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Want to tell us what else you would like to see in "Patrika", then drop us a note at:
patrika@hinducentre.org.sg

Do forward this newsletter to all

patrika
the voice of the Hindu Centre, Singapore

November 2015

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President's Message

Namaste Friends,

2015 is drawing to a close, and during the recent months we have seen a flurry of activity at the Hindu Centre as well as outside. The Centre continues to be a vibrant hub for Education, Bhakti and Seva activities. The vibes come from the volunteers who keep the Centre pulsating with bhajans, Hinduism classes, talks, yoga, counselling, book sales, and so on. In fact, our booth selling books, CDs and T-shirts at various temple events is a welcome sight to all visitors.

We recently concluded a 4-part lecture series called 'The Three Schools of Vedanta' by Shri V Prabhakar Rao. We held a wonderfully convivial 10th anniversary dinner for Mitra with stakeholders, counsellors, volunteers and donors on the 17th October.



You can read about all of these here and more in this issue of *Patrika*.

If you have any suggestions or feedback to the centre, you are welcome to drop me a line at presidenthinducentre@gmail.com.

I would like to wish everyone of our readers a very happy Deepavali !

Light up your lives, sweeten your taste-buds and dress up to celebrate the victory of *Dharma* over *Adharma*.

N Varaprasad

President Hindu Centre

Happy Deepavali



In Focus

In this interview, Shri Venkoborao spoke to Patrika about how the ancient epic Ramayana teaches valuable lessons about ethics, morals, and duty and becomes a seminal text of utmost relevance to the contemporary world.

Please tell us about the time you became interested in The Ramayana.

I was tremendously inspired, when as a 9 year old boy, I had listened to the entire Ramayana discourse over 48 days by Sri Anantha Rama Dikshitar. The slokas came alive in his ringing majestic resonant voice. Probably my understanding was very limited being a little boy, but it stayed in my mind ever-green. Rama, as a very straightforward being wedded to Truth and Dharma, gradually became an idol



Shri Rao at HC



Ranganji

for me.

Of course, pursuit of education and career as well as the pleasures and duties of family life kept me away from any serious study of Ramayana or even other scriptures. Sometime over the past twenty years I could get back into deeper study of Ramayana and other scriptures. Sri Ranganji's series of Ramayana discourses in Singapore over the past fifteen years, and my intense discussions on Ramayana with this Master, acted as a trigger for me to jump into a systematic and deep self-learning of Moola Valmiki Ramayana. Other scriptures like Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Vedanta followed soon.

What are the various ways in which this epic is relevant to our times?

Ramayana can be seen as a Religious Text or as a Text on Dharmashastra, especially highlighting the importance of duties in a family. Its extraordinary stress on Values, Ethics, Morals and Duties makes it a universal text (irrespective of religion and geography) and timeless. The duties & values emphasised therein are as relevant today as they were ten thousand years ago, and as relevant in Singapore or USA as they are in India. In the current times people are aggressively rights conscious and not so much duty conscious. This creates tensions and stress in families, offices, schools and in short in the society. Ramayana will inspire the listener or reader to give a high importance to one's duties. This will reduce the tension and stress in the society. I frequently come across this question: "Can the Ramayana values be practiced at all in current times?" My simple answer is this: "In life nothing is pure black or pure white. May be it is impractical to expect one to follow the Ramayana values in their full intensity. But, one can certainly try to imbibe them in one's daily life to the extent one can. It will gradually purify that person, build his inner strength, make him more effective in his functions and he/she will even become a role model and inspiration for others.

In fact, ever since I started giving talks, writing articles and authoring books on this subject, I have been pleasantly surprised by the very positive response to them from many in Singapore (and also from people outside of Singapore). It shows that a good section of the society believes in the relevance of our scriptures in general, and Ramayana in particular, to current times.

In what ways can the younger generation be encouraged to read The Ramayana or any other text pertaining to a Hindu way of life?

These days the youth seem to get put off by the word ‘religion’. They associate scriptures with religion and rituals, which are anathema to most of them. But the word ‘knowledge’ attracts the youth. They are running towards achieving success in their lives and anything that will help in their success-drive will be welcomed by them. Hence the two key words are “knowledge” & “success”. We should adopt a promotional campaign which is based on these factors. If we promote the study of our scriptures as strengthening their knowledge base and strengthening their ability to succeed in their day to day lives, there is a higher probability of attracting them.

But, herein I have to state something very significant. In my opinion, the parents (of all age groups) need to be drawn towards scriptural study first. This large group has by and large stayed away from it (except for a small percentage). And they become the role models for the youngsters in their families and in the families around them in the society. As long as these people do not become standing examples of scriptural knowledge, we cannot attract the youth. Interestingly, I have seen in some cases the reverse strategy working well too! Getting the youngsters into the class has influenced their parents to also take up the study!

If you were asked about what is essentially the Hindu way of life, what would be your answer?

This is probably the best question in this interview! There are too many thoughts flying around on this subject. Let me give you my take on this. The Hindu way of life, which has a beautiful name “*Sanatana Dharma*”, derives its moorings from *Shruti* & *Smriti*. In essence, it teaches one to live a life of righteousness (dharma) performing one’s duties (karma) as necessitated by one’s position in life. It teaches you not to stop with this but to gradually get into an enquiry of the larger purpose of life, understanding of God (*Jnana*) and to be devoted to God (*Bhakti*). Gradually in this journey one is encouraged to develop a sense of detachment to material things (*Vairagya*). The prescribed goal per Hindu way of life is to seek liberation from the constant cycle of birth and death (*Moksha*). I am simplifying it for the purpose of brevity. But these few sentences guide our entire life.

Talk to us about what inspires you most in The Ramayana.

Ramayana inspires one to hold onto and follow high values in life. Throughout Ramayana Rama does not show or use any super power. In his prime time (age of 25 to 39) he was a wanderer in the forest with no kingdom, title, wealth, army etc. Yet, he was revered and put on a pedestal by everyone he came across in his wanderings in the forest, because of his adherence to Satya and Dharma. Even his enemies respect him for the same reason. Mareecha, a rakshasa, tells Ravana, another rakshasa that Rama is



Ramar Pattabhishegam

the very personification of Dharma, and that Ravana cannot confront him and hope to succeed. With Rama as the inspiration every character in Ramayana reaches extraordinary heights. Sita Devi herself, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Sugreeva, Vibhishana, Guha are all great examples of this. Rama simply radiates the power of dharma (the ethical way of life) and lifts the entire society around him. To me this is the greatest fascination of Ramayana. No wonder Tulsidas and Kamban got so inspired by Rama and Ramayana that they came out with their own bhakti filled literature on Him. No wonder we see Ramayana inspiring many countries in South East Asia too.

Another deeply personal reason for inspiration comes from the fact that my Guru Shri Raghavendra Swamy was a great devotee of Lord SitaRama.

What is the difference between a religious and an academic pursuit of a religious text? I ask this because you wrote an article on Prof. Lipner's talk on Hinduism and he had taken, if I am not wrong, an academic approach to Hinduism.

Yes, that was a great academic lecture by Prof. Lipner on understanding Hinduism and its evolution. The major difference between an academic way of looking at a text and a religious way ... is 'faith'. For an Academician the text is a work by an author. Period. There is no faith involved. For an academician Ramayana may just be another literature like Kalidasa's *Shakunthalam*, Raghuvamsam or Homer's *Iliad*. The academician might study it for the poetic beauty in it, the strength of the characters, the development of each character, to get an understanding of the way of life pertaining to that period etc. Divinity of the characters and faith that it is a true narration cannot be accepted by the academician.

On the other hand, the religious pursuit of the same text can be in different ways. A pure



kalamkari painting of chitrakuta

straightforward

Religious person may study it for chanting the *slokas* as a religious prayer and may read it since it is an act of piety earning good merit for him/her and the family. A Religious Scholar may go in with the same mindset of the Religious seeker and go further towards understanding the epic in all its subtleties, understanding

the divine characters in greater depth, looking for religious messages buried within and doing all these with a high reverence to the author as a Maharishi. A Religious-Academic Scholar will also be looking at the text with full faith and piety just like any other religious person and combine the objectives of a Religious Scholar and the Academician. This approach is also good for a detailed research into the text (on any aspect) without compromising a high degree of reverence to it. I would probably put myself in the fourth category.

Could you also tell us something about other Hindu religious as well as philosophical texts that have inspired you?

The Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, Bhagavatham and similar works of Maharishis contain pristine concepts, principles and ideals. They have the power to uplift a whole society. Unfortunately today only a small section of the Hindu community knows the contents of these, from the original works. We know the Ramayana & Mahabharata stories but do not know the profound gems of ideals and thoughts inside them. For example all of us know that Bharata came over to Chitrakutam and pleaded with Rama to take back the kingdom. We also know that Rama refused Bharata's appeal and Bharata ended up carrying Rama's Paduke back with him. But, how many of us know in detail what all logical points Bharata put forth for convincing Rama and, even more importantly, what all points of dharma that Rama elaborated upon in his refusal? Therein are found the gems of ancient thoughts. We are missing the treasure house within our grasp because we are not aware of it. We can no longer have an excuse that these are all in Sanskrit which most of the Hindus today are not proficient in, since they are available in translated versions with original slokas in transliteration. My sincere hope is that we slowly but surely move towards dipping into this treasure chest available right in our backyard.



Mark your calendar

GLIMPSES OF UPANISHADS LECTURE SERIES



Since October 2015, Hindu Centre has been organizing lectures by Swamini Pramananda on the teachings of the Upanishads. We have had two lectures to date. The swamini, among other things, introduced us to the attitude and the framework of mind one must have to learn from the Upanishads in the first lecture and in the second lecture, she took us through the real character of the seeker. Over the next several issues of the Patrika, we will cover the content of these lectures.

For details on regular activities and programmes at the Hindu Centre, Please visit the Centre's official Facebook Page!

Update of Centre Activities

Raksha Bandhan

Rakshabandhan was celebrated on Saturday, 29 August, at the Sri Srinivasa Perumal temple auditorium at Serangoon Road.



tradition dates back to ancient civilizations, myths and folklore. Medieval Indian history has many examples of women seeking protection of powerful warriors by tying the Rakhi on this auspicious full moon day (*Poornima*) in the Hindu month of Shravan (August).

For the tenth year in a row, Hindu Centre organized this yearly event along with fifteen other Singapore based Indian organisations. Rakshabandhan is a festival in which brothers and sisters renew their bonds of sibling affection and duty towards each other. The sister ties a thread (*Rakhi*) on the brother's wrist, which symbolises a prayer for his well-being, and the brother promises to protect her for life. The



This year, prior to the event, an art competition was organized in which over three hundred students from the Indian schools in Singapore participated. This year's theme was '*Sarve Bavanthu Sukinaha*' (May all Beings be Happy). Students' drawings were assessed by a panel of judges. Three winners went away with trophies and valuable prizes while all participants received certificates.

The event kicked off with the performance of a *Havan* (purification by fire) to obtain the blessings of *Ishtwara*. There was also an 'on the spot' art competition for children aged 5 to 16 on the day of the celebration. Trophies, vouchers and certificates were presented.



In addition, the students of Indian schools and Indian organisations put up cultural performances. The colourful costumes, ethnic music and dance pieces mesmerized the audience. A short film, to highlight the significance of Rakshabandhan, was the icing on the cake.



Since last year, the Rakshabandhan organizing committee has been honouring individuals for their contributions towards improving the lives of Singapore Hindus. The inaugural award was given to Shri Hariram Dayani who is one of the pioneers of Hindu Centre. This year, the award was given to Dr V K Pillai, the founder of Hindu Centre.



The highlight of the celebration was the '*rakhi*' tying ceremony which was done along with the chanting of mantras.



The celebration concluded with a sumptuous dinner.



The entire program was sponsored by well-wishers and Indian organisations with the aim of gathering individuals together to celebrate this universal bonding across all cultures, religions and backgrounds.

For more pictures, please visit

<https://picasaweb.google.com/117426172168688701704/RakshaBandhan2015?authkey=Gv1sRgCJPy4qyol6j3Kg>

Bandhu: Volunteering at Homes for Aged

Hindu Centre's Bandhu volunteers have been serving at homes for aged since 2009 at the Jamiyah Home, Bukit Batok 4S Home & Ren Ci Nursing Home. The aim is to befriend the sick and aged residents and spend some meaningful time with them.

Ren Ci Nursing Home at Tan Tock Seng felt that its Hindu residents needed spiritual befriending and asked the Centre to include some religious sharing in its volunteering sessions. Volunteers from other faiths regularly visit, befriend, take the residents for outings etc and hence there was a dire need for Hindu volunteers to do the same. The goal is to give the residents some spiritual comfort by teaching and chanting simple mantras for health and happiness, bhajans, bhakti related stories, japa, games, etc. We started a fresh training programme to incorporate these activities, and also recruited more volunteers for the newly constructed Ren Ci Nursing Home at Bukit Batok St. 52.

Further, a special Bandhu handbook was prepared to help volunteers conduct their session. The handbook explains the model sharing session, the goal of any session, the attitude of the volunteers, and the place of the Bandhu program in Hindu Centre's Seva activities.

The five-week training, which started on 4th of July 2015 and ended on 2nd of October 2015 was conducted by HC volunteer teachers and trainers. Besides these sessions, we had other sessions where professionals from IMH shared how to handle the elderly, and gave valuable tips on dementia. Upon successfully completing the five-week training programme, the trainees formally received certificates.



We are now pleased to report that our fifteen newly recruited volunteers have started sessions at Jamiyah Home, Bukit Batok Ren Ci, Ren Ci Tan Tock Seng and Bukit Batok 4S (Swami Sathya Sai Home). We also organise celebrations like Tamil New Year and Deepavali at the Homes each year. For Deepavali this year, we plan to take the Hindu residents from all four homes to a temple. Besides the darshan of Īśvara, the celebrations will include a cultural program and dinner. Goodie bags will also be given to them.

All are welcome to join us for the celebrations. You can also sponsor some festive goodies and others activities. Those interested may kindly contact 9656-8806 for more information.

Hindu Centre Teachers' Training



swamini pramananda

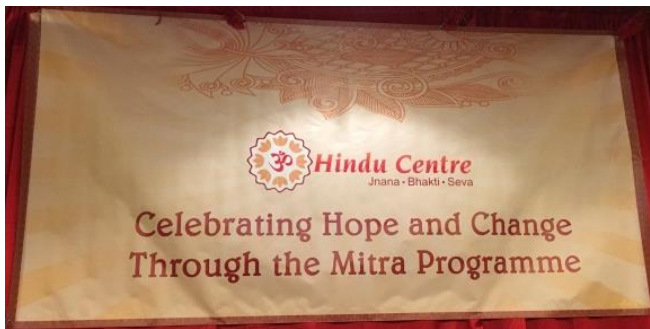
Hindu Centre has recently formed a partnership with Amma Ji's (Swamini Pramananda, the direct disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati) organisation called Purna Vidya foundation, to incorporate its teaching methodology into Hindu Centre's balagurukulam. Through this relationship, we thought it would be a great opportunity to have Amma ji as our lead trainer for our 2015 Teachers training programme.

So in May 2015, we started our very first class for our teachers training programme. Our curriculum is based on three components - scriptural tenets of Hinduism+ shloka chanting + Vedic dharma through amma ji's sessions. The programme has two other in-house trainers, Mr Ravendran & Ms Thavamalar.

We are several weeks into the programme now. We have covered topics such as Dharma, karma, scriptures etc. We also had Amma Ji come in from Coimbatore in September for a weekend. Her lectures on dharma & scriptures were certainly enlightening. Everyone was in awe as she explained how dharma can be conceptualised into two clear compartments of pre-conventional (animal/man), conventional (man/man) & post conventional (God/Man). And how these three compartments encapsulate all four pursuits of the human mind of *artha, kama, dharma & moksha*.

With Ishvara's grace we hope to graduate our teachers in May 2016. We hope our programme will send forth a batch of teachers equipped with Hindu knowledge, assimilated human values and the drive to serve the community as teachers of Hindu Centre.

Mitra 10th Anniversary and Fundraising Dinner



On Saturday 17 of October 2015, 250 guests gathered together to celebrate the 10 years of Hindu Centre - Mitra Programme, and of its commitment to provide hope and change to the ex-offender population. The Guest of Honour for the dinner was Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister, Environment and Water Resources.

In his address to the guests, Dr Varaprasad, President of Hindu Centre, shared the 5- year vision plan of Mitra Programme till 2020 with an emphasis to provide aftercare support resources and services to augment current community and national initiatives to support offender rehabilitation. During the course of this year, the Mitra Committee has been working on a vision statement for the Mitra Programme which Dr Varaprasad announced at the dinner:



Celebrating 10 years



Minister Masagos Sulkijli cutting the anniversary cake with (from left to right) Mr Mano, Dr Varaprasad, Mr Vijay, and Ms Jayanthi

The dinner was attended by 50 Mitra volunteers and over 60 Mitras and their family members. It was a special occasion to celebrate 10 years of commitment of the longest serving Mitra volunteers, Mrs Jayanthi (serving at Changi B3), Mr Mano (serving at SAF Detention Barracks) and Mr Vijay (serving at HEB-Ashram).

The Radio Channel Oli interviewed Mitra Volunteer Mrs Indrani Velusamy, while the TV Channel Vasantham for its Taalam (Indian Beat) programme interviewed various volunteers, Mitras and covered the dinner. Finally, the newspaper Straits Times, as part of a bigger article on the role of religion in rehabilitation, conducted interviews of Mitra volunteers, various Mitras and Hindu Centre Management Committee members.



Mr Bala being interviewed by Vasantham Taalam-Indian Beat

But beyond the celebration of the 10th anniversary, the purpose of this dinner was also to help raise funds for the new Mitra aftercare programme. The Mitra Committee managed to reach its target of \$50,000 thanks to the support of over 20 major donors. A big thank you to all, in particular to Straits Law Practice LLC and Asia Tunneling & Construction PTE LTD the two main contributors.

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**HC Mitra Programme
sincerely acknowledges
its principal donors:**



Mitra Volunteers singing 'lean on me'

We would also like to thank all of those who contributed to the success of this event, Hindu Centre Management Committee members, Mitra Committee members, Mitra 10th Anniversary Special Committee members, all the volunteers who turned up to either support the organisation of the event or got on stage and contributed to an excellent entertainment



The Hindu Centre-Mitra volunteers



Thoughts of a Balagurukulam teacher

We come from different backgrounds but are united by the common goal of inculcating values and knowledge of Hinduism to children. When we were young kids ourselves, we have each experienced Hinduism in such a way that it made us grow and become a better person.

If you asked us, 'is belief important in Hinduism?' we will all nod in consensus without doubt. However, we also know that belief should be informed by the knowledge of Hinduism. Despite the many challenges we face as working adults, we seek the knowledge that will bring us nearer to that higher path. Our years of practicing this sacred religion have made us conscious that knowledge must be attained to appreciate the purpose, reason and importance of Hinduism.

My name is Lalitha. I work as a technical assistant in a ship management company. I have been volunteering with the Balagurukulam program since 2011. It's been 4 years down the road and it has been a great experience teaching the kids. Actually the learning takes place both ways. The children are not the only ones learning here. We get to learn the art of questioning from them as well. Teaching in the Balagurukulam program gives us an opportunity to get an in depth understanding of the topic that we're sharing. Sometimes getting up early on a Sunday morning is a challenge but when we get to the Centre and start interacting with the kids, all the tiredness is gone. Their energy is just so contagious and their interest in learning is what keeps us motivated.



See for example Uthra. She identifies herself more as a Hindu now than before. In fact, sometimes it appears to me that she knows more about Ganesha, Hanuman and Krishna than me. She has developed such devotion, and shows an astounding ability to describe different forms of gods without any confusion and complete acceptance. She sings her bhajans with devotion, and her stage performance of bhajans was flawless. It was heartwarming to be able to facilitate such arrangements that helped boost her confidence level.

My co-teachers and I hope to continue inspiring young minds like Uthra, and in the near future would love to see students who graduate from the Balagurukulam program do their part and share their knowledge with the younger ones.

Vedic Yoga- meaning and practice

Shiva Rai spoke to Patrika about the true essence of Vedic Yoga

"Citta Vritti Nirodha" thus proclaims Patanjali as the point of Yoga in a 2,500 year old scripture, Yogasutras. Traditionally, Yoga was one of the six schools of thought in Hinduism which has recently gained worldwide popularity due to its benefits that millions attest to. However, the communal style of teaching Yoga has also spawned different types of 'Sadhana' (practice). It is commendable that almost every gym in Singapore offer Yoga classes but in this process, "Citta Vritti Niroddha" or "cessation of thoughts" as the unique goal has been unfortunately forgotten.



Even though Yoga is promoted by many of the modern day practitioners of the art as the ultimate discipliner of the body and the mind, many of them do not help their students to truly achieve the real essence of Yogic practice.

It is to fight these misconceptions and keep Yoga rooted in its traditional pedagogy that Hindu Centre has been hosting Vedic Yoga classes for five years now. Every week a volunteer teacher comes and teaches students, not just poses (asanas) but a holistic set of practices including breathing exercises (pranayama), chanting (japa) and meditation (dhyana) as well as explaining a few central tenets of Hinduism critical to aspirant's spiritual development. Without fail, every Tuesday at 7.30 a class of 15-20 students fills up the hall on the first level. We see parents come with their teenagers; young professionals come with their friends, even the older pioneer generation with their families representing a diverse cross section of Singapore coming to learn and benefit from the lessons. Even though they may sweat because of the poses at the start,

invariably, everyone leaves with a contented smile at the end, having achieved a little peace of mind or experienced even a little bit of "citta vritti niroddha".

Hanuman Chalisa Chanting SG50

The idea of commemorating times was mooted by the HC enthusiastically welcomed by successfully conducted this which Vishwa Chetna and Brahmana Sabha and Life four hours, about ninety accompaniment of Dholak.



SG 50 by chanting Hanuman Chalisa 51 President, Dr Varaprasad, and one and all. The Hindu Centre event on the 12th of September, 2015 in Singapore Dakshina Bharatiya Bliss Foundation also participated. For chanters sang Hanuman Chalisa to the

Hanuman Chalisa dates back to the 16th C when Akbar invaded Hindustan, and was in the process of consolidating the Rajputana (modern day Rajasthan) with his empire. There is an interesting story associated with the composition of Hanuman Chalisa. It is believed that when the report of Mahakavi Tulsidas being blessed with the darshan of Lord Rama and Lakshmana reached the court of Mughal ruler, Akbar, he was summoned to the court. When Akbar demanded to see Lord Rama, Tulsidas said that divinity can be seen only by the believer. Angered, Akbar order that the saint should be imprisoned. Tulsidas composed forty couplets on



Tulsidas being blessed by Hanuman

the glory of Hanuman in this state of imprisonment. Around the time of his imprisonment, it is said that Akbar's court was invaded by a troop of monkeys. When the monkeys could not be subdued, Akbar was forced to release Tulsidas, upon which the monkeys are said to have disappeared without trace. As Tulsidas's chanting of Hanuman Chalisa during troubled times is said to brought his release from misfortune, it is widely believed since then that the chanting of this poem frees one and all of misfortune, and bestows wisdom and mental peace upon the believer.

The story of Hanuman is an inspiring one. He is said to have taken up so many 'projects' of doing away with human misfortunes upon earth that he is popularly hailed as 'sankat mochan' (destroyer of trouble). We prayed for his blessings as Singapore continues her journey into the future with a serious commitment to uphold peace and prosperity! We prayed that He should give us the wisdom so that we may join our nation's leaders in their commitment to the nation's ideals, to protect our shores, to safeguard us from war and terrorism, and to promote greater unity amongst us so that we may care for one another and work for the betterment of every one of us. In our prayers, we included a prayer for the role of HC in our society. We sincerely prayed that more people should benefit from the Gnana, Bhakti, and Seva programmes of the Centre. The Centre aspires to realize this vision by becoming a major institution of teaching Hinduism in the region. This can be achieved by continuing to create and sustain a strong core of activities that reaches a significant number of people.



Participants from other Hindu organizations

The event that took place from 8am to 12 noon on 12th September, 2015, was attended by several local Hindu organizations, volunteers and others. The altar was beautifully decorated with flowers, lights and Vadamalai. The huge life size photo of Lord Hanuman inspired the chanters with positive energy to chant with utmost focus and concentration. After the conclusion of 51 rounds of chanting, there was group aarthi singing when devotees came up one by one to do aarthi before the altar. The session concluded with the cutting of SG 50 cake and a sumptuous lunch.

Ganesh Chaturthi Celebration

Ganesha in Hindu belief is the God of wisdom, knowledge and new beginnings. For the past three years, bhajan group, which is part of the Bhakti Wing under Educomm in Hindu Centre has taken the lead in celebrating Ganesha Chaturthi.

It would be an understatement to say that Ganesha, commonly known by all races as the Elephant- faced God is one of the most beloved Gods of Hinduism. He is also one of the most recognized gods outside of India.



*Om Gam Ganapathaye
Namaha*

Ganesha is known by many names, one of which is Vighnaharta. It means the remover of obstacles. Devotees believe that if Ganesha is worshiped, he grants success, prosperity and protection against adversity. In a lesser known role, Ganesh is also the destroyer of vanity, selfishness and pride. Hindus worship Ganesha first before commencing any duties, occasions or even prayers. This is because He represents the Om or the Pranava, where nothing can be done without uttering it. The occasion of Ganesha Chaturthi gives people an opportunity to remember what Lord Ganesha stands for. A chance to reignite ourselves in our search for Divinity and to get the blessings of Ishwara.



This year we celebrated Ganesha Chaturthi on the 17th September. It was presided by Swamini Pramananda (Ammaji) who is a senior disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. She is also the author of the Purna Vidya text, which the Centre has adopted. We started the celebration with the 16th

step Puja, which was conducted by Ammaji. She led the crowd in Ganesha chants and there was continuous chanting of 'Om Gam Ganapathaye Namaha' while the puja was underway. One would agree that the atmosphere was vibrating with devotion. She then gave a short talk on *Bhagawan Iccha*. Bhajan group members then led the crowd in melodious Ganesha Bhajans. They were accompanied by the Centre resident harmonium player, Mr Ramesh. The celebrations ended with everyone participating in the aarthi. We were all also blessed to have gotten Ganga theertham on that day which Ammaji had brought with her. Prasadam was then served to all.

Bhajan lead Miss Pushpa shared her thoughts on the celebration:

“Ganesha is commonly known as the remover of obstacles in any undertakings. Bhajan group members felt that Ganesh Chaturthi was an important celebration to undertake as we wanted the Centre to be blessed with more visibility. We also wanted more students to attend the Centre and for Centre to be filled with more people in its Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and Seva (service) wing.” Thus we started organizing the celebrations from 2013.



We are blessed to have Ammaji presiding the celebrations for the past two years. Ammaji in her talk on Bhagawan Iccha also mentioned how this trip was kind of 'ordained' for her by Bagawan as she wasn't planning a trip in September to Singapore at all! Having Ammaji at the event definitely was a blessing to all who were present.



There was also a good turnout for the celebration and the preparation was a fulfilling one for the Bhajan group volunteers who came forward to help out. Special thanks go to Mr Somu and his boys who helped with the beautiful decorations. The event wouldn't have been a success if not for the volunteers. It was indeed a satisfying, and fulfilling day.

We hope that we would be able to continue holding Ganesha Chaturthi celebrations in the coming years at the Centre and that more people would be blessed by Lord Ganesha.

VolunteerSpeak



Yoges

I always wanted to know more about Hinduism. In 2010, one of my colleagues introduced me to Hindu Centre. I started attending classes on chanting Rama Stotram, and Hinduism 101 (basic Hinduism) at HC. In 2011/2012 Vishnu Sahasranamam and Bhagavad Gita classes were conducted at the Centre by Swami Prakashananda from Malaysia for a period of six months. It was a very enriching experience.

When the Centre started a bhajan group in 2011, I became a volunteer with the bhajan group. We hold monthly bhajans in the Centre now. I mainly assist in the power point slides for the group. This year I joined the education committee in the Centre as well. Whenever the Centre brings in teachers from overseas, I try to attend their classes as well. This year has been an exciting one with Ms Niloofer Giri and Swamini Pramananda (ammaji) conducting classes. There was also an opportunity to learn Lalitha Sahasranama.

The Centre does prayers on Maha Shivaratri, Vaikuntha Ekadashi, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Guru Poornima just to name a few. I distinctly remember my first Maha Shivaratri at the Centre; it was an experience like none other. Everyone was involved in the 4 *kaala* puja with chants, *bhajans*, and *linga abhisekam*. The Centre was filled with positive vibrations and one did not even feel the tiredness as the clock ticked by.

Hindu Centre teachers are very knowledgeable and patient. They go out of their way to ensure that students understand the concepts, and when they teach, they do not bring in their own likes and dislikes. I would like to say special thanks to one such teacher, Anu, who has inspired me to continue learning. She is ever ready to pass on her knowledge and her classes are always filled with stories from the *Puranas*. She encourages us to continue learning from the scriptures. Special thanks also to Malar who ensures that our chanting is accurate; and Ravi for presenting concepts in a simple way for all to understand.

During these years at HC, I have learnt to have more respect for our religion, and the classes have helped me during my lowest and darkest moments in life. I have been able to put things in the right perspective and evolve into a better person. People in the Centre are ever ready to extend their hands to others in times of need and we are 'family' to each other in our own way. The spirit of giving is also evident in the Centre. When people have requests for chants to be done for the sick or for the departed, I've witnessed how a small group of people have come together to do the chanting in people's houses.

Thanks to Hindu Centre and its dedicated teachers, people who are thirsty for knowledge or who want to clear their doubts or who are just seeking are able to do so. It's a place where truly one can see the Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), and Seva (service) being upheld at all times. It's a place for one to touch base with one's roots. I would be ever grateful to the colleague of mine who introduced me to Hindu Centre.

God! Give us wisdom as a father gives to his sons. Guide us, O Much-invoked in this path. May we live in light. (Rig Veda 7.32.26)