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## Message from the President

By Mridula Pore

**Namaskaar and swaagatam,**

**WELCOME to both our old and new members.** I hope that you have had an excellent summer and are looking forward to the new academic year.

Over the coming term the CUHCS committee will be doing their best to offer you a wide range of events.

There is the festival of Navaratri which we celebrate with Raas Garba alongside the local community.

There will also be fortnightly discussion forums on a range of topics relevant to Hindu culture today. These are always lively and interesting sessions that bring together a wide range of opinions and thoughts.

For more information about Hinduism and its culture you can refer to our library which is open to all members.

The highlight of the Michaelmas term is, of course, Diwali. After a traditional Lakshmi puja you can enjoy

some wonderful home cooking at our annual dinner.

The Lent term will see the return of the increasingly popular variety show, 'MASTANA'.

This is a display of the amazing range of art forms that Hindu culture encompasses and, as ever, all the proceeds will go to our official charity, Sewa International. It is also an opportunity for all members of the society to get involved in the production of the show.

As you may know, we are affiliated to the National Hindu Students Forum, UK. To mark the 10 year anniversary of NHSF there will be a convention of Hindu students from across the world held in Birmingham this December.

We will keep you updated about this and other events held by organisations around the country.

I hope that you will be able to make time for CUHCS and that together we can take the society on to new heights

I wish you all the best for the coming year.

## The Committee

Please do not hesitate to contact any of us if you have any queries, problems or suggestions.

<b>President:</b>	Mridula Pore	(Sidney Sussex, mp291)	<b>Other committee members:</b>	
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Abhilasha Patel	(Newnham, ap282)	Alkesh Patel	(Trinity, aap32)
<b>Secretary:</b>	Sveta Alladi	(New Hall, spa24)	Nikhil Shenai	(Jesus, ns271)
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Devarshi Saxena	(Christ's, ds304)	Raghu Nandakumara	(Jesus, rn223)
<b>Publicity:</b>	Mitul Shah	(Christ's, ms411)	Vaibhav Gupta	(Christ's, vg223)

## Editorial

By Mitul Shah

**THIS YEAR sees us welcome new faces to Cambridge, and welcome back old friends.** Michaelmas always proves to be an exciting term for members of CUHCS, and this time is no exception.

For the benefit of new members, I would like to explain that the newsletter is a open forum for the views of its members. We are always looking for new ideas, and will do our best to publish all articles submitted.

Home to the two major festivals of Navratri and Diwali, this term is always eventful for Hindu students. Traditionally, this is a time of year where we celebrate. Here in Cambridge, we too will be celebrating, and look forward to seeing you there.

However, none of us can look over the terrible recent episode in America without reflection.

The sheer scale of the human catastrophe there has unfortunately made this one of the defining events of our generation. At such a time, I feel most strongly

that it is a time to extend our thoughts beyond religion, and appeal to human nature.

It is my belief that Man is fundamentally good. Variety is the essence of humanity, and if we cannot embrace diversity then we have descended to the level of the brute. The only way to achieve greater morality, regardless of your religion, is through respect for others. Indeed, it is only this that can be called true faith.

Hate and spite may win wars and countries but only love and compassion will conquer hearts and minds.

## The Power of Faith - In The Words of the Great



*'All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes, and cry that it is dark. Know that there is no darkness around us. Take the hands away and there is the light which was from the beginning.'*

- Swami Vivekananda



*'The wise one who gives to the foremost, concentrates on the foremost, whether he becomes a deva or a human, rejoices in his foremost attainment. Those who have faith in detachment have faith in the foremost, and for those with faith in the foremost the result will be foremost.'*

- Buddha



*'By hearkening to the Name, man dives deep into an ocean of virtues; by hearkening to the Name, the disciple becomes an apostle. By hearkening to the Name, the blind man sees the way; by hearkening to the Name, impassible streams are forded.'*

- Guru Nanak

## Polytheism and Idolatry

By Nikhil Shenai

**"THERE IS nothing worth worship but God."** (Quran, The Family of Imraan).

Polytheism and idolatry are charges often levelled at eastern religions, and especially Hinduism. If such charges are accepted, the quote from the Quran above would seem to conflict irreconcilably with eastern religion. However, the quote from the Gita below supports the quote from the Quran:

***"Even those who are devotees of other gods, worship them with faith, they also sacrifice to Me alone, O Son of Kunti [Arjuna], though not according to the true law."*** (Bhagavad Gita, IX-23).

This quote implies that the 'true law' is to worship (the one) God, and not 'other gods'. But who or what are these other gods?

I feel that 'gods' here refers

to the various ideals which people strive to follow or attain (as in my last article, faith/religion is the personal attempt to reach these ideals). So 'other gods' would indicate ideals other than God (the ideal of Truth according to Gandhi).

Using this interpretation, the worship of different devas and the use of statues in prayer is not necessarily inconsistent with worshipping (the one) God. Sri Ramakrishna asserted that the devas represent different aspects of God, while icons help the mind to focus in prayer to God. If the practices of worshipping the various devas and using icons are recognised as such, they ultimately strengthen worship of God. On these grounds, eastern faith is not polytheistic or idolatrous.

Instead, the two practises are a means to an end; they are a way of training the mind to

concentrate on the Absolute. Sri Ramakrishna and others felt that as the mind grew more able to focus on God, the number of devas worshipped and the size of icons could reduce. Ultimately, the mind would be disciplined enough to remain on God all the time without any need for representations.

To conclude, eastern religion is not polytheistic or idolatrous. All religions agree that ultimately there is only room for one ideal – God / Truth, though they may differ in the means of attaining to the ideal. This has an implication relevant to events today.

A person cannot be a Hindu nationalist; either they are a Hindu and they follow Truth, or they are a nationalist and they live for their country. Neither can a person be an Islamic terrorist; either they worship God, or they are committed to violence.

## Planets of the Gods

**By Dev Saksena**

**HAVE YOU ever wondered why certain people fast on certain days?** Or perhaps, why there are some days when everything you do goes wrong and others when all you can do is right? The answer to some of these questions may be found in Hinduism's weekly or planet gods, dictating the characteristics of the days of the week and what can and should be done on certain days. Here is a summary of the days and their respective Gods:

### **Ravi-var (Surya or Sunday)**

This day is influenced by the Sun. Ravi is another name of Surya, the sun-god. He has a red complexion and thus it is auspicious to wear red on this day. He may have two or four hands, which carry two lotus flowers or a conchshell and a disc. He rides a chariot with one wheel pulled by seven horses. Sunday is a good day to start a new endeavour. Usually Ravi is a malefic planet in Hindu astrology. Attributes of Surya are religious, charitable, learned and strength.

### **Som-var (Moon or Monday)**

Monday is under the influence of the moon planet (Soma). It is good to fast and wear white on Mondays. Soma has a white complexion and carries a mace. He rides on a chariot with three wheels pulled by three horses. Someone who is born under the influence of Soma will be respectable, rich, powerful, have many friends, and be honoured. The Moon is usually an auspicious planet. Attributes



*Some Hindus believe that the moon confers Wealth and Education*

Soma confers are wealth, education and studiousness.

### **Mangal-var (Mars or Tuesday)**

Mangala (mars) has a red complexion. A person under the effect of this planet has a tendency to suffer through accidents, robbery, attack, or imprisonment. This planet is usually detrimental and is often worshipped so that one can become free of its detrimental effects. One can wear red to help ward off the effects of this planet. If a leader starts a war on this day, he will be victorious. However, one should not start an auspicious activity on this day. Attributes Mangal confers are education, energy and fame.

### **Budh-var (Mercury or Wednesday)**

This is the day of Mercury (Budha) who has a light green complexion. He also wears green clothes and a green garland. He has four arms and carries a club, a sword and a shield. It is considered especially auspicious to feed

Brahmins on this day.

Budha's influence is neither favourable or unfavourable – it exerts its influence in reference to the other planets. Budha confers the attributes of happiness and good fortune.

### **Gurupati-var (Jupiter or Thursday)**

Guruvara is the priest of the demi-gods and rules Jupiter. He has a golden complexion and yellow is the colour for Thursday. He usually sits on a lotus or rides on a chariot pulled by eight horses. Someone under the influence of Guruvara will have a lot of wealth. Attributes Guruvara confers are respect, leadership qualities, and strength.

### **Shukra-var (Venus or Friday)**

Shukra means 'bright' and he is the teacher of demons and can bring the dead back to life. He has a white complexion Shukra is usually a very auspicious planet and a person under the influence of Shukra will be honoured across the land and will attain a high office. Shukra confers the attributes of charity and long life.

### **Shani-var (Saturn or Saturday)**

This planet is potentially the most detrimental. If wrongly placed in a person's chart it can cause poverty and bereavement. Shani is black-coloured. Shani-shrines are found in temples of other Gods throughout India. By worshipping Shani, one can rid oneself of the misfortune that this planet causes.

To gain the ultimate benefit, it should be worshipped on Saturdays. Attributes conferred by Shani are opulence, long life, and talent.

## Vegetarianism in Hinduism

**By Sveta Alladi**

**VEGETARIANISM, known in Sanskrit as Shakahara, was for thousands of years a principle of health and environmental ethics throughout India.** Nowadays Indians appear to be less strict about their dietary habits. The religious importance of vegetarianism has faded and it has become a more regional tradition, more common amongst South Indians. I am myself a vegetarian and have been all my life without really understanding why. All I was aware of was from a storybook that I read as a child explaining that the cow was sacred and so I couldn't eat beef.

The word Shakahara literally means to consume (ahara) vegetable (shaka). The term for meat eating is manshara, "mansa" meaning meat. This word conveys a deeper meaning of life's sacredness and an understanding of the law of karma. It is explained in the 2,000 Manu Dharma Shastra:

**"The learned declare that the meaning of mansa (flesh) is, he (sa) will eat me (mam) in the other world**

**whose flesh I eat here."**

In Hinduism vegetarianism is taught as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. Therefore consuming meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence against the animal kingdom. It is suggested that the desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. Some people think that vegetarianism allows fish and eggs in the diet but this is not strictly following the Hindu principles of vegetarianism.

Ahimsa, is the name given to the law of non-injury, it is the Hindu's first duty in fulfilment of his religious obligations to God as defined by Vedic scripture. Mahatma Gandhi is famous for following this principle strictly and preaching non-violence throughout his life. Jainism exhorts, "non-violence is the highest religion" and in Christianity, "Thou shall not kill".

This does not mean that by eating meat you are not a good Hindu. There are many "rules" laid down in the scriptures that have been modified over the years. Previously all castes of Hindus

ate meat including Brahmins. To give a feeling of self-improvement Brahmins began refraining from eating meat, an enjoyed but unnecessary food group. This helped differentiate the Brahmins from other Hindus. Nowadays more Hindu Brahmins are eating meat in order to fit in with the western lifestyle and they are forgetting the original values on which the religion is based.

However more people are also turning to vegetarianism as a healthier option, a way of losing weight by reducing the calorie intake and increasing fibre in the diet. Recently more people also disapprove of the killing of animals and it has become easier in the west to maintain a vegetarian diet. In India in particular more non-Brahmins are becoming vegetarian in order to be associated with a higher status.

The basic principles of vegetarianism seem easy to understand but perhaps more difficult to follow in the western world. However I have managed like many others without any trouble and this small effort is my little contribution to make me feel a Hindu.

# DHAMAKA 2001

## “May Week Ka Pathaka - Yeh Hai Dhamaka”

By Mitul Shah

CUHCS held its second ‘DHAMAKA’ on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2001, complete with a new cheesy slogan.

After all the exams, everyone was in a mood to relax and enjoy themselves, and Dhamaka gave them the very best of opportunities to do just that. The night got going with traditional Raas-Garba, with excellent music from the local Hindu community.

Then, the bhangra kicked in, kindly supplied by the DP Roadshow. The music went on



*Raas-Garba at Dhamaka*

well into the early hours, and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

In between, a variety of authentic Indian foods were served to the hungry revellers.

Overall, the event was a huge success, and definitely lived up to its reputation as the best society event in May Week.

Many thanks to the local Hindu community for kindly letting us use their community centre for Dhamaka.

We look forward to Dhamaka this year, which promises to be bigger and better than ever.

## Events This Term

**MICHAELMAS** is one of our busiest terms, and we hold a wide variety of events. Here are the details:

**FRESHER’S SQUASH:** This will be from 4pm to 6pm on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October in the New Cellars of Pembroke College. It’s a great chance to meet the other people who make up the society, and to learn what CUHCS can offer you. Free refreshments will be provided.

**DISCUSSION FORUMS:** This is the chance for you to have your say on matters concerning Hinduism, ethics, and life. They are very informal, and are open to all. This is a great way for both members and non-members alike to expand their knowledge, and hear alternative viewpoints. Our current timetable for this term is:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. What is religion?                       | Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> October, 7pm<br>Fisher Building, St. Johns  |
| 2. Dharma - its relevance and implications | Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> October, 7pm<br>Fisher Building, St. Johns   |
| 3. Karma and the laws of reincarnation     | Wednesday 7 <sup>th</sup> November, 7pm<br>Fisher Building, St. Johns |

Please note that details of discussion forums are subject to change, and will be confirmed by email.

**DIWALI DINNER:** This is our largest event this term. It starts off with a pooja (explained step-by-step in English), and then a delicious homecooked meal. With some authentic Indian entertainment too, it is truly a night not to be missed. Details to be circulated soon by email.

**NAVRATRI:** This nine day festival starts this year on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October. We regularly attend the Raas-Garba put on by the local Hindu community. Details to be circulated soon by email.

### ***NHSF (National Hindu Students Forum) Events***

CUHCS is affiliated to the NHSF, and all members are welcome to attend the national events. Depending on demand, we may be able to provide transport.

**NHSF ANNUAL LECTURE:** This year, the speaker is Francois Gautier, a world-renowned journalist. The lecture is entitled: ‘*Hindus, Form your own identity! A Western Journalist’s Perspective.*’ It will be on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November, at 4.30 p.m. in the Old Theatre, London School of Economics.

**DYNAMIC SPIRIT:** This is an international convention of Hindu students to mark 10 years of the NHSF. It will be in Aston University, Birmingham, from Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December to Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December. Details soon.

*This newsletter is an open forum for all members of CUHCS, and the articles and information in it are based upon personal opinions. These do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of CUHCS on any particular issue. Hence, although we make every effort to ensure that the material is suitable, CUHCS cannot be held liable for any views expressed.*