

PRERANA



AN INSPIRATION TO HINDU WOMEN



वर्षप्रतिपदा

ISSUE 17 - 2024

PRERANA

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

We, as women, are always busy with personal and professional commitments. Our day mostly begins with household chores and continues until late evening, doing a number of routine jobs for our family and people around us. At times, it seems that we are working like machines, going on without rest. And then, without realizing, disappointment, despair, and loneliness seep in and we begin to question: 'Why am I doing all this, and for whom?' This is the time, we need to reflect and introspect. This is the time we need to as

catch up with other women around us and ask, 'How are we all doing?'

This magazine, '**Prerana**' is an attempt to reconnect women with each other and with our own self to find our inner '*Prerana*', the motivation to continue working ceaselessly, but with clarity and a vision that we are moving on together to build a strong Hindu society, brick by brick, with our collective efforts, with love and enthusiasm. Let us bring out the beauty in each other, support each other, and thrive together!



WRITE TO PRERANA

Have something to share? You can write about your experiences in HSS, art and craft projects, book reviews, recipes, or about any topic that appeals to you.

Not sure what to write? Each issue has articles under the titles '*American Women I admire*', '*Hindu women from History*', '*What inspires me*', '*The book that changed my life*', '*I want to share*' and many others. Hope this gives you *Prerana* to write to us. Send in your articles, questions and comments to: prerana.feedback@gmail.com



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PREVIOUS ISSUES

Check out all the previous issues of Prerana here:

<https://www.hssus.org/prerana-e-zine>

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh



Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) USA is a voluntary, non-profit, socio-cultural organization. It aims to organize the Hindu community in order to preserve, practice and promote Hindu ideals and values.

HSS conducts structured programs of regular athletic and academic activities to develop strong character and leadership skills in its members, and encourage maintaining Hindu cultural identity in harmony with the larger community.

Visit www.hssus.org for more information

Namaste,

अहल्या द्रौपदी सीता
तारा मंदोदरी तथा
पंचकन्या स्मरे नित्यम्
महापातक नाशनम्

This is one of the shlokas I have learned as a child as most of you must have. Earlier, I used to memorize whatever my grandmother asked me to; no questions asked. Later I began to wonder who these people were. Then I listened to the Ramayana and Mahabharat stories and learned more about these women.

Four of these women are from the Ramayana and Draupadi is the central character of the Mahabharata. The second line of the shloka reminds us to always remember these women. I began wondering what was so special or great about them.

Draupadi was the main character from Mahabharat, and as the wife of Pandavas, she was able to demonstrate her decision making abilities. But what about the other women from the shloka? Those who have read the Valmiki Ramayana and the Mahabharata might not have any doubts, but most of us who have never read these epics, this may be a question.

For example, what is it about **Mandodari** that brought her this recognition? Mandodari was Ravana's wife and implored Ravana to let go of Sita when he abducted her.

Tara was the mother of Angad and the wise wife of Vali who later married Sugriva.

Sita, as all of us know, is the main character in the Ramayana. Yet in films and television serials, she is depicted only as Rama's wife and crying in Ravana's *Ashok vatika*. She was just a devoted wife.

Ahalya, the wife of Rishi Gautama, on the other hand, visits in the story as a woman cast in stone. She was cursed because Indra misbehaved with her and she accepted Indra's overtures. When Sri Rama touches her with his feet, she returns to her human form.

What is great about the shloka is that it helps us remember these women allow us to choose between 'paap' and 'punya'. This is our central theme for the current year and we are delighted to present to our readers the first in a series of articles by Ami ji Ganatra, about these four women. Ami Ganatra is the renowned author of 'Ramayana Unravelled' and 'Mahabharata Unravelled'.

Read on..



Panchakanya, a pre-1945 lithograph from Ravi Varma Press. (Source: Wikipedia)

Anjali Patel

*Shakha: Maitri Shakha, Frisco, Dallas, TX
Hobbies: Travelling and exploring*

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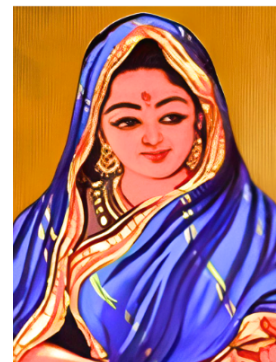
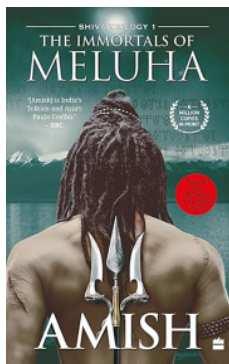
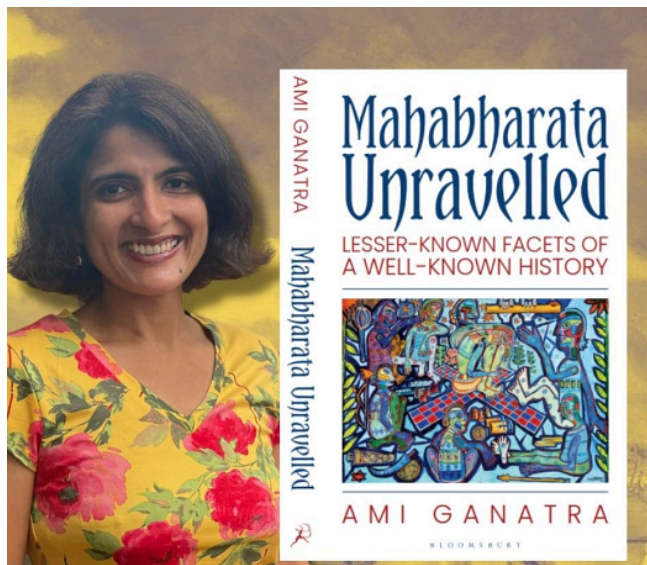
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THE STORY OF AHALYĀ

WRITTEN BY: AMI GANATRA

The story of Ahalyā as popularly known portray her as a helpless lady deceived by both Indra who took advantage of her as well as heartless husband who cursed her to become a stone for no fault of hers. Her redemption happens only when a Young Sri Rama touches the stone with his foot. But Valmiki Ramayana from which is the original source of this happening has a very different narration of it. Here's an excerpt from my book Ramayana Unravalled: Lesser-known facets of Rishi Valmiki's epic, that narrates the incident as Valmiki Ramayana has.

Vishvāmitra began narrating the story of Ahalyā to Rāma and Lakshmana. 'Ahalyā, the wife of the celebrated Rishi Gautama was a woman of exceptional beauty. Her elegance was known far and wide. Even Indra couldn't help but desire her youthful charms. He was waiting for a chance to lure Ahalyā. The opportunity came when Rishi Gautama was away from the āshram one day. Indra, disguised as Gautama, entered Ahalyā's room. 'O lady endowed with such fine limbs, I desire your indulgence,' he said directly, without mincing any words.

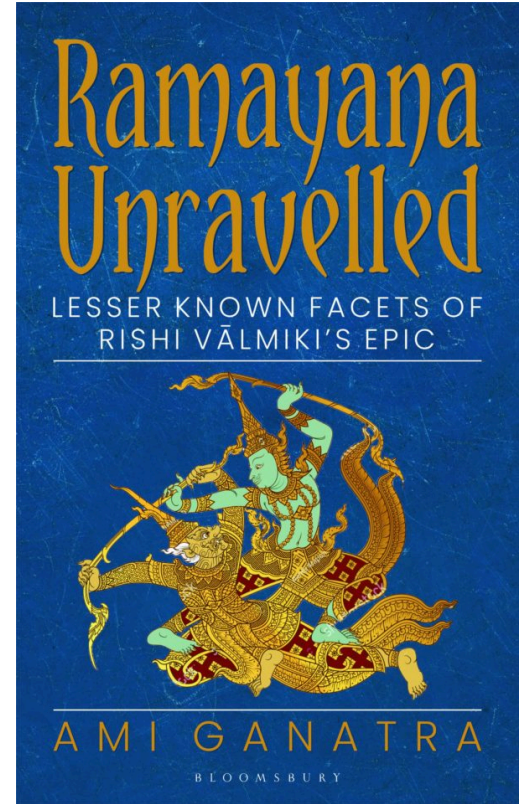
Ahalyā recognised Indra even in his disguise. Ahalyā was excited and even curious that Indra himself desired her—how could she refuse? The excitement impulse caused a lapse of judgement. Ahalyā willingly gave in to Indra's desire. Then, feeling content and realising that Gautama could be back soon, she said, 'Surashrestha, I am gratified by consenting to your wish. Now please leave as soon as possible and protect me from Gautama's wrath.' Indra smiled: 'I am extremely satisfied and will go away as quickly as I came.' Indra tried to rush out, but Gautama had arrived and spotted him by then.

It didn't take Gautama long to put two and two together. He realised what had transpired in his absence. Indra had desired a lady who was someone else's wife and his wife had been unfaithful. Gautama looked at Indra, burning with anger. Indra was already shivering with fear. Gautama pronounced a curse on Indra: 'You took my form and did what shouldn't have been done. That is why you will become impotent from now on.' As soon as the words were spoken by Gautama, Indra's testicles fell off.



From his wife, Gautama sought atonement. 'May you live here in seclusion, unseen by the world, engaged in intense tapasyā, fasting and surviving only on air. One day Rāma, the son of Dasharatha, will arrive in this āshram. When that happens and you have welcomed him, cleansed of your greed and delusions, you will unite back with me.' Saying so, Gautama walked out of the āshram to live in the Himālayas. Indra had to eventually get new testicles. Testicles of an animal were implanted on him, we are told.'

Vishvāmitra continued, 'Come along to this āshram of Gautama and redeem Ahalyā, who resides here in the form of the goddess herself.' Rāma and Lakshmana followed Vishvāmitra into the āshram. There they saw her, shining bright, illumined by the radiance of her tapasyā. It was impossible to look at her—just like we cannot stare at the intense light of the sun reflected from a pool of water. Her aura was like that of a full moon shining from behind a cloak of fog. The arrival of Rāma marked the success of Ahalyā's tapasyā. Rāma and Lakshmana bowed down and touched her feet reverentially. Ahalyā welcomed them. While Rāma and Lakshmana were in the āshram accepting Ahalyā's hospitality, they heard some steps



approaching them and then Gautama appeared at the door. He had kept his word. So had Ahalyā. They were both united once again in their nuptial bond.

The story of Ahalya is that of a lady who falters but has the strength of character to not only acknowledge her mistake but also undertake intense tapasya to overcome her flaw and achieve complete control over her mind and senses. In fact, her story is not different from many other rishis who achieved greatness after having faltered before in life. The beauty of Dharma is that one is not condemned to eternal damnation for making a mistake, rather it gives us a chance for prayaschitta. But no one else can do it for us. We have that agency and we have to use that agency. Ahalya did. She transformed herself and got a place of reverence in our Itihasa.

Ami Ganatra



This is What I Have Learned From My Child



WRITTEN BY: BINDOO TALATI

There is a saying 'What good are wings, without the courage to fly?' These words resonate deeply with how I learned to believe in myself with my daughter's support. A few years ago, I began learning classical dance with my daughter to fulfill my childhood dream.

I never thought even in my dream that I would perform on the stage. I have been fond of dancing since childhood,

But I had my inhibitions. it was probably because I had a different upbringing in India than my kids in the U.S. As an Indian immigrant and the mother of three kids, my pursuits for dance remained buried, but my passion for it never died.

One morning my daughter amazed me when she asked me to give a stage performance with her. I was not sure of myself at first. I wondered how would others react and what if I forgot the steps. But my daughter's words of encouragement never stopped as she helped me prepare for the performance. Nobody else in the family but her ingrained that idea in me 'You can do it.' And I did. My journey has continued since then and she is my biggest supporter. From her, I learned the value of self-belief and having the courage to go after the things that bring me joy.



Bindoo Talati

*Shakha: Springfield IL Shakha
Hobbies: volunteer coordinating*



CREATED BY: NEENA NARUMANCHI

FESTIVAL WORD FINDER

GUESS THESE FESTIVALS AND FIND THEM IN THE WORD FINDER.

(WORDS CAN BE IN ANY DIRECTION!)

1. A NIGHT OF PRAYING TO BHAGWAN SHIVA.
2. FESTIVAL OF COLORS.
3. HINDU NEW YEAR.
4. THE DAY BHAGWAN RAM WAS BORN.
5. A SPECIAL DAY OF WORSHIP FOR THE GURU.
6. THE DAY BHAGWAN KRISHNA WAS BORN.
7. FESTIVAL TO CELEBRATE THE BOND BETWEEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
8. GANPATHI BAPPA MORIYA!
9. NINE NIGHTS OF PRAYER TO THE GODDESSES.
10. FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS.

I	R	A	J	X	X	N	L	S	H	P	C	O	M	H	C	R	X	N	H	P	A	S	A	L
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M	C	I	Y	J	E	E	N	D	I	O	S	S	O	T	M	C	E	E	S	O	H	H	I	N
U	K	B	O	A	Y	Q	B	S	J	G	B	E	K	Z	U	K	Y	Q	J	G	A	A	B	B
X	R	D	T	P	D	Q	R	C	T	E	H	V	L	A	X	R	D	Q	T	E	K	N	A	R
F	A	D	Z	V	M	W	G	U	R	U	P	U	R	N	I	M	A	W	D	Z	X	W	F	G



Neena Narumanchi

Answers on Page

Shakha: Downtown Chicago Shakha, Chicago, IL

Herbal Queen Of Arunachal Pradesh



WRITTEN BY: VASUDHA PAWAR - DESHMUKH

In a proud moment for the women of Bharat and of Arunachal Pradesh, Yanung Jamoh Lego, known as the '**Adi Queen of Herbs**', has been honored with the prestigious Padma Shri award this year 2024 for her contributions to the field of agriculture, on the eve of 75th Republic Day.

A shining example among the 132 Padma awardees in 2024, including 29 remarkable women, is Yanung Jamoh Lego. Hailing from Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang district, the 58-year-old herbal medicine expert and former deputy director in the state agriculture department has been a beacon of traditional healing. She has played a pivotal role in reviving the ancient medicinal practices of the Adi tribe. The Adi community people reside mainly in East Siang, Upper Siang, Siang and in parts of Lower Dibang Valley districts of the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Yanung Jamoh Lego's remarkable journey is one of selfless service and unwavering commitment to preserving the indigenous knowledge of medicinal herbs. Despite facing financial constraints and personal challenges, her passion for traditional healing and perseverance led her to dedicate her life to reviving the lost healing system of the Adi tribe. This dedication has significantly contributed to the preservation and continuation of Arunachal



Pradesh's rich medical heritage. People from far-flung areas, including foreigners, come to her center where they receive free herbal treatment for various ailments including cancer and AIDS. For many, she is the last beacon of hope in their fight against ailments that are difficult to treat and cure.

Over 3 decades, having provided medical care to over 10,000 patients, Yanung has not only healed bodies but also empowered communities. Her educational initiatives have enlightened one lakh individuals on the benefits of medicinal herbs, while her training programs for Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have equipped them with the skills to incorporate herbal remedies in daily life.

Yanung Jamoh Lego's selflessness extends beyond her work. She has said, "I do it for my own passion and knowledge that nature and my parents have given me; I don't want to take advantage of struggling patients. I get a lot of joy from helping people with my herbal remedies."

A true environmentalist, Yanung Jamoh Lego has been a driving force in promoting the conservation of medicinal plants.



Annually planting over 5,000 medicinal plants, she has not only contributed to biodiversity but has also advocated for the establishment of herbal kitchen gardens in every household across the district. Her role as a conservationist has significantly contributed to retaining the biodiversity in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Deeply knowledgeable about the medicinal value of herbs, Yanung Jamoh Lego has meticulously preserved, protected, and practiced the traditional healing system – a heritage passed down through generations. Her awe-inspiring journey, fueled by passion, perseverance, and unwavering dedication to the ancient Adi medicinal practices, culminated in the prestigious Padma Shri award bestowed upon her in 2024.

Vasudha Pawar - Deshmukh

Shakha: Arjun Shakha, Pittsburgh PA,
Hobbies: cooking, listening to music, traveling

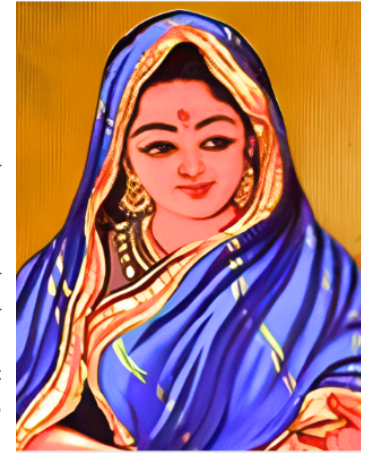
HINDU WOMEN



Ubhaya Bharati – The Great Vedic scholar

WRITTEN BY: KARUNA MESTRY

The notion that Hindu women are confined to domesticity is a persistent but fading myth. As we turn the pages of history, exceptional characters like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, Ghosha, Ratnavati, Rani Lakshmibai, Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Kalpana Chawla, Pratibhatai Patil, etc emerge, shattering stereotypes and commanding respect. Today, we delve deeper into the life of one such jewel, Ubhaya Bharati, a renowned scholar of the Vedic era.



Ubhaya Bharati, daughter of Vishnumitra, resided near the banks of the Sonbhadra River. She married Mandana Mishra, a renowned scholar and disciple of Acharya Kumaril Bhatta. Together, the couple led a traditional Vedic life in Mahishmati village. One fateful day, Adi Shankara, a young scholar on a mission to revive Vedic knowledge, arrived at their doorstep. Shankaracharya had the vision to spread the importance of Vedas; hence he traveled all over and engaged in shastrarth (debates)

He made people understand that the Vedantic path is superior. Though surprised by the challenge from a much younger opponent (Shankara was in his 30s, Mandana Mishra in his 70s), Mandana Mishra accepted.

The question arose – who could possibly judge such a high-caliber debate? The answer lay closer than expected – Ubhaya Bharati. Her exceptional intellect and deep understanding of the scriptures made her the perfect arbiter. Shankara readily agreed, and Ubhaya Bharati's selection as judge stands as a testament to the esteemed position women could hold in Hindu society. Gender equality can be seen.



The debate commenced with a unique stipulation: if Mandana Mishra prevailed, he would renounce his marital life and embrace sanyas ashram. Conversely, if Shankaracharya wins, he will accept grihasthashram (household life). For days, the two scholars engaged in a spirited exchange of arguments and counter-arguments. Ubhaya Bharati, known for her sharp intellect, listened intently but found declaring a clear winner a formidable task. Then, Ubhaya Bharati did a smart trick. She put a flower garland around the neck of both contestants. The next day, the flowers around Mandana Mishra's neck started withering due to agitation. He started losing his temper.

He is brilliant but losing control of his internal wisdom. Hence, Ubhaya Bharati declares Shankaracharya as the winner. Shankaracharya was impressed by her impartial judgment.

She courageously challenged the undefeatable Adi Shankaracharya for the debate as she is ardhangani (better half). Shankaracharya accepted it. During the first debate, she noticed that as a sanyasi, Shankaracharya is not aware of the marital pleasures. She started questioning Kamashastra. Shankaracharya kindly requested for 30 days' time to answer that. Then, through yog shakti, he entered King Amruka's body (parakaya pravesh) who had died on that day itself. He gained all the knowledge and returned to his original body on the 29th day. He went back to Ubhaya Bharati and explained.

Ubhaya Bharati, thoroughly impressed by Shankaracharya's resourcefulness and newfound knowledge, declared him the greatest Vedic scholar. Inspired by his teachings, both Ubhaya Bharati and Mandana Mishra, who took the name Sureshwaracharya, became his disciples. Ubhaya Bharati is said to have settled at the Shringeri Math, a renowned monastery established by Adi Shankaracharya. Even today, many revere her as the reincarnation of the goddess Saraswati, patron of knowledge and learning.

Karuna Mestry

Shakha: Swami Vivekanand Shakha, Kent, Seattle

Hobbies: Oil Painting

Our State of Bharat - Tripura

WRITTEN BY: MANASI PALKAR



Tripura is a state in North-East India. It shares borders with the two neighboring countries of Bangladesh, Mizoram, and the Indian State of Assam. On its north, south, and west, Tripura is surrounded by Bangladesh. Its international border is 856 km long (84 percent of the total length of the border). The state connects to the rest of India by National Highway-8 which links Guwahati to Sabroom via Agartala which is currently being upgraded to four traffic lanes.

Size and Seasons

Tripura nearly equals the size of Montana in the USA. Agartala is the capital city of Tripura. The main language is Bengali followed by other local languages such as Kokborok, Mogh, Chakma, Halam, Garo, Bishnupriya, Manipuri, Hindi, Oriya, and English. The summer temperatures are between 20° to 36° C. Winter temperatures range from 7° to 27° C. Rainy season is experienced from June to September.

Fun Facts

The state fruit is the Queen Pineapple and the state flower is Nageswar; the state tree is Agar, the state bird is the green imperial pigeon, and the state animal is langur. This tells us what is popular and abundant in Tripura. Education in Tripura is compulsory and free for children between ages 6 and 14 through thousands of public, primary, and secondary schools.

Cultural Life

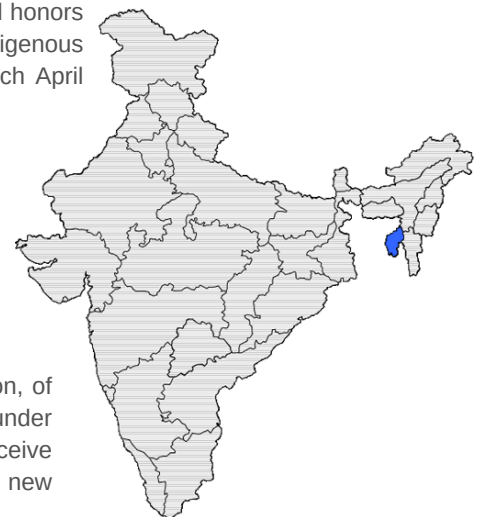
Most of the population, adhering to Hinduism and speaking Bengali, shares in the broader cultural traditions of India, while the Muslim minority is closer in culture to Bangladesh. Traditions of the tribal peoples are important elements of Tripura's cultural life, with each community possessing its own festivals, folklore, music, and dance.

Two of Tripura's largest festivals are the Khar chi Puja and the Garia. The Khar chi Puja—also known as the festival of the 14 Gods—has its origin in tribal tradition but is now a major temple festival, celebrated within a predominantly Hindu framework by both tribal and nontribal peoples. The festival takes place in Agartala every July and honors the deities and the Earth. The Garia celebration is a prominent festival of the indigenous population and is associated particularly with the Tripuri people. Garia is held each April following the planting of the fields to pray for a successful agricultural year.

History

The history of Tripura includes two distinct periods—the largely legendary period described in the Rajamala, a chronicle of the supposed early maharajas of Tripura, and the period since the reign of the great king Dharma Manikya (reigned c. 1431–62). At the beginning of the 17th century, the Mughal Empire extended its sovereignty over much of Tripura.

Then the British East India Company obtained the diwani, or financial administration, of Bengal in 1765 and the part of Tripura that had been under Mughal rule came under British control. From 1808 onwards, each successive ruler was required to receive investiture from the British government. In 1905 Tripura was attached to the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam and was known as Hill Tippera.





The last ruling Maharaja of Tripura, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, ascended the throne in 1923, and before he died in 1947, he settled Tripura's accession to the newly independent country of India. Tripura officially became part of India on October 15, 1949. It was made a union territory on September 1, 1956, and it became a state on January 21, 1972.

In the 1980s, there was considerable ethnic violence in Tripura, fueled largely by local demands for an independent tribal homeland. In 1988, the tribal dissidents ceased hostilities and dropped demands for autonomy in return for increased participation in the state government.

(Reference: Britannica, Internet Blogs and Government site)

Manasi Palkar

Shakha: BhagatSingh Shakha, Sammamish, WA. NW sambhagJ

Hobbies: Gardening, Storytelling



MY ART



WRITTEN AND CREATED BY: SRI VAISHNAVI

Art can be understood as any form of creative expression that evoke emotion, stimulate the senses or communicate ideas. Art often reflects the culture, values and perspective of the artist and can serve aesthetic and social purposes.

Pencil art and canvas painting have been the popular form of artistic expression for centuries and widely practiced by artists around the world. I have been into pencil art, canvas painting since my childhood.

Pencil art refers to artwork created using pencils. This includes drawing, sketching or shading with graphite or colored pencils on various surfaces such as canvas, paper. Pencil art can range from simple sketches to highly detailed and intricate drawings with a wide range of styles and subjects.

Canvas painting refers to creation of art work on a canvas surface using various painting techniques and mediums such as acrylics, oils, water colors or mixed media. Canvas painting allows artists to use a variety of tools to create a wide range of styles.

According to Hindu calendar, Chaitra Shukla Pratipada is celebrated in many regions across Bharat with different names (Ugadi, Gudi Padwa) but the significance remains the start of the spring season, bearing the meaning of beginning of new year.

Since this is the month of Ugadi Festival, I am presenting the Canvas art that I painted for Ugadi or Samvatsaradi. In this painting, I showcased the art of festivities and celebration. The green themed colors are chosen to indicate that trees come back to life at this time of the year. Goddess Parvati/Lakshmi prayed for the auspicious beginning of the year.





All the families decorate their house with Mango leaves as thoran to the entrance and flower garlands will elevate the decorations. This is the season in which Mango trees bear fruits, which is considered as auspicious to all the Hindus. Special dishes are made on this day and Ugadi pachadi is must and distributed among households which has 6 flavors sweet, sour, salty, bitter, astringent and piquant symbolizing one must experience all the flavors and make most of them in the coming year. In the painting, a group of people are celebrating it by sharing it.

My other favorite hobby is pencil art, which helps me to communicate values and culture. The beauty in Pencil art is the detailing, the more details within the sketch makes the art hyper realistic. I have used various shades of graphite pencils which helped me to create a wide range of textures, tones and details capturing the essence of the subjects with remarkable precision and depth. This art form helps me to immerse myself with a deep connection with the subjects that I choose. Pencil art stands as a testament to the skill, creativity, requiring patience, precision and keen eye for details. In the world of digital imagery this art form stands as a testament to the enduring power of handcrafted expression.



Sri Vaishnavi

Shakha: Peoria shakha, Peoria Illinois
Hobbies: Drawing, painting and pencil art



ON THE COVER - VARSHA PRATIPADA

Cover page art depicts the unique Solar New year concept called Vishu, celebrated in coastal parts of south karnataka and kerala states. "Vishu kani" is the arrangement made with fresh fruits, vegetables and flowers adorned with jewellery and other decors and flanked by a mirror. This is kept at the home mandir next to the traditional deepam (called vilakku) and Lord Krishna is generally the centre of the Newyear prayers. It is a traditional ritual that every member of the family sees ones own reflection in the mirror first thing in the morning (before looking at anything in particular) and promises all of a prosperous year ahead. This arrangement is made the previous night and kept ready for the new morning.

Artist: Sabitha Hebbar

Shakha: Veer Savarkar Shakha. PSW sambhag | Hobbies: Art and music

My Reflection Culture

WRITTEN BY: ANKITA WAYCHAL

Introduction

On my journey through life, I have been steeped in the vibrant tapestry of Indian Culture.

Born and raised in the heart of this diverse country, my experiences have been shaped by countless traditions, festivals, and values. The heady scent of spices during Diwali fills me with nostalgia, and the rhythmic beat of dhol drums at a wedding celebration brings me joy.

In this reflection of culture, I invite you to embark on a journey through my eyes, exploring the rich heritage that has shaped who I am.

Tradition

Indian culture is a vibrant tapestry woven from countless traditions that transcend time and geography. These traditions bridge the gap between generations, from the exquisite artistry of rangoli adorning festival thresholds to the deeply reverent rituals that connect families. Every element, from the vibrant pageantry of weddings to the simple, profound practices of daily life. The cultural landscape is enriched by each tradition, from colorful weddings that are filled with rituals to simple yet profound daily practices. India is home to many languages with Hindi and English being the official languages.

Festivals

India's vibrant calendar explodes with a symphony of festivals, each one a symphony of colors, emotions and spirituality. Family forms the heart of these celebrations. Events like weddings, Diwali and religious ceremonies are occasions for family members to come together, strengthen bonds and share joy. These joyous celebrations serve not only to mark the passage of time but also to reaffirm the enduring cultural unity that binds India's rich diversity.

Values

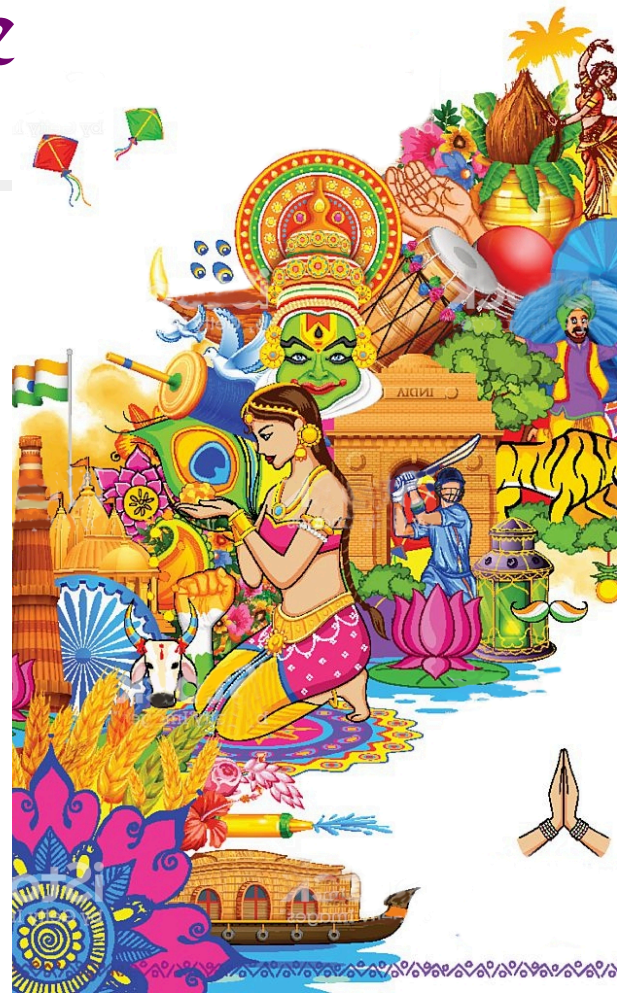
The ethos of Indian Culture is filled with values that are passed down through generations.

The moral fabric is formed through the respect for elders, the importance of community and hospitality and a deep understanding of nature.

My character has been shaped by these values and I have also come to appreciate how everything is connected.

When I think about the cultural background that has shaped me, it becomes apparent that India's diversity is not just a collection of customs, it is a living breathing entity that persists and leaves an everlasting imprint on those who embrace it.

Indian culture's future is filled with exciting possibilities as it embraces change while still cherishing its rich traditions. The interplay of tradition and modernity is expected to create a cultural landscape that resonates with a dynamic and globalized world.



Ankita Waychal

Shakha: Chanakya Shakha, San Ramon

Hobbies : Singing

BOOK REVIEW



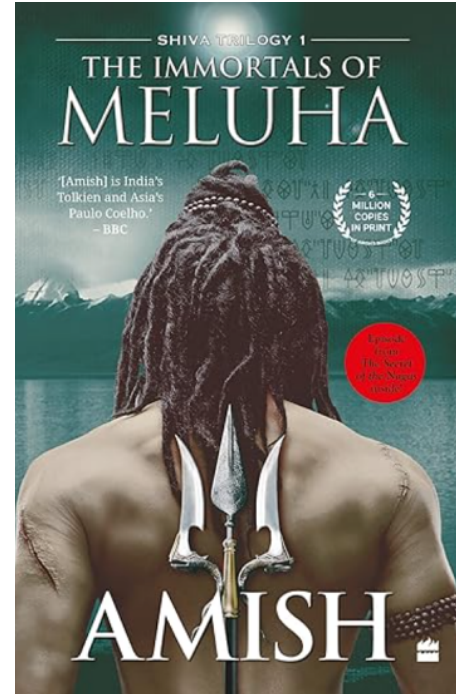
The Immortals of MELUHA - By Amish Tripathi

WRITTEN BY: PREETI PRATIMA:

Growing up in a household where our Hindu identity was supreme but there were hardly any discussions of Hindu scriptures or rituals, my knowledge of our Hindu scriptures is minimal. Just like many people who bore the brunt of partition, my grandmother's top priority was her three children's survival. As a young widow, who had to flee Pakistan with practically no possessions except her precious three young boys in tow, her youth and most of her middle age went into establishing herself and educating her boys. My dad and his brothers never learned about any of our religious texts; perhaps because they never had anyone to teach them.

My mother, on the other hand, came from a family of Arya Samajis; she grew up questioning most of the stories of Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharat, etc. As a result, my and my sisters' knowledge of our vast collection of religious texts & stories is limited. I say this to let you know when I decided to read The Immortals of Melhua by Amish Tripathi, I developed a strong desire to know more about the stories relating to devas, asuras, and our deities. I had no clue what to expect and no cross-references from any religious texts.

What drew me to the book was the claim by the author that it is a book about approaches the existence of Shiva and Sati uniquely and the book takes the perspective that before any of the deities became so they were all human beings with exceptional qualities.



The story is set in Melhua, a near-perfect world created by one of the greatest Suryavanshi kings to ever rule the world, Bhagwan Ram. Every great story needs a conflict and some bad guys. Here the conflict is between the Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis who have been enemies for generations. One of the points of contention between the two kingdoms is the water of the dying river- Saraswati. Chandravanshis have joined hands with Nagas, people who have extreme physical deformities and thus are forced to live in the shadows. Nagas are painted as creatures who possess brute force, They have no remorse and are cold-hearted in their attacks. The present king of Melhua, King Daksha, has no way to fight the onslaught of attacks by the combined forces of Chandravanshis and Nagas, Therefore, he seeks the help of the brave tribe of Gunas, led by Shiva.

The story is fascinating from the very first sentence. The author has done a remarkable job of creating the world of Melhua, which is an advanced city, putting most of our modern cities to shame. There are no magical powers or 'divya shaktis' at work. Everything is a work of science, accompanied by human perseverance and grit. The tale also has its fair share of intrigue in the form of Nagas who are always lurking in the shadows.

Even with my limited knowledge of scriptures, I could pick references from our religious texts like Princess Sati who marries Shiva. There is Mount Mandar where Somras is made by Brahaspati, the chief inventor, giving Suryavanshis the ability to live a long healthy life. Shiva becomes Neelkanth when he drinks the 'somras' in its pure form. There could be many such references, big or small but like I said in the beginning, my knowledge here is quite limited.

In Tripathi's words, "Myths are nothing but jumbled memories of a true past. A past buried under mounds of earth and ignorance." I'm not sure how much of what he writes is our itihaas but the fact that it could be our itihaas makes this book worth reading.

Preeti Pratima

Shakha: Chanakya Shakha, San Ramon

Hobbies: Reading

MY JOURNEY TO YOGA AND SELF DISCOVERY



WRITTEN BY: JYOTHI YAYAVARAM

My journey to Yoga didn't begin with a longing for inner peace, health benefits, or spiritual enlightenment. It began with a series of serious health issues.

One day, I suddenly woke up at midnight, struggling to rise from my bed with severe numbness in my left hand and left leg. I started to have trouble with simple tasks such as cutting vegetables, tying shoelaces, and holding anything. I immediately realized something was wrong and consulted an orthopedic surgeon through my PCP. They did many tests and an MRI and diagnosed me with a C5-C6 Cervical Herniated Disc. I was worried and depressed with sleepless nights, as the doctor had told me that my only option was to get surgery.

My PCP suggested that I see a neurologist for a second opinion. As soon as the neurologist saw me and the MRI, he was shocked at how I was still walking and not in a wheelchair. He gave me hope about options other than surgery. He said, "If you were my sister I wouldn't suggest going for surgery. Your body tells you what to do and what not to."

This hope is what led me to think about starting yoga. I started my Yoga journey by doing simple stretches and Surya Namaskars. I slowly started to see the improvement in the numbness. About six months later, I began to feel like my old self again, completely normal.

Soon after, I was also going through Menopause. I had 75 days of consecutive spotting which made me restless and annoyed—each day brought a new challenge with surges of hot flashes that left me drenched in sweat and frustration. I had tried countless treatments and therapies to relieve the pain and possibly cure it.

After two years of struggling with all of these different problems, I finally turned back to yoga as my last and final resort. I knew that yoga was not only physical exercise, so I started doing breathing exercises along with the asanas. In very little time, something miraculous began to happen. The menopause passed without hot flashes, and my mind was calm and peaceful.

At the same time, the COVID pandemic hit. Right in the pandemic, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and my father had a heart attack. Both my parents passed away within a few months. I began to sink into the deep depths of depression and stress which led to Eczema flare-ups. After consulting a doctor about my eczema, they diagnosed it as an autoimmune disease and advised me to reduce my anxiety.

Then, I decided to spend at least an hour each day doing yoga without fail. As I needed motivation to continue doing it every day, some of my friends and I created a WhatsApp group where we joined a Zoom call to do asanas and pranayama along with meditation and continue to do so till today.

Now, every day I stand strong, proud of how far I've come, filled with a profound gratitude for what yoga has given me. Though my journey to Yoga may have begun in adversity, it has blossomed into an awakening; a journey of self-discovery, healing, and transformation that continues to unfold with each breath, each step, and each moment of presence.

I hope my story helps you all realize that even with our busy schedules, we should spare at least 30 minutes a day and use Yoga, as a tool to relax our body and mind because if we are healthy and happy, our families will be too.



Jyothi Yayavaram

Shakha: Dharani shakha, Uttar LA:
Hobbies: Cooking, Crafting cakes, Gardening

A Summer Camp with a Dharmic Approach



WRITTEN BY: ESHA SHUKLA-SHARMA

We are almost at the end of the school year; some plan to go to India and explore our Janmabhoomi and be with our dear ones while others are stuck with corporate jobs and unable to go. So, what do we do with kids? Summer camps come to the rescue.

Summer camps are part of the experience of youth culture in America. All sorts of summer camps are available, for instance, coding camps, biking camps, and pottery-making camps. What if we had a chance to instill some cultural values in kids through a camp that focused on Dharmic values – A Hindu values-based camp?

'Waves Camp' is one such camp that's gaining popularity in the Seattle area. It's a Hindu values-based summer camp for kids ages 5-13 years and they follow the Aum school curriculum. In the 2-week camp, they get introduced to diverse subjects from Vedic math, mantra chanting, holistic cooking to yoga. At the end of the camp, there are skits, plays, and performances. They even chant shokhas that they have learned over time.

My eight-year-old daughter Anaika attended Waves camp last year and was thrilled to be a part of it next year too. She said, "I truly enjoyed the camp. My favorite was learning about holistic cooking methods like sprouting and the importance of Indian spices on our health. I look forward to educating myself more about India".

This kids' camp is organized by Waves and the syllabus is prepared in collaboration with the nationally accredited Aum School. Aum Education Society of America, a non-profit organization, fills the need for Dharmic values in early childhood and elementary education by designing a curriculum integrated with mainstream subjects. They are a group of lifelong volunteers working in Hindu-American community organizations who want to provide families with a school where children learn Dharmic values with academic excellence.

Manasi Palkar, President of Waves camp shares the idea behind the aum camp, "In Bharat, the upbringing of a child is supported by extended families and communities, embodying the proverbial 'It takes a village to raise a child.' Conversely, in the USA, parents must intentionally cultivate this village. Aum School serves as such a village, where children absorb sanskaras and dharmic values through our curriculum and activities. Here, they learn A for Aum and B for Bharat!"



She said that the Aum school was started during the pandemic,

online. In 2022, they commenced with the in-person summer camps. They have also established regular Hindu schools in some parts of the USA, and they aim to do the same in Seattle. "Since it's mostly a volunteer-run organization, we need a lot of support from the parents and our community," she added.

It is good to see that we have all the necessary outlets to make our kids aware of our divine India. It's up to us how strong we build our community and make our kids proud of their roots. Swami Vivekanand rightly said, 'India has been the land of philosophers and home of spiritualism for all ages. It has given birth to various religions that teach the world the lesson of peace, harmony, and love.'

Esha Shukla-Sharma

Shakha:S.Bharathi Shakha, Bellevue, WA Sambhag NW

Hobbies: Dancing, Writing, Nature walks

HOME SWEET HOME



WRITTEN BY: ANJALI PATEL

We recognize five senses- vision, touch, smell, taste, and hearing; we experience the world through these senses especially our memorable experiences are associated with some or the other sensory memory. When we say 'home sweet home' some sensory memories related to our house begin to play.

"All Indian homes stink" is a general derogatory statement, but when we enter the home and if some nice food is being cooked, that smell makes us feel homely. Other than food, the agarbatti in the evening makes our home calm and makes us feel the presence of god. What fragrance makes your home a home?

Sound of TV, classical music, movie songs, bhajan, shlok, gazal, western music- each one touches some emotions, which makes us calm, happy, excited, emotional and much more as each music has its time and place. Do you think your home has some specific moods that go with these things? Do you think you want to do something about it?

Flowers, candles, decorated dining tables, photo frames, or anything specific to your home will make your home complete. Seeing some form of Bhagwan Ganesh at your home somewhere is nothing less than a warm connection with yourself and your house! My mother makes this or my wife/husband/child makes this, and that tastes amazing because the main ingredient of that recipe is love. Similarly, hug, kiss, or pat on the back- everyone knows the value of this as a family. It is precious because it contributes to your memory of 'home'.

Can you Identify what makes your home special and what those five things are that remind you of your house?

Anjali Patel

Shakha: Maitri Shakha, Frisco, Dallas, TX

Hobbies: Travelling and exploring



FESTIVAL WORD FINDER (ANSWER FOR PUZZLE PAGE)

I	R	A	J	X	X	N	L	S	H	P	C	O	M	H	C	R	X	N	H	P	A	S	A	L
L	O	T	A	E	S	V	L	E	I	F	A	N	S	M	O	H	S	V	I	F	T	M	T	L
A	K	A	N	E	E	S	H	W	A	R	A	E	A	E	O	K	A	S	A	R	A	E	A	H
W	S	I	M	L	D	O	T	M	A	D	N	R	N	F	I	S	D	T	A	D	I	F	I	T
I	F	A	A	R	A	E	Z	T	N	A	C	H	J	R	D	F	A	E	U	A	T	R	A	Z
D	K	T	S	A	N	O	J	A	G	E	M	A	A	L	E	K	N	O	V	R	A	L	T	J
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M	Z	B	A	J	R	A	N	G	B	A	H	O	L	I	M	J	R	A	B	A	B	H	I	N
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I	R	T	A	R	V	A	N	C	A	I	X	L	D	P	G	K	E	E	X	I	K	N	U	P
N	T	V	M	D	I	L	Z	R	D	S	I	A	N	O	N	T	I	L	I	V	S	D	V	Z
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U	K	B	O	A	Y	Q	B	S	J	G	B	E	K	Z	U	K	Y	Q	J	G	A	A	B	B
X	R	D	T	P	D	Q	R	C	T	E	H	V	L	A	X	R	D	Q	T	E	K	N	A	R
F	A	D	Z	V	M	W	G	U	R	U	P	U	R	N	I	M	A	W	D	Z	X	W	F	G

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh



हिन्दू स्वयंसेवक संघ

NORTH WEST

NORTH EAST

GREAT LAKES

CENTRAL PACIFIC

MIDWEST

MID ATLANTIC

PACIFIC SOUTH WEST

SOUTH WEST

SOUTH EAST

PRERANA ^{e-zine}

AN INSPIRATION TO HINDU WOMEN

Music is the celestial sound, and it is sound that controls the whole universe, not atomic vibrations.
Sound energy, sound power, is much, much greater than any other power in the world.

~ Swami Satchidananda

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