



A premium retirement village
.... where the good life gets better !

SIVIDHA NEWS

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Thought for Today: <http://www.thoughtfortoday.org.uk/todays-thought/>

➤ **From the MD's Desk:**

Dear Friends,

Seasons greetings - I wish all of you a merry Christmas and a very happy new year.

The projects in Sividha are progressing - albeit a bit behind schedule.

The Entrance gate cum the security cabin is complete and has been commissioned.

The cottages in Phase 1A are complete; the ramps connecting the road to the cottages are being built. This took more than the projected time. This should be done by this month end. After that, the cottages will be handed over to the shareholders.

We have asked for an increase in the sanctioned load of electricity - this became necessary because of changes in BESCOM rules. Once this comes through - hopefully in one month - the solar panels will be commissioned.

Finding a partner for the ACF remains a challenge. We are trying to utilize the space in the club house. This needs investment. Most interested parties are reluctant to invest. They are ready to start the facility in the existing cottages! We will continue our efforts to find someone who will invest in doing up the space in the clubhouse. An added challenge is to generate enough revenue from this.

The Members Committee is working hard to suggest amendments to the RVM; this has become necessary as we have no provision in the RVM to deal with transgressions. The Board will consider the MC suggestions and we will call an EGM soon to discuss this and make some changes in the RVM.

You will also hear about the investment needed for water conservation in Sividha. We need to conserve rain water and charge our bore wells. We have a proposal for the same. This will be placed before the SH in an EGM, as it involves a substantial expenditure.

The service tax department has questioned the Sividha model. It has sent a notice for payment of a large sum of money as service tax for the 'services' rendered by the company to the SH. We have contacted experts in the field. They are confident that this notice will not stand scrutiny. This issue will be taken up seriously and challenged. We will keep you informed of the progress.

Regards
Dr. K. Lakshman



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SNL Archives: All back issues of Suvidha News Letter are available at: <http://suvidha.co.in/news-letters.html>
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➤ Event Highlights:

✚ 25-11-2016: Potluck Lunch Programme

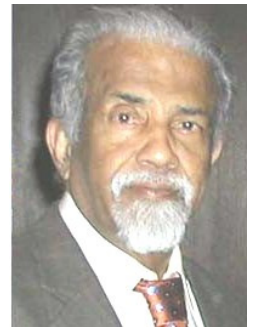
Suvidha Ladies Club had **Pot Luck** lunch on **Friday 25th November, 2016** at the Banquet Hall at 12 Noon. About 20 ladies participated with as many items. It was a great fun tasting so many dishes. Passing the parcel was played and prizes were given to 1st, 2nd and 3rd winners; picture says a hundred words, see for yourself by clicking on the link below. The ladies had a wonderful day all to themselves!



Link to photos is given here: <https://goo.gl/photos/3P31XxE55VPQF8kK6>

✚ 27-11-2016: Talk by Prof. E.C.G. Sudarshan on “SUNYA”

Suvidha Ladies Club organised a talk by internationally renowned physicist Prof. **E.C.G. Sudarshan**, professor at the University of Texas, Austin, USA on Sunday the 27th Nov.2016. The topic of the talk was **"Emptiness (Sunya): How does one understand it"**. It is just fortuitous that Prof. E.C.G. Sudarshan was with us in Suvidha Village for a few days. We are very thankful to Prof. E.C.G. Sudarshan for accepting our invitation.



Prof. Sudarshan is the recipient of many prestigious awards worldwide for his innumerable contributions in the fields of Physics, Philosophy and Vedanta. He has published 10 books and presented more than 400 papers in refereed journals around the world. In his distinguished career of more than half a century Prof Sudarshan has been associated at different times with the Indian Institute of Science, Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, Harvard University, University of Rochester, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, to name a few.

The learned professor was conferred Padma Bhushan (1974) and Padma Vibhushan(2007) by the Government of India in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the world of science. You may listen to his talk at the link given here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzTGY9kvPaEcWNvUFVCakhYZGM/view?usp=sharing>

✚ 4-12-2016: Yoga Camp for elders (5 Nov – 4 Dec 2016)

The volunteers of "Residents of Suvidha", our Neighbourhood WhatsApp Group, conducted a Yoga workshop (8 sessions) for Suvidha Seniors by Ms. Bijaya, Yoga Therapist of Sagar Clinic on Saturday/Sundays from 10 am to 12 pm in Club House. About 20 seniors attended the workshop. Topics covered are tailor made for the participants to cover Asanas, Mudras and breathing techniques. It was a rewarding experience for the participants. Thanks to Ms. Bijaya for making it possible.





12-12-2016: Suvidha Ladies Club Picnic

Suvidha Ladies Club arranged a **Picnic on Monday, 12th December 2016** at the **Camp** in Bannerghatta National Park for all resident ladies. Thanks to Mr. Sarath Champati of cottage # 115A, who helped in getting best deals through his contacts in Bannerghatta National Park.

Fifteen ladies came forward; the oldest being 84 years and the youngest in sixties. The morning was spent going on the Safari and visiting the zoo. After a satisfying hot lunch they played Housie for an hour. Hot tea and snacks were provided at 4P.M. Tired and very happy with day's events they returned to Suvidha village by 5 P.M. Link to Bannerughatta picnic pics <https://goo.gl/photos/fE6YqWoZtgKJtSnVA>



➤ Suvidha On The Move :

- **Door to Door Waste Collection Drive:** From 1st of December 2016 : SUVIDHA waste management has taken a leap in its waste management programme by introducing door to door collection of segregated waste from its source i.e. the cottages itself. The programme was drawn on a drawing board with multiple steps before putting into the action and the bearing of the steps that were followed were based on the following observations:
 - a) **Sensitizing the issue of waste segregation:** Since last one year several lectures / demonstrations were held to sensitize the residents as well as the care givers in respect of the issues involved and the importance of taking responsibility in the implementation of the system. Drawing upon the lessons learnt, a new system was designed for implementation from 1-12-2016.
 - b) **“Two Bins One Bag” mandate** was introduced by procuring them from the market and supplying them to the residents at its original cost. This package includes one green plastic bin and one red coloured bin along with a big white bag.
 - c) **Sensitizing the Segregation & Collection staff and the Volunteers:** Training workshops with different guest volunteers were conducted on two occasions demonstrating the use of the coloured bins and the white bag mandate. The residents were very much a part of these recent demonstrations. Apart from practical demonstration and power point presentations, concise hand-outs were distributed to the residents for their reference.



- d) **Construction of a new waste collection shed** in addition to existing Dry Waste storage room. Two sheds were constructed with the material salvaged from the dismantled old store house. There are two independent store room for [1]. To store the Hazardous Waste {Red}; and [2]. Composting room for the Bio-degradable Waste generated from the kitchen {Green}. These rooms are well designed with provision for ample aeration, water proofing and are made in-accessible to birds and other animals.



- e) **Waste Collection:** According to the schedule that is flagged off on 1st December 2016, the three-wheeler with garden staff will collect the segregated waste from the cottages between 11 am and 12 noon on working days in a week. The three-wheeler will carry three large bins coloured White, Green and Red for collection of waste matter and the waste collectors are provided disposable gloves for their protection.
- f) **Expectations:** With all round co-operation from the residents, our village will be clean and litter-free and earn the respect it deserves as the cleanest and greenest retirement village in Karnataka.

o **Improving Telecommunications:**

- a) **Landline & Uninterrupted Intercom :** A good news... BSNL, Bangalore Telecom District has now taken a very good initiative. To provide uninterrupted Phone and Broadband services to our Suvridha Retirement Village, BSNL is now providing a RING OFC Cable Network!. Our Thalaghattapura Telephone Exchange is now connected by two different OFC cable networks - one via (the existing) T Avalahalli Exchange and the other (new one), via Konankunte Exchange; thus forming a RING. For forming this RING, BSNL has spent Lakhs of Rupees! This RING is under Testing now and will be energized soon this week. This RING will provide us uninterrupted BSNL services. When one cable route is damaged, there will be uninterrupted service through the other one.
- b) **Mobile connectivity:** There have been multitude efforts from different quarters to improve the mobile connectivity by contacting and pursuing different service providers to visit the site and find suitable permanent solution to boost the signal quality. One such involves drawing a dedicated fiber-optic cable or installing a dedicated tower within the Suvridha Village.

o **Phase 1A Status:**

- a) The last cottage under phase 1A is getting the finishing touches and will be ready for handing over by the month end once the approach road is laid. The Viewing deck is progressing well and is all set for the first slab connecting all the pillars.



- b) **Landscaping :** New landscaping work in front and in-between the first five cottages under Phase1A was completed with a variety of plants and trees. It looks a lot greener now! (above photos)

- **Maintenance programme** of the main pump house was undertaken by the Suvidha staff which included cleaning and changing the filter membrane of the RO plant along with other maintenance work. Thereby they saved a substantial cost towards the change of the membrane.
- The old security cabin at the exit gate was recently shifted to a new location adjacent to Cottage # 100 to improve the vigilance at the vulnerable areas.

➤ **Suvidha Staff News:**

On Friday the 9th December 2016, a Send Off to our Security Officer Mr. J. David was given by the residents as well as the staff members of Suvidha. Mr. David served as Security Officer at Suvidha for more than four years. All the members who were present during the send off function wished him success in his new endeavour at Bidar as service providing agency to the local Hospitals.



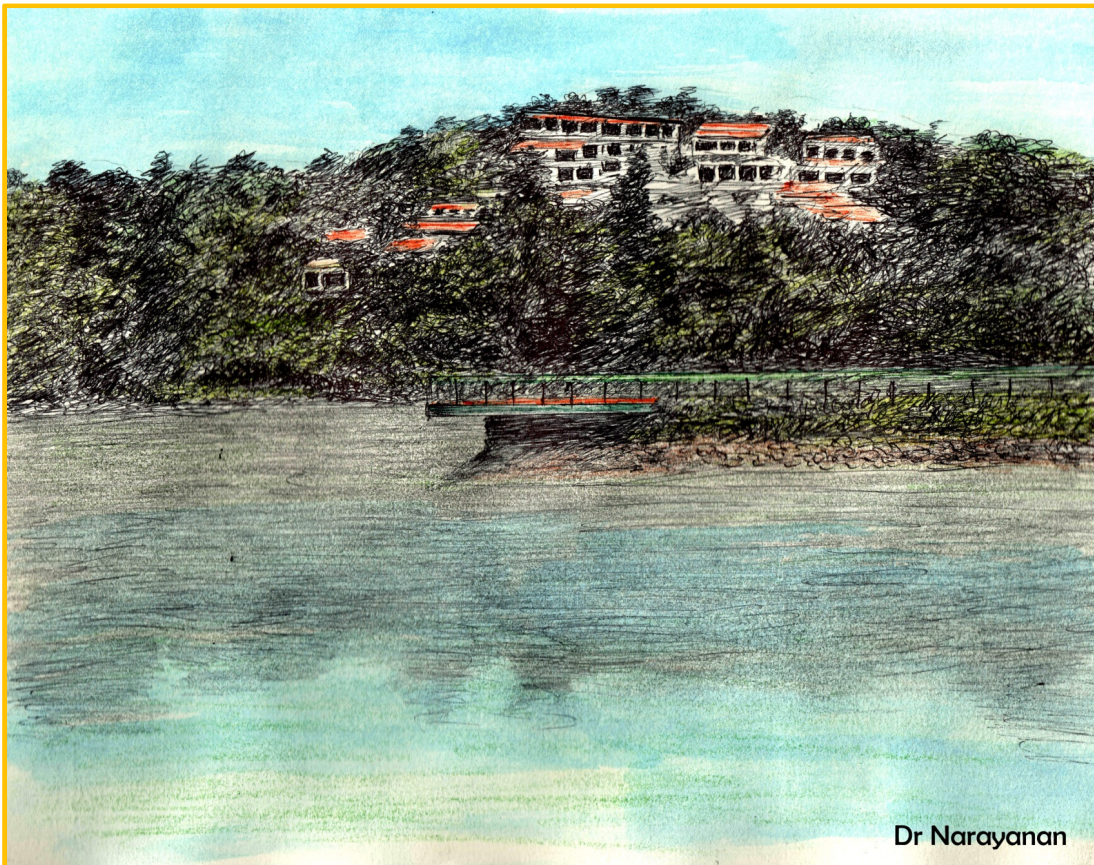
➤ **Suvidha Talent Corner:**

Under this banner, we introduce to our readers, the contributions of our Suvidha family members who have developed substantial special skill-sets as hobbies. Hope you will all enjoy such presentations. We welcome all such talented members to participate in this endeavour.

- **Paintings:** Dr. Narayanan R, is a popular gynecologist and a resident of Cottage No. 107 at SUVIDHA. Dear readers, you have enjoyed some of his paintings over the past two years. They were captioned under the heading, "Flora of Suvidha". To bring in a change, he now intends to capture the beauty of Suvidha by sketching a few familiar scenes. Hope you will enjoy !



VIEW FROM SUVIDHA LAKE



Dr Narayanan

- **Birds of SUVIDHA:** This is a series of beautiful and at times stunning pictures of birds that are either resident of or visitors to our Village. Mr. Ashok Dey, a permanent resident of SUVIDHA since November 2010, has been able to photograph as many as 101 different species of birds in the Village.



BLACK-HEADED CUCKOOSHRIKE



Black-headed Cuckooshrike

My bird-of-the-month is the **Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*)**. In the six years that we have lived in the Village, my first sighting of this species was only a month ago, in November. Slightly smaller than the ubiquitous Red-whiskered and Red-vented Bulbuls, it measures 18cm from beak to tail. The male of the species has dark slate-grey head and body, black wings, fine white tips to undertail coverts and bold white tips to its long tail. The female of the species (pictured here) seems, in my opinion, to be the better looking of the two. Its tail is shorter than the male's and its head, back and rump are pale grey with broader white fringes to lesser, median, greater and primary coverts. It has a prominent black supercilium and strong dark grey and white horizontal barring throughout its underparts.

Distributed over most of the subcontinent this species is usually found in pairs (although I wasn't so lucky). The species forms part of itinerant mixed hunting parties of insectivorous birds. It is known to be partial to mango, tamarind and other leafy trees growing in and around human habitation. It feeds mostly on insects but also on berries such as lantana. Its nesting season is between March and August.

- **Butterflies of SUVIDHA:** India has over 1,500 species of butterflies. Mr. Ashok Dey, a permanent resident of SUVIDHA since 2010, has been able to photograph and identify many species of butterflies inside our Village until now. Our Newsletter will carry this series comprising pictures and descriptions of butterflies of SUVIDHA.

PLAINS CUPID

The **Plains Cupid (*Chilades Pandava*)** is distributed all over South Asia and in Myanmar and has been found at altitudes of up to 2,000 m in the Himalayas. But it prefers moist, well wooded regions. Its wingspan varies between 25 to 35 mm. This species belongs to the family *Lycaenidae* or "Blues", so called because the butterflies are usually shades of blue and purple on the upper side, brown or white on the underside with spots and lines of darker colours.

The appearance of the sexes is distinguished by the male's upper wings being more metallic blue with narrow borders while those of the female are paler blue or brown with scattered blue scales and broader borders.



As butterflies have many predators and parasitoids threatening to destroy the various stages of their lives, they have adopted many survival strategies, four of which are camouflage, unpalatability by storing toxic compounds, mimicry of species that are unpalatable and larval association with ants. Most Blues, including the Plains Cupid, have developed two important mechanisms for protection. The first is the presence of tails on the hind wings of adult butterflies and the second is the association of their caterpillars with ants.



The tails are short, slender and thread-like with lobes at their bases which in turn have black and golden spots surrounded by patches of orange scales. These, together, may resemble and in fact look more prominent than the actual head and antennae of the butterfly. Hence, attacking predators, usually birds or lizards, instinctively bite or peck at the tails and the lobes, while the alarmed butterfly shoots forward out of reach. As the wings are soft, their parts break off, but the butterfly's life is saved. Individual blues with tails and lobes and large parts of their hind wings broken off are quite common and each of those represent a life saved due to adaptation

Long before they become butterflies, the Blues caterpillars survive through a remarkable association with ants. While ants usually eat caterpillars of butterflies, they have a different deal with the Blues. Most Blues caterpillars secrete "honeydew", a sugary solution in glands on the 11th and 12th segments. The ants harvest the honeydew from the caterpillars and constantly surround them thus protecting them from parasitoids and small insect predators. And if the ants need the honeydew when the caterpillars do not secrete it, the ants coax them to do so by gently stroking the caterpillar's glands with their antennae and jaws. Result: throughout its life the Blues caterpillar produces a considerable amount of honeydew as 'protection fee' to the ants.

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► Readers' Corner :

DIASPORA HINDUS RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE

Courtesy: Dr. T. S. Rukmani, PhD, D Litt., Resident of Suvidha Village, Cottage # 73-74
(Presently, the author is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.)

Here in 'Suvidha' there are many of our friends who are NRI's living abroad and can thus qualify to be called 'Diaspora Hindus'. But how many really understand this loaded 'word' which has many ramifications. Though the word itself was first used with the dispersal of the Jews from their homeland it became a generic term and used for all groups that migrated to other lands from their own place of birth. India is not new to this movement of its people to other lands and in recent times we are all familiar with the Prime Minister of India addressing large groups of the Indian Diaspora in various parts of the world on his many travels abroad. In this short article I am only dealing with Hindus and not all Indians who have migrated to other lands.



Today there are large numbers of Hindus in practically all parts of the globe. When we had a

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conference on the Hindu Diaspora at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada sometime in the nineties we came to know that Hindus have migrated to at least 155 countries in the world. Hindus migrated for many reasons and one of the main reasons for mass migration to countries like S.Africa, Trinidad, Mauritius etc., from India in the 18th century was due to colonial exploitation which had rendered a large number of the population in these countries literally impoverished. It was the lower classes who were affected the most and the early migrations reflect this demography very clearly. This is witnessed in the migration of indentured labour to countries like S. Africa, Trinidad, Mauritius etc. Other causes for migration as witnessed in recent history is persecution and ethnic cleansing in one's own motherland which forces people to move out to other lands. One is witness to that when Hindus from Sri Lanka fled to other lands in the 20th century. Then you have another group who also voluntarily move to alien soil to improve their economic status or in the case of academics and scientists for better research and professional benefits. Whatever the reasons maybe there are certain problems when Hindus or for that matter any group which is alien migrates to another country. A whole field of academic studies is based precisely on this called Diaspora Studies. Today significant numbers of Hindus have assimilated themselves into their host countries and in N. America they form an important minority to be reckoned with.

In the process of adjustment to a new environment Diaspora communities adjust in different ways. They consciously formulate a new identity using symbols and cultural artifacts that they have brought with them when they moved into the new countries. In the process a new kind of Hinduism emerges in keeping with their new life styles and new environment. In a sense this reformulation of Hinduism has been a feature in India itself. The capacity to change and adjust with the flow of the times has been a characteristic of Hinduism from Vedic times. Where for instance are the Vedic devatas in present day Hinduism even in India. New deities with a large number of devotees such as Santoshi Maa and Ayyappan have sprung up and captured the imagination of significant religious groups. Even though Hinduism has shown flexibility to adjust to varying circumstances the 'diaspora' phenomenon has the added problem of a small minority adjusting itself to a majority group in a new land whose culture, religion, language and general way of life is totally new. While in India the religion and culture adjusted to the changing circumstances without many jerks and shocks while in a foreign land the diaspora group had to consciously make the choice of which aspects of the 'original Hinduism' and 'culture' they needed to retain while deciding to discard others which were part and parcel of their lives in India. When stated thus it seems a simple adjustment but one can visualize the angst and stress the original diaspora groups must have gone through in order to finally come to terms with the new adjustments.

There is no uniform Hinduism or cultural symbols exhibited in the different lands that Hindus migrated to. India itself does not have a uniform way of celebrating its religion and there are cultural variations from one region to another. Thus the festivities and cultural symbols even in India differ from North to South, from East to West and even within these zones within regions that are part of these zones. These differences are reflected in the diaspora groups as well when they migrated to other lands. For instance since the migration of Hindus to South Africa was mainly from S.India the religion and cultural artifacts they carried with them are what are even today represented as Hinduism in S.Africa to a large extent. In a religious sense one can learn about the ethnicity of the groups that migrated in large numbers to certain regions as the deities or devatas that are still worshipped in those places are mainly the ones that the initial group that migrated to that place had worshipped in India. The indentured labourers recruited to work in S.Africa were largely Hindus from the lower classes and they were worshippers of non-Vedic and local deities such as Mariyamman, Murugan, Siva and Draupadiamman whom they worshipped back home. They continued to hold on to that tradition in S.Africa as well. Since temples play a large part in the cultural life of a Hindu, in spite of the poor salary of five pounds a month which the indentured labourer was given, they saved some of that money and together built modest temples to these deities which are still in evidence in S.Africa. The religious festivities which are still observed in S.Africa again are the festivals associated with these local deities. Thus fire walking, carrying the kavadi, worshipping Draupadi and Mariyamma as mother goddesses are celebrated with enthusiasm. My husband and I have personally witnessed the kavadi carrying and the fire walking ceremonies performed on important occasions like Thai Pooam etc., where men, women and children participate in large numbers. With the arrival of the Gujarati traders in the second and third wave of immigrants some Vaisnavite temples also came into being in S.Africa catering mainly to the North Indian immigrants. Festivals like Deepavali and Holi are also observed by these groups and today there is an intercultural mix where everyone participates in these festivals jointly.

When we moved to Montreal, Canada, a friend who visited from S.Africa was amazed to see that the practice of Hinduism in Montreal/Canada was so different from what she was familiar with in S.Africa. So much so she told me 'these people are not practising Hinduism correctly'!!. For her the genuine form was the one she was familiar with back in S.Africa. It took me a lot of time educating her on the different and varied ways in which Hinduism is practised by the Hindus.

As far as diaspora groups are concerned countries like S.Africa have had them for more than 200 years. Many S.African Hindus have not even visited India and many generations have grown up in that part of the world and for them S.Africa is their country, with India being just a memory. One is reminded of Naipaul's , the Trinidadian's nostalgic trip to India after which he wrote his two famous books "Area of Darkness' and 'Land of a Thousand Mutinies'(if I remember the titles

correctly) the first trashing India and the second a more sympathetic and appreciative assessment of the land of his ancestors. In Canada almost seventy years have gone by after the first migrants in large numbers came to these lands and now four or five generations later this is the country which they know and consider as belonging to. One recognizes the fact that the original zeal of those who first landed in these parts to retain their culture cannot be shared in equal measure by these later generations. So the first question one needs to address is how can the present day Hindus in these foreign lands retain their religious and cultural identity and secondly while doing so how can they smoothly assimilate themselves into the wider cultural landscape of the land which they have willingly adopted as their place of residence. Hindus thus are faced with deciding whether to go all out and adopt the ways of the host country or retain at least some of the main features of the culture which is what their ancestors tried to instill in them. I shall firstly discuss some trends that are emerging and secondly also suggest a couple of ways in which they can enrich their lives both as Hindus and as citizens of the country they live in.

Hinduism in India was centered round the worship of deities like Siva, Visnu, Sakti etc., as well as the smarta tradition of worshipping all devatas without a preference. There were temples exclusively devoted to Visnu, Siva, Sakti etc., in India. Hindus lived with groups worshipping different devatas as well as other religious groups in India itself so they did not have to learn afresh how to adjust to the different groups both intra-religiously as well as inter-religiously in a diaspora situation. But in the new situation they are pitted against religious groups that have an exclusive mentality and there is the danger of acquiring that attitude if one is not always on one's guard. In an intra-religious sense Hindus from different parts of the world have adjusted to the many varied ways of worship and are now generally comfortable with going to temples which houses many forms of the divine whether it is Visnu, Siva etc., viewing the devatas as an expression of the one transcendent power. This is the major trend that one witnesses today even though there may be some exceptions to this. Another trend is the increasing importance accorded to religious leaders coming from India like Ram Dev or Sri Sri Ravi Shankar or Swami Dayananda Saraswati who no longer are samnyasins in the age old sense but who are acaryas instructing their followers in the path of seva, knowledge, Yoga and so on. They also have their branches in other countries like North America, Canada, Africa etc., and thus maintain a close link with the diaspora communities. This is a new trend and is a very welcome one at that, as the Hindus in these parts get to have a connection with the homeland and in a sense the umbilical cord is not broken. One could call this form of Hinduism as the Sanatana-dharma form which goes back to the Vedic spirit of accommodating all beliefs both religious and philosophical. The only danger that one sees in this new trend is raising the status of the guru to a divine form and sometimes even building temples glorifying the guru. Once the line is crossed between an acarya serving the community by following his assigned task of instruction and being raised to the level of divinity which has various different meanings and connotations there is the possibility of schisms developing amongst groups owing allegiance to different gurus much like the schisms that were witnessed in India between the Vaisnavites and Saivites in medieval times for instance. Even though such guru groups do tremendous seva both in the social, cultural and educational spheres one needs to be vigilant to this future possibility.

One positive development today is the increasing recognition of the fact that the mother tongue is the best way to convey the nuances of a culture and the efforts by ethnic groups especially in the Toronto area in Canada to teach children their mother tongue in schools is a commendable effort in the right direction. This is another trend which will catch up with other groups as well in my view. All these directions will enable a diaspora Hindu to appreciate one's twin identity based on the country one lives in and one's own cultural heritage. This is something to strive for so that there is a harmonious blend of both cultures in one's personality. These two directions seem to be the ways in which Hinduism is leaning towards especially in the diaspora groups and in my view will continue for some more time at least.

One should not forget the many talented women mainly Hindus who started dance and music classes in North America in the sixties and seventies. They contributed tremendously, perhaps even unconsciously, in preserving the best in Indian culture. Apart from the dance and music per se what is transmitted in these classes is also some religious ideas as the music embodies so many myths and stories propagating dharma and there is also developed a feel for the languages in which the music is composed even though one may not understand the meaning. We have to thank these pioneers who did not let the culture die with them. Now that these have become well established institutions they will continue into the future as well. I strongly feel that temples have to become the sites where these art forms are learnt so that the youth are indirectly attracted to visit the temples and unknowingly also absorb the religious ideas as well. As dance in particular is popular with the youth, it also lays down the path for integration into the broader culture for both the Hindus and the others as well. Another idea which can be pursued is to start a small library within the temple premises with books both for the very young children like the Indrajal comics and for the teenagers and older groups. The seniors who are retired and would like to do seva may volunteer to maintain that library. People can donate some books which emphasize aspects of Hindu culture and it can slowly grow.

While it is important for the Diaspora Hindus to assimilate within the larger community it is also important for the host country to also absorb some of the positive features of the immigrant populations which is happening as well. However one needs to acknowledge that while there are some positive developments in this direction Hinduism as a religion is still

something of an unknown commodity. There are small steps being taken through the efforts by scholars who read papers at the Academy of Religions and other conferences to disseminate knowledge about the religion and culture of the Hindus. There is also a spurt of Inter faith meetings which nowadays has a Hindu representative not seen some years ago. But compared to other religions wherein the representatives are either Christian priests or Judaic rabbis the Hindu is very often represented by an academic. This gives an impression that our priests in temples are not competent to deal with their counterparts in the other religions. And unfortunately that is the truth. The Hindu priest even today is not treated with the respect given to other professions and that has to be remedied. One way in which it can be done is to send some of our chosen bright priests to western Universities and learn about the world religions in some depth. They can pursue that further by reading books and in this way they can develop enough self confidence to face other priests on an equal footing. Academics do not have the authority of the religion behind them and it is only a pujari or Hindu priest who can be considered authentic as speaking for the religion. Since the pujari was to take care of temple ritual and the acarya took over the instruction of pupils in ancient India this bifurcation worked well in those times. But now times have changed and particularly in a diaspora setting it is the Hindu priest who has to be accorded the same status and authority that the other religions accord their religious functionaries.

The culture of the homeland is like a DNA and seems to cling to one as an umbilical cord somewhere in the unconscious, somewhat like the collective subconscious that Jung talked about or like the samskaras that our philosophers talked about. So there is a tendency to take an active interest in all that happens in the homeland and it has only become easier with the advancement of technology these days. But should this interest extend to the politics in the homeland and impact the Diaspora Hindus is a serious question. Recent trends seem to suggest that both in the case of Hindus from India and Sri Lanka the diaspora communities are deeply embroiled in the politics of their respective homelands. In my view a delicate balance has to be maintained between the religious and the political spheres of the homeland impacting on the life of the Diaspora Hindus. While the discussion in India centres round whether religion should enter politics especially in a so called secular republic that India has opted for it is not a question which can be discussed in a black and white manner. To quote Gavin Flood "On the one hand what might be called conservative, political Hinduism claims that religion should have a voice in the public sphere and should inform government policy; on the other the secularists reject religion in the public sphere on the grounds that it is undesirable when there is such a diverse range of religious voices in India and public religion has led to [terrible incidents of communal violence]. These Indian issues have been exported to the Hindu diaspora, and Hinduism in America, for example, has come to have a strong voice in articulating a Hindu identity....

The issues here are complex. On the one hand, ideologies of religious exclusivism and intolerance...express genuine concerns of people at what they perceive to be the erosion of their identity. On the other hand, the secularist critique of religion on rationalist grounds is in danger of not recognizing the legitimate concerns and voice of people who regard Hinduism as fundamental to who they are". India will continue to have a variety of religious voices and they will be debating these issues along with the voices of secular modernity.

I also feel that Hindus do not encourage their children to take up religious studies as an academic discipline. Unless and until we have comparable scholars from our own community educated in the jargon of the west it will not be possible to articulate our traditional concerns of loss of culture in a so called secular country like India in a rational and measured manner. The religious intellectual Hindu is yet to emerge who can do that. Only one who is well educated in the texts and tradition will be able to steer clear from the literalism and fundamentalism that have dogged other religions.

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A Better Life

Compiled by Dr. P M Chandrasekhara, Cottage # 75

In 1991, in the tiny town of New Berlin, in the upstate New York, a young physician named Bill Thomas performed several experiments. When he took the job as a medical director at a nursing for elderly, he saw despair in every room. The nursing home depressed him. He wanted to fix it. At first, he tried to fix it the way that, as a doctor, he knew best. Seeing the residents so devoid of spirit and energy, he suspected that some unrecognised condition or improper combination of medicines might be afflicting them. So he set about thinking and conducting detailed investigation to come to a conclusion that good life was one of maximum independence at the nursing home. So, acting on little more than instinct, he decided to try to put some life into the nursing home. He introduced plants, animals and children into the lives of the residents. Result > people who weren't able to speak started speaking! People who had been completely withdrawn and non-ambulatory started coming to the nursing station and saying, I will take the dog for a walk. The lights turned back on in people's eyes. Researchers studied the effects of this programme over two years and compared



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the results with of a nearby nursing home as control. Their study found that the number of prescriptions per resident fell to half. The total drug costs fell to just 38% and the Death by 15%. All this because the residents felt a reason to live. In the early 1970s, the psychologists Judith Rodin and Ellen Langer performed an experiment in which they gave a plant to the residents of a nursing home. Half of them were assigned the job of watering their plants and attend a lecture on benefits of taking responsibilities in their lives. The other half had their plants watered for them and attended the lecture on how the staff was responsible for all their wellbeing. After a year, the group encouraged to take more responsibility--proved more active and alert and appeared to live longer. The most important finding of Thomas's experiment wasn't that having a reason to live could reduce death rates for the disabled elderly. The most important finding was that it is possible to provide them with reasons to live, period. Even residents with dementia could experience a life with greater meaning and pleasure and satisfaction.

In 1908, A Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce wrote a book *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. Royce was concerned with a puzzle about mortality. He wanted to understand why simple existing – seems meaningless to us. What more is it that we need in order to feel that life is worthwhile?. The answer, he believed, is that we all seek a cause beyond ourselves. This was, to him, an intrinsic human need. The cause could be large [family, country, principle] or small [a building, project, the care of pets]. The important thing was that, in ascribing value to the cause and seeing it as worth making sacrifices for, we give our lives a meaning. Royce called this dedication to a cause beyond oneself loyalty. He further argued, human beings *need* loyalty. It does not necessarily produce happiness and can even be painful, but we all require devotion to something more than ourselves for our lives to be enduring. Without it, we have only our desire to guide us, and they are fleeting, capricious, and insatiable. Royce observed “We cannot see the inner light. Let us try the outer one”. And we do, Consider the fact that we care deeply about what happens to the world after we dies. If self-interest were the primary source of meaning of life, then it wouldn't matter to people if an hour after their death everyone they know were to be wiped from the face of the earth. Yet it matters greatly to most people. We feel that such an occurrence would make our lives meaningless.

The only way death is not meaningless is to see yourself as part of something greater: a family, a community, a society. If you don't, mortality is only a horror. But if you do, it is not. Loyalty, said Royce “solves the paradox of our ordinary existence by showing us outside of ourselves the will which delights to do this service, and which is not thwarted but enriched and expressed in such service”. In more recent times, psychologists have used the term “transcendence” for a version of this idea. Above the level of self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they suggest the existence of in people of a transcendent desire to see and help other beings achieve their potential.

As our time winds down, we all seek comfort in simple pleasures – companionship, everyday routines, the taste of good food, the warmth of sunlight on our faces. We become less interested in rewards of achieving and accumulating, and more interested in the rewards of simply being. Yet while we may feel less ambitious, we also become concerned for our legacy. And we have a deep need to identify purposes outside ourselves that make living feel meaningful and worthwhile. With animals and children and plants Bill Thomas helped usher into Nursing home, a program he called the Eden Alternative, he provided a small opening for residents to express loyalty – a limited but real opportunity for them to grab on to something beyond mere existence. And they took it hungrily.

The problem with medicine and the institutions it has spawned for the care of sick and old is not that they have had an incorrect view of what makes life significant. The problem is that they have had almost no view at all. Medicine's focus is narrow. Medical professionals concentrate on repair of health, not sustenance of the soul. Tet – and this is the painful paradox – we have decided that they should be the ones who largely define how we live in our waning days. For more than half a century now, we have treated the trials of sickness, aging, and mortality as medical concerns. It's been an experiment in social engineering, putting our fates in the hands of people valued more for their technical prowess than for their understanding of human needs.

That experiment has failed. If safety and protection were all we sought in life, perhaps we could conclude differently. But we seek a life of worth and purpose, and yet are routinely denied the conditions that might make it possible, there is no other way to see what modern society has done.

Bill Thomas wanted to remake the nursing home. Keren Wilson wanted to do away with it entirely and provide assisted living facility instead. But they were both pursuing the same idea: help people in a state of dependence sustain the value of existence. Thomas's first step was to give people a living being to care for; Wilson's was to give them a door they could lock and a Kitchen of their own. The projects complemented each other and transformed the thinking of people involved in elder care. The question was no longer whether a better life was possible for people made dependent by physical deterioration : it was clear that it was. The question now was what is the essential ingredients were. Professionals in institutions all over the world began trying to find answers.

Making lives meaningful in old age is new. It therefore requires more imagination and invention than making them merely safe does. The routine solutions haven't yet become well defined. Elderly desires not to compromise on their Autonomy which mattered most in their life. There are different concepts of autonomy. One is autonomy as free action – living completely independently, free of coercion and limitation. This kind of freedom is a common battle cry. But one should realise that aged with disabilities need assistance too. Our lives are inherently dependent on others and subject to forces and circumstances well beyond our control. Having more freedom seems better than having less. But to what end? The amount of freedom you have in your life is not measure of the worth of your life. Just as safety is an empty and even self-defeating goal to live for, so ultimately is autonomy.

The Great Philosopher Ronald Dworkin recognised that there is a second, more compelling sense of autonomy. Whatever the limits and travails we face, we want to retain the autonomy—the freedom—to be the authors of our lives. This is the very marrow of being human. Dworkin [1986] declared “ *The value of autonomy Lies in the scheme of responsibility it creates: autonomy makes each of us responsible for shaping his own life according to some coherent and distinctive sense of character, conviction, and interest. It allows us to lead our own lives rather than be led along them, so that each of us can be, to the extent such a scheme of rights can make this possible, what he has made himself*”.

All one is asking is to be allowed to remain the writers of our own story. The story is ever changing. Over the course of our lives, we may encounter unimaginable difficulties. Our concerns and desires may shift. But whatever happens, we want to retain the freedom to shape our lives in ways consistent with our character and loyalties. This is why the betrayals of body and mind that threatens to erase our character and memory remain among our most awful tortures. The battle of being mortal is the battle to maintain the integrity of one's life. – To avoid becoming so diminished or dissipated or subjugated that who you are becomes disconnected from you were or who you want to be. Sickness and old age make the struggle hard enough. The professionals and institutions we turn to should not make it worse. But we have at least entered an era in which an increasing number of them believe their job is not confine people's choices, in the name of safety, but to expand them, in the name of living a worthwhile life.

The terror of sickness and old age is not merely the terror of losses one is forced to endure but also the terror of the isolation. As people become aware of the finitude of their life, they do not ask for much. They do not seek more riches. They do not seek more power. They ask only to be permitted, insofar as possible, to keep shaping the story of their life in the world—to make choices and sustain connections to others according to their own priorities. In the modern society, we have come to assume that debility and dependence rule out such autonomy. However the recent experiences that have been enumerated in the previous pages conclude that it is very much possible to oblige their desire and needs a fresh look.

“The Japanese have the word “Karma”. It means – if it's going to happen, there's nothing I can stop it. I know my time is limited. And so what? I've had a good shot at it.”

To be continued....

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