty!) consisting of Bhagirathi I, II, III 6856m, 6512m and 6454m respectively.

Just beyond Chirbasa (3600m and nine km from Gangotri) the trail passes the last of the coniferous pines and silver birches, which frame the Bhagirathi Range and the upper section of Shivlinga (6543 m). The mountain Shivlinga is shaped like a cobra's head which seems to watch over the glacier. The trail gradually ascends the next five km to Bhojbasa, involving an 800m sprint along the valley side to avoid landslides! We were now above the tree line, although juniper bushes were scattered up the otherwise barren hillside. Just below Bhojbasa the trail leads through an extensive boulder field - a hot and dusty section on a warm day. Our guide was finding the trail by following donkey droppings across the boulders - great! After spending the night in Bhojbasa (3790m) wearing 6 layers and brushing our teeth with glacial water from the Ganges in the morning, we set off early for the river's source.

It was 1.5 hours walk from Bhojbasa to the dhabas below Gaumukha. It was a further 2km to Gaumukha (3890m). This final section of the trail led through moraine and the boulders deposited by many landslides. It was hard going. The last 500m to the source of the Ganges follows a trail along the river bank. However the sight that awaited us when we witnessed the gush of the river emerging from the abrupt glacier wall cannot be described in words. It had to be *experienced* (not seen) to be believed! It is sure to impress even the less devout.

DID YOU KNOW?

- v Mother Ganges is always depicted riding a crocodile
- v Mythology states that if a dying man takes a drop of Ganges water, he is assured of heaven when he dies.
- v The total length of the Ganges is 1557 miles



For more information or details should anyone be interested in trekking, please contact Nishan on nd229@cam.ac.uk

Navratri

Navratri is one of the main Hindu festivals which brings the whole community together and captures both young and old alike. Navratri literally means “nine nights”, the festival coming to an end on the tenth day Vijaya Dashami (Victory Day). On this day we try to attain “seemolangahana” which means surpassing our limitations. In Hindu mythology, Navratri marks the celebration of two parallel stories: The defeat of the demon king Ravana by Rama and the defeat of the demon Mahishasura by the goddess Shakti (Durga).

The festival is celebrated in many different ways. In Gujarat on each of the nine nights the popular dance of Raas-Garba is played. In Bengal the festival is celebrated as Durga Pooja. In South India the story of Rama is enacted as “Rama Leela”

The nine nights are split into 3 sets, each being dedicated to Durga (goddess of strength and power), Lakshmi (goddess of wealth and prosperity) and Saraswati (goddess of knowledge and enlightenment). During the prayers we ask these goddesses for strength, satisfaction and knowledge to defeat the evils within ourselves.

Abi Patel

Diwali

Popularly known as the festival of light, Diwali or Deepavali is one of the biggest festivals in the Hindu calendar. People clean their houses, and decorate the entrance with intricate ‘rangoli’ designs to welcome the gods into their home. Oil lamps, or divas (from which Diwali gets its name) are lit and fireworks are let off. And, of course, as with a lot of Hindu festivals, there are mountains of different foods, especially snacks.

The festival of Diwali celebrates the glorious return of Lord Rama to his kingdom of Ayodhya following his exile and his victory over the notorious demon king, Ravana. In the same way that the citizens of Ayodhya decorated their city and stood in their best clothes to welcome their king, Hindus today decorate their houses and buy new clothes for their families. They pray to Lord Ganesha for an auspicious year and for wisdom and to the goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and beauty. Diwali occurs at a time when the harvest has been gathered and people offer their prayers to thank God for the past year and ask for blessings for the year to follow. In some parts of India, Diwali is considered the start of the new year.

Diwali is also important for the Sikh community. The sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, was released on this day after being falsely accused. The emperor granted him the release of as many of his followers who could hold on to his coat. The guru had a coat made with as many strings attached as there were followers, allowing everyone to be set free.

The Jain community believe that their twenty fourth ‘tirthankar’, Mahavir, achieved moksha (freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth) on the day of Diwali, and as such is an important day for Jains.

We hope that you will join the CU Hindu Cultural Society to celebrate Diwali here in Cambridge. There will be a pooja, to which everyone is very welcome, followed by a dinner and Raas garba. Tickets for the dinner and garba will be available shortly.

Mridula Pore

SANSKRIT - Language of the Gods

Sanskrit is the common language of the Hindu Scriptures. It is the oldest language in the world. It is the language of the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas. Sanskrit literature is easily the richest literature in the history of mankind. The word Sanskrit literally means "Perfected Language" or "Language brought to formal perfection". This is quite an appropriate name since NASA declared it to be "the only unambiguous language on the planet". Sanskrit is a scientific and systematic language. Its grammar is perfect and has attracted scholars worldwide.

Recently well-known linguists and at least two legendary computer-scientists have expressed the opinion that Sanskrit is the best language for use with computers. Sanskrit has a perfect grammar which has been explained to us by the world's greatest grammarian Panini. Sanskrit is also the mother of all Indo-European languages and the big sister of Greek and Latin. It is the origin of all the Indian languages.

The Sanskrit alphabet is called "devanagari" and literally means "cities of the gods". Rishis discovered Sanskrit and used it to create the mantras. These mantras were made up of a combination of sound vibrations, which when recited had a specific effect on the mind and the psyche. In the times of the Rishis, the main aim was to attain the truth, and what better medium than Sanskrit - the perfect tool. Due to its specificity and purity this seemed the best language with which to understand God's creation and as such is called "the great spiritual language of the world" (Joseph Campbell).

Until 1100AD Sanskrit was without interruption the official language of the whole of India. The dominance of Sanskrit is indicated by the wealth of literature of widely diverse genres including religious and philosophical, fiction, scientific literature to include mathematics, linguistics, astronomy, medicine and politics.

Max Muller, the great German scholar (and probably the greatest advocate for Sanskrit in the West) concluded that without knowledge of Sanskrit a liberal education would hardly be complete-India being the intellectual and spiritual ancestor of the race, historically and through Sanskrit.

Even in translation the works of Sanskrit have evoked the supreme admiration of Western poets and philosophers like Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Melville, Goethe, Schlegel, and Schopenhauer.

Dead Language? There are at least a dozen periodicals published in Sanskrit, all-India radio news broadcasts in Sanskrit, television shows and feature length movies produced in Sanskrit, one village of 3000 inhabitants who communicate through Sanskrit alone, not to mention countless smaller intellectual communities throughout India, schools, as well as families where Sanskrit is fostered. The famous Gayatri Mantra is on the lips of millions of Indians every morning. Sanskrit is not dead; Sanskrit is alive and well.

Vijay Chauhan

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	Rewa Vaidya (rdv20)
President: Raghu Nandakumara (rn223)	Nishan Degnarian(nd229)
Vice President: Vija Chauhan (vpc21)	Neil Sabharwal (ns259)
Secretary: Tushin Shah (ts254)	Abi Patel (ap282)
Treasurer: Mridula Pore (mp291)	Dhiraj Bisarya (db277)
Publicity: Nishma Shah (ns258)	Raj Shah (rms58)

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

info@cuhcs.org.uk