

REFLECTIONS



A Hindu Cultural Center of Albany Hindu Temple Society's Newsletter devoted to the Capital District's Indian-American community particularly its seniors

Editorial: Let Us Honor Our Grandparents

By Ram Chugh, Ph.D.



Namaste!

Grandparents constitute an anchor for our families. They connect us with our near past and give us hope and

inspiration for our future. They pass on to us religious, cultural, moral, and social values they learned from their own grandparents. In particular, they form special bonds with their grandchildren. They share stories of their lives with them, play games, read books, laugh and even cry with them. While playing, grandparents again become children themselves. In the process, they enrich their own lives and those of their grandchildren. They become distant observers of the changing life cycle and the passage of time. They think of their own childhood and of their own

grandparents. There is then a realization that, like their own grandparents who continue to live through them, they will continue to live in the minds of their grandchildren as well. That is the reality of life.

To express gratitude and love to grandparents and what they mean to us, the United States observes a National Grandparents Day on the first Sunday in September following the Labor Day every year. This year the Grandparents Day falls on Sunday, September 13th.

In his 2014 National Grandparents Day Proclamation message, President Obama said: "Each year, we pause to salute the grandmothers and grandfathers who strengthen our families and shape our Nation. Through decades of hard work, they have broken down barriers and blazed pathways for the generations that followed, and they continue to provide inspiration and support to their children and grandchildren. On National Grandparents Day, we

honor the anchors of our families and recognize the immeasurable ways they enrich our lives."

The Hindu Cultural Center plans to organize its own "Grandparents Day" celebration on Sunday, September 13, 2015. The details of the program and activities for that day are currently being worked out. These will be shared with our community when finalized.

Let us take time to honor our grandparents on September 13th. Please see the REQUEST on page Six.

This issue contains two pieces written by famous Indians, Tagore and Swami Vivekananda, and three short essays by young students from our Heritage class, Somida Oruganti, Bhargvy Ramathan, Shashank Salgam. Other contributors include Amar Chandel, Jagdish Doshi, Richa Kaushik, Kajal Lahiri, Jai Misr, and Kishan Putta.

We thank them immensely for their contributions to *Reflections*.

WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR

A Poem by Rabindranath Tagore*

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead

habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

*Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the greatest writer and poet in modern Indian literature. He was awarded Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1913. He wrote this inspirational poem before India's independence. It represents his dream of how the new, awakened India should be. The original [Bengali language](#) poem was published in 1910 and, in Tagore's own translation, in the 1912 English edition of *Gitanjali*.

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My Reflections on Tagore



By Kajal Lahiri, Ph.D.*

Tagore once commented, "Depth of friendship does not depend on length of acquaintance". Ram Chugh and I are kindred souls bonded by our

deep-rooted appreciation of the poet.

Gurudev was a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, playwright, educator, spiritualist, painter, lyricist, composer, singer, freedom fighter and a philosopher – an unprecedented conjunction of talents, rare in human history. **Kazi Nazrul Islam characterized Tagore as the modern Valmiki or Kalidasa.**

I was brought in a family where even our dog was trained to be quiet when we would listen to or play music. During last thirty years, my wife Nandini and I together with graduate students from SUNY and RPI presented Tagore songs (often translated in English or Hindi) many times in TRICIA and temple functions. My major education took place at Indian Statistical Institute that wouldn't have been situated in Kolkata but for Nehru's fascination for Tagore who was very close to the founder of the Institute, PC Mahalanobis. Tagore's influence is as pervasive today as was 150 year ago.

* Kajal is a Distinguished Professor of Economics at SUNY Albany.



Time for a Second Opinion



By Amar Chandel*

As one gets on in age, one gets many invaluable faculties: wisdom, insight,

experience..... The actual list is long and ever expanding.

However, at the same time, one also loses certain long-cherished attributes, including strength, speed and flexibility. I propose to write in detail on the techniques with the help of which this inevitable decline can be minimized and slowed down. But that will be in future. Implementing those suggestions and benefiting from those may take several months. To set the ball rolling immediately, I want to share with you a tip, which you may put into practice right today and start reaping benefits almost instantaneously.

You see, besides many other responses that slow down with age, one's taste buds also become less sensitive. The result is that the foods, which taste absolutely normal to others may not seem so to you at all.

That poses serious problems. As you well know, certain food items are bad in excess even for normal, healthy, young people. These can be all the more damaging for the seniors. Among these you can count salt and sugar. While the use of the former has to be strictly regulated, the second needs to be totally banished from planet earth. Unfortunately, both are used in abundance in western food.

The problem gets aggravated for the aged because for them these tend to be exceptionally harmful. And yet, after the age of 60, you are not properly able to detect taste and smell. The result is that one tends to find food bland even if there is adequate salt or sugar in it.

Instead of cursing your luck or asking the doctor to do something about it, there is an easier way out: depend on the judgment of a younger person whether an item has enough salt or sugar in it or not. If he or they tell you that the particular dish tastes just right to them, go by their judgment instead of depending on your own sensors.

Even if you do not have their company constantly, just use their advice as the benchmark. Once you have compared notes with them that the food that tastes to you as if it should have another spoon of sugar in it, is actually sweet enough, stick to that level of "sugarless-ness". Just because you cannot taste it does not mean that it is actually not there. Nor is it any guarantee that it will not harm you.

That will be frustrating at times but living with tastelessness is a better option than living with sickness. **Please remember, you have eaten for taste for 60 years. The next 30 years are the time to eat only for health and nutrition, taste be damned.**

Happy living!

*Amar Chandel, author of two self-help books, *Stress to Serenity*, and the best-selling *Perfect Health in Twenty Weeks* (Konark Publishers), can be reached at: asknature@gmail.com



Aging Gracefully



By Richa Kaushik, MD*

Today's society views old age as a curse, associating it with loneliness, weakness, poor health and misery. However, with some

simple interventions, the Golden years can be the most meaningful and enjoyable stage of one's life.

Keeping a positive attitude is probably the single most important factor in aging with grace.

Anticipating changes in our body helps us be ready for them. Feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness need to be examined and addressed.

Maintaining physical, mental and spiritual health is extremely important as we grow older. A simple fitness regime, gentle yoga, meditation and spiritual discussions can help maintain one's mind and body as one grows older.

Dress well and maintain good personal hygiene. It promotes self-respect and transmits a positive feeling to those around you.

Financial health is very important as well. Take time to understand your finances and then manage them to give you the best financial stability as you get older.

Eating a healthy diet and avoiding smoking and alcohol can improve quality of life. Ensure adequate sleep and a safe environment. Regular checkups and preventative health visits should be adhered to.

Spending time with grandchildren is a great way to de-stress. If physical limitations limit outdoor activities there are many indoor games like chess and scrabble that one can engage in. The innate innocence of children brings joy and makes you feel younger in their company.

Maintaining or starting up hobbies also helps make life more meaningful. Gardening, sewing, knitting, scrapbooking are some activities that can be very gratifying. Some may take this opportunity to travel and visit places they've always wanted to go when younger.

Another avenue to stay active and to feel useful is by volunteering. There are many options in the community

ranging from libraries, hospitals, airports, theatres and community gardens which benefit from the time and energy donated by volunteers. It can be very flexible and is a great way to stay social and active.

There are many social groups available from community colleges, book clubs and spiritual groups. Finding one will add much meaning to life and provide one to have something to look forward to. Our temples are a great resource as well, providing an opportunity for socialization as well as providing spiritual strength.

As we face the inevitable process of aging, stay positive and remember 'old is gold'

* Richa is a Gerontologist and works at VA Hospital in Albany.

The Hindu Indians from the Caribbean

by Jai N. Misir, Ph.D.



The population of Hindus of Indian origin consists largely of Indians from India and the Caribbean. An exact count may be hard to reach, but we

can show that Hindus in the Capital District run in the thousands.

According to the 2010 US Census, Schenectady, New York had approximately 8,000 Indians from Guyana, comprising 12% of the total population. Apparently, this number continues to grow.

Most Indians from the Caribbean sketch their ancestry to the mid-1800s when East Indian indentured servants were brought to the Caribbean. The Indian workers were signed up mostly from the Bhojpur area of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, where clashes took place against the British. For Indians, who ran away from the villages, the labor agreement offered to them appeared an excellent way of getting away from the poverty, disgrace, and torment of the British occupation.

Laughed at for being uncultured, uneducated and uncivilized, the Indians did not throw away their culture for money. However, they strung together their spiritual,

philosophical, and social practices and reconstructed the society that maintains the Hindu culture. The Indians erected temples in countries such as Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, and Suriname in the 1860s.

These oppressed people arrived in the Caribbean with a few items of clothing, a *lota* or small, spherical water vessel, and a copy of Tulsidas' *Ramayana* written by the 14th century Hindu poet-saint, famous for his devotion to Shri [Rama](#). This story of Rama's life maintained the faith for newly transplanted Indians in the Caribbean. Because of a spiritual need of a group of people, these Indians brought Hindu *dharma* or religion from India which stayed alive in the Caribbean.

In the *Jahaji* ships or "ship-travelers" from Calcutta to the Caribbean, the indentured servants sang the *Hanuman Chalisa*, devotional song to Hanuman, and the *Ramayana*. The Hindu epic *Ramayana* and *Hanuman Chalisa* continued its flight through the villages in the Caribbean. The pandits carried out their jobs bravely by going to Indian villages and estates to perform Hindu religious functions. The close relationship between the pandits and the poor workers conveyed a fresh breath to Hinduism in the Caribbean.

In the 1960s, Hindus from the Caribbean took another major trip. Faced with political strife and economic hardships, Hindus, particularly from Guyana, journeyed in large numbers to North America. These Caribbean Hindus became some of the earliest people to erect places of Hindu worship and set up the custom once again in the United States and Canada.

Jai N. Misir, Professor Emeritus/Hindu Priest He taught at Hudson Valley Community College.

JAINISM: An Introduction

By Jagdish Doshi*



Jainism is a religion of purely human origin and it has emanated from the mouth of a dignitary, a JIN, who has secured the omniscience and self-control by his own personal efforts. There have

been 24 such Spiritual Victors (also known as Tirthankars) and Rishabhdev (Adinath) was the first one and Mahavir was the last of these Tirthankars. Thus, the people who worship the Jin or the Tirthankar and who follow the religious tenets proclaimed by the Jin are called Jains and their religion is Jainism.

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions, predating recorded history. **It is an original system, quite distinct and independent from other systems of Indian and Western philosophy.** It is a union of personal independence with social and ecological independence, and believes in harmony and love toward all living beings.



Mahavir the 24th Tirthankar was born about 2600 years ago in 599 BCE. At the age of 30 he left his princely life on a spiritual quest.

After 12 years of austerities and meditations, he attained omniscience. At age 72 Mahavir left this mortal world and attained Nirvana, that blissful state beyond life and death. He consolidated the faith by drawing together the teachings of the previous Tirthankars and by emphasizing the principles that are important to all of us.

For millions of Jains who have been practicing Jainism, it is a way of life. The central themes of the Jain Way of Life are:

Non-Violence (Ahimsa) promotes the autonomy of life of every living being. Jainism has based its ethical code entirely on the observance of the tenet of non-violence. It emphasizes the balance and harmony both among human beings and between humanity and all other forms of life.

Non-Absolutism (Anekantvad) strengthens the autonomy of thought of every human being. It is a method of thinking and analysis. It tends to be partial to all thinking and behavior from all different angles of vision possible and is based on truth only. The power and life of non-absolutism lies in open-mindedness, clarity and impartiality of thoughts.

Non-Possessiveness (Aparigraha) supports the autonomy of self-control. Not to have any attachment in the mind is non-possessiveness. Mahavir did not divide and distinguish between *Ahimsa* and *Aparigraha*. Violent thoughts (of arrogance or attachment) promote tendency to accumulate and when man accumulates, his violent tendencies begin to manifest. In this manner the vicious cycle of accumulation for violence and violence for accumulation keeps working.

A Jain always says:

"I forgive all souls; let all souls forgive me. I am on friendly terms with all; I have no enmity with anybody."

*Jagdish is a Chemical Engineer, Six Sigma Black Belt and retired from Honeywell after 32 years of service.

Message from Dr. Swatantra Mitta, Chair, HCC Board

I felt proud and happy while reading the articles written by our community members for this issue of *Reflections*. I felt especially proud reading the short essays written by three young students from our Heritage class.

Reflections is a community newsletter, written, edited, and formatted by members of our community. **Rasik Shah, Richa Kaushik, and Sastri Sripada** provided valuable assistance in this effort. **Vijay Oruganti** helped design and format the newsletter. I thank them immensely for their service. Lastly but most importantly, I wish to express my deep gratitude to **Ram Chugh** for initiating this newsletter and for his tireless efforts in putting it together.

The newsletter is being sent electronically using the email lists accessible to the HCC. Some of you might get duplicate copies because you may be on several e-mail lists. You may delete any duplicates.

Comments and story suggestions on *Reflections* are welcome and should be sent to Ram Chugh at:

Reflections.HCC@Gmail.com

A Youngster's View of Indian History

By Shashank Salgam*



In the beginning a nomadic people known as the Aryans (Nobleman) arrive in India. They came to

India using the Kybher Pass and many other routes to go through the Himalayas. At that time a civilization, the Indus Valley Civilization was on the verge of collapse. The rivers began causing great floods and in some places the rivers dried up and Aryan migrants weren't helping. The Indus Valley civilization eventually collapsed in 1800 BCE. Aryans eventually settled in and were mixing and mingling with Dravidian people and blending different elements of their cultures to make Vedic Culture.

Hundreds of years passed and the great philosophers Mahavira and Gautama Buddha founded Jainism and Buddhism. From the 3rd century BCE to the 5th century CE the great Mauryan and Gupta dynasties were founded and Buddhism diminished but Hinduism grew in popularity.

About year 1000 CE an Afghan leader Mahmud of Ghazni, looking to create a vast central Asian empire, turns to the rich lands of India, conquers most of northern India and creates the Sultanate of Delhi. Later, Mughal emperors rule northern India for the three centuries till the British came in the late 1800's.

The British introduced English, printers, railroads, cars, and coal mining. Rumors began to spread that the British were using pork in cartridges used in guns that led to the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857.

In 1915 Mahatma Gandhi came back to India from South Africa where he was fighting for civil rights for the Indian Community there. In India he gathered many people and made protest about high taxes and discrimination. For the next 32 years he would fight for independence, equality, and justice. In 1947 India got independence. **The years after would be a long road ahead but India would manage and become the center of the world stage.**

* Shashank is 10 years old. He is in Grade 4 at Shaker Road Elementary.

Time Keeping in Ancient India

By Bhargavi Ramamurthy*



As American-born teenagers of Indian origin, we do not get sufficient opportunities to discover and

experience our heritage in our daily lives. However, with the hard work and dedication of the Albany Hindu Temple's Heritage Class, we are able to connect to our ancestors and rich roots. Being a teenager, I am part of the Senior Group in Heritage Class. **We learn about our ancient civilization, their ways of life, and how they conducted themselves every day.**

We all have, at one point, lain under a stary night looking up at the beautiful stars in the midnight sky. One of our topics of discussion this year was naksatras, or birth constellations. We studied the skies, and learnt that the position of the sun, moon, and stars during our time of birth, affects which naksatra we are born into. The night sky is split into naksatras depending on the position of the sun in the sky, and the position of the Earth's orbit. The naksatras are similar to the Zodiac signs, where the sky is split into 12 sections. The naksatras are; Vrsabha, Mithuna, Kataka, Simha, Kanya, Tula, Vrschika, Dhanus, Makara, Kumbha, and Mina. The sun, every month, enters another sign. Twelve months, twelve different zodiac signs. While this may seem like unnecessary information to the average American, the life of an ancient Hindu was based upon knowing the naksatras and positioning of the celestial bodies. Many famous Indian festivals were centered on the cycle of the sun and moon.

I had the opportunity to learn these topics in more depth in Heritage Class than if I had talked about them at home with my family. I am very excited and am looking forward to doing so again next year.

* Bhargavi is a 13-year old student and is currently in Grade 7 at Koda Middle School of Shenendehowa School District (Clifton Park, NY)

Why Grandparents are Important to Me

By Somida Oruganti*



There are many reasons why our grandparents are important to me. But there are 3 specific reasons why they are.

The first reason why our grandparents are important is because they look out for us. If our parents are not here your grandparents may be there to look out for you.

An example of this in my life was when I came home from school, my parents weren't home, and all the doors were locked. When my grandmother saw me outside, she let me inside the house.

The second reason why our grandparents are important is because they can cheer us up when we are sad. If you're gloomy and sad, your grandparents can be there to make you happy.

An example of this in my life was when I was bored and blue, with nothing to do my grandfather told me a joke, and he made me laugh.

The third and last reason why our grandparents are important is because they can feel us accompanied when we feel lonely. If you feel like there is nobody with you, your grandparents are always in your heart.

An example of this in my life was when I felt lonely, and my mom gave me the phone to my grandparents. I talked to them, and I didn't feel lonely anymore.

In conclusion, I am starting to realize that my grandparents are the most important people in my life.

* Somida is 10 years old and is in Grade 4 at Menands School.

Kids: Embrace the Future, Embrace the Past

By Kishan Putta*



In 1974 and 1975, my sister and I were born in Albany. Our parents were among the founders who helped establish the temple at the old farmhouse location.

Back then, at the old temple, the parents would spread newspaper in long rows on the red/black carpet and we'd all eat sitting on the floor pressed next to each other.

It was very tight. But it was also a very tight-knit community. Everyone knew

each other and all the work was done by volunteers. My dad was treasurer and every Sunday my sister and I would help him count the donations from the hundi -- good for math skills!

When I was a teen, K. Bala Uncle started a youth group and encouraged us to express ourselves. Children's Day that year in the old temple was so crowded you could barely walk with everyone sitting on the floor. We did a play about growing up in America. I did a comedy routine making fun of my parents' funny habits/sayings.

But we all ended saying the same thing about our parents: They were the first to come here from India. They knew almost no one here. But they still left comfy lives in India and took a big risk. They struggled to assimilate. They pinched pennies. They shoveled the Temple driveway and mowed its lawn. They did all this so we could have a better life and still retain our culture. But they also had each other -- the community supported each other immensely.

So many people helped me get where I am, starting with the many loving uncles and aunties of the temple community. I live in Washington, DC, and work on health care policy. I ran in a local election in 2012 and won, and I ran in a bigger election in 2014 and lost. But all through the years, the same uncles and aunties who I knew from childhood were there to support me and I will always be grateful.

So, Kids, here's my message to you as you move forward:

You have even more opportunities than we did - there literally are no barriers for you. But make sure that you know about how much struggle went into all these opportunities. Find some of the uncles/aunties who lived here in the 60s and 70s and 80s and ask them what it was like in Albany and at the temple. Ask them what has changed -- and what hasn't. I promise you will be glad you did. And remember - we are always here to help you if you need anything.

*Kishan is the son of Sury and Jhansi Putta. He can be reached at kishanputta@gmail.com

Swami Vivekananda Response to Welcome at the 1893 World Parliament of Religion*



'Sister and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial

welcome, which you have given us.

...

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation, which has sheltered the persecuted, and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion that has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings:

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

*Excerpt from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1984, Vol 1, p. 3.

Note by Ram Chugh: Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was born into an aristocratic Bengali family in Calcutta. From a young age, he was inclined towards spirituality. He was influenced greatly by Swami Ramakrishna and became his chief disciple. After Ramakrishna's death, Swami Vivekananda toured India extensively and acquired first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in the country. He then set up Ramakrishna missions in India and became a chief spokesperson on Vedana and Hinduism. He is often referred to as a national patriotic

saint. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda travelled to America to attend the Conference of World Religions in Chicago. He captivated the audience and earned wild applause for beginning his address with the famous words, "Sisters and Brothers of America." He mesmerized them with his masterful oratory and with his message about the universality of Hinduism and the greatness of Indian culture. He travelled to several cities in the United States and conducted hundreds of lectures and classes, disseminating tenets of Hindu philosophy. His lectures, writings, letters, and poems are published as The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. In 1984, the Government of India declared observance of Swami Vivekananda's birthday on 12 January as a "National Youth Day" every year because, it was felt that the philosophy of Swamiji and the ideals for which he lived and worked could be a great source of inspiration for the Indian Youth."

Associations within the Indian Community of Capital District

Given below is the listing (alphabetically) of the associations within the Albany Capital District. Most of them organize social, cultural' and religious events of interest not only to their own members but also to the community at large. Most of the information for these associations was collected from their websites. In case, an existing association is not included, please send the information (name of the association and the contact person) to Ram Chugh at:

Reflections.HCC@Gmail.com.

Thank you.

1. Albany Telugu Association

www.albanytelugu.org

President V.V. Ramireddy

Secretary: Srinivas Arvapalli

srinivasarvapalli72@gmail.com

2. Albany Maharashtra Mandal

<http://albanymm.org/about>

Suryakant kale (Chair)

3. Gujarati Samaj of Capital District

<http://albanygujaratis.com/about-us.html>;

email: albanygujaratis@yahoo.com

4. Jain Society of Capital District (not

registered for non-profit organization).

Contact persons: Jagdish Doshi (518) 783

0141 & Banshi Mehta (518) 725 1985.

5. Kannada Koota of Capital district

www.kkcd.org

email contact info@kkcd.org

President: Kashinath Prasad; Treasurer:

Satish Bhat

6. New York Albany Tamil Sangam

www.albanytamilsangam.org

President/contact: Mr Kailash Prabhu:

kailash_prabhu@hotmail.com

7. Tri-City India Association (TRICIA)

<http://triciany.org>

President: Dr. Gattu Rao

8. TRICIA Support Group

Contact persons: Paul Uppal, Hari Kabra,

Renu Kallianpur

9. Sixty Plus Group (of TRICIA)

Secretary: Bidhan Chandra

Trustees: Promila Agrawal, Sneha

Chaudhary, Ram Chugh

10. UTSAB (Bengali Association)

President of UTSAB: Ashish Ghosh

PO Box 1872 LATHAM NY 12110

<http://www.utsab.org>

CORRECTION

The first name of the author of, *Sikhism: An Introduction*, in the last Issue of *Reflections* was spelled incorrectly. It is Maninder and not Maninandar.

SUGGESTIONS

Comments and story suggestions on the newsletter, *Reflections*, are welcome and be sent to Ram Chugh at: Reflections.HCC@Gmail.com

REQUEST

Community members are requested to send the names of their grandparents to Dr. Swatantra Mitta, Chair of the Grandparents Day Celebration Committee, at: srinivasmitta@yahoo.com so that they could be invited to the September 13 event at HCC. She can also be reached at 518-399-0638

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