

Sangama

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The Samaja extends hearty congratulations to Kris and Shaun Guru for winning the first place for Division I and for Ashish Murthy for winning the first place in Division II for the State Finals for the Odyssey of the Mind competition. In addition, Ashish's team also won the Renata Fusia Award. On June 1st all three attended the World Finals at the University of Maryland. On behalf of the members of the Samaja we wish them well.

On Saturday March 15, 2008 the Samaja celebrated Shivaratri and Ugadi functions. Children participated in many types of activities and also the Ladies put on a play called Husband Bashing. This being the annual function of the Samaja, the outgoing President Mr. Sunderesh and his officers gave the annual review of activities and a healthy financial status of the Samaja. The members elected the following persons to the Board for the years 2008 and 2009.

President: Mr. Vijay Kumar
Vice President: Mr. Shivaraj Bhujange
Secretary: Mrs. Anupama Rudrakumar
Treasurer: Mrs. Rathna Bale

Members of the Board are: Mrs. Prema Veerabhadrappa
Mr. Renu Guru
Mrs. Sujatha Banav
Mrs. Leena Gurkar
Mrs. Shaila Parvatharao
Mrs. Manjula Sangappa

Past President: Mr. Sunderesh Siddaiah

On behalf of the members we extend our hearty congratulations to the above officers and board members of the Samaja.

In the previous issue we said that God is the only one and there is no one like Him. In this article we discuss some of His attributes. Allama Prabhu says God exists- ***“Like fire in stone, Like reflection in water, Like tree in the seed, Like silence in sound, Guheshwara, Your relation is with Sharana!”***. The vachana brings out four characters of God. They are: Adrushya, Nirlipta, Avyaktha and Abedya. Adrushya means that cannot be seen. Stone has fire but it cannot be seen. But, by striking stones fire is seen. Water reflects the objects. But it cannot acquire the properties of water. God exists in this world like reflection. He has no properties of this world. Tree grows from seed. The seed must contain all the traits to become a tree. So the tree is hidden in the seed. God is also hidden in the body that is associated with this world. Behind every sound there is silence. Silence cannot be separated from sound. Sound waves travel along with silence. The latter exists only for a brief moment during sound. This inseparable quality is called Abedya. God exists in this world like the fire in stone, like the reflection in water, like the tree in seed, and like the silence behind sound. Through sādhanē (perform to achieve) devotee can experience God. God cannot be seen. God exists in this world without any attachments. God has everything, and He is inseparable from this world (life). He can be experienced through sādhanē or performance.

Allama says that ***“Fire in stone, can it burn? Tree in seed, can it grow? Cannot be seen, didn't realize! Status of Guheshwara, Knows by enjoying within!”***. There is fire in stone, but it does not burn unless it is started. Similarly, God exists in this world but cannot be seen. A seed cannot grow into a tree even though all the traits of the tree are hidden in the seed. God who is hidden in this world neither can be seen nor can be realized by person absorbed with worldly things. Those who realize God enjoy Him in themselves. This vachana solidifies the fact that God is in every person.

In the next vachana, Allama says that God exists in this world but He is not attached to this world. ***“The fire in water does not burn water, See, it stays as water!, Looking at it, It is not water!, Like the fire and water, God is inside us without mixing, Stays firmly, who knows His status? Both inside and out He is, Yet He is invisible! Guheshwara, Look Your presence!*** Fire is in water. It cannot burn water. Its presence in water is invisible. Only those with knowledge can grasp the existence of fire in water. Similarly, God is within and outside of us. His presence is invisible. Yet, He is not the body.

Further Allama Says ***“Like wealth hidden in ground, Like lightning hidden in clouds, Like mirage hidden in desert, Like beauty hidden in eyes, Guheshwara, it is your presence!”*** Diamonds, gold, and other precious metals are hidden in the earth, lightning is hidden in clouds, and mirage is hidden in the desert and beauty is hidden in eyes. Similarly, God is present everywhere but He is hidden both inside our body and outside of body or in this world.

Article of the month:

BASAVESHWARA – THE UNIVERSAL MAN

by
Mrs. Shashi Gowdar

Down memory lane, the image of my hometown in Mysore, India kept floating before my eyes. While reminiscing, I had an urge to evoke the New Jersey to Mysore connection. Indeed, first wonders go deepest. Clearly, it was my maiden name Shashi Murthy that replayed like a kaleidoscope, the colorful reflections of my life. For the moment, Shashi Murthy has taken over Shashi Gowdar. Between the names, I see the days of yesterday and the days of tomorrow! Along the way, through the eyes of a Veerashaiva, I've felt the echo between ignorance and knowledge, joy and sorrow & intimacy and distance. I asked myself, Isn't it good fate that brought me to New Jersey to recall my spiritual heritage? From 21st century vision, I endorse how appropriate the Basava philosophy of 12th century is - with the nodding of my head and widening of my eyes!

It is a delight that I was born into a Hindu family and that meant I will live as a Hindu and die as a Hindu. My forefathers thought the universe made sense only through 'Hindu Eyes'. Little did they know how my religious landscape would evolve in the coming generation. As a Hindu, I believe in karma or deed that governs all life and the conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. As a Lingayat, what I appreciate foremost is Basavanna's concept of compassion and tolerance towards all living beings! With this notion in my mind I see my place in the Universe.

It seemed like harmony had visited my heart. Paradoxically, every morning I would wake up to the Islamic prayers in a Hindu home from a mosque nearby. It was astounding. The chanting was soothing and slow, as one man's voice was calling out for Allah... It was as deep as the universe. My Muslim friends always said that Islam is a beautiful religion of brotherhood and devotion. While some of them saw Allah inside them, some of them took it upon themselves to defend god outside! In tandem, I treasure the inheritance I gained from Basava in transcending barriers and integrating faith. *In this regard Basava has left a legend of free thinking behind when it comes to harmony and coexistence!*

Despite the paradigm shift in my consciousness, my grandma's voice would beckon me with the sound of Mantras. In the Pooja room at home, idols of gods would be decorated with Jasmine flowers; Oil lamps lit up, bells clanging and scented incense sticks would be burning. It certainly delighted all the senses of sight, sound and smell. I felt at home here on the vast planet of earth. Even more than the rituals, Hinduism is about soul and liberation - the "Atma" & "Moksha". Atma is an individual's soul that touches upon god's soul - In other words "Atma meeting the Parmatma". Moksha is about liberation of the birth cycle. Moksha is through the bank of Karma, where the liberation account of each of us is credited and debited depending on our actions. My mother summed it up as, "if you take two steps towards god", she said "god runs to you". *The more I learned about Basava and Ishta Linga the less I wanted to leave them.*

Christ the King Convent in Mysore is the school that I was educated and learnt English as well. The nuns and missionaries in my eyes are icons of sacrifice and ultimate moral. I enjoyed being in the school Choir singing Christmas carols. I enacted as Cinderella in the English play, living the magical moments of a fairy tale and savored the elocution and poetry contests. Many times, I sneaked into the chapel to listen to the piano and to kneel and pray to Jesus & Mary. I could see the smile on Mary's face and she lovingly smiled at me. We rejoiced the many religious holidays for the rest of our school lives. We shared the plum cake in Christmas & obbatu in Gowri festival & veggie biryani after Ramadan. *This reminded me of "Dasoha"- Basava's concept of Sharing and oneness in humanity, I felt the gratitude for him, like in the gratitude one feels before the sunset and before the sunrise.*

It was a pulsating mix of energy. I was born in a Hindu home, waking up to Islamic prayers, enjoying education in a Christian school. I relished the fusion. It seemed as though the trees, the rivers, the air & the sun all spoke one language of unity in Mysore. I respect Veerashaivism for promoting harmony and equality but adore the teachings and essence of all the other religions too. Like Mahatma Gandhi rightfully said "All religions are true". I have read Khalil Gibran, Jehovah, Bhagavad-Gita & Basveshwara and these books are a must read. It opened the gates of my mind; I chuckled to myself, Oh Lord ... some day I should march on a universal pilgrimage to Kalyana, Varanasi, Mecca and Jerusalem!!! To me, life seems worthless without beliefs, without beliefs positive energy and imagination would be sacrificed at the altar. *Perhaps beliefs should be seen with the windows of our heart and not with the eyes of our head.*

I entered Mount Carmel's College in Bangalore with political Science as my major. Perhaps, it's my father's influence on me. His political career spanned for over half a century and I now know why! He is humanly secular in nature and he strongly believes in "work is worship" At age 85, he is still the sitting member of Parliament. He grew up in the world of experience, where hearts understand each other intuitively, and the spirits matured with knowledge. Now, tell me "Wisdom" how do I get there? *I realize the resolve is to read books of prophets like Basava to gain exposure to the widest possible breadth of thought. Amazingly, 900 years ago, Basaveshwara organized forums at Anubavamantapa for intellectuals to air their views and have discussions on religion where vachanas were derived. Most certainly, it lights a match in one's dark head!*

Bangalore, where I grew up, has the same buzz as New York or London. We interacted in English, Kannada and Hindi, and watched Hollywood and Bollywood movies as well. We heard Mozart, Vachanas, Hip Hop, and wore saris, skirts and selwaars. We practiced yoga, meditation & aerobics classes. Surely, we manifested in a multitude of avatars! I relished the fusion, perhaps I could have been born as a Muslim or a Christian, and Basava could have fused me into a Lingayath? Why not? It's time to retrace his steps. *Didn't Basava repudiate castes and classes? Didn't Basava usher in gender equality? Gracefully, I had auctioned my heart to him!*

People move in life for a better future. In 1975, I uprooted everything and left for a great horizon beyond the unknown. I left behind the *Karnataka Rice fields, the Cauvery River, Sacred Kudala Sangama & the Chamundi Hills*. These clearly define the roots I cherish - it has made me who I am and where I come from! I landed in the United State of America - the land of freedom, equality and liberty for all. While Mysore felt like the placid river of Ganges, New York felt like the bustle of the rush hour. My small circle coincided with the center of a larger circle – "*Basava meeting the Christ*". It all made perfect sense, *Basava emphasized the Universal man* so I feel in sync. Better yet, I learned that the world that moves with you is "your heart".

My heart still skips a beat during Christmas season after a night of snow fall. New Jersey is my sweet home and is breathtakingly beautiful when the sun shines and the snow flurries create a lacework on the trees. What I had before my eyes stole my heart!. Walking on the fresh white snow, leaving foot prints, I felt something supremely regal. After a silence, *they were there and so was I*. I saw all the gods looking down at me with kindness. My heart beat with fear and joy. The reassurance is *the presence of all gods in me is the finest of the rewards*. Coming full circle in my final intuitive recognition, the answer is the same all over the world - the world is not made for us and that we have to be made for the world. Like Basava said "*it's the integrated man with his heart, mind and will, pointing to the same star that can be a universal man*". What mattered most was that I learned how to live a life of *faith without borders* not only at a spiritual level, but also at professional, relational and intellectual levels. This is the 12th Century wisdom needed for a global man in the global world.

Congratulations to the following VSNY/NJ graduates. Each of you have made your parents proud and also the members of the community. We look forward for many more graduates from our community.

Mr. Sachit Bhujange, 2007, BS in Business Management from NJIT, Newark, NJ.

Mr. Ganesh Thippeswamy, 2008, Graduating High School in June from Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, NY. He will attend- Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois from fall 2008

Miss Priyanka Shivakumar, 2007, BA, University: George Washington University, DC

Miss Sheela Raya, 2008, BA, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. She will join Goldman Sachs in the fall

Mr. Vijay Kumbar, 2008, B.Sc. Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY.

Mr. Swaroop Gonchikar, 2008, B.Sc. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, N.C. He is currently volunteering for Bike and Build Organization and is on cross-country bicycle trip from Manteo, NC to San Diego, CA

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and no way reflects the views of the Samaja. Send your comments to the Editor or to the member of the Board.