

Syllabus

Year III, Quarter I

Age Group : 5 to 8

Gokulam is the place where Lord Krishna's magical days of childhood were spent. It was here that his divine powers came to light.

Every child has that spark of divinity within. Bala-Gokulam is a forum for children to discover and manifest that divinity. It will enable Hindu children in US to appreciate their cultural roots and learn Hindu values in an enjoyable manner. This is done through weekly gatherings and planned activities which include games, yoga, stories, shlokas, bhajan, arts and crafts and much more.....

Balagokulam is a program of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)

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Shloka

नमस्तुलसि कल्याणि नमो विष्णुप्रिये शुभे ।
नमो मोक्ष प्रदायिके देवी नमः सर्व सम्पत्प्रदायिके ॥

namastulasi kalyaaNi namo vishhnupriye shubhe |

namo moksha pradaayike devii namaH sarva sampatpradaayike ||

Meaning: I bow to auspicious Tulasi who is dear to Lord Vishnu, who brings good luck to devotees, who guides one to attain salvation, who showers all the wealth to the devotees.

Subhashitam (Words of wisdom)

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः ॥

niyataM kuru karma tvaM karma jyAyo hyakarmaNaH |

sharIrayAtrApi cha te na prasiddhayedakarmaNaH ||

Meaning: Perform your duties in daily life. It is far better to act than to be inactive. By being inactive, you cannot even maintain the needs of your physical body.

Amrutvachan (Quotes)

“Hinduism.....gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the God ward endeavor of the human spirit. An immense many-sided and many staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, Sanatana Dharma....”

Sri Aurobindo

Sangathan kaa mahaamantra le

Sangathan kaa mahaamantra le, taruNaayii kaa jvaar uThaa
 Yug se soye sputa hridayme, dharmabhakti kaa jvaar uThaa
 Hindu hriday lalakaar uThaa ||

Ved Upanishad Ramayan kii, mukharit kar shaashvat vaaNii
 Simhavaahinii durgaa jaagii, bhaaratmaataa kaLyaaNii
 Jiivan bhar kartritva bhaav se, giitaa kaavyavahaar uThaa ||

Paramparaa hai rishi muniyon kii, santan kii shaashvat vaaNii
 Viira suton ke svaabhimaan kii, kaalajayii amritavaaNii
 Maan binduon kii rakshaa hita, phir bhiishaN hunkaar uThaa ||

Vishva vijay kaa svapna dhaarakar, kaTina parishram karanaa hai
 Samataa mamataa samarasataa kaa, bhaav jagat me bharanaa hai
 Man me driDha sankalp liye phir, amara putra lalakaar uThaa ||

sUryavansh kaa mahaatej le, shatru hriday dahalaayenge
 brahma tej kaa tatvajnaan le, jnaanshikhaa laharaayenge
 keshav-maadhav kii pukaar sun, soyaa hindu jag uThaa ||

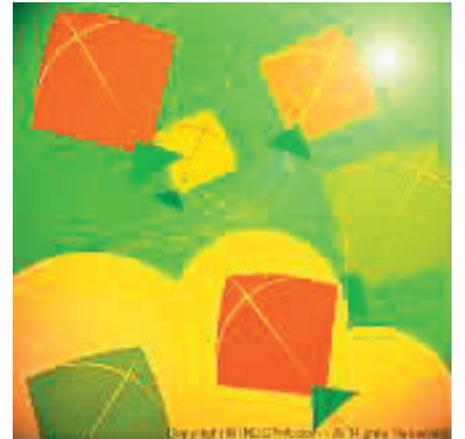


Makara Samkranti

The month of January has witnessed several significant events of the history such as birth of Swami (sage) Vivekananda, lord Ganesha, and Martin Luther king. One of the most auspicious days for the Hindus, Makara Samkranti, also falls in the same month, generally on the 14th January. Makara (Capricorn) is a name of one of the 12 signs of zodiac. The analogy of Samkranti is Sama-Kranti. Sama in Samskrita language means balanced, equal or orderly state of existence and kranti means a fundamental change. Briefly, Samkranti means a transition. Thus the basic meaning of the Samkranti is a change towards a balanced life and social setup and brotherhood amongst all individuals.

Celebrations

Makara Samkranti is celebrated in almost all parts of the Bharat (India). As Bharat is a diverse and multilinguist country, this festival is called by different names in different parts of the country such as 'Pongal', 'Lohri', 'Khichari', 'Paush Samkranti', 'Magha Samkranti', 'Bhogali Bihu'. This festival is also celebrated in different ways. During this day, elders in the family give special gifts to the younger members of the family. Thousands of people fly colorful kites. They also hold kite competitions. Especially kids and youngsters take part in the kite competitions and play enthusiastically. Kite-playing has been a unique and famous game being played in Bharat. People from northern parts of the India get up early in the morning and do the Ganga-Snan (bathing in the waters of the holy river - Ganga) and Surya-pooja (worshipping the Sun). The month January is the peak of the winter. On the eve of Samkranti, people lit huge bonfires around which all friends and relatives gather together. In some parts of the India, a til-gul (a mixture of til - sesame seeds and gul - jagary) is served to friends and family members. In cold days, eating til-gul helps to maintain the body temperature and to keep the health good. Womenfolks, especially recently married ones, invite each other for the get together called 'Haldi-kumkum' and give gifts which are useful in the daily routine. In southern parts of Bharat, it is celebrated by worshipping the god - Sun. The people eat and serve a pongal - a delicious dish



of sweet rice and jaggery. In villages, cows, bullocks and cattle are washed, decorated and worshipped. Birds are fed colorful pongal balls. Bullock cart races are held where the village people get together and participate. There is a tradition of special art called Rangoli, which is drawn during this festival season. This art is done in front of the house with the Rice flour and colors. As described in the beginning, though Makara Samkranti is being known by different names and celebrated in different ways, the message delivered by it is one and the same and for all. Despite the variety of rituals and customs, there is a unity and homogeneity in the basic concept of this festival.



Historical Importance

The day of Makara Samkranti has very much historical importance too. It was the day that Pitamaha Bhishma chose to die. It was the day when holy river Ganga flowed down from Heaven to Earth. It was the day when lord Vishnu killed the demons, buried their heads under the Mandar Parvat (mountain) and ended ever increasing terrorism. Just two days before the Makara Samkranti, Swami (a sage) Vivekananda took the birth.

Social Aspect

On the social ground, Makara Samkranti carries a vital significance for society's welfare. It stands for the brotherhood amongst all individuals which is the basic requisite of the great precepts of liberty and equality. The selfishness, the ultimate destructor of the social fabric can not stand where a spirit of brotherhood; fraternity is alive. As described earlier, it is the tradition to eat and serve til (sesame seeds) and gul (jaggery). Til represents an individual whereas jaggery represents sweetness, love and affection. The paste of jaggery (love and affection) holds all til (individuals) together to form a social harmony. In today's world, where variety of faiths and beliefs exist, this kind of attitude is very much essential. This is the day considered as a time to express gratitude to the elements of mother nature which help to nurture and enrich human

Pitamaha Bhishma was one of the greatest characters of an epic Mahabharata. He had a boon to choose the day to die. In the Mahabharata war, he fought with Arjuna. Arjuna wounded him so badly that he could not even move. Even in this wounded condition, he chose to wait for the day of Makara Samakranti to die and he breathed his last on this auspicious day.

lives. From this day, the duration of sun-light increases and that of night (darkness) decreases. Light symbolizes knowledge, and brighter aspects of our lives and darkness represent ignorance and duller aspects. Thus 'Samakranti' signifies this positive change of increasing the good qualities in us and decreasing the negative ones.

Astrological Significance

As per the Hindu philosophy, the first period of the year (first six months) is called as Uttaraayana. It is also known as northern hemisphere. The second period is called as Dakshinaayana or southern hemisphere. Makara Samkranti is the day when Uttaraayana starts. In other words, it is the day when the Sun changes the direction of its course and starts journey in northern hemisphere. As you know, there are 12 signs of zodiac. Makara (Capricorn) is the first sign that falls in Uttaraayana path; northern hemisphere. Let us consider an example of a train. A train makes a round trip. It reaches the destination, changes its direction and returns back to where it started. Similarly, on this day, the Sun completes the path of Dakshinaayana (southern hemisphere), changes its direction and start journeying Uttaraayana (northern hemisphere). The Sun changes its direction at the point of time when it enters the sign of Makara (Capricorn).

Makara Samkranti as a Sangh Utsav

Makar Samkranti is special for the Bala-Gokulam (Sangh) too. It is considered as one of the six utsavs of the Bala-Gokulam. The Bala-Gokulam focusses on the Makar Samkranti because it promotes brotherhood amongst all individuals which is the need of the time. It is the day of introspection and making resolves for the entire year. In Sangh, the new adhikari gana is initiated and utsav is rounded off by distributing til-gul at the end.

Highlights of the Makara Samkranti

- 1) Makara Samkranti is known by various names and celebrated in various ways.
- 2) It stands for a change towards balanced life and social setup. It promotes brotherhood amongst all individuals.
- 3) Uttarayana is a brighter part (wisdom) and Dakshinayana is a darker part (ignorance). The Sun's journey from Uttarayana to Dakshinayana indicates journey from ignorance to wisdom.
- 4) It is one of the six Sangh utsavs.





King Harshavardhana

History indicates that during the colonial era Bharat (India) was the richest and most advanced country in all terms such as wealth, standard of living, arts, science and attitude/values by which the people lived with. It was obvious that it was attacked several times by many invaders; particularly from middle-eastern countries. But whenever invasions happened, brave kings of Bharat stood up against it and protected their country (Bharat). King Harshavardhan was such a king who not only fought against the invasions, but also tried to build a mighty empire.

King Harshavardhana was born in 590 BC. After the death of his elder brother, he ascended the throne. Although he was only sixteen at that time, he proved himself to be a great vanquisher as well as competent administrator. He was particularly instrumental in uniting the small republics and monarchical states and build a mighty empire.

Before the king Harshavardhan's time, Bharat was facing barbaric invasions from middle-east and central Asia. As she was divided in several small kingdoms, she couldn't stand against these invasions. But the King Harshavardhan united small kingdoms to build a mighty empire and defeated invaders known as Huns. The capital of his empire was Kanauj. His empire consisted entire Northern Bharat including Asam and some Southern provinces such as Maisore.

The administration of king Harshavardhan was excellent. While the core region of the empire was directly controlled by him and his imperial officials, the peripheral regions were ruled by feudal kings who had accepted Harshavardhan's power over them. He also observed about the day-to-day life of the people and their culture. He tried to eradicate the rigid and exploitative nature of caste system and the growing difference between the rich and the poor people. All in all, people in his kingdom were honest, simple and lived with esteem values.

In the beginning king Harshavardhan was a devotee of lord Shiva. But after meeting with a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim and traveler, Hieun Tsang, he leaned towards Buddhism and completely embraced it in his later years. Although he accepted Buddhism, he never forced his people to accept it. In fact he promoted all different kinds of faith and treated them equally. During that time, the University of Nalanda was very popular in the world. King Harshavardhan contributed a lot to make this university big and popular. He also promoted art and literature. He himself was a writer. He wrote three sanskrit plays, namely Nagananda, Ratnavali and Priyadarshika. It is said that the first diplomatic relations between China and Bharat were established during his tenure.

King Harshavardhan ruled his kingdom more than 41 years. He died in the year 647 AD. Unfortunately he did not have any inheritor. After his death, there was nobody to take over. Apparently after his death, his empire rapidly collapsed into small states again. His empire died with him! He will be remembered by Hindus for his remarkable deeds.





Holy Cities of Bharat

The earth of Bharat is sacred, even more precious the cities that have a bond with the revered. From Takshashila to Mathura, the birthplace of Shri Krishna, these cities all have an important significance in the history of Bharat, whether they represented an international center of education or the very place where Shri Krishna gave guidance to the Pandavas to build a city. Each part of Bharat precious and respected and many are sites for holy pilgrimages, a place of serenity.

Mathura

Mathura is a city located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, northeaster part of Bharat. This city is a pilgrimage site, the birthplace of Shri Krishna. At the site of Shri Krishna's birthplace, there was a Keshav Dev Temple built in the underground prison. Mathura was the capital during the Surasena Kingdom, during the time of the Mahabharata. At the time, Kansa, Shri Krishna's maternal uncle, ruled Surasena Kingdom. Mathura was one of places that produced the images of Lord Buddha. This city was in a strategic location in ancient times, in the crossroads of different trade routes.

Maya (Haridwar)

Haridwar stands for "Gateway of Shri Hari." According to the Hindu scriptures, Haridwar is one of the four places where amrit (elixir of immortality) was spilled from a pitcher carried by Garuda (the vehicle of Lord Vishnu). The spot where the nectar fell is considered to be Har Ki Pauri (footsteps of Shri Hari), where Lord Vishnu left his footprint and the holy Ganga River touches it at all times. This spot is one of the most sacred spots, with thousands of devotees visiting the spot during the festival or to just take holy snan (holy dip). King Bhagirath is said to bring the river Ganga down from heaven to Earth in order to provide moksa (salvation) to his relatives.

The city lies on the banks of the holy river Ganga. Haridwar is one of the sites of the Kumbha Mela, which occurs every three years (the other three sites are Prayag, Ujjain, and Nashik.) Each twelve-year cycle includes one Maha Kumbha Mela at

Prayag, which is the largest gathering anywhere in the world. King Harshvardhan of Ujjain started it.

Takshashila

Takshashila was an important city because it was an important center of learning and university. The ancient city is now located in Pakistan. King Taksha, son of Bharat and Mandavi from the Ramayan, founded the city. Takshashila was also the place where King Parikshit (Kuru heir from Mahabharat) was enthroned. Chandragupta Maurya established the Maurya Empire and his advisor, Kautilya (Chanakya) was a teacher at Takshashila. Chanakya is greatly associated with Takshashila. He wrote his famous treatise Arthashastra (The Knowledge of Economics) there. Generally a student entered the university at age sixteen and learned the Vedas, and the eighteen arts, which included skills such as archery, hunting, and elephant lore. There was also a law school, medical school and school of military science. There is a museum at Takshashila where there are the remains of the Gandhara civilization.

Indraprastha (Delhi)

Indraprastha is an ancient city that was the capital of the Pandavas' kingdom. It is located on the banks of Yamuna River and very close to the modern national capital city of Delhi. When Yudhisthira, the eldest of the five Pandava brothers was given the kingdom of Khandavaprasth, a region northwest to the city of Hastinapur, the land cursed with barren and arid soils, diseased and dangerous forests and famine. However, Lord Krishna summons Indra, the king of the Devas to help Yudhisthira, who in turn summons the Deva architect Vishwakarman.

Performing sacred ceremonies to bless the land, Vishwakarman built a glorious new city (Indraprastha), which became the capital. Millions of people migrated to this new city, and soon prosperity and health spread across Khandavaprasth.

There are several other famous and spiritual ancient cities in Bharat such as Ayodhya, Tirupati, Dwaraka, Somnath, Ujjain, etc. They are not covered here due to lack of space. Try to get more information about them from other sources such as internet, books and parents.



Shloka

ॐ त्रयम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

OM trayambakaM yajAmahe sugandhiM puSTivardhanam.

urvArukamiva bandhanAn mrutyormuxiiya mAmrutAt.

Meaning: We worship the three-eyed One (Lord Siva) Who is fragrant and who nourishes well all beings; may He liberate us from death for the sake of Immortality even as the cucumber is severed from its bondage (to the creeper).

Subhashitam (Words of wisdom)

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति ।
तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति ॥

yo mAM pashyati sarvatra sarvaM cha mayi pashyati |
tasyAhaM na praNashyAmi sa cha me na praNashyati ||

Meaning: He, who sees ME (the Universal self) present in all beings, and sees all things as existing in ME, I am never out of sight for him, nor he is out of sight of ME.

Amrutvachan (Quotes)

“From every sentence (of the Upanishads) deep, original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit.... In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. They are destined sooner or later to become the faith of the people.”
“ It has been the solace of my life -- it will be the solace of my death.”

- Arthur Schopenhauer

Sangathan kaa mahaamantra le

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sUryavansh kaa mahaatej le, shatru hriday dahalaayenge
 brahma tej kaa tatvajnaan le, jnaanshikhaa laharaayenge
 keshav-maadhav kii pukaar sun, soyaa hindu jag uThaa ||



Gods and their vahanas (vehicles)

Most of the Hindu Gods have a specific purpose and they are shown armed to serve their purpose. They also have specific vahana (vehicle) who carry them. Most of the vahanas not only carry their respective Gods but also double their strength. Some vahanas have divine powers and divine history of their own. In most cases, vahanas are animals. It indicates that how the two most visible live beings, human and animals, support each other to live happy and peaceful life. Let us try to learn about vahanas of some Gods.

Nandi: Nandi is a big bull who is a vahana (vehicle) of Shiva. It represents the strength and virility.

Lion: Lion is a vahana of Goddess Durga (Parvati). It is an additional strength of the Goddess Durga. Goddess Durga could not have destroyed the demon Mahishasura without the help of her vahana Lion.

Airavata: Airavata is a white elephant with four tusks. It carries the God Indra and serves Him as an additional power.

Garuda: Garuda is an eagle often showed as a winged human-shaped figure with a beaklike nose. It carries the lord Vishnu, the preserver.

Some vahanas are symbolical and often emblematic of the Gods they carry. They signify the ability of their respective Gods. Following are some examples.

Mouse: Mouse is a lord Ganesha's vahana. Here, mouse is more like a symbolic representation of lord Ganesha's ability. Mouse can slide into the smallest crevice and find its way out in any situation. Thus it represents Lord Ganesha's ability as a remover of all obstacles.

Swan: Swan is the goddess Saraswati's vahana. Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge, learning, and wisdom. Her vahana, Swan, also represents wisdom, grace and beauty.

According to some Hindu scriptures, some vahanas are depicted as

evil elements or bad attitude. And having the Gods riding on them show how those elements are controlled by them. For example, in some scriptures Nandi represents wild or exotic behavior which is uncontrollable and having Shiva riding on it represents that it is controlled by him. Similarly, Swan represents arrogance and pride over its beauty and having Saraswati riding on it represents that the knowledge or wisdom is superior than beauty or external appearance.

There are several other Gods and their vahanas mentioned in Hindu scriptures. Following are some examples. Try to get more information on them.

God/Goddess	His/Her Vahana
Surya (Sun)	Seven horses
Goddess Lakshami	Uluka (the owl)
Vaya	Thousand horses
Kartikeya	The peacock
Yama	The male buffalo
Brahma	Seven Swans





Holy Rivers and Mountains of Bharat

Raju had to go to Bharat (India) during his summer vacation to his grandparents' place in a small town near Haridwar, situated on the banks of river Ganga. There he saw many people taking bath in the river with high devotion, performing river's pooja and chanting a shloka:

"Gange cha Yamune chaiva, Godavari, Saraswati,
Narmade, Sindu kaveri, jalesmin Sannidhim Kuru"

Out of curiosity, he asked dadaji, "Dadaji, What is the meaning of the shloka and why are people here performing the pooja of the river Ganga?"

Dadaji smiled and started explaining, "We Hindus worship nature and therefore try to preserve it. We don't exploit it. Instead, out of gratitude, we worship trees, rivers and even adore mountains which plays a prominent role in the existence of human race. So the shloka that you hear which has the names of rivers is invoked by all the Hindus while taking bath." Raju was satisfied with the answer. But he also wanted to get more information about those rivers.

Next day in the morning Raju opened the geographical map of Bharat and started tracing all the rivers and mountains that he knew and started marking them. He traced Ganga which was flowing from Himalayas through the Northern plains and joining Ganga Sagar (Bay of Bengal). Also he could trace "Yamuna" and "Sindhu" flowing in the North, "Kaveri" flowing in the South, "Godavari" in the East, "Narmada" in the West, but couldn't find the river "Saraswati" anywhere in the map. So he asked Dadaji, "Dadaji, I cannot find the river Saraswati anywhere in this map" Dadaji said "River Saraswati existed thousands of years ago and it was on the banks of Saraswati that Hindu civilization thrived and evolved. But

later river Saraswati dried up because of imbalanced activities under Earth's surface" Convinced Raju again started looking into a map.

Once Raju, alongwith his uncle and friends, went for a trekking in Himalayan mountains. On his trekking trail, he saw many sadhus (sages) and saffron clad sanyasis who were either meditating or preparing some medicinal pastes with herbs and plants. Raju's uncle explained him about the importance of the Himalaya in the Hindu Dharma. He also explained how Himalayan mountains play an important role strategically as well as geographically and climatically. Additionally, he also gave information about other mountains like Sahyadri, Vindhyanchal, Shivalik, Satpura, Poorvanchal, Mahendra, and Malaya. To remember the names of these prominent mountains, he also taught Raju a shloka which goes like this:

"Mahendra, Malyah, Sahya, Devatatma Himalaya,

Devo raivatako vindhyo, Girishcharaavali sthathah"

"What a beautiful way of remembering the names of mountains!" Raju wondered in his mind.

Days passed, Raju learnt more and more about prominent rivers and mountains in Bharat and many stories associated with them. And the day came when summer vacation ended and he had to return back to his home in US. This time he had so many things, stories, facts about Bharat that he was looking forward to share them with his friends in US. He with a heavy heart bid farewell to his grand parents and uncle with a promise of returning next year to have another eventful summer time..





The Great King - Krishna Devaraya

During 1336 AD, there used to be a big and glorious empire in South India, namely Vijayanagara. Krishna Devaraya was a very famous king of Vijayanagara empire. Krishna Devaraya brought Vijayanagara Empire to the zenith of its glory. Under his rule, Vijayanagara empire flourished in all aspects of the life such as the law and order, arts, spiritualism, secularism.

Hampi was the capital of Vijayanagara empire. It was chosen as capital because of its strategic location bounded by torrential Tungabhadra River on one side and defensible hills on other three sides. Hampi with its marvelous architecture has always been a subject of awe for historians as well as those who are interested in ancient architecture. The city was formed by Harihara-Bukka who were predecessors of the Krishna Devaraya.

Krishna Devaraya - A Warrior

Krishna Devaraya was a very clever and strategist. In warfare strategies, he was second to none! While fighting wars he led his army to success everywhere. There are many incidents where losing battles turned into a great victory under his leadership. During battles, he not only led from the front, but also attended the wounded in the battle field. This shows how astute and caring he was for his own country men.



During his time, some parts of Southern India were under the control of Islamic rulers. They used to attack the villages of Vijayanagara empire. They used to loot and plunder these villages, break Hindu temples and run away with the wealth and money. Krishna Devaraya put an end to this. His army attacked and defeated the Commander (namely Sultan Mahmud) of Bijapur province of Southern India. He captured Golconda (a prestigious fort) which was under Islamic rulers. He also captured the fortress of Raichur from the Islamic Sultan of Bijapur. Even though 16,000 soldiers of Krishna Devarayas army were killed in the battle, as a result of this campaign, aggression of Islamic Sultans of Deccan region was put to an end.

It is said that the bloody Islamic invasion which swept Northern part of Bharat couldn't make any inroads in the Southern region until the Vijayanagara Empire was standing. As a result of which Hindutva strived and flourished in the South without any hindrance for a very long duration.

Art loving Krishnadevaraya

Krishna Devaraya's period is also considered as a golden period for Literature. Many poets of Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada and Tamil enjoyed the patronage in his Kingdom. Vyasatirtha, a Saint from Mysore was Krishna Devaraya's guide. Krishna Devaraya, himself was a great scholar and has compiled, many literary works such as Madalasa Charita and Rasamanjari.

There were 8 famous poets in Krishna Devaraya's court who were called as Ashta Diggajas. (relates to 8 cardinal corners or directions). Paintings, Sculpture, dance and music were greatly encouraged by him and his Successors.

Ideal King

Krishna Devaraya endeared himself to the people by his personal charm, kindness and an ideal administration. Under his rule, even the foreign visitors wandered freely. He himself followed a personal discipline in the form of daily exercises and rituals. He encouraged trade with the Western Countries. He had cordial relationship with Portuguese who had at that time established trade centres on the West Coast of India.

Like all other Hindu Kings, he also respected all the sects of Hinduism. He himself was a great devotee of Lord Balaji. He offered objects of priceless value to world famous Tirupati temple of Lord Balaji ranging from diamonds to golden swords.

Last Days of the Vijayanagara

Unfortunately, because of constant Islamic invasions, Vijayanagara fell down to muslim invaders in the battle of Talikota in the year 1565. Muslims looted Hampi for five months systematically. The fall of Vijayanagara and Hampi opened doors for the Muslim invasions in Southern India.



Shloka

शांताकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशं । विश्वाधारं गगनसदृशं मेढ्रवर्णं शुभाङ्गं ।
 लक्ष्मीकांतं कमलनयनं योगिभिर्ध्यानगम्यं । वन्दे विष्णुं भवभयहरं सर्वलोकैकनाथम् ।
 shaa.ntaakaaraM bhujagashayanaM padmanaabhaM sureshaM |
 vishvaadhaaraM gaganasadR^ishaM meghavarNaM shubhaaN^gaM |
 lakshmiikaa.ntaM kamalanayanaM yogibhidhyaarnagamyam |
 va.nde vishhNuM bhavabhayaharaM sarvalokaikanaatham ||

Meaning: I bow to Lord Vishnu who is the embodiment of peace, who reclines on Shesha (the serpent), whose navel is the source of the Lotus, who is the Lord of lords, who pervades the universe, whose complexion is as (blue as) the clouds, who embodies auspiciousness, who is the beloved of Goddess Lakshmi, whose eyes are like Lotus, who is meditated upon by the yogis, who is the remover of the fear of the cycle of birth and death, who is the only master of all the lokas (heaven, earth etc).

Subhashitam (Words of wisdom)

पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।
 वेद्यं पवित्रमोकार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥

pitAhamasya jagato mAtA dhAtA pitAmahaH |
 vedyaM pavitramoMkAra R^iksAma yajureva cha ||

Meaning: I am the father of the universe; I am the mother, the sustainer, as well as grandfather. I am the goal of vedic knowledge, I am the sacred OM, and I am verily the Rik, the Yajur and the Saama (vedas).

Amrutvachan (Quotes)

“After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophic, and none so spiritual as the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. The more you know it, the more you will love it; the more you try to understand it, the more deeply you will value it”

- Dr. Annie Besant

Sangathan kaa mahaamantra le

Sangathan kaa mahaamantra le, taruNaayii kaa jvaar uThaa
 Yug se soye sputa hridayme, dharmabhakti kaa jvaar uThaa
 Hindu hriday lalakaar uThaa ||

Ved Upanishad Ramayan kii, mukharit kar shaashvat vaaNii
 Simhavaahinii durgaa jaagii, bhaaratmaataa kaLyaaNii
 Jiivan bhar kartritva bhaav se, giitaa kaavyavahaar uThaa ||

Paramparaa hai rishi muniyon kii, santan kii shaashvat vaaNii
 Viira suton ke svaabhimaan kii, kaalajayii amritavaaNii
 Maan binduon kii rakshaa hita, phir bhiishaN hunkaar uThaa ||

Vishva vijay kaa svapna dhaarakar, kaTina parishram karanaa hai
 Samataa mamataa samarasataa kaa, bhaav jagat me bharanaa hai
 Man me driDha sankalp liye phir, amara putra lalakaar uThaa ||

sUryavansh kaa mahaatej le, shatru hriday dahalaayenge
 brahma tej kaa tatvajnaan le, jnaanshikhaa laharaayenge
 keshav-maadhav kii pukaar sun, soyaa hindu jag uThaa ||



Sage Narada

Narada was a son of lord Brahma, the creator. He was often known as Narada Muni. The word 'Nara' means a man and 'Da' means a 'giver'. Thus Narada means the one who gives (useful knowledge) to the mankind.

Narada was a sage of a kind. Like other sages, he would not spend time in penance and meditation. Instead, he strove for human welfare. He wandered places facilitating the good of the world, guiding the perplexed, engaged in helping the pious in times of challenge and danger. He devised plans for protecting the righteous and punishing the wicked.

Narada had blessings that he could show up anywhere, anytime and anyplace. He used these blessings and appeared in all yugas (satya, treta and dwapara) from time to time to spread the good word and help the needy. He traversed distant worlds (or planets) but never went anywhere without a purpose. He used to make his purposeful entry by chanting the name of the lord Vishnu (Narayana) and playing a veena (a musical instrument) You must have learnt how Narada helped Dhruva, Prahlad, Savitri in Pauranik stories and Pandavas in Mahabharata.

Narada could not keep any secrets. He was usually known for revealing secrets on a bad time or spreading gossip. Therefore he was often mistaken as a quarrel-monger and a talebearer. His deeds often brought a trouble and friction among gods, demons and men. But one must remember that Narada's intention was to espouse a good cause. It was his constant desire that bad people should be punished for their deeds. Whatever Narada did, though sometimes it seemed bad, turned into a happy ending.

He was a first-order celestial musician. He was a great devotee of lord Vishnu (Narayana). He was always found chanting the name of lord Vishnu and playing a veena - a musical instrument. He was well versed with Vedas and Upanishadas. He had an extraordinary proficiency in Samaveda which is dedicated to the music. He knew the art of articulating each syllable and was also well versed in semantics. He also knew the precise use of each word.

There are so many wonderful and inspirational stories about Narada muni mentioned in our Hindu scriptures. Try to learn them from other sources.





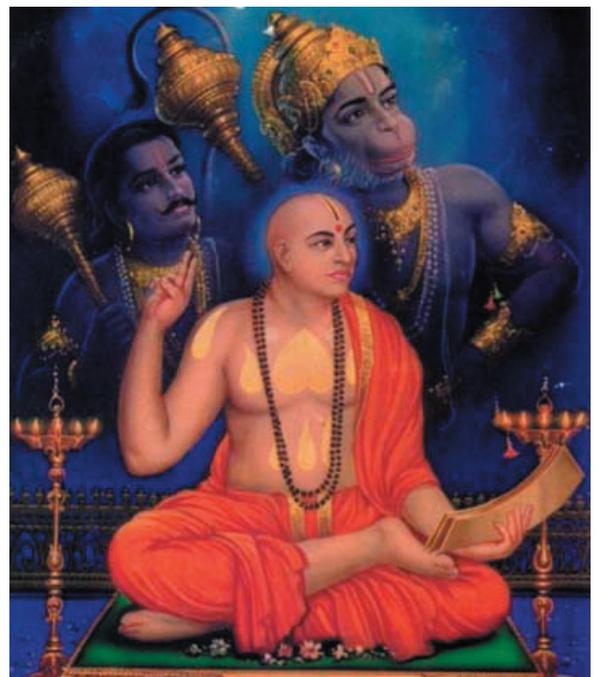
Story of Swami Madhwacharya

From time to time, numerous saints, philosophers and social reformers took birth in Bharat (India) and travelled throughout the country to preach and guide people. Such people give it a drive when the society becomes stagnant. It is because of them, Bharat has remained spiritual country. Swami Madhwacharya was one of them.

Swami Madhwacharya was born in a small village near Udupi in Karnataka state on the day of Vijayadashami in 1238 A.D. His original name was Vasudeva. He had a distinguished personality from his childhood. Once, when he was 5 years old, his parents took him to a carnival where he got lost. His parents kept searching him everywhere. At last, they gave up and came home. And they were surprised when they saw little Vasudeva right at home!! His parents asked him, "We lost you at the carnival! How did you come home?" Vasudeva replied, "God is with me! He brought me home safely." Happy parents realized that their child was not an ordinary child.

Vasudeva's father gave him a primary education. When he was 7, he was sent to a Vedic scholar Guru Totantillaya's ashram for further education. He was sharp and an intelligent boy. His grasping power was second to none! He could easily memorize the text by reading just once. He would appear only at the time of the lessons and spend rest of the time on the playground. Guru Totantillaya felt his behavior a bit strange! Earlier he thought that Vasudeva was not giving enough time for the study, but later realized that he was not falling behind in the study.

Indeed, Vasudeva loved physical activities. He had a strong physique and was always surrounded by playmates. Each day they used to play different games. Wrestling and swimming were his favourites. Even after growing old, he used to play along with his friends (disciples). At one point, he was a master of vedantic philosophy and also a sturdy wrestler.



As all great saints do, Vasudeva wanted to take sanyasa. He sought a permission from his parents. His parents didn't want to give him a permission, but looking at his exceptional qualities, they unwillingly gave him a permission. Another great saint Achyutaprajna initiated Vasudeva's sanyasa and gave him a new name - Madhwa. Now Vasudeva was called by Swami Madhwacharya.

Swami Madhwacharya toured the whole country (Bharat) to propagate his vedantic philosophy. His philosophical interpretation of Vedic knowledge is known as 'Tatwavada'. Madhwa's Dwaita philosophy, is described 'Tattwavada'. According to his philosophy - "This world, is not an illusion. God is not a magician He signifies the duty of truth. This world should be considered as a school understand God's greatness." He taught and trained many devotees who later became his disciples. He wrote as many as forty books which have been spiritual treasure for subsequent generations. He maintained that one's caste or religion is not decided by birth but by his nature and personality.

In most of his discourses he spread the message that: "Do not make a fuss about how one should address god. You can address him in any language and by any name. Know that there is no word in the world without His name. Apart from the language we speak, the entire nature extols Him. The sounds of the sea, the wind that blows, the chirping of the birds, the hooting of animals - all these are nothing but homage to God. Learn to recognise His existence in all the voices and everywhere. Live with godliness."

Swami Madhwacharya stayed in Udupi in Karnataka for a long time. He installed the image of Shri Krishna in Udupi which has now become a prominent spiritual place. With the help of his eight main disciples, he opened ashta-mathas (eight mutts - spiritual and educational places) at Udupi.

Once a man receives a name and fame, he also faces criticism and resistance. Swami Madhwacharya was no exception to it. He faced opposition to the principles and the approach he advocated. Many raised voices that the Swami was disturbing the traditional order. And when people couldn't confront him successfully in the debate, they applied shameful and petty ways to dominate him. Some even stole his collection of books! But Swami Madhwacharya was able to shut these voices and propagate his thoughts.

After leading full and fruitful life of 79 years, Swami Madhwacharya's soul left this world and merged into a supreme-soul. His last message to his disciples was: "This universe is a playful creation of God. Let us not try to diminish it by denouncing it."





Char Dhaam

Hindus consider Bharat as a holy land. A land where Ram and Krishna came on earth as reincarnations of Vishnu for the destruction of evil. So through out Bharat there are places and sites which are considered holy and where famous temples and mutts are located. Many traditions which evolved from Hindu dharma such as Saiva, Vaishnava, Sikh, Saktha, Bauudha, Jain have their holy places in nook and corners of Bharat which makes Bharat a holy land.

Hindus travel thousands of miles to visit the holy places. This is how the tradition of pilgrimage started and continued since ancient time. Hindus from south travel to north to visit holy places such as Kashi, Amarnath. Similarly Hindus from North visit places in deep south such as Rameshwaram, Tirupati, Madurai. Also places in west Bharat such as Somnath to Parashuram kund in Arunachal Pradesh also are sites of high reverence by Hindus. All these holy places played an important role in binding Bharat culturally and have helped in bringing people closer and united.

Adi Shankaracharya, a saint, reformer, and philosopher of ninth century AD played a prominent role in reviving Hindu dharma in Bharat. He traveled from north to south, east to west rejuvenating our culture and thus became instrumental in national integration. He was born in a Brahmin family in a town called Kaladi in Kerala (a state in southern part of Bharat). He became a sanyasi at a very young age. It is believed that he was a reincarnation of Lord Shiva. He traveled, debated with several scholars and established the authority of Hindu Dharma.

Adi Shankaracharya established Char Dham (Four Centres) in Badrinath (North), Rameshwaram (South), Jagannath Puri (East) and Dwaraka (West) in four corners of Bharat thus setting a classic example of cultural and national unity of Bharat.

Badrinath is situated in Himalayas on the banks of Alaknanda river. The town lies between the Nar and Narayana mountain ranges and in the shadow of Nilkantha Peak. Badri refers to a berry that was said to grow abundantly in the area and nath refers to lord Vishnu. It is widely believed that Adi Shankaracharya discovered a black stone image of Lord Badrinarayan in Alaknanda river and he enshrined it in nearby tapt-kund (hot springs) which was later moved to the present temple by the King of Garhwal. One legend has it that when the goddess Ganga was requested to descend to earth to help suffering humanity, the earth was unable to withstand the force of her descent. Therefore the mighty Ganga was split into twelve holy channels. River Alaknanda is one of them. Badrinath later became the abode of Lord Vishnu or Badrinath. That is why it is also known as Bhu-Vaikunta or earthly abode of Lord Vishnu.

Rameshwaram is a town in Southern State of Tamil nadu. It is also considered as one of the

holiest places in Bharat. Here in Rameshwaram temple Lord Shiva is worshipped as Sri Ramanatha Swamy. Because here Shiva-ling was worshipped by Lord Shri Ram on his way to Sri Lanka and thus the name. Also Rameshwaram is considered as one amongst 12 Jyotir lingas of Bharat. Rameshwaram temple also stands as an example of marvellous Hindu architecture. Different rulers built the Ramanatha Swamy Temple over a period of time starting from the 12th century. The temple comprises forty wells where the taste of the water of each well is different from the other. Sethu Karai is a place 22 km before the island of Rameshwaram from where Lord Ram built a floating stone bridge "Ramasethu" till Rameshwaram that further continued from Dhanushkodi in Rameshwaram till Talaimannar in Sri Lanka as mentioned in the Ramayana. So Hindus all over the world consider Rameshwaram as a very prominent pilgrimage place that they have to visit during their life time.

Dwarka (western part of Bharat) is believed as one of the seven most ancient cities in Bharat. The legendary city of Dwaraka was the dwelling place of Lord Krishna. It is believed that, due to damage and destruction by the sea, Dwaraka has submerged six times and modern Dwarka is the 7th city to be built in the area. The city derives its name from word "Dwar" meaning door in Sanskrit. The temple has five storey tower which was built by Sambha, who is the grandson of Lord Shri Krishna. There are two gateways namely Swarga Dwar where pilgrims enter and Moksha Dwar where pilgrims exit. From the temple one can view river Gomati flowing towards the sea. Dwarka is also considered as one among 108 holy Vaishnava Tirthas of Bharat.

The Jagannath temple in Puri (eastern part of Bharat) is a famous Hindu temple dedicated to Jagannath (Krishna) located in the coastal town of Puri in the state of Orissa. The name Jagannath (Lord of the Universe) is a combination of the Sanskrit words Jagat (Universe) and Nath (Lord of). The temple is an important pilgrimage destination for many Hindu traditions, particularly worshippers of Krishna and Vishnu. The temple is famous for its annual Rath yatra, chariot festival where huge and elaborately decorated chariots are used for the procession of the three main temple deities. The huge temple complex covers an area of over 400,000 square feet, and is surrounded by a high fortified wall. It contains at least 120 temples and shrines. With its richness in sculpture and of the Orissan style of temple architecture, it is one of the most magnificent monuments of Bharat.

As of today Jagannath Puri temple's kitchen is considered as the largest kitchen in Bharat where "Maha Prasad" is fed to thousands of devotees on a daily basis. Around 500 cooks and 300 helping hands prepare 56 different offerings known as 'Mahaprasad' or 'Abhada' for Lord Jagannath, which are served to the deity six times a day. It is said that food for one lakh devotees can be prepared in the temple kitchen within an hour.

So these Char dhams located at four corners of Bharat stand today giving a message of national and cultural unity of Bharat and remind Hindus to stand united forgetting all the regional and language barriers.



