

# patrika

*the voice of the Hindu Centre, Singapore*



*August-September 2013*

## President's Message

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Dear friends of Hindu Centre,

Namaste. One of Hinduism's characteristics is the idea of a personal Guru, or spiritual mentor. Such a concept is present in all our stories and mythologies. When a Hindu youth reaches a teachable age, he is sent off to the forest to be tutored by a Guru to be fully initiated into the philosophy and values of Hinduism. This Guru-Sishya relationship is venerated in all our stories.

This idea has been taken into the modern era by Hindus following many different spiritual guides and leaders. All over India and the diaspora, where Hindus are to be found, there are many ashrams and missions, where the faithful are members. Here they attend bhajans, listen to talks, attend satsangs and have books and media resources available to them. Many Hindus indeed could attend more than one such ashram or mission.

In Singapore too, there are many Hindu groups each following a different Swamiji, Swamini or Guru. The Guru-Shishya tradition is well-established.

Hindu Centre, Singapore has taken a different track. Instead of linking itself to any particular Guru or mission, it has reached back to the source itself – the Shashtras. These include the vast body of Hindu scriptures based on the Vedas and Agamas. Hence, we are exposing our members and participants in our activities to the essential and undiluted nature of Hinduism.

Our philosophy has been to introduce our members to the core essence of Hinduism. We do our research and study directly from the Shashtras. If anyone asks who does Hindu Centre follow, our answer is clear as day. It is the Hindu Shastras.

Sincerely,

N Varaprasad

## In Focus

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### Interview with Devi Vanamali

*In Singapore recently for the launch of her 11<sup>th</sup> book “The Science called Hinduism” (a copy of which she has donated to the Hindu Centre’s library), Devi Vanamali took some time off to speak about her ashram at Rishikesh and the work she does among the local people.*

**Namaste, let me begin by confessing that I’d never heard of your organization until now.**

We don’t like too much publicity but we have a website ([www.vanamaliashram.org](http://www.vanamaliashram.org)). Have you been to it?

**I did, but a website doesn’t give everything - like personal details, for instance.**

Personal details are something I don’t like being asked about at all. I’m not very interesting as a person.

**In that case, can you say something more about the ashram and your plans for it?**

I started the ashram about 30 years ago in Rishikesh in a very small way. We still have only four rooms for guests so although anybody can come and stay they have to write well in advance. I don’t want to expand. All the other **ashrams** are expanding beyond limits.

**How many people stay permanently at the ashram?**

Well, we have two temples that function through the year and so there is a *pujari* who lives with his family. The temples are named after Badrinath and Kedarnath and were installed by my guru Sri Jayendra Saraswati Maharaja who is the Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. He himself went on a *padayatra* to Badri-Kedar and brought back mud from there. He installed the temples for all those not capable of making it up there but said that they would get the same benefits by praying here. He took a personal interest, sending his own craftsmen and workers to build the temples in the South Indian style.

**How did the Shankaracharya become your guru?**

I’d gone to take the blessings of the Shankaracharya (the predecessor of the present one) before I came to Rishikesh and at that time we had met (of course he wasn’t the Shankaracharya then). After I came to Rishikesh I was desperate to have a guru. Although I was sure that my guru would find me and I did not need to search, yet I searched for him. I almost approached several people but at the last moment something would stop me from asking them.



Then one day the Shankaracharya was passing my ashram. My brother saw him and told me. I went running after him and asked him if he would come and bless the ashram. I was surprised when he agreed because they normally don't go to private ashrams. Then, in the following days, while he was in Rishikesh, I would go to meet him. One day while everybody was sitting with him, I burst out and asked him whether he would agree to be my guru. To my amazement, he agreed and gave me my mantra which I have been using since then. It's very strange. My life has been mapped out for me by the Lord.

### **So you now live mostly in Rishikesh?**

I stay there in winter from October-March. During the summer, I go to a tiny village called Gajja on the Chamba-Tehri road near the Kotishwar dam. There is so much poverty there. In the government schools, there are no seats or benches. So we have now started giving these and things like uniforms and books to the children. Then we give rations to old people in both Gajja and Rishikesh. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month, we give provisions like 5 kg atta, 5 kg sugar, tea and milk powder.



My dream actually was to start an old people's home for the really poor. But that requires a lot of manpower and is quite a difficult task. Instead of that, we are now getting people to adopt old ladies by paying Rs 1,000 every month. The condition of women in Garhwal is pathetic. They toil from morning to night and get nothing while the men just loll around. We have opened bank accounts for each of them and their sponsors deposit money every month.

We also collect old clothes. A girl in Singapore sends us huge cartons of old clothes and lots of other stuff like utensils, pencils, toys, which she collects and which reaches us at our door in Rishikesh. These children had never seen a toy in their lives. I remember when I gave a toy rabbit to a boy he screamed in horror. Now, they all clamour for toys.

### **How did she hear of the ashram?**

She's my daughter's sister-in-law and has come to the ashram. All the people who support us have come to the ashram. We don't ask for money. Whatever we deserve, we will get, and we have been getting whatever I can possibly manage. Why go beyond that? You have to be able to do something with all the donations you get otherwise there may be temptations to use it for yourself. I don't want to get into that racket.

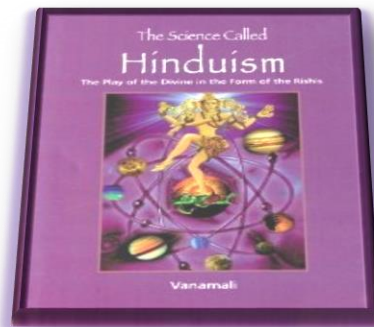
### **What will happen after you?**

You should never think you are the only one. There are hundreds of organizations. We are just cogs in an enormous machine. One cog goes, another can be put in.

### **You are in Singapore to launch your book "The Science called Hinduism."**

Yes, this is my 11<sup>th</sup> book. Before this, I'd written the six *Lilas- Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Devi, Hanuman, Lila of the sons of Shiva* (some of these have been published under different names by foreign publishers) - a

*Gita, Nitya Yoga* - essays on my guru *Gurudeva*, the Kamakoti Peetham, and a cooking called the *Taste*



translation of the *Bhagavad the Bhagavad Gita*, a book Shankaracharya of Kanchi book on Sattvic Vedic *Divine*.

### **That sounds interesting. Can you say something more about it?**

It's on Indian vegetarian cooking. I'm not a great cook so I don't know how I wrote it. I don't know how I've written anything. I am only a typist. But I want Hindus to be proud of their heritage and religion and, sadly, due to the onslaught of Western ideas, there has been a gradual erosion of pride, especially among those who live abroad. In fact, one of the most unfortunate things to happen because of the subtle British attempts to undermine our heritage (I have written more about this in my book) is that many Hindus themselves, looking at their religion through Western eyes, tried to mould it in a manner pleasing to the West.

**But Hindu reform movements at the end of the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century also did a lot of good by building opinion against such practices as sati, ill treatment of widows, child marriage etc.**

I don't deny that the British did some good for India. We owe our railways and roads to them. Certainly they did some good by inspiring our own people to fight against these practices. But this book is an attempt to make Hindus realize the greatness of their religion and not an attempt to point out its bad side. Perhaps I should write another book to that effect.

## Mark your calendar

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### Balagurukulam

In this term, the Balagurukulam students will go on an excursion to Gardens by the Bay on September 1, 2013.



Term 2 ends on October 13, 2013. The next session will start in the New Year.

### Vedic Yoga

A unique blend of Asanas (postures), Pranayama (breathing) and Dhyana (meditation) techniques, Vedic Yoga as described in our Hindu scriptures helps attain inner peace and good health.

Weekly classes every Tuesday at the Hindu Centre from 7.30-9.00 pm.  
Fee: \$50

Weekly classes every Wednesday at the Sri Ruthra Kaliyamman Temple, 100 Depot Road from 7.30-9.00 pm.  
Fee: \$20

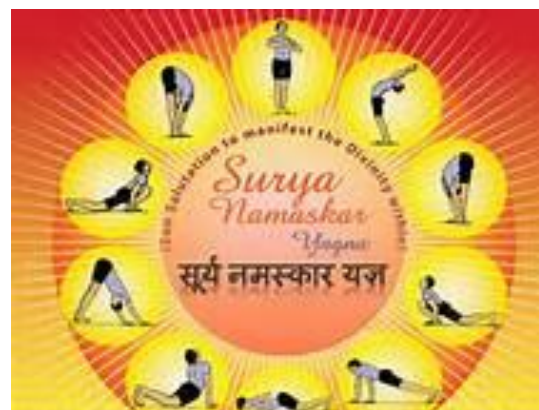
### Surya Namaskaram

In the month of Aavani, Surya Namaskaram is observed to worship the Sun God.

Join us this month of Aavani for Sun salutation.

Dates: 18<sup>th</sup> Aug, 25<sup>th</sup> Aug, and 15<sup>th</sup> Sept.  
Venue: Hindu Centre  
Time: 7.30 am-9 a.m.

Dates: 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. and 8<sup>th</sup> Sept.  
Venue: Sri Ruthrakaliyamman Temple, Depot Road  
Time : 7.30 am- 9 a.m



## Glories of Devi

In the Devi Mahatmyam, there are many stories relating to how the Devi vanquished evil demons and saved mankind from many sufferings. These stories teach us ways of defeating our negative thoughts and overcoming our many irrational desires.

The classes are brought to you by Sri Ruthrakaliyamman Temple in conjunction with Hindu Centre.

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> Aug, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept, 10<sup>th</sup> Sept, 17<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Venue: Sri Ruthrakaliyamman Temple, 100 Depot Road, Singapore 109670

Fee: S\$ 20

For Registration, please call Hindu Centre @ 2978540

Or email at [edu@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:edu@hinducentre.org.sg)



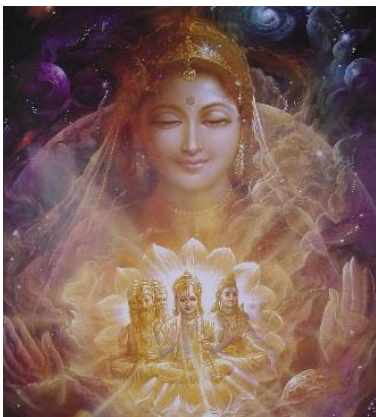
## Youth '4' Youth Camp IV

The 3Day-2Night camp rescheduled due to the spot for further updates



which was scheduled for June 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> had to be haze in Singapore at that time. Please watch this on the youth camp.

## Bhajans



Join us for a mesmerizing evening of sacred chants and songs

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2013

Venue: Hindu Centre

Time: 7.15 pm to 9 pm.

## Book Fair



Hindu Centre's next Book Fair is on 31<sup>st</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> September. The Book Fair will carry not only Books and CDs but also Key chains, T Shirts, and several other items. In this round of sale, there are several new titles that have been acquired recently by the Centre. The Centre has taken care to choose books that will appeal to a wide range of readers. CDs of daily bhajans, prayers, and mantras for relaxation will also be on sale. The T-Shirts that will be on sale at the book sale have been specially printed by the Hindu Centre for children.

Please visit the centre on these days and avail of this great opportunity of owning wonderful books, CDs, T-shirts, and other spiritual knickknacks.

There will be also a yoga demonstration during the book sale!



## Raksha Bandhan

Kivanto Vishwam Aryam  
Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

"Join Hands for Togetherness"  
Raksha Bandhan 2013  
For Universal Brotherhood

Universal outlook is the hallmark of Hindu thought. Many festivals, rituals and ceremonies are celebrated to reaffirm this spirit over and over again.

Rakshabandhan is a gesture of the members of the community reaffirming their pledge to protect their loved ones and the society they live in. A simple thread symbolizes love, care and affection and our bonds with the family as well as our society.

Organized by Hindu Centre along with over 30 other organizations in Singapore

Date  
Sunday, 25 August 2013

Time  
9:30 a.m. - Breakfast  
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. - Yagna  
11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. - Cultural Program including Rakhi, followed by lunch

Venue  
Arya Samaj, 113, Syed Alwi Road (Opposite Mustafa Centre)  
San Gachadhvan San Vadadhan San Vo Manasi Janatam  
\* Let us walk together, talk together, have one thought \*

25 August, 2013



Raksha Bandhan, or the "bond of protection", symbolizes the life-long bond between brother and sister. On this day, the brother promises to take care of his sister for life and the sister prays for her brother's well-being by tying a thread around her brother's right wrist.

Please join in the celebrations on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August at Arya Samaj, 113, Syed Alwi Road.

# Ganesha Chaturthi

9 Sept, 2013

Lord Ganesha is believed to be the remover of all obstacles. Invoking the blessings of Lord Ganesha before any important venture is believed to give success to us.

Hindu Centre wishes all readers a very happy Ganesha Chaturthi!



## Update of Centre Activities

### Hinduism 101- Dive In

The Patrika team attended a part of one of the sessions of Hinduism 101 classes in which members participate in lively discussions about the meaning of Hindu rituals and the importance of the Vedas and the Upanishads to daily living.

The team spoke to the students who shared their thoughts about the impact of this course on their lives:



*“Attending these classes enhanced my personal growth. I gained a better knowledge why we pray”*

*“Attending these classes has helped me to move from zero knowledge to a good idea about what Hinduism is”.*

*“Hinduism is a way of life. The classes have prepared me physically and mentally to live life like a Hindu”.*

*“The classes have made me proud to be a Hindu. It has given me confidence in my Faith so that I am now better prepared to guide the young ones in my family about the meaning of Hinduism”*



Speaking of their teacher, Ms. Vasanthi, the students said how the classes are interactive and seem more like sharing sessions. Difficult concepts are conveyed in simple terms which makes these lessons enjoyable. Ms. Vasanthi reminisced about how she was a student of Hinduism 15



years ago and today when she teaches this course, she says that it is a learning process for her as well.

## Mitra

The 8<sup>th</sup> batch of Mitra volunteers completed the training programme conducted by the Centre and were presented with their certificates this August. The certificates were presented to them in a ceremony held at Sri Sivan Temple, Geylang on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2013.



## Mitra

On 19<sup>th</sup> July, Dr. Ganapathy Narayanan spoke to Mitra Volunteers on “understanding gangs as subcultures”. Some of the Mitra volunteers shared their thoughts with the Patrika team about the talk, and this has been summarized below by one of the centre volunteers.

“Being serving counsellors we often have unanswered questions that linger in our minds, Questions such as why do they deviate so much from social norms? Why do they ascribe to such alternative values and why is aggression such a valued attribute amongst them? Dr Gana’s talk addressed these questions and provided an inside into Gangs and their rise as subcultures. He stated that Gang subcultures provided an alternative social system that promoted alternative values in which showing attributes of aggression and masculinity were encouraged. He introduced three different types of subcultures Criminal, Conflict and Retreatist and described their characteristics. After this he profiled two prison gangs Sarajumbo and Omega and their process into prison gang folklore. The talk ended with pictures of gang member tattoos celebrating their deviant identity and distrust for law.”

## Interfaith Forum

As part of the Community Engagement Programme (CEP), OnePeople.sg has been conducting the "Introduction to Religions workshop" for various grassroots and community leaders, Ministry & State Boards, educators, and workplaces. To introduce Hinduism and its tenets, Hindu Centre's teacher, Mr. Saravanan Sinaya presented to students and staff of Singapore Polytechnic on 17th July 2013. His talk was well received and appreciated by many in the audience who had been thus far unfamiliar with or had inadequate understanding of Hinduism. Hindu Centre will continue to work closely with OnePeople.sg to bring knowledge about Hinduism to a wider audience.

## Guru Purnima Celebrations



Guru Purnima is observed to pay respects to Sage Veda Vyasa. This year, Guru Purnima was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July and Hindu Centre celebrated the occasion joyously.

The celebrations started with a puja followed by a talk on "Guru in the Yoga tradition". After the talk there was a meditation session followed by bhajans. Around 30 people including teachers, Mitra counsellors and other guests attended the function.

## Excellence Award

The Hindu Centre is proud that its Senior Executive, Mr Kabirdas Perumal, fondly known as Das by his friends and the Centre's volunteers, received the Award of Excellence from the Hindu Endowments Board (HEB).

In its citation, HEB stated that "over the past 35 years, Das has actively volunteered for all temple's events including Purattasi, Thaipusam, Vaikunda Ekadasi and deity processions. Even after giving so much of his time for the Hindu Community, Das still finds time for grassroots work."



Das's daughter, Ms. Suganya Kabirdas, received the award from the Minister of Transport, Mr Lui Tuck Yew, at the HEB Awards Ceremony held on 21 July, while Das was on a pilgrimage in India. For Das, Seva is an instrumental part of his life.

# VolunteerSpeak

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When I was a teenager, I liked to read books on Indian Philosophy and Hinduism. Keen to know more, I spent many years searching for a place where I could learn about Hinduism, and in June 2001 a youth wing member of Hindu Centre introduced me to the work the Centre was doing to educate people about Hinduism. This youth member's passion and knowledge, especially at such a young age (he was 21 at that time) inspired me to attend classes conducted by the Centre.



After attending the first course, I began to see things differently. I became more tolerant and understood the need for looking inward, to be aware of my many flaws. It was a time for introspection, a time for change. What impressed me most was that we were not taught by Swamis or traditional Gurus **but by fellow Singaporeans** who studied Hindu religion over and above their full-time jobs, and chose to share the knowledge selflessly with no payment in return. I was further enthused by my young teacher. His knowledge of Hinduism and delivery of the subject material was done with such charisma that I was both impressed and humbled. Thereafter, I attended most of the courses and trained in their various teaching programs.

I was moved and wanted to 'give back' because I had personally benefitted from all this sharing. Volunteering at the Centre helps me to learn more and this continuous learning helps me reflect and keep things in perspective. I am constantly struck by the vast knowledge contained in the Hindu scriptures and now understand the old adage - "the more you learn, the more you realize how little you know!"

I have realised that 'seva'- giving back to society - is paramount in our teachings and I wish to continue as long as it is physically possible. I stay motivated because of Ishvara's grace that removes all our obstacles, Management Committee whose support and confidence moves me (and others) to contribute more, and of course, fellow volunteers and HC admin who are there for you no matter what and not expecting anything in return.

*For Enquiries/Registration:*

*Tel: 62918540 (Hindu Centre)*

*SMS Registration: 8533 0667*

[edu@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:edu@hinducentre.org.sg)

Please visit our website  
(<http://www.hinducentre.org.sg/>  
) or

Facebook page

The Hindu Centre, Singapore, is dedicated to the spiritual progress of Hindus through the three pillars of **Jnana**, **Bhakti**, and **Seva**. The Centre's vision is to become an institution of authority on Hinduism in the region by teaching the core values of Hinduism, creating a strong hub of devotional activities with a good outreach of attendees, and through strong and sustainable Seva initiatives. The Centre hopes to strengthen the induction and management of youth volunteers by creating a greater sense of ownership and engagement at different levels in the management of these programmes.

Drop us a note to [patrika@hinducentre.org.sg](mailto:patrika@hinducentre.org.sg) if you want to tell us what more you would like to see in your "Patrika"!

Please forward this newsletter to all your friends and relatives!