



# Gitanjali 2014

An Ohmkaram Publication



ഭാഷാഭാരം 1189-1190

(Kerala cultural organization based in St Louis, MO)

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*2014 Issue (7<sup>th</sup> Edition)*

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**HAPPY NEW YEAR 2015**



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**Madhavan Natesan Manchira & Family**

## EDITORIAL

Once again we take the pleasure of bringing Gitanjali to you. Gitanjali, an Ohmkaram publication, is an extension of Ohmkaram's mission to promote and cherish Kerala Hindu tradition and culture. It is our annual homage to our traditions and roots. It is also a vehicle for the creativity of our members. In every issue of Gitanjali, we showcase your thoughts on the things that matter to all of us as a community. It is a repository of all the memories of the Ohmkaram family.

As always, the editorial team worked hard to bring this issue to you. Gitanjali is a labor of love and we try our best to exceed the high expectations. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the entire editorial team for taking the time out of their busy schedules. It is because of their timely and value adding input that Gitanjali is in your hands.

Without a doubt, all our contributors walk hand in hand with us in our journey to making Gitanjali better every year. Thank you to all the contributors. We are especially thankful to our young members, and to their parents who encouraged them to contribute. We are hopeful of your continued cooperation and look forward to your contributions for the next issue.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this issue of Gitanjali.

Thank you

Editors



Kavita Menon



Suraj Alakkassery



Vijayalakshmi Harish

## EDITORIAL TEAM



Vinay Menon



Harish Natarajan



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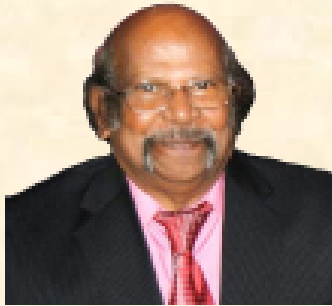
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*Dear Members of OhmKaram,*

*It was an honor and privilege to be the President of OhmKaram for the second time in 2014, the first time leading the organization for two years. I'd like to thank the committee members for their hard work and support to organize all the activities throughout the year. Without their help I could have done nothing at all. An organization cannot survive or grow without the cooperation of its members.*

*Day after day, year after year, OhmKaram is growing with many new members. I still remember the day when just few of us thought to have a Kerala Hindu organization around St. Louis. That is the beginning and birth of OhmKaram. The main purpose of this organization is to teach the value and culture of Hindu religion to our youngsters. We have Malayalam School taught by Anju Prayaga and others. I take this opportunity to say in two words... "Thank You" from the bottom of my heart ... for a great job well done.*

*We helped few financially challenged but deserving students in the past few years. In 2014 we gave Rs. 30,000 to a deserving student for college education. We will continue to do so in future. All these are possible because of your help and contribution. We provide the scholarship to any student only once. It is not easy to find a suitable candidate. We are from different parts of Kerala. If we all try together, we may be able to find a needy student. Please help us to find an eligible candidate for scholarship in future. Please check our website [ohmkaram.org](http://ohmkaram.org) to find the application form, rules and regulations of our scholarship program. Please ask the prospective candidate(s) to fill the application form and submit as per the instruction in the form.*

*I'd like to specifically thank our Food committee and Entertainment committee. Without their help we cannot do anything. Thanks also go to special committees such as Chendamelam committee and Vallamkali committee for bringing the first such programs to the greater St. Louis area.*

*Once again I'd like to thank everyone for choosing me as the President of OhmKaram.*

*Sincerely,*

*Natesan Manohara Madhavan*

*President*

*12/20/2014*



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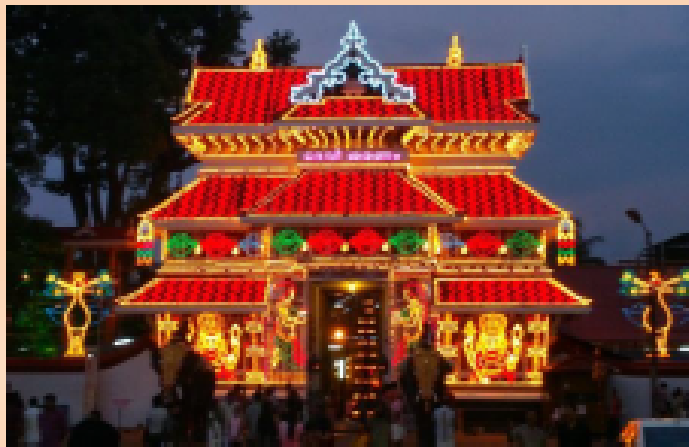


**Front cover...** The front cover of *Gitanjali* always celebrates some aspect of Kerala culture and traditions. The cover of *Gitanjali 2014* depicts the festivities around the Thrissur Pooram. The main image is of the Parmekkaavu Bhagavathy temple. The images on the side are of the Vadakkumnathan kshetram, Aanakuda in the shape of the Om and caparisoned elephants. We thank Mythily Harish for the beautiful cover design and Latha Unni for contributing the stunning pictures personally photographed by her.

## **THRISSUR POORAM**

Contributed by Mythily Harish

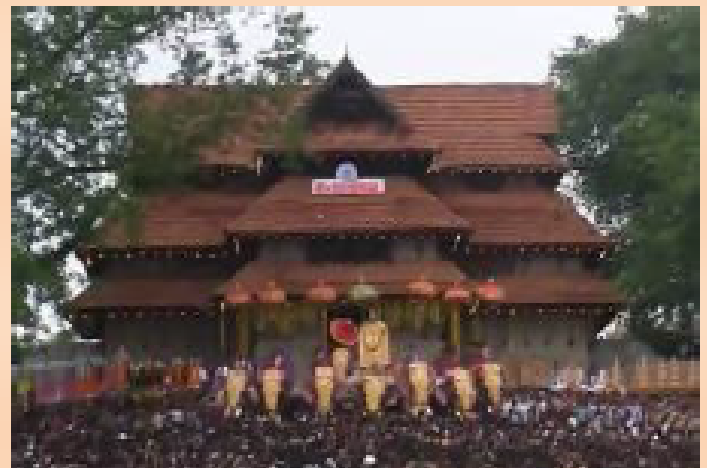
**Parmekkaavu Bhagavathy Temple** is one of the main participants in the world famous Thrissur



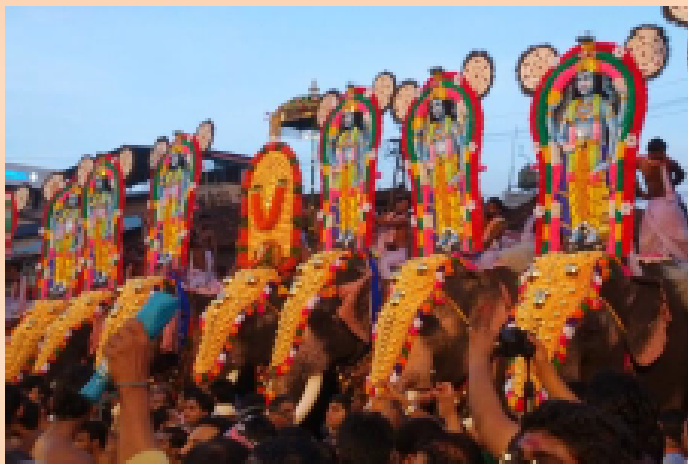
Pooram festival. According to legend, when an aging member of the *Kuruppal Tharavad* was no more able to continue his routine visits to the *Thirumandhamkunnu Bhagavathy*, he made a final visit. On his return journey, he took rest under a banyan tree and placed his umbrella on the ground. When he tried to pick it up again, he was unable to as the Goddess has taken up residence in the same. A temple was built there. Later, when the *Vadakkumnathan* temple was being renovated, the temple was shifted below a *Paro* tree. This Goddess began to be called as the *Parokkavu Bhagavathy*, and this later morphed to *Parmekkaavu Bhagavathy*. As the original temple of the Goddess was beneath the

banyan tree at the *Vadakkumnathan* temple, the first lamp is lit in the direction of that tree every day. The famous *Illanjithara Melam* in connection with Thrissur Pooram is in reverence of the Goddess.

*Vadakkumnathan kshetram* is the icon of Thrissur. The city itself is named after its main deity, Lord Shiva. Said to be established by Lord *Parasurama*, this is one of Kerala's most ancient as well as most famous temples. The most well-known festival associated with the temple is the Thrissur Pooram, which is held in the precincts of this temple. The Thrissur Pooram is a meeting of Gods, presided over by the God of Gods –*Mahadeva*. The sponsoring temples –the *Thiruvambady Sreekrishna* temple and the *Parmekkaavu* temple conduct the Pooram as an offering to the deity in *Vadakkumnathan*.



Caparisoned elephants and *Kuda-Maattam* to the enchanting beats of *Panchavadyam* – Kerala's distinctive orchestra are the main attraction of Thrissur Pooram. The *Kuda-Maattam* (changing umbrella) is a friendly competition during which hundreds of decorated and colorful long handled deities' umbrellas displayed in quick succession atop the elephants. Each side tries to beat the other in terms of the attractiveness and novelty of the umbrellas. Amidst the cheering of devotees and spectators, the elephants stand tall and proud, a testimony to Kerala's artistic prowess.





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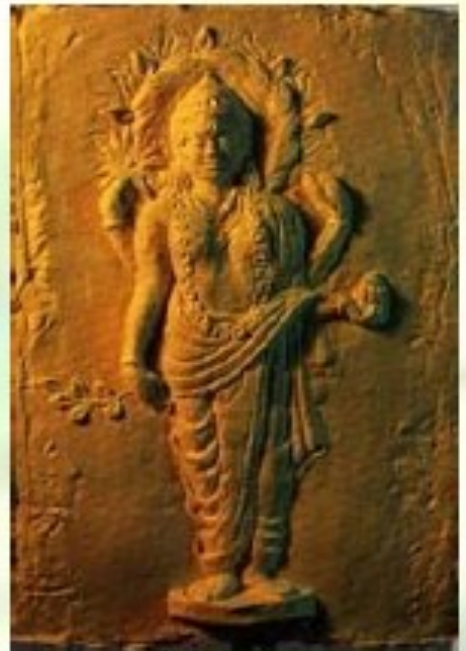
# HEALTH, AGING AND LONGEVITY: HINDU WAY OF LIFE

By Dr. Sudhirdas Kumar Prayaga

രാഗാദിരോഗാൻ സതതാനുഷക്താനശേഷകായ പ്രസ്യുതാനശേഷാൻ  
ഔത്സുക്യമോഹാരതിദാൻ ജഘാനയോ അപൂർവവൈദ്യായ നമോസ്തു തസ്മൈ  
*ragadirogan sathathanushakthan asheshakaya prasrethanaseshan  
Oulsukhyamoharathidhan jaghanayo apoorvavaidhya namosthuthasmai*

I pray respect to the 'apoorva vaidhya', the father of healing or the god of good health, who protect us from all ailments caused by 'ragas', which are associated with and spread all over the body giving rise to disease, delusion and restlessness (*Ashtanga Hridayam 1.1*).

Vagbhata acharyan in his classic Ayurvedic text *Ashtanga Hridayam* indicated that 'ragas' are responsible for many of our 'rogas' or ailments. 'Ragas' are psychological feelings, probably unique to humans, caused by the dualities in mind such as love & hate, attachment & detachment, generosity & greed, pride & envy, etc. Same thought can also be seen all across *Bhagavat Gita*.



Dhanwanthari

മാത്രാ സ്പർശാസ്തു കൌശ്യേയ ശീതോഷ്ണ സുഖദുഃഖയാ  
*maatra sparshaastu kaundheya seethoshna sukhadukhadaa*

In *Bhagavat Gita* Krishna says to Arjuna that 'one feels heat and cold or happiness and sadness due to the interactions of our 5 senses with the external world (*Bhagavat Gita 2:14*). While our ancestors thousands of years ago were aware of the role of senses, mind and psyche in disease processes, western medical science is only recently recognizing the importance of psyche in health and disease.

In a broader scale, diseases can be classified into four main classes viz, psychological, infectious, metabolic and genetic. Aging and associated conditions itself are not a disease or can be part of above classes. In our society today we are all leading a fast paced life to achieve material wealth and success, often ignoring our health. We tend to forget that health is our most important wealth. By middle age when we realize this fact often many our bad habits have already contributed to our poor health.

കുർവ്വന്നേവേഹ കർമ്മാണി ജിജീവിഷേഷ്ചതം സമാഹ  
*kurvenevaha karmani jijivisheshatham samaha*

*"Hindu literature has a wealth of information about good health and practices"*

*Isavashya Upanishad* proclaims that one can aspire to live for 100 years, if we follow our *Dharma* and *Karma* (*Isavashya Upanishad -2*). Aging and longevity are two aspects in life everyone is always concerned with. People are trying various chemicals and other methods, without even knowing whether they will work, to look young and live longer. Modern science says our average life expectancy is about 70-80 years now, while our ancient *rishis* and *acharays* have already established that we can live for 100 years. So, where or why is this disconnect?

The problem is most of us are at a loss when it comes to our body, without a clue, how to do the maintenance of our body. In simple terms, general aging can be considered as due to oxidation and peroxidation of various macro molecules within our body. As you age the skin becomes more wrinkled because it loses its elasticity mostly due to damages to membrane macromolecules such as proteins and lipids which make up the body structure. We can compare this to a car, a well maintained car can last a long time while a race car with rough use won't last a season. We spend a lot of money and time to

Continued on Page 13

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maintain our car but not to protect and maintain our body. Strangely, modern science and western medicine which is supposed to provide clear directions fall short. The so called pundits keep changing their mind about what is good and what is not for good health. Media and information overload also contribute to such fallacy. Fortunately for us, ancient Hindu literature has a wealth of information about good health and practices. In fact geriatric science, *jara chikitsa*, is one of the eight major divisions of classic Ayurveda, which deals with aging. Probably our western style education made us ignore these information and left them in the dust bin. It is our duty to get them back to practice.

Presently, we believe that vigorous exercise is good to keep fit and trim. Running marathon appears to be a fad these days. Aerobics and similar hyper exercise seems to be the norm to be healthy. Media also extol these in vain. I believe, rigorous physical exercise is antithesis to good health and longevity. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying we don't need exercise but we need a balanced physical and mental regimen. I don't see anywhere in our ancient Hindu literature mentions of the virtues of vigorous exercise. On the contrary, there are innumerable mentions about the importance of balance of body & mind and how to do that. Scientific literature also supports this view, although the media and the pundits are yet to catch up.

നിശ്ചയിതോ സമോക്രമ സമത്വം യോഗ ഉച്യതേ  
*sidhyasidho samobhootva samathvm yoga uchyate*

In *Bhagavat Gita* Krishna says that balance of body and mind is *yoga* (*Bhagavat Gita* 2:48). Krishna also says that those who do unscientific and senseless torturing of their body, in the name of pacifying the gods, are ignorant and are not my favorite (*Bhagavat Gita* 17:6).

കർശയന്ത ശരീരസ്ഥം കൃതഗ്രാമമചേതസ  
മാംചൈവാന്ത ശരീരസ്ഥം താൻവിദ്യാസുര നിശ്ചയാൻ  
*Karshayanta sareerastham bhootagraamamachetasa  
Maamchaivaanta sareerastham taanvidhyaasura nishchayaan*



There is an inverse correlation between heart rate and life expectancy in most mammals. Average adult human heart rate is about 70 beats per minute. The number of heartbeats per life time is a constant among mammals, despite a 40 fold difference in life span or 500,000 fold difference in body weight. Lowering the heart rate of humans from 70 to 60 increases life expectancy by over 12 years (*European heart journal supplement* 2003, R. Ferrari). Scientific studies have shown that increasing the heart rate is a risk factor for cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. The vigorous exercise most of us do in the name of good health increases heart rate. In contrast, *asanas* (yogic postures), *pranayama* (breath exercises) and *dhyana* (meditation) helps to lower heart rate and slowdown breathing. All these are techniques for good health and longevity prescribed in many of our ancient texts, including the well-known *Yogasutra* written by *Pathanjali* thousands of years ago. The purpose of a fruitful exercise regimen should be to stimulate the whole body and not to give a workout to your heart or burn calories.

Food is another important factor for good health, what you put in is what you get out. Food rich in antioxidants protects tissues by neutralizing the damaging effects of reactive oxygen and free radicals, thus slowing down aging. Unlike the current craze to avoid fat or sugars at any cost, our ancient literature suggests the importance of a balanced diet. There is also a wealth of information about choice of food in our literature. Pulse diagnosis is a technique to determine if a food is good for your body.

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## Q & A WITH Dr. T.P. SASIKUMAR

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Interviewer: Binu Chakkamparambil

### Q. Why do we light lamps? What is the best method to practice this ritual?

A. *Deepojvalanam* (lamp lighting) is a ritual devoted to the Sun God. The presence of sun is seen in the *Agni* (fire). *Agni* in the personified and purified form is the lighted lamp. Lighted Lamp (*Deepam*) is an energy generator. A normal *Deepam* can harmonize around 30 feet radius area. The light is knowledge with enlightenment. Let us have the blessing to see that light of realization.

*eka varthyam mahaavyaadh  
dvi varthis thu mahath dhanam  
thri varthyam mahamsalakshyam  
chathu varthyam danidraatha  
panjavarthis thu bhadrani spaal  
dvi varthyam sushobhanam*

"One naalam is not healthy, two is wealthy, three makes greedy and tired, four give poverty and five is prosperity. But the poet concluded by saying two are enough."

Thus while lighting the lamp; devotee and the God have to be in light. Symbolically one flame has to be towards *bhaktha* and other must be for God. Generally *pooja* room faces east or west. Two flames in the lamp - one to east and other to west. In the presence of light both devotee and God joins, as *athma* and *paramathma*; indicated by the *chin mudra* (*Jnana mudra*) - joining pointing finger to thumb as in meditation.

The Practice - Lamp can be lighted in ghee or high-density-oil (like gingelly oil/sesame oil). The highly viscous fluid has the capacity to rise through the wick, as they are non-Newtonian fluids. Wick is only the *saakshi* (the tool) and ghee or oil is what is being lighted. Thus the number of wicks (as misunderstood by many) has no sanctity. It is the *deepam* (flame / *jwala* / *naalam* / *varthyam*) what is to be counted.

The Sloka chanted while lighting the lamp:  
*subham karoti kalyanam  
aregyam dhyamasampada  
shatrubuddhirvinasaya  
deepajyotirnamestute*

"Let the lamp provide the light to make the activity better, Let it provide health and concentration, I salute the light that destroys enemy" (see the great thought - not the enemy but the enemy is; that is being destroyed).

### Q. Why is Hinduism so lenient, with no strict rules or rituals to follow?

A. Hinduism existed in *Bharatha* (modern India) and is a way of life. It is not a faith or system. It is an evolutionary style of tradition that the society followed / following. Today one is called a Hindu, as his parents/ancestors followed that tradition. The child does not have to undergo any process of making or taking him into Hinduism. He can live and die without knowing / doing any rituals / practices that other Hindus may do or follow. But what he does as a Social / Human being is all that is prescribed in Hinduism.

One need not go to temple regularly or even once in life nor have to follow rituals. Hindus are not afraid of Gods - they are like friends or relatives. Being a Hindu one can challenge some or all of the rituals and faith in Hinduism. Being a Hindu one is allowed to think independently and objectively, without conditioning. One remains as a Hindu never by force, but by choice.

We have the scriptures that are told by masters and heard by disciples (*Sruthis*), written documents (*Smrithis*) and like the one told by God (*Krishna*) as a chariot driver to a warrior (*Arjuna*) during *Mahabharatha* War - The *Bhagavad Gita*. But all these link the Hindus to the *Param Brahma* - supreme abstract authority who is the creator - that is the concept of energy and matter. Thus, if one believes it or not, it exists and if one understands or not we get that energy in us - this is what Hinduism says. It teaches us to pray for all (not just humans alone) '*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu Om Shanthi, Shanthi, Shanthi,*' [meaning - May all the beings in all the world be happy and be in Peace]. So much of freedom, flexibility, democracy and so pragmatic - nothing to show - but to feel from within as a realization.

### Q. Why is it that women are not allowed to do religious activities during certain periods?

A. *MANAS* (mind - thought process) is important in reaching to God and for the *Bhakthi* / Realization. The *Yoga Sasthra* is the way to reach God, the Ultimate Meditative stage- *Samadhi*. One has to undergo *Yama-Niyama-Aasana-Pranayama-Prathyahara-Dharana-Dhyana-Samadhi*. One easy way to reach meditative

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manas is through *Bhakthi* (devotion) rather than all these eight steps as per *Yoga Sasthra*. Temples are the institution for these and also similar rituals at home.

It is not just during the period days for ladies, for people who have lost their relatives, or have a birth in their family, when the body has pain, have cough or cold or any disease are all not permitted to enter inside the temple. These are certain rules that are prescribed to not to dilute the concentration.

During the *pradakshina* (circumambulation) the rules to be followed are as stated below.

*Paadaal paadaantharam gathwa* (walk slow)// *Karau chalana vivarjithau* (dont swing hands) // *Vaacha-sthothram hruthi-dhyaana* (prayer on lips and concentration in manas) // *Mevam kuriyal pradakshinam* (is the ways for circumambulation)

It is presumed to be difficult when the body is not normal to have the manas in concentrated mood. The body reacts as the mind reacts and vice-versa too. It is said that the body and the mind is such related as the vessel and the oil - here it goes -- *sareera manaso yoga // parasparamanurvajeth // aadhaara adheya bhaavena // thapthajya khadayoriva* (when hot oil is poured into a cold vessel, the heat from the oil transfers to the vessel and vice-versa).

Many don't even know that visiting temples or doing rituals for reaching to God during fully happy or sad - fully eaten or feeling hungry are not allowed. One has to be balanced and controlled with a clean *manas*.

#### Q. Why do we have so many Gods?

A. We have hundreds and thousands of philosophical and sacred scriptures, namely; *Veda* (the knowledge origin), *Upanishads* (questions answered by saints), *Brahmanas* (Ritual guides), etc. And to explain all these in story form we have many *Puranas* and *Ithihasas*. It is only in these stories that God appears as *Sankalpas* (Imagination / Conceptual). *Ayurveda*, Construction, Dance, War etc. are part of auxiliary and part of Knowledge books (*Upa-Veda* and *Vedanga*). These scripture books contain only concept of Natural Forces described as God. These are highly abstract and difficult to follow for the common man and thus to explain it Gods are created as *Sankalpas*. Thus we have multiple Gods.

#### Q. What would be the most important aspects of our religion that must be taught to our kids?

A. It is important to learn the traditions from our great heritage. We don't teach Religion. We have to teach the stories from *ithihasas* and *puraanas*. They have great values of life - physical-social-cultural-emotional-intellectual-spiritual lessons. So make the children to read / listen to the scriptures as just stories.

Language as Sanskrit has great tradition and good inside meanings. The peace of mind that comes through the poetical *slokas* as they are learned in the childhood will remain in them when they grow. Give these wisdom to the next generation that our forefathers gave us. Make the children get exposed to the *slokas* and its meaning. Make them to learn it - memorize it. The ability of learning it will make them to have good brain power and good pronunciation ability apart from the inner meaning and energy that is imparted spiritually.

Create *satsangs* and make the chanting as a practice at least some time together with all the family members together so that the spiritual bond is set and will remain in them. The family bond and the protection of the family is inculcated in the kids through the *satsangs*. Teach them to respect elders.

Try to explain the physical-philosophical-social-scientific meaning of the *slokas* as they grow higher based on their grasping power and interest. Courage to be self and ability to support others, care for the environment and fellow beings are also part of the spirit in many of the *slokas* that are learned as routine. *Nithya prarthana* (Prayer) and rituals can be 10 to 20 minutes of time as routine and slowly reaching to the practice of mediation as self *dhyana* practice.

[Many *slokas* are explained and listed in my BLOG - [www.drtps-shiksha.in](http://www.drtps-shiksha.in) - under *slokas*. They are also shown in YouTube by searching for meditation and *slokas* by drtps]

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## എടാ THRISSUR POORAM കാണാൻ വന്നോളൂട്ടാ നമ്മടെ ഗെടിഗൽ രൗണ്ടിളുണ്ടാവും *Harish Natarajan*

While you may be wondering what this means, those who were born and brought up in the great city of Thrissur, will be able to identify this colloquial phrase easily as they must have heard it a thousand times in their lives. This is a recollection of my memories from my childhood/college days about - the great city of Thrissur, its inherent cultural heritage and the so-called "Poomam of all Poomams - Thrissur Poomam"

Thrissur (also called as Thirusivapperoor or Trichur) is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the southern state of Kerala in India. The city and its suburbs are built around a hillock called Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam that also houses the Vadakkunnathan Temple, one of the largest temples dedicated to Lord Shiva in India. Thrissur City also houses Paramekkaavu Devi temple and Thiruvambady Srikrishna Temple that are also very important temples of Kerala. These 3 temples and its deities form a very unique bond that creates the background behind the great festival - "Thrissur Poomam".

The name Thrissur is derived from the word "Thiru-Shiva-Per-Oor" translates to "The City or Town with the name of the "Lord Siva". The name owes itself to the most prominent feature of the city, that is the Vadakkunnathan temple, which has Lord Shiva as its presiding deity.

Thrissur is known as the "Cultural Capital of Kerala" because of its rich cultural/spiritual/religious heritage that it has gained over so many years. Thrissur houses various institutions dedicated to fine arts that promotes talent across Kerala and beyond - Kerala Sangeetha Nadaka Academy (Dedicated to Kerala dance, drama and music), Kerala Sahithya Academy (Dedicated to culture, painting, plastic and visual arts), Kerala Lalitha Kala Academy (Dedicated to Malayalam language and literature) and Kerala Kalamandalam (Dedicated to dance and music).

However, what people all round the world really associate Thrissur with, is the Poomam. The image of Gods on their elephants, graced by beautiful umbrellas and accompanied by the energizing beats of drums, is an unforgettable one!

Thrissur Poomam is essentially a temple festival hosted in every year on the 'Poomam' day of the Malayalam Calendar month of 'Medam'(April or May month of the English Calendar). Even though the mythology around the festival is based on Hindu Gods, people celebrate pooram without any religious difference. It is held on the "Pooma Parambu" or the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam that houses the Vadakkunnathan Temple. The word Poomam meaning 'the meeting point of all the arts' is so called because during the festival, one does see all the arts converge. Every beautiful art, from music, to dance to the skills of elephant riding that are associated with the state of Kerala are displayed in this marathon festival held over 36 hours over 2 days. The processions of decorated elephants and dazzling display of fireworks that light up the sky are the major attractions of the festival besides several other enthralling programs and events.

Main participants are Paramekkaavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambady Sri Krishna Temple. The Paramekkaavu temple is situated on Swaraj Round near Thrissur Medical College near the Thekkinkaadu

*Continued on Page 21*



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Maidhanam and the Thiruvambady temple is situated on Shoranur Road. There are other temples from the suburbs who also participate and they hold "Cheru Poorams" (Small Poorams) that culminates at the main Pooram.

### **Kodiyettam**

The Pooram celebration begins 7 days before the main Pooram. It starts with the ceremonial flag hoisting (Kodiyettam) by various participating temples. There is also a ceremonial flag hoisting at Naduvilal(MG Road) and Naikkanal(Shoranur Road) in Thrissur City. "Aal" means Banyan Tree and there are banyan trees at all the main roads that culminate at the Swaraj Round of the Thrissur city. There are pandhals(wooden pandals) that are setup at each "aal maram" decorated with lights that light up the city at night.

### **Sample Vedikettu(Sample Fireworks Display)**

The first round of sample fireworks display, know as Sample Vedikettu, happens on the 4th day after the flag hoisting of the Pooram presented by Thiruvambady and Paramekkaavu temples. Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam is venue for this and the display usually has innovative patterns and varieties of fireworks display that acts as the pre-cursor before the actual fireworks display on the Pooram day.

### **Aana-Chamayam Pradarshanam(Elephant Caparisons Display)**

The elephant caparison (Nettipattam), elephant accessories (Chamayam), ornamental fan made of green peacock feathers (Aalavattom), royal fan made of soft cotton(Venchaamaram), sacred bells(Mani) and decorative umbrellas(Muthukkuda) are prepared by Thiruvambady and Paramekkaavu temples separately. Paramekkaavu temple exhibits this at its Agrashaala housed near the Paramekkaavu Temple and the Thiruvambady temple display the caparisons at the CMS High School in Thrissur City on 4th and 5th day before the Pooram.

### **Pooram Day & Ilanjithara Melam**

The main Pooram starts on the 6th day after Kodiyettam. The events start at the Thiruvambady Srikrishna temple and Paramekkaavu Devi temple with their respective groups marching from their own temples towards the Vadakkunnathan temple. The Thiruvambady temple and Paramekkaavu temple enters through Western Gopuram and Eastern Gopuram of the Vadakkunnathan temple respectively. Over 200 Panchavaadhyam artists (Panchavaadhyam means orchestra using 5 Kerala musical instruments - Thimila, Maddalam, Ilathalam, Kombu and Edakka) play their instruments under the Ilanji tree inside the Vadakkunnathan temple, hence it is called "Ilanjithara Melam". Once the Ilanjithara Melam is completed, both the temples(elephants and staff) exit through the gopurams to the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam. The Paramekkaavu temple assembles their team near the end of the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam near to the Municipal Office and Thiruvambady Temple gathers near the Southern Gopuram.

### **Kuda-Maattam**

Once they exit the Vadakkunnathan temple, then they participate in the main elephant caparisons display at each end by their respective staff who sit on the elephants. The crowd encourages their teams that they support by using "Aaarpu Vili" when the decorative umbrellas are changed by their respective teams. After Kuda-Maattam, the celebrations happen across the night where lot of Cheru Poorams culminate on the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam.

### **Main Vedikettu**

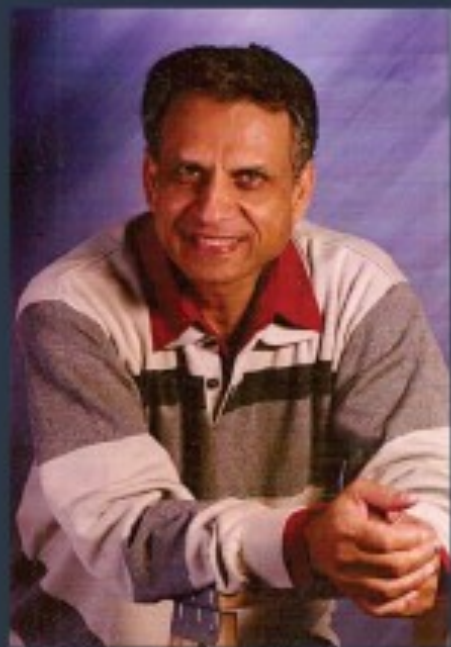
The same night, both the temples display their main fireworks display. This is one of the highlights of the Pooram festival and will attract lot of crowd even coming from distant suburbs to the city.

### **Upachaaram Cholli Piriyaal(Farewell Ceremony)**

The 7th day of Pooram is the last day of Pooram. It is otherwise known as "Pakal pooram". For the people of Thrissur pooram is not only a festival it is a time for hospitality Upachaaram Cholli Piriyaal(Farewell Ceremony) is last event held at the Aal Maram(Banyan Tree) near the Vadakkunnathan Temple entrance. Thiruvambady Sri Krishna Temple and Paramekkaavu Devi Temple idols are taken from the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam to their respective temples marking the end of the Pooram celebrations. The festival will end with display of fireworks know as Pakal Vedikettu on the Thekkinkaadu Maidhanam.

When all the festivities are all over, the people of Thrissur remember and rejoice the memories of the festival that is celebrated without any religious boundaries and look forward to again re-live the spirit of harmony that awaits them next year during the Pooram days.

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# REFLECTIONS INTO A DAY OF HEALING

By Dr. Rajesh Rajan MD

Becoming a physician, one must undergo several years of exhaustive training. This entails many hours of patient care to experience different aspects of medicine. One must train in different settings including inpatient, outpatient as well as intensive care unit. With each day of training, you encounter different patients. With each encounter, you gain a little more which ultimately shapes you into your profession.

I remember my first patient in the intensive care unit in my third month of training. A 45 year old male was admitted after passing out while playing tennis. This patient was otherwise healthy person without any medical problems. His family included his wife and three young daughters. I first encountered the patient while evaluating him in the emergency room. I was unable to gain any information from him as he was on a ventilator, not able to breathe for himself. He was found to have a large brain bleed as the cause of his collapse. At once I knew that his condition was critical and it was unlikely that he would recover. The neurosurgical team had emergently taken him to the operating room in efforts to relieve pressure from the bleed.

This was my first experience with such a sick patient and I was devastated by his condition. I could only picture that this person who was normal yesterday is at the brink of his death today. I could not thoroughly concentrate on my work that day thinking of him and his family. I remember the most difficult challenge was to discuss the prognosis with his family. I can still visualize that moment, sitting in the small, quiet room with his wife and three children. I can still see the tears in their eyes as I explain to them that their loved one is dying. I could see all hopes fading from their eyes as I speak with them.

The next two days were very tough for me. Each day I would have discussions with the family explaining that there were no changes. I could tell that they had come to the realization that their loved one was no more. The next day, I returned to work to see a new patient in the room. I knew then that he had passed away. The family had decided not to proceed with any further care and decision was made for organ transplantation.

This was only the beginning of many challenges yet to come. Days would pass and I would learn to cope with the healing of many as well as the death of others. It is still difficult to handle the death of patients that you care for. However, I do not think that I am affected as much now because I have learned to distance my emotions.

I write this today as a reflection of one of the many experiences that has shaped me. We must realize that we are all blessed with what we have each and every day. We do not know what can happen tomorrow and therefore we should live in peace and take what life has to offer to the fullest. We must understand that with each hardship, there are others who are in greater suffering than we are.

SWAMI SARANAM

## TULASI STOTRAM

नमस्तुलसि कल्याणि नमो विष्णुप्रिये शुभे ।  
नमो मोक्षप्रदे देवि नमः सम्पत्प्रदायिके ॥२॥

Namas thulasi Kalyani,  
Namo Vishnu priye Shubhe,  
Namo moksha pradhe devi,  
Nama sampath pradhayike.

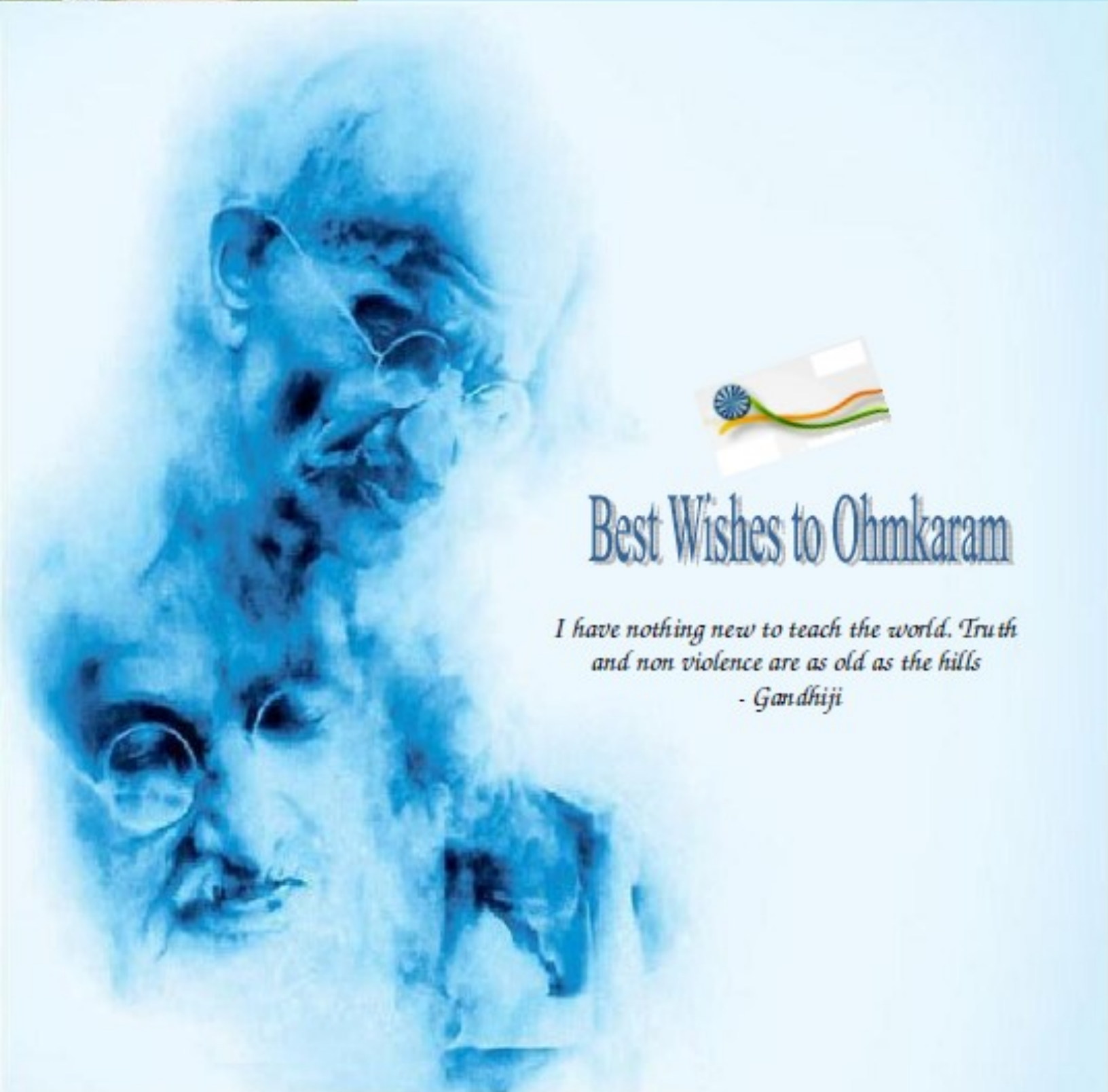
### Translation:

Salutations to the benevolent Tulsi,  
Salutations to the holy darling of Vishnu  
Salutations to goddess giving salvation,  
Salutations to her who grants wealth





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## BOOK REVIEW: THE SCEPTICAL PATRIOT

*By Vijayalakshmi Harish (Mythily)*

To tell you why *The Sceptical Patriot* means so much to me, I have to tell you the story of why I chose to read the book.

It was in the cold, snowy month of February that I came to the United States. Back home I was Hindu, Brahmin, with a Masters Degree and with a skin colour that qualified me as "wheatish" if not "fair." In the US, I am from a developing nation, on a H4 visa, and with skin that is brown (if not dark). From being a part of the "majority", I was suddenly a part of the "minority". People didn't even expect me to know English, and were often surprised when I spoke it fluently. It was almost as if people expected me to be somehow inferior.

To add to this, when I visited the space exploration section in a science center here, I found that while great astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo were mentioned, Aryabhata's name was conspicuous by its absence. My mind immediately buzzed with a number of questions - Didn't Aryabhata speak of heliocentricity before the Greeks/Romans? Didn't he calculate the distance from the earth to the sun almost precisely way before anybody else? He must have because we keep naming satellites after him -right? So why isn't his name here?

I read books of fiction by Indian American authors that portrayed India as this exotic land of tigers, elephants, mangoes, demure women and poverty. But that is not the India I know. So what then is India? And who am I as an Indian? Where does my country stand on the world stage?

I understood that the answers would lie in an exploration of history, among ancient documents like the *Aryabhatiyam*. But where do I find those here? As they say, when the student is ready, the teacher appears. I came across a promotion for *The Sceptical Patriot* on Facebook and I was excited! Sidin Vadukut had already done what I wanted to do, and all I had to do now was buy his book!

Well, easier said than done. I could not get a hard copy here in the US, and could not buy the e-book on Flipkart (as my IP address is US based. I discovered only now that the ebook is available on Amazon for \$5.99). I told my brother back in India to buy it for me and send it to me through my uncle who had gone there for a cousin's wedding.

So finally, months after its release, I read *The Sceptical Patriot* over the weekend. And it was worth the wait!

Did India really invent plastic surgery and zero? Is it true that India has never invaded another country for the past 1000 years? Was J C Bose the real inventor of the radio and not Marconi? Is Sanskrit really the "best" language? If you are curious about these and other questions, then this book is a must read. For those of you who would like a sneak peek, an edited excerpt from the book about plastic surgery in ancient India is available for free online. Just google it!

First off, the size of the book is not intimidating. Speed readers like me will be able to finish the book in a day. The very slow or super busy will probably take a week to read it. Processing what one reads however is the work of a lifetime. The ideas presented in the book linger in the mind for a long time after it has been read. The book condenses what must have been years and years of research into approximately 200 pages, and I immensely respect the work that must have gone into putting it together.

Second, the book destroys some assumptions we make about history books -that they must be serious, boring and full of dates. In *The Sceptical Patriot*, Sidin Vadukut crafts a compelling, "unputdownable" story. The writing is fresh, engaging and incredibly hilarious. Through personal anecdotes and rich reconstructions of historical events he takes us on a journey through the ages. The reader becomes part scientist, part Indiana Jones and part time traveller as he/she joins the author as he explores writing on temple walls, reads ancient documents, trawls through the Internet, debunks some myths and clarifies some "facts".

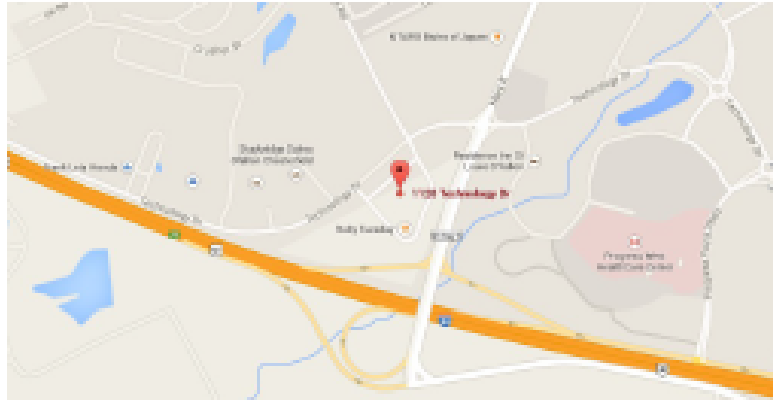
In answering some questions, Sidin raises some other pertinent ones. Why must we know our history? Why do our history textbooks generally end like a fairy tale

*Continued on Page 27*

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(wegotindependencefromtheBritishandweallivedhappilyeveraftertheendbye)? Why do history teachers focus on memorizing names and dates when there are so many awesome stories to tell? What lessons from our history can we use to create a powerful India in the present?

It challenges and provokes. Some of what he discovers will makes you uncomfortable because it destroys some beliefs that we have unquestioningly accepted about India. For example, the belief that India was the richest country in the world before it was colonized by the British. After his extensive research, Sidin concludes that while India was a one of the largest economies in the world, it was certainly not "the richest". This is not a book for a lazy reader. Enter this book with an open mind, be willing to debate and continue thinking about the ideas in it. As Sidin himself explains, history is not a series of indisputable facts, but a retelling of events extrapolated from evidence. An emergence of some new evidence could change the story that is told. Sidin lets the reader decide what story he/she wants to accept.

My favourite part of the book comes towards the end, where he summarizes the book and his personal experience while writing it into three epiphanies. The first epiphany is about the "Indian" identity –that there is no such thing in reality. All Indians are the product of many civilizations that called "India" home, and that a true Indian must be proud of this so-called "lack of identity." He gives the example of the aloo gobi, a classic North Indian dish, with similar versions in other parts of India. We accept it as being an "Indian" dish, but just 600 years ago it was unheard of in India, simply because the ingredients required to make it –potatoes, tomatoes and green chillies did not exist in India! Tomatoes became part of Indian cuisine only in the 1800's or later. Potatoes were grown in Akbar's times, but still not widely used even 150 years later.

So given this sort of history, we have a choice –we can complain about our "Indianness" being diluted by other cultures, or we can learn from our past and celebrate our ability to absorb any culture and make it our own.

The second epiphany is that we must overcome our tendency to blame the past. We blame the Mughals and the British, focusing on the atrocities committed by them. Vadukut points out that while these are difficult truths to accept, a position of wanting revenge for these in the present is illogical and ultimately prevents us from looking forward. It keeps India divided and weak.

The third epiphany is that the highest points in Indian history come at a time when society was open, well-administered, curious and peaceful in spite of turbulence. When we are able to create that sort of scenario in today's India –when we manage to overcome barriers on the basis of religion, caste, politics, state etc, we can bring back that greatness. Like Shah Rukh Khan's team in Chak De!, when we stop playing for regional boundaries, and start playing for the country, we will be a winning team.

What I loved was his focus on adapting the learning from the past, to application for a better future. This I felt was a beautifully optimistic way of looking at things. India does have a rich past, and much that can be adapted to make things better in the present. For example, we learn from the ancient Indian university cities of Takshashila and Nalanda that we need more state support for educational institutions that foster "enquiry, criticism and skepticism", which lead to innovation rather than the current educational system that is so narrowly focused on making students "employable".

Did I get the answers I was looking for? Yes and No.

While Sidin Vadukut does talk about Aryabhata's role in the use of zero, he doesn't mention his contribution to astronomy, so I still don't know if his name should be on the science centre's wall. I'm hoping for a follow-up book that will answer more questions. But I now know not to care if Aryabhata is mentioned.

While I have always been proud of the diversity and complexity of our country, this book has encouraged a deeper appreciation of the same. We may not be the world's richest country or the "best". We have a ton of faults and problems that plague us. But the resources to overcome these lie within us too. We have forgotten some of history's most important lessons. If we succeed in bringing together what has worked for us in the past, with the resources we have available in the present, India will surely have a golden future.

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# ADVANCING AGE AND THE TABLET

*By Gopal Menon*

Advancing age is generally associated with illnesses such as loss of memory, difficulties in learning something new, dementia, etc. The main reason for this is loss of brain cells. This problem is more acute in the case of persons leading a mentally sedentary life, which is not unusual for retired people.

During our working life we are usually mentally quite active. Even ladies who are housewives need to be mentally active – they have to manage the household, take care of the needs of children, help the children with their studies, etc. After retirement we are no longer burdened with the cares of the office / factory. The mental load on housewives also generally reduces after the children grow up.

Mental activity generates new connections between neurons in the brain and help in making up for the reduction in neural connections associated with brain cells that die. Hence it is essentially that we keep the brain active in our sunset years. The default mode in most of us is to shun activity. So, in order to ensure that mental activity is maintained on a regular basis, it has to be made a pleasurable occupation. A tried and tested method is the tablet – not the one you swallow but the electronic one with microchips.

My mother celebrated her eightieth birthday on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2014. She is a living example of how one can be mentally active even in old age.

My mother was brought up in a village in Kerala. She studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard and after marriage shifted to Bombay. She has been a housewife throughout her life. She has spent her whole life taking care of her husband, children and grandchildren.

In the year 2012 she visited USA to spend some time with her daughter and son who are American citizens. During this period she saw a tablet which was with her daughter, who showed her that it can be used for playing games. One of the games that she saw being played using the tablet was Scrabble – a game that she had played on a board. Having helped her children in their studies when they were in lower classes, she had acquired sufficient skills in English to be able to play this game. She also saw that games such as breaking balloons, cutting fruits, etc can be played.

Seeing her interest, her grandson presented her with a Google Nexus 7 tablet, which had just been introduced in the market. I can say with certainty that this was the best present that she has ever got in her whole life. There has been a paradigm shift in her mental activity after getting this gift.

1. Though my mother had heard the word "internet", she had no clue what it was. Her grandson created a mail ID for her and showed her how to send and open emails. The world suddenly opened up to her and she could now easily communicate with her children and relatives who were physically far away from her.

2. She was also shown how to use "Hangout" and participate in a video call. She now regularly calls her children and grandchildren and has the pleasure of seeing them apart from just talking to them on phone.

3. Her tablet is filled with a number of games. Her favourites are Mahjong, Scrabble and Sudoku. She plays Scrabble on-line with unknown opponents. Her neighbours, who are about half her age are astounded by this and are now planning get tablets for themselves. I had introduced her to Sudoku a few years ago to keep her mentally agile. She no longer looks at the newspaper for Sudoku – she has it in her tablet. She spends quite some time daily playing such games.

4. A number of religious texts such as Ramayanam, Mahabharatham, Lalitha Sahasranamam, Vishnu Sahasranamam, Narayaneeyam, various Puranas, etc in Malayalam / Tamil / English – she is very fluent in Malayalam and Tamil and can read English quite well. Now she does not need to search for these books – they are all available at one place. In case she wants something new, she has to just tell her son who would download it from the internet. She uses the laptop TABLET daily for reading these texts.

5. She has learnt how to surf the net. She often searches for Youtube videos on various crafts – she has made many items such as paper flowers, flowers from cloth, paper baskets, stuffed toys, etc after watching such videos. Language is not a barrier as she just wants to see how it is done – so she

*Continued on Page 31*

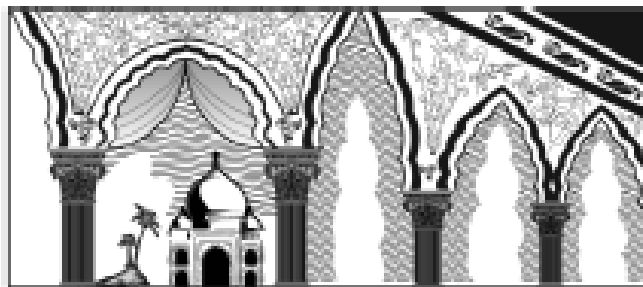
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watches such videos in all languages. I have seen her watching French and Russian videos on such crafts.

6. Sometimes she surfs the internet to watch some old Malayalam or Tamil film. She has headphones and can this indulge in this activity without disturbing anybody. She also uses the tablet to watch episodes of TV serials that she may have sometimes missed.

7. A lot of storybooks have also been downloaded in her tablet. So she need not ask anybody to loan her any book to read. She has got a large private library of her own.

8. Quite a few religious and film songs are stored in her laptop. She also has internet radio apps. She often just lies down and listens to her tablet playing songs.

My mother was introduced to the tablet at the age of 78 and she has taken to it like a duck takes to water. Whenever she goes out of town to visit her children she carries the tablet. She uses it while waiting at the airport for the plane just as a company executive uses his laptop in the airport to look at excel spreadsheets. The crucial element in this whole thing is that she was introduced to the tablet as a means of entertainment – the other benefits followed.

Many of us have old parents who are retired and have a lot of time in their hands. Based on the experience of my mother, my advice to everyone is to hook them on to a tablet. This will ensure their mental well being. The earlier it is done the better.

## VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

*by Shruti Punnachalil*

Video games are becoming large parts of young boys' lives; the graphics in these video games look very realistic. Now, your child might not be playing these games just yet, but what happens when they turn thirteen or fourteen and they begin playing games with gun violence with amazing graphics which look extremely realistic.

In my opinion, some kids, even at the age of thirteen or fourteen, can't understand that video games are not real life, which means that there is a chance they could bring the violence from those video games out into the real world. In some cases, children could get so angry that they would recreate the violence they see in those video games. There are stories of children being exposed to violent content then commit violent crimes over the smallest things like having their video games taken away. This kind of phenomenon can occur because of children being exposed to violence. It just happens that video games are the most accepted way for young children to be exposed to violence.

Being a thirteen year old, I see my peers become exposed to violent video games and become familiar with types of guns, blades, and other weapons. Is this really what you want your children to be exposed to?

If you are to let your child play a violent video game, make sure that they are mature enough to realize that they should not bring the violence they see in the video game into real life. Now, this seems probably seems like common sense, but you would be surprised as to how many children have not grasped this important concept. As I said before, I feel as if some children commit violent acts because of little things that set them off. This might seem unbelievable to you, but it happens too much to be looked over.

Overall, parents should start becoming more and more concerned about the content their children are exposed to. As technology is becoming more and more advanced and graphics are becoming better, children are going to be exposed to it even more. Video games are rapidly becoming more realistic and violent, which means parents need to be more careful about what their children are being exposed to.



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# യാത്രക്കാരൻ

- എം. എൻ. മഞ്ചിറ

പോന്നുഷസ്തിൻ സ്വർണ്ണ  
 പാളികൾക്കുള്ളിൽ  
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 ഒരു പുതു സൃഷ്ടിക്കായ്



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# എൻ്റെ നാട് അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലൂടെ

- രാജ് ഉണ്ണി

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് എൻ്റെ നാട്ടിലെ അവസ്ഥ ഗുരുതരമായിരുന്നു. അവിടെ വൈദ്യുതി ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നില്ല. ടെലിഫോണില്ലായിരുന്നു നഗരവെള്ളവും എത്തിയിരുന്നില്ല. ഇന്നോ വൈദ്യുതിയുണ്ട്. ടെലിഫോൺ ഉണ്ട്. നഗരവെള്ളവുമുണ്ട്. പോരാത്തതിന് ജലനിധി വെള്ളവും എത്തുന്നുണ്ട്. അതിനാൽ നാട്ടിലെ അവസ്ഥ ഇന്ന് വളരെ വ്യത്യസ്തമാണ്.

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് വൈദ്യുതി ഇല്ലാതിരുന്നതിനാൽ രാത്രിയിൽ കുട്ടികൾ മണ്ണെണ്ണ വിളക്കിലായിരുന്നു പഠിച്ചിരുന്നത്. ഇന്നാണെങ്കിൽ വൈദ്യുതി എല്ലാ വീട്ടിലും ഉണ്ട്. കൂടാതെ ടെലിവിഷനും ഉണ്ട്. അതിനാൽ കുട്ടികൾ എല്ലായ്പ്പോഴും ടെലിവിഷൻ്റെ മുന്നിലിരിക്കുന്നു. പഠിത്തത്തിൽ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് ശ്രദ്ധ കുറയാനുള്ള ഏക കാരണം ടെലിവിഷൻ ആണെന്നുതന്നെ പറയാം.

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് ഫോൺ ഇല്ലാതിരുന്നതിനാൽ അയൽ വക്കത്തെ കാരണവരെ വിളിക്കാൻ ജോലിക്കാരെ പറഞ്ഞേയക്കാറുണ്ട്. അല്ലെങ്കിൽ പടിപ്പുരയിൽ ചെന്ന് "കൂ" വിളിക്കാറുണ്ട്. ഇന്നാണെങ്കിൽ നാട്ടിൽ ഫോണിന്റേയും സെൽഫോണിന്റേയും കളിയാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ട് കുട്ടികൾക്ക് ആർക്കും "കൂ" വിളിക്കാൻ അറിയില്ല.

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് കുടിവെള്ളത്തിന് കിണറും ഏത്തവും ആണ് ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരുന്നത്. ഇന്നാണെങ്കിൽ കുടിവെള്ളം കുഴൽ വഴി അടുക്കളയിൽ എത്തുന്നു. അതുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് ഏത്തം എന്തെന്നോ, ഏത്തം കൊണ്ട് വെള്ളം

എങ്ങിനെ കോരണം എന്നോ അറിയില്ല. ചില സ്ഥലങ്ങളിൽ കപ്പിയും കയറും ഉപയോഗിച്ചാണ് വെള്ളം കോരിയിരുന്നത്. ഇന്നോ ടാപ്പ് തിരിച്ചാൽ വെള്ളമായി.

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് നിലം ഉഴുന്നതിന് കാളയേയും പോത്തിനേയും ആണ് ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരുന്നത്. ഇന്ന് അതിനു പകരം ട്രാക്ടർ ആണ് ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നത്. അതുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ കുട്ടികൾക്ക് കാള എന്തെന്നോ പോത്ത് എന്തെന്നോ അറിയിരുന്നില്ല. കന്നിമാസം കൊയ്ത്തും പണിയും കഴിഞ്ഞാൽ കർഷകരുടേയും അവരുടെ പണിക്കാരുടേയും ആനന്ദത്തിനായി കന്നുകെട്ടി നടത്താറുണ്ട്. ഇന്ന് കന്നും കന്നുകെട്ടിയും എല്ലാം വിന്മരിക്കാൻപറ്റാത്ത ദൂരത്തിൽ അകന്നിരിക്കുന്നു. മാസങ്ങളോളം നീണ്ടുനീക്കാറുള്ള കൃഷിപ്പണി ഇന്ന് രണ്ടു ദിവസം കൊണ്ട് തീരുന്നു. അതിനാൽ ജോലിക്കാർക്ക് കൃഷിപ്പണിയോട് വലിയ മതിപ്പില്ല.

അര നൂറ്റാണ്ടിനുമുമ്പ് കാശിനു വിലയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അന്ന് മുക്കാല്, നാലണ, എട്ടണ, ഒരു രൂപ മുതലായവക്കൊക്കെ നല്ല വിലയുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. അതുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ സാധാരണക്കാരുടെ പക്കൽ പത്തു രൂപയിൽ കൂടുതൽ ഉണ്ടാകാറില്ല. ഇന്ന് ആരുടെയും പക്കൽ നൂറു രൂപയിൽ കുറഞ്ഞ നോട്ടു കാണുകയില്ല. ആവശ്യസാധനങ്ങളുടെ വില വളരെ അധികമായിരിക്കുന്നു. അതിനാൽ നാട്ടിൽ ടെക്നോളജിക്കൽ ട്രെഡ്ഡെന്റ് ഉണ്ടെങ്കിലും സാധനങ്ങളുടെ വില അധികമായതിനാൽ മനുഷ്യജീവിതം വളരെ കഷ്ടത്തിലാണ്.

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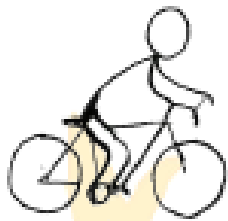
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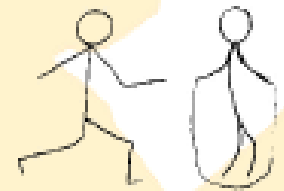
## EXERCISE – IS IT REALLY THAT IMPORTANT?

By Ananya Pillai



Have you ever heard the expression "use it or lose it"? It's true! If you don't exercise, you might have a higher chance of having health problems. Nowadays, almost nobody has time to exercise because of electronic devices. It wasn't like this before. Thirty years ago, most people led lives that kept them at a healthy weight. Kids walked to and from school every day, ran around at recess, participated in gym class, and played for hours after school before dinner. Most families weren't rich enough to buy phones or any other electronic equipment. That has changed drastically. Children are becoming obese just because of lack of exercise. Exercise not only keeps you fit, it also builds strong muscles and bones, helps you concentrate better and makes you happy. That's why children need more exercise both in and out of school.

For children, it is very important to exercise daily. Children need to start exercising more because they could have a higher chance of getting childhood obesity or heart disease. In a recent study, the percentage of childhood obesity is growing at an alarming rate with 1 out of every 3 children now considered overweight, according to KidsHealth.org. Many children are spending less time exercising and more time in front of the TV, computer, or video game console. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 8 to 18 year olds in the U.S., watch about 4.5 hours of television in a day, and the average child spends about 7 hours on all screen media combined( TV, videos, DVDs).The United States has the highest rate of obesity for large countries. Childhood obesity is now the no. 1 health concern among parents in the United States, topping drug abuse and smoking. Among children today, obesity is causing a wide range of health problems, including high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and elevated blood cholesterol levels. Obesity has been cited as a contributing factor to approximately 100,000–400,000 deaths in the United States per year and has increased health care use and expenses, costing people an estimated \$117 billion in direct and indirect treatments. That's a lot of money! Heart disease is also affecting many children in the United States but not as much as obesity is. About 40,000 children have heart disease because they don't exercise. This is a major problem.



Think about every time you walk, settle into a chair, or pick something up, you're using your bones, muscles, and joints. Without these important body parts, we wouldn't be able to stand, walk, run, or even sit. That's why it's important to keep them strong and healthy; so that it will help you in the long run. It is never too late to improve the health of your bones, joints and muscles. By exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy weight, we can delay or even prevent conditions that damage our bones, joints and muscles as we age.



Did you know that just 30 minutes of exercise a day can make you smarter? Many of us might not know this but, exercise makes you smarter and also puts you in a better mood. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals called endorphins. These endorphins interact with the receptors in your brain that make you feel happier. Children who get more exercise also tend to do better in school. Exercise not only builds your fitness, but also boosts your brain power, which can help you do better in school and improve your grades. Studies show that children who exercise at least 60 minutes every day have bigger brains. Who doesn't want to be smarter? In particular, exercise enlarges your brain's *basal ganglia*, the part that helps you pay attention, even when you are going through a boring class.

Kids exercise all the time without even thinking of it. Just being active, like when you run around outside or play kickball at school, is a kind of exercise. Everyone has a role to play in reducing childhood obesity, including parents. When you exercise daily, you are preventing yourself from health problems, building strong muscles and bones, and also making yourself smarter. When you exercise, you're helping build a strong body that will be able to move around and do all the stuff you need it to do. Try to be active every day and your body will thank you later.

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## THE BIRTHDAY WISH

*By Kavita Menon*

*Illustrations by Vinay Menon*

Jay was resting in his room. He had been studying for a test tomorrow, and was now taking a much needed break. In less than an hour he would turn 21. It was a big milestone, his entry into adulthood. He was now eligible for an adult Driver's License.

Jay would also be graduating this year. He had already been accepted into a prominent medical school. Further after his internship he would be specializing in Neurology. He had always dreamed of becoming a Neurosurgeon. His dad was a Cardiologist, while his mom had stayed home to take care of him and his little brother. When his dad was held up at work, or called at odd hours to attend emergencies there was some comfort in having their mom at home with them. Jay's brother was a sophomore in high school. He too was exceptionally brilliant and would soon be following in their father's foot-steps.

Jay's cell phone rang. It was his mom. "Hi Mom" he answered. "It's your Birthday! Happy Birthday Jay!!" his mom said. She was calling to wish him on his birthday. Just then the door to his room burst open and two of his best friends entered their hands full of shopping bags. He thought he could make out some party stuff in them. There was some silver on bright neon peeking through one of the bags. Shaking his head he wondered what his friends were up to.

Sam & Justin had been his best friends from school. They had been staying in the same neighborhood since elementary school, and it was not a coincidence that they all had tried for the same college. Justin was a star football player. He was the funniest among them, and was the mischief-maker of the group, while Sam with his quiet manner was the more responsible one. When Justin got them into trouble, it was Sam who looked for ways to get them out of it. Jay fell right in between them, balancing them out. Many times it was Jay's vote that decided the outcome of their adventure. Jay & Sam were roommates. They shared the dorm room with two others.

Later in the day tomorrow, they would all be going to Jay's parents' home for the birthday party that was being thrown for him. Jay was the last in his group to turn 21. He knew the tradition. It was getting to few minutes before 12. Students from the hall were entering the room with more party items, & cases of beer. His friends had bought cake. There was a tradition in the fraternity of plastering the birthday boy's face with it. "I need to go, Mom", Jay said. Listening in to the loud noises in the background his mom cautioned him to not do anything crazy. Saying he would be careful & not indulge in anything foolish, he hung up.

As the guys started counting down to 12, Jay stood in anticipation of what was to come. When the clock chimed 12, cakes were smashed into his face, beers washed down their throats, and with loud cheers the boys helped Jay usher in the next phase of his life. Someone, either Justin or Sam, slipped the gaudy florescent T-Shirt saying "I am 21. . ." written in silver around his neck. People were howling, whistling, enjoying. Shots were poured and drunk. Soon the alcohol was all gone. Someone suggested they go to a bar. Some vetoed, others in favor of going, booed those who had vetoed. Everyone was in high spirits.



There was a bar at a little distance from the campus, and it was agreed that those interested would go there. This suggestion soon presented itself a problem. The bar was close enough to be of walkable distance, but it would be closing soon. And since it would stay open for only half hour more, the quickest way to reach there would be by car. The drive was not far, but most people in the group were buzzed. In a car they could be there within five to seven minutes especially at this time of night when the traffic would be negligible.

Sam vetoed this idea suggesting they call it a night. Jay, confused, wasn't sure, when Justin declared that he could drive. He hadn't had that much to drink, was fine, and in control of himself. Jay remembered his promise to his mom, to not do anything foolish. As Justin convinced Sam and urged them along, Jay couldn't think of any harm befalling them. The roads were sure to be empty. It was winter but

*Continued on Page 47*

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*Continued from Page 45*

there was no ice or snow on the ground; the skies were clear, and the bar itself was not too far. This could be the one night he would get to enjoy in a long time to come. He wanted this to be a night that he could look back on with warm memories.

They all piled into two cars - Justin driving one, and the other being driven by a frat member. Both cars were packed to overflowing with three people in front and four to five in the back. Seat-belts were foregone, they wouldn't be much help anyways.

Justin's car was the first to leave. They started out, with the boys all talking, commenting jovially & making idle chit-chat in the car. There was a part of the road that adjoined the woods. There were all sorts of animals ranging from deer to small critters living in it. As they got on to the road, the boys teased Justin about the pace at which he was driving, challenging him to speed up. Justin, in good humor rising to the challenge accelerated, and they all cheered. Just around the bend in the woods, unseen by them, was a deer crossing the road. On spotting it, Justin swerved the car in time to avoid hitting the deer, but lost control. The car toppled on its side, spun few times, hit a tree on its path, and continued straight down to the valley, where it lodged itself in the river-bed.



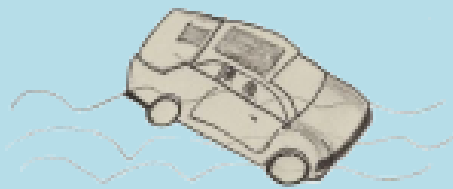
In the slightly warm winter weather with the snow melting there was enough water in the river to sink the car. The additional problem was with the river-bed itself being made of soft mud & clay. The car was stuck.

Some people were thrown out of the car when it had toppled and crashed. Justin, stuck behind the driver's wheel was strapped in, and could not get himself out of the seat belt. Sam, sitting in front passenger seat was one of those thrown out of the vehicle. Jay, sitting between Justin & Sam found himself in an even more precarious situation. The passenger side door was jammed, and there were some badly injured people in the back. He realized he wouldn't be able to get out without Justin getting out first.

Justin having hit his head on the steering wheel and been hurt by glass, was bleeding profusely. As Jay checked on his injuries he felt excruciating pain on one side of his body. He couldn't move his right hand or leg. He thought he might have some broken ribs & bones. His special Birthday T-shirt was torn up & covered with blood. Adding to the misery, the air bags that had opened up during the crash were now suffocating them. Someone in the back said something and Jay could feel him struggling to get upright.

Every time the car moved Jay could feel it sinking into the soft mud. Brackish muddy water had started filling the car. He yelled at Justin or to anyone else who could hear to find some opening, a way to escape before the river consumed them. He shook him hoping for a response to the calamity that was unfolding, but his friend lay unresponsive. He tried to reach past him to open the driver's side door, but it was locked shut. As Jay stretched, the pain on his side got intense leaving him breathless.

The car lay inclined in the river-bed where it had landed, and part of it started sinking into the mud. With every movement the car tilted even more, and Jay felt himself pushed against the passenger side into the submerging section. He panicked, and screamed for anyone nearby to help.



He had just turned 21. He could see his whole life as it unfolded. His parents, his brother. His Dreams, his Career, his Life. And now there was no hope. There was no one around to save him. He didn't know if the other car following them had realized they had met with an accident, or found the people flung out during the crash. Had they gathered that their friends lay on the brink of death minutes away from being drowned in a car in the valley river-bed? Even if any of his friends had known the location of the car, they probably were in no state themselves to navigate the slope of the valley.

This end to his life felt anticlimactic. Some time back they were celebrating his birthday. Now he was awaiting a slow torturous death. He felt deeply disappointed in himself. As he remembered the sequence of events earlier, he realized how easily he had let himself be persuaded to join the drunken party out on a drive to the bar. He remembered how Sam had suggested calling it a night. It had been his

*Continued on Page 49*

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## Recipe: Spinach Casserole *By Latha Unni*

### Ingredients:

6 (10 ounce) packages frozen spinach	1 cup heavy cream
2 tbsp butter	2 cups milk
2 tbsp olive oil	$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon powder
2 cups finely chopped onion	1-2 tsp red pepper flakes
2 tbsp chopped garlic	1 tsp black pepper
	2 cups parmesan cheese
	salt to taste

### Directions:

- 1) Defrost spinach, squeeze as much liquid as possible and set aside.
- 2) Heat butter and oil in a pan and fry onion until translucent. Add garlic and flour and fry for two more minutes.
- 3) Add cream, milk, cinnamon powder, red and black pepper, and keep stirring on medium heat until the sauce thickens. Remove from heat.
- 4) Add spinach, salt to taste,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups parmesan and stir well.
- 5) Transfer to a 8 X 10 baking dish and top with the remaining parmesan.
- 6) Bake at 400 deg C for 20-30 min.

Serves 8-10



**TIP :** Add additional cheese to spinach mixture for extra cheesy taste. Also, parmesan can be substituted with your favorite cheese.

Recipe can be cut in half.

The spinach mix can be prepared a day ahead, refrigerated, and baked just before serving.



vote that had mattered. And, he had been indecisive. Now he and his friends were paying for it with their lives. He felt tremendous despair. His eyes filled with tears. As he lay there waiting his end, he prayed to God. He prayed to God to give him courage and strength. He couldn't turn to see the person behind him, so he called out, but couldn't hear anything from there either.

The car was going underwater. The water level had reached up to his neck. It was time. Jay asked God for forgiveness, for peace, for another chance. As the car sank, he took a big breath of air thinking to hold out as much as possible. Please another chance! As the water covered the top of his head, he wished with all his heart that he had another chance at living.

He started trembling as the cold muddy water enveloped him. He felt himself shivering, going breathless. The car was plunging deeper but he was too helpless to do anything about it. He found himself struggling to find a way out as the car continued its descent sinking into the muddy river. His whole body started to shake violently. Tremors seized his entire being. His lungs felt like they would explode, yet the vicious tremors wouldn't stop. He wondered if this is how it felt like to die. That's the last thought he had before he faded out.

- The rate of drunk driving is highest among 21 to 25 year olds.
- Only time will sober a person up. Drinking strong coffee, exercising or taking a cold shower will not help.
- Every two minutes, a person is injured in a drunken driving crash.

Jay woke up gasping for breath. He took a deep breath. Then another. As he came to, he realized he had been roused by his friends. Justin had been trying to wake him up, while Sam was handing him the phone. It was his mom calling. He looked around, checked the date, the time on his watch. Deja vu! He was back to the time before his birthday.

Jay could not believe it. Had he actually been through that horrible car accident or had it all been a dream? He saw the shopping bags his friends were holding. He could make out the party stuff. Then he saw something bright neon with silver sparkle on it. He instantly realized what it was. It was the T-shirt that he would wear when the clock chimed 12. He could not explain away the fact that he already knew about it. Or that he had an idea about the sequence of events that was to happen tonight. Was it really true? Had he actually been in that awful car crash? With that came the realization that his wish had come true! He realized how lucky he was. He had asked God for a second chance, and God had given him one! His eyes filled with tears. He thanked God for all the little blessings & miracles in life that he had taken for granted. He promised to be a more responsible person.

As he answered his mom's call, he heard her saying the same thing again "It's your Birthday! Happy Birthday!! Promise me you will be careful, and won't do anything foolish." And this time as he answered her he knew he had every intention of keeping his promise. He had been given a Second Chance!! His Birthday Wish had come true!

## Recipe: Bell Pepper Rice (By Latha Madhu)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Basmati rice - 3 cups  | Cumin seeds - 1/2 tsp                       |
| Medium size onion - 1(diced)   | Turmeric powder - 1/4 tsp                   |
| Medium size tomato- 2(cut into chunks for puree)                                   | Chilli powder - 3/4 to 1 tsp                |
| Bell pepper (red, yellow or orange) - 2 (seeds removed and cut lengthwise in half) | Garam masala(optional) - 1/4 tsp            |
| Ginger - grated/minced - 2 tsp   | Oil - 6 tsp or desired amount for sauteeing |
|  | Salt - according to taste                   |
|  | Coriander leaves for garnish                |

**Directions:** Cook rice separately and set aside. Puree tomatoes in a blender and set aside. Heat oil in a pan. Once hot add cumin seeds. Immediately add diced onions and ginger and saute for 5 minutes. Then add bellpepper and saute for another 5min. To it add turmeric powder and chilli powder and stir it once. Now add tomato puree and salt to the vegetables and let it cook on medium flame until gravy starts to thicken a little bit. You can also add garam masala at this time if you wish. Now lower the flame nicely and add cooked rice to the gravy and mix well. Remove from stove and add coriander leaves to garnish. Enjoy with pappad or raita.



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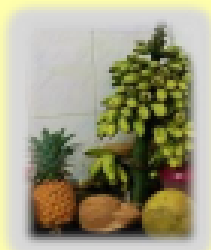
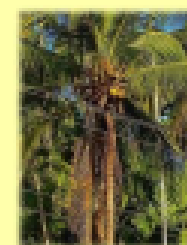
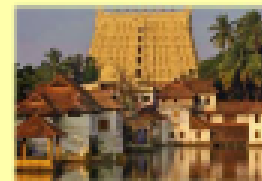
Compiled by: Kavita Menon

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1. Kerala declared Venice of the East uses Waterways (Canals) as a mode of transport. They provide an alternative to roadways or to connect areas otherwise not easily accessible. There is even a separate authority that handles the waterways – Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI).
2. In 2011 the High Court ordered the Padmanabhaswamy Temple Committee to unlock some of the unopened chambers leading to the discovery of immense treasures, making this Kerala Temple the wealthiest in the world.
3. It is believed that the ships of King Solomon landed in a port called Ophir (now Poovar) in Thiruvananthapuram in 1036 BC. The city was the trading post of spices, sandalwood and ivory. Merchants sought not only pepper but also cardamom, ginger, turmeric, rice, monkeys (can you believe it??), ivory, and woven cloth. In fact, the name for one kind of popular cotton cloth, Calico, comes from the city of Calicut.
4. Heard of any accidents or deaths caused by falling coconuts? Considering Kerala is highly populated with coconut trees it is amazing no such accidents have been reported. Kudos to the people of God's Own Country for making it safe.
5. Kerala is one of the few Indian states where lineage continues through the birth of a daughter as opposed to the birth of a son in other states. The Tharavadu (family) names are passed down from the maternal side of family. This probably explains the 2011 census's female-to-male ratio of 1084 females per 1000 male. Even the female literacy rate is higher than that of the males – 100 : 96. Yoo-hoo Women power!!
6. About 50 plus types of Bananas can be found in Kerala, all in different shapes & sizes. You can pick your choice based on taste or medicinal properties. Go ahead, try it!!
7. With Coconuts available plentifully Keralites use Coconut Oil in their hair tapping its benefits for rich, lustrous, beautiful looking long hair. Ayurveda too uses coconut oil extensively in many of their formulations.
8. Kerala was the first state to declare total literacy in 1990. Recognizing the need for a literate population, the state & central governments, launched a number of plans & programs providing free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14.
9. If the gold jewelry worn by all the Kerala Brides on their wedding day is collected, there might be enough gold to help a small country get out of debt, thus making Kerala India's most gold owned state.
10. Kerala holds the number one place in the country's Fishery economy. Located on the coast of the Arabian Sea Keralites are big fish eaters. Both salt- water & fresh-water fishes are found in abundance here.
11. A survey conducted in 2011 shows Kerala as having the highest life expectancy - 74 years, as compared to other states. Kerala also holds a record for the lowest infant mortality rate. Hooray to literacy in Kerala.
12. Kerala known as the "Spice Capital of the World" was wholly dependent until recent times on commerce from trading spices like cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, ginger and turmeric, with pepper being the highlight. The Kerala cuisine is richly spicy with use of chilly, black pepper, cardamom, cloves, ginger, and cinnamon.
13. Good old Malayali and his moustache. As the joke goes, one tourist asks "Why do you have a moustache?" Man replies, "Because I'm a traditional Indian man and it is like a status symbol to me." Coming of age youths sport moustaches as a sign of masculinity, and also as a highly valued point of pride.
14. Ayurveda, the science of life and longevity, is the oldest practice of medicine in a natural way. The state ranks numero uno among others in its practice. Kerala possesses an unbroken tradition of Ayurveda that has surpassed many invasions and intrusions both foreign & native. As of recent times, it is being used as a form of supplemental medicine in the treatment of diseases like cancer & AIDS.
15. Kerala leads many other Indian states and territories in terms of per capita GDP. Though Kerala's economic progress is above the national average, with around 3,000,000+ Keralites working abroad, the Kerala Economy is largely dependent on remittances. One concern is that Kerala government maybe running some of the highest deficits in the country.
16. Other than being the 'Land of Spices' Kerala is also the Cashew capital of the world. How do Cashew nuts grow? The answer is that cashew kernels or nuts grow on the cashew fruit (apples). The kernels are harvested from cashew apples that drop to the ground after maturity. The apples are used to make jam, juice, syrup etc. Nothing goes to waste.



Lastly, why did a Malayali cross the street?

Simply ☺

Note: This list is not all inclusive. The humor in it belongs to the author.

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# RELAX & PAMPER YOURSELF WITH SIMPLE DIY SPA TREATMENT

Compiled by Sunita Pillai  
Source: Various Spa websites

## Yogurt, oatmeal & Honey facial mask

This face mask is suitable for all skin types and is super simple to prepare. It will cleanse and rejuvenate your skin.

### Ingredients

1 tbsp. of oatmeal, finely ground  
1 tbsp. of organic plain yogurt, with active cultures  
A few drops of honey

### Directions

Add yogurt to the oatmeal in a small bowl and mix together. Warm a few drops of honey, to do this, warm a spoon under hot water for a few minutes then add a few drops of honey to the spoon. Add the honey to the oatmeal-yogurt mixture and gently stir. Apply the mask to the face and leave on for 10 minutes. Rinse off with warm water and press a warm washcloth to your face. Apply a moisturizer.

## Oatmeal Honey Scrub Recipe

### Ingredients

1 tbsp. oatmeal (ground up finely in a blender or food processor)  
1 tbsp. honey  
1 tbsp. sweet almond oil (or coconut or olive oil – which ever you prefer)

### Directions

Mix everything together until it's a thick sticky mixture. Feel free to add a little extra oil or even a few drops of water if it's too sticky or clumpy. Smooth onto face and rub into skin for a couple of minutes and then rinse off. This homemade oatmeal honey face scrub that exfoliates moisturizes and leaves your skin feeling silky smooth.

## Lemon Sugar Body Scrub

<http://www.getfitwithnikki.com/2014/12/pamper-yourself-this-holiday-season/>

### Ingredients

2 cups granulated white sugar  
1/3 to 1/4 cup of coconut oil

3-4 drops of lemon essential oil/fresh few drops of lemon juice

### Directions

Mix coconut oil to sugar then add lemon essential oil. Apply and rub mixture onto skin. Rinse clean with warm water. Store the remaining scrub in a jar. This scrub exfoliates and removes dead skin from your body, leaving you feeling soft and rejuvenated.

## Lip Scrub for Dry/Chapped Lips

### Ingredients

Brown Sugar: 1 tablespoon  
Honey: 1 tablespoon  
Olive Oil: 1 teaspoon/Vitamin E oil  
Sprinkle a pinch of Cinnamon

### Directions

Mix 1 tablespoon of honey with 1 tablespoon of brown sugar together.  
Add 1 teaspoon of olive oil and mix well.  
Spoon into a container and use it within 1 -2 weeks.  
Take a dime size amount of scrub and rub gently onto dry lips.  
Gently rub until some of the sugar has dissolved.  
Rinse well with warm water.

## Peppermint Lime Foot Soak

### Ingredients

2 cups Epsom salts  
1/2 cup baking soda  
1 lime zester  
3-4 drops peppermint essential oil/lime essential oil  
green food coloring {optional}

### Directions

To make the foot soak, combine 2 cups of Epsom salts with 1/2 cup baking soda and zest of one lime in a large bowl, and add 3-4 drops of lime essential oil and 3-4 drops of peppermint essential oil. Stir with wooden spoon to mix thoroughly. (Optional, you could add just a drop of green food coloring if you'd like) Pour the mixture into a jar or bag, and use within a few weeks.

So carve out a little time for yourself between cooking, shopping, planning and office, to pamper yourself with a little at-home spa day. Your body and your mind will thank you for the tender love and care.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FIRST® LEGO® LEAGUE COMPETITION

*By Roshni and Pranav*

The FIRST® LEGO® League (FLL) is an international competition for elementary and middle school students organized by the FIRST® (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) in partnership with the LEGO® group. FIRST is an international youth organization that also operates the Junior FIRST LEGO League (Jr FLL), FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) and FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) competitions.

We, "The Mindstorm Troopers of Missouri" participated in the FLL competition in 2014. There are three main aspects of FLL – Core Values Demonstration, Project and Robot Game.

**FLL Core values Demonstration:** There are 8 core values. The FLL Core values are: a) we are a team; b) we do the work to find solutions with guidance from our coaches and mentors; c) we know our coaches and mentors don't have all the answers, we learn together; d) we honor the spirit of friendly competition; e) what we discover is more important than what we win; f) we share our experiences with others; g) we display Gracious Professionalism® and Coopitition® in everything we do; h) we have FUN!

Each team was provided with a small task to be completed in 5 minutes. Judges then had a friendly interaction with each team and assessed them for demonstrating the FLL core value.

**Project:** FLL announces a World Class theme every year. The theme for the year 2014 is "World Class Learning". A team must discuss and finalize a topic for their project based on the theme. The next step is to conduct research on the topic with professionals and survey the targeted audiences to understand the challenges in the topic. After brainstorming and research, teams design an innovative solution that adds value to society by improving something that already exists, using something that exists in a new way, or inventing something totally new. The solution is then shared with the professionals in the respective area to get feedback on the idea. Finally, they must prepare a presentation to share the work with the judges at a tournament. The presentation can include posters, slideshows, models, multimedia clips, skits and more. We brainstormed various topics and finalized to research on "how the kids select and read books at the County Library".

As part of our research, we met the Assistant Manager and Librarian at the Daniel Boone Library, Ellisville and Samuel Sachs library, Chesterfield to understand how books are currently catalogued and published. We understood that the publisher sends every book to the Library of Congress where it is catalogued and added to the library databases across US. We also interviewed some parents to understand how they pick books for their kids. After the research and analysis we framed the Question: "How Can an Elementary/Middle class student learn to use the library in an Easy and Effective manner?"

Our Solution was the ABLM (Automated Book List Machine). We designed the Automated Book List Machine where an Elementary or Middle School student scans their library card (or type in their pin number). Kids fill out a profile survey sheet on their first visit. ABLM determines their reading level based on their profile/history and interests. ABLM recommends a list of books at 3 levels (lower, current and higher).

We shared the ABLM idea with the assistant manager at the county library; schools; wrote letter to Senator, Governor of Missouri; First lady and Founder of FIRST Inc.



*The Mindstorm Troopers of Missouri with Automated Book List Machine (ABLM)*

*Continued on Page 55*

**FLL Robot game:** Kids build, program and test an autonomous robot using **LEGO® MINDSTORMS®** kit. The kits contain software and hardware to create customizable, programmable robots. It includes an intelligent brick computer that controls the system, a set of modular sensors and motors, and Lego parts to create attachments

At the Robot Game, the teams compete with robots they have built and programmed. The Robot performs sequence of missions on the table. Each mission accomplished earns points. Within 2½ minutes, they try to get as many points as possible, on the approximately 2 sq. m. large playing field. The robot must act autonomously and all movements must be independently operated by the program. Remote controls are not allowed. Robot building includes setting up the mission posts, Design of the Robot Motors and various sensors, Design Arms and EV3 programming to perform various missions.



Robot Table with Mission post

The missions our team has done so far are Opening Doors, Apprenticeship, Search Engine, Adapting to Changing Environments, Sports, Remote Communication and Reverse engineering. For the Robot to accomplish a mission the arms have to be built and attached. The arms vary for the missions.



Arm for Sports Mission



Arm for Search engine pull the loop



Arm for Opening door

### **FLL Champion Team - "The Mindstorm Troopers of Missouri"**

We excelled in all the three aspects of FLL (Project, Core value demonstration and Robotic Design interview & game) and **WON the Champions award** in the FLL qualifier round on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

We got selected for the Eastern Missouri Competition which is the State competition. It was held on December 7, 2014. Unfortunately, we didn't qualify for the world competition, but we definitely will rock it for the next year's competition! We are glad that as a Rookie team we came this far in the competition. Now that we have seen the end of the tunnel, we will start working with the end in mind.

#### **Winning Team:**

Front (Left to Right): **Rohan** 4<sup>th</sup> Gr, **Pranav** 5<sup>th</sup> Gr (Ohmkaram), **Shaun** 4<sup>th</sup> Gr, **Adicharan** 5<sup>th</sup> Gr, **Roshni** 5<sup>th</sup> Gr (Ohmkaram). Behind (Left to Right): **Ramesh Rajan** (Coach) (Ohmkaram), **Siddarth** 5<sup>th</sup> Gr, **Shibu** (Assistant coach), **Mayur** (Mentor), **Naimesh** (Mentor)



To know more about our FLL journey contact our parents at [Vimal\\_nair@yahoo.com](mailto:Vimal_nair@yahoo.com) or [Rameshkumar.Rajan@gmail.com](mailto:Rameshkumar.Rajan@gmail.com)

# Art by Ohmkaram Kids



'Om' by Manali Shah,  
age 16



Sunrise by Mythili Alankar,  
Second Grade

Night Time  
 When the sun goes down  
 The moon rises  
 They call it Night Time  
 In the dark lonely stars  
 The Moon shines  
 Bright all through the night  
 All through the night  
 All through the night  
 The Moon shines bright  
 In the Moonlight

Arshya Pillai

Night Time by Arshya Pillai,  
Second Grade



By - Aryan Pillai  
2nd grade

Legos

Legos are my favorite toys as there are different kinds of pieces and minifigures. My favorites are Lego Ninjago and Lego Chima. I have four Ninjago sets, four Chima sets and a few minifigures.

I like Legos because we can build anything we want and have so much fun building structures and acting out all kinds of battles with the little lego people.

I have asked Santa to give me a Lego Ninjacopter for Christmas. When my parents ask me what I want for my birthday, I always ask for legos.

I like my playroom, where I enjoy and create new stories with my Lego pieces and characters. Whenever I open a new Lego set, a sense of awe overpowers me. I spread out the pieces and observe each tiny brick. An hour later, I am amazed that these individual pieces have interlocked to become a masterpiece. My mom mentions that this summer LEGO Kids Fest is coming to St. Louis, Missouri. I am excited to visit and explore my Lego Building Experience.

Legos by Aryan Pillai,  
Second Grade





**The Wind by Shruthi Punnachalil, age 13**

**Holidays by Ankita Nair, Second Grade**



Little butterflies all around  
 Butterflies oh butterfly  
 Sparkling in the sky so bright  
 They make the place look  
 so beautiful. Ohhh. They're so  
 beautiful. They're so beautiful  
 Oh they're so beautiful That  
 it just makes me want  
 sayyy. "Wow what a beautiful  
 day" Ohhh Ohhh Ohhh

**Butterfly by Mythili Alankar, Second Grade**



Soccer  
 By Dhruv Menon, Second Grade

Soccer is a sport where you kick a ball and try to score goals and be goalie and has goals. My favorite position is forward where you get to score goals. But sometimes I play defense. My role in defense is to kick people's shirts. My favorite player is Lionel Messi. He plays forward for Argentina. The FIFA World Cup takes place once every four years. This year the FIFA World Cup was in Summer 2014 between Germany and Argentina. Germany won the

**Soccer by Dhruv Menon, Second Grade**



World Cup. Soccer games are 90 minutes long with a half time in between. When players get hurt or are tired to play then they get substituted by other players. I play for the team ISL Chelsea. My teammates and I play together to do the team work. Soccer is all about teamwork. I enjoy Soccer and I hope you enjoy it too!

How to get ready to eat dosa and chutni

First you need to get a bowl and if you have five people, get five plates and pour the chutni into the bowl then put the dosa on the plate. Make the table ready by putting flowers in the middle of the table. Get napkins and set it right next to the plates. BY READY! Then call the people that are going to eat. Don't forget you have a nice time.

**How to get ready to eat Dosa & Chutni, Hrithika Malugu, First Grade**

Straw House by Anvika  
Malugu, age 3 years



Dancing by Hrithika  
Malugu, First Grade



GANESHA  
by Sheeja Natesan

## DIWALI FESTIVAL

By Vani Ganesh, age 14

Diwali is a cultural tradition celebrated every autumn. On this day, also known as "The Festival of Lights", families light small lamps or candles and place them in the front of their homes; they also dress in new clothes. Diwali is an ancient Hindu festival which is celebrated to symbolize the conquering of light over dark, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance.

Diwali is very important to Hindus; it dates back to ancient times where it was celebrated for the victories of compassion and love over the darkness of evil. The causes of this celebration vary between different Hindu beliefs, some believe that Diwali marks the return of Lord Rama to his loved ones after exile; many others believe that Diwali is a celebration closely linked to the goddess of wealth and prosperity, Lakshmi. No matter how you look at it, the celebration always has the same outcome, light conquers dark in all beliefs.

Diwali is mainly celebrated in India, but many people celebrate it here in America too. It came to the United States in 2003 when celebrated at the White House by the Congress and President George W. Bush. In 2009, President Obama made a visit to India to observe this holiday himself, and take part in the festivities. After that, he came back giving his best wishes to all Indians celebrating Diwali.

No matter where you may live, America or India, it is important to stick to your roots and celebrate this auspicious holiday. Like Gandhi once said, "A nation's culture resides in the hearts and souls of its people."

# MY TRIP TO GOLCONDA FORT

Omkaar Alakkassery, Third Grade



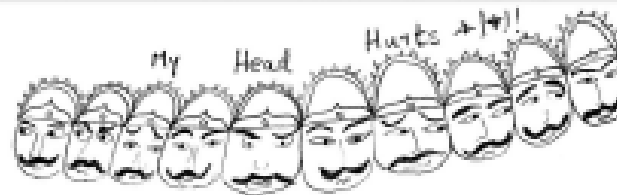
Over the summer I went to India. When I was there I went to a fort in Hyderabad. My mother, my father, my sisters and Mama and his wife went too. The fort I went to was called Golconda fort. We parked the car (Hyundai i10 AWD) and went into the fort.

The door was huge and had super sharp spikes. A tour guide helped us around the HUGE fort. First they told us about the kings, there were 7 kings. Then they told us about the messaging system, which were claps, 4 of them. But it only worked when you were standing in the center. There was a block if you could pick it up you could join the King's military. Then we went up to the queen's bedroom it was AWESOME!!!!!!!!!!!! Because you couldn't see the inside from the outside but you could see the outside from the inside and it was a clear curtain!!!!!! Then we went back down and to the bathtub of the king. You could use hot water, warm water, cold water or rose water. Then we went to a place that was the court for the criminals/caught enemies. Even if the guy in court moves his/her hand it is heard as a huge sound in the kings palace so if the guy picks up a sword it is heard in the palace of the king. After that we went to the kitchen. There wasn't a gas or electric you would use a wood stove. It takes a long time to cook something on it than a gas or electric (I don't know which is better). Then we went to the king's bedroom. They lit up all the rooms with diamonds; they used lamps to reflect light to light up the room. I thought that was awesome because of the creativity put into it since there was no electricity but that also meant no power cuts. We also learned that the queen's palace has been destroyed by enemies. There was also a water fountain in the courtroom. Then we walked out of the courtroom and out of the Castle, then got into the car and drove out of the fort.



## Facts on Golconda Fort:

- It is located about 11kms from Hyderabad city.
- It's about 800yrs old.
- It is built on a 400ft high hill.
- "Golla Konda" in Telugu stands for *Shepherd's Hill*.
- The fort was started building in 1143 AD.
- The Qutub Shahi dynasty built the fortress to its complete glory.
- The most magnificent aspect of the fort is its acoustic engineering – a handclap under the dome at the entrance can be heard about a kilometer away at the top of the fort at a certain point, but nowhere in between.
- The fort also had their ingenious water supply system which carried and stored water in overhead tanks.
- The kingdom had one of the wealthiest diamond businesses.



Ravana's Headache  
A cartoon by Vinay Menon

v. m. n.

# OHMKARAM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Ohmakaram supports many voluntary and charitable activities. In addition to supporting its own members Ohmkaram strives to help the society's down trodden. Ohmkaram scholarship fund was established to help poor and deserving bright students with financial need in Kerala. There are two types of Scholarships... Donor Sponsored Scholarship and Scholarship provided from Ohmkaram's general fund. In Donor Sponsored Scholarship the fund is fully generated or provided by the donor. So the donor can select a candidate for Scholarship and decide on the amount of award. The fund for the other type of scholarship is collected by fund raising or by member contribution. Selection of the scholar and the amount of the award are decided by the Scholarship committee. You can be a part of this activity by volunteering to run the program or donating some money to the fund. For more information please check the scholarship tab in [Ohmkaram.org](http://Ohmkaram.org)

## Eligibility for awarding the scholarship

1. Student should be domiciled in Kerala
2. Student should attend a professional course of any year
3. Student should be enrolled in any institute in Kerala
4. Scholarship will be awarded to a student only once in life time

## PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES

2014



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ATHIRA MURALEE

2009



KRISHNA MOL



# OHMKARAM

...a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayali Hindus in the Greater St.Louis area.

Ohmkaram is created with a vision to encourage active participation in the Hindu culture, foster cooperation and unity among Kerala Hindus throughout St. Louis and adjoining cities. In the midst of a collage of cultures, it is easy to forget and even lose track of many subtleties of our tradition that give a meaning to our identity. The mission of this organization will be to rejuvenate and reinforce the Kerala Hindu traditions. Participation and Involvement of our youth will be facilitated enabling them to appreciate our cultural roots. This Organization will also serve as a platform for effective networking of Hindus from Kerala or anyone interested in Kerala Hindu culture. This association will try to provide Hindu cultural resources not available through other sources in the Greater St. Louis area.

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# Malayalam School of St. Louis

*by Anjana Prayaga*

Malayalam School of St Louis, an Ohmkaram affiliate, is a voluntary organization that teaches and promotes Malayalam language to interested students in the St Louis area. This is the eighth year of service with thirty students enrolled currently. The school runs efficiently because of help from parents, volunteer teachers and students, who assist with various school activities. The school also provides an opportunity for youngsters for volunteering.

Special thanks to Latha Sujeeth for reserving class rooms at St Louis County Daniel Boone Library for conducting the classes. Sudhir Prayaga helps with posting information about school in the news media. Thanks also to Raj Unni, Suresh Krishnan and Vinod Menon for their generous donations to Malayalam School. Parents are the most important part of this organization, not only for providing snacks & juices for the students, but also for supporting their childrens' education and seeing the importance of learning their mother tongue.

Contact us if you are interested in participating Malayalam School activities, including volunteering. Registration for next year will start in July through August. We teach students to read and write Malayalam in our class. Classes are conducted at different levels. Malayalam School meets on alternate Saturdays for two hours, from September through May, every school year at St Louis County Daniel Boone library in Ellisville or library in O'Fallon.

## Malayalam School 2014-2015



Volunteer teachers: Anjana Prayaga, Binu Chakkamparambil, Deepa George, Kavita Anoop, Reshmi Anil, Rohini Nair, Sheena Konikkara and Sona Prabhakaran.  
Student volunteers: Ashwin Prayaga and Rubina Thomas

Contact: **Anjana Prayaga**

Website: [www.ohmkaram.org/MalayalamSchool.html](http://www.ohmkaram.org/MalayalamSchool.html)

E-mail: [malayalamschool@yahoo.com](mailto:malayalamschool@yahoo.com)

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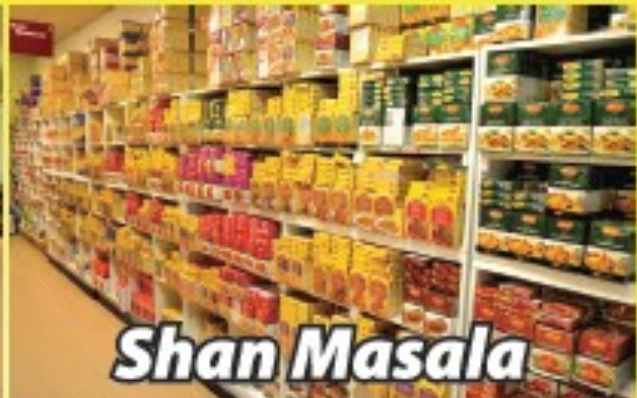
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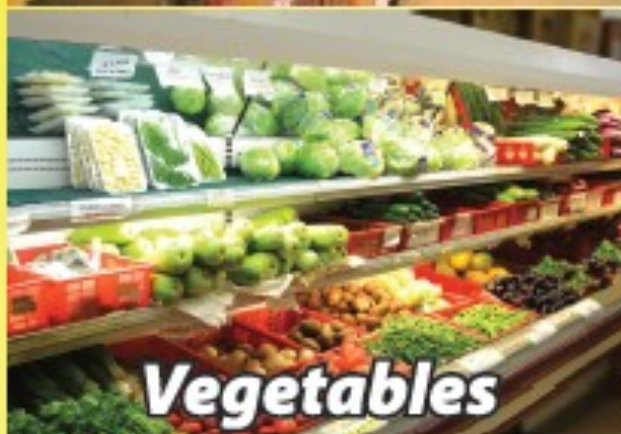
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