



Fire in the heart sends smoke into the head
— German proverb

CELEBRATE

THE SPEAKING TREE
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 4, 2011



EVENTS



Essence Of The Gita

Discourses on the Bhagavad Gita in English by Swami Nikhilamanda Saraswati at Chinmaya Mission Auditorium, 89, Lodhi Road December 4 - 7, 6.30 pm onwards

Satsang Varsha

Asaram Bapu to hold satsang at Kothi Meena Bazar ground Shahganj, Agra December 7 - 8, 9.30 am



A Life Drawing

Exhibition of paintings by Jhupu Adhikary at Gallery Quill And Canvas 22, South Point Mall, Golf Course Road, DLF City V, Gurgaon On view till December 9 for details, call 9818189604



Beyond Limits

Art exhibition by Balbir Krishan at Academy of Fine Arts and Literature 4/6, Siri Fort Institutional Area on view till Dec 11, 11 am

Festival Of Music & Dance

Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra presents a two-day programme at Kamani Auditorium Copernicus Marg December 19, 6.30 pm

This Week

December 6 Muharram
Gita Jayanti
December 7 Akhanda Dvadashi
Bharani Deepam
December 8 Karttikai Deepam
December 10 Dattatreya Jayanti

Energy As Purifier

The Maha Somayagna fire ritual was conducted for the first time in Nepal in the true spirit of ahimsa, without animal sacrifice, reports **RANJENI A SINGH** from Kathmandu

From a handful of curious onlookers, the number of visitors to the *pandal* swells to thousands. Some have piety writ large on their faces as they come to soak in the energy that the *homams* and chanting of Vedic hymns were generating, while for some it was purely academic interest.

The occasion was the five-day Maha Somayagna that took place in Panauti, a small town 25 kms from Kathmandu, Nepal, recently. The yagna was conducted by the India-based Vedic Society, along with the Institute of Studies in Vedic Sciences and Agnihotra, USA.

No Animal Sacrifice

The Somayagna was the first non-violent fire ritual to take place in Nepal. In all previous *yagnas* in the world's only Hindu nation, animals were sacrificed. According to local experts, the Buddha himself had appealed to the people of Nepal to keep *yagnas* violence-free. The last Somayagna was conducted 13 years ago in the Pashupathi Temple in Kathmandu, in which animals were sacrificed.

Sanskrit scholar Martin Gluckman, the driving force behind the yagna, says, "We selected Nepal as our gift back to the Himalayas which is the best expression of Vedic consciousness and actual representation of *rishis* on earth. The Himalayas represent the human search for Ultimate Truth." Perhaps with this in mind, the society selected a spot from where an entire stretch of snow-clad mountains was visible from the *yagnashala* for performing the yagna.

"The yagna in Nepal was to demonstrate to the people that one can uplift all without any need for causing suffering to another sentient being. The objective of *rishis* who conducted *mahayagnas* was to help bring more peace and harmony to the place where they were being conducted," says Gluckman. Nepal's *rajguru* or chief priest Madhav Prasad Bhattarai is optimistic that the Maha Somayagna "will bring peace and prosperity to the residents of Nepal."

The Sun is the main source of energy, and fire represents the Sun's energy. Ancient texts say that any offering to fire as a god, is actually an offering to the Sun. Such offerings cleanse the environment of all negative energies and protect it, too.

The Ritual In Progress

Inside the *pandal*, there were brick-layered fire altars of different shapes in separate enclosures that were cordoned off by bamboo fences. The major offerings to the sacrificial fire — *somasana*, the juice of *somalatha*, a herbal plant plus dozens of other herbs, wooden and clay utensils in odd shapes and sizes, bundles of *darbha* grass, wood and tins of cow-milk ghee — were spread out for easy access. Outside the



PRIESTS CHANTING VEDIC MANTRAS DURING THE MAHA SOMAYAGNA AT PANAUTI, NEPAL

enclosure, visitors sat on the carpeted floor after circumambulating the enclosure. Outside the *pandal*, on one side, two cows were tied to pegs for regular supply of fresh milk. On another side, the womenfolk prepared *prasadam*s everyday to be distributed to people after they were offered to the deities.

Over each day, the *yajaman* — who led the ritual — was assisted by the chief priest and over a dozen *ritwiks* in offering oblations to Agni, the fire god amidst chanting of hymns from the *Rig, Sama* and *Yajur Vedas* with specific, high-pitched intonation. On Day One, the fire was created by rubbing two pieces of wood, as detailed in ancient Vedic scriptures. The yagna began with *guni puja*, followed by *yagnasankalpam, madhuparkam, deekshanyeshiti* and other rituals. There were numerous fire altars of different shapes and sizes. Over the next four days, the priests moved back and forth these altars, making different types of oblations to Agni, the fire god, including what are known as *prayaneeyshti, somakryanam, aatithyeshiti, pravaryam, yagnapucham, avabhutham* and *udayaneeysti*.

Alex Hankey, distinguished professor of yoga and Physical Science at the Bangalore-based Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, had stationed his student Divya Kesavan with a random event generator (REG) to record the energy field in the *pandal* and its surroundings. "What the REG is telling us is that the universe is apparently generating vibrations, for which we do not yet have an adequate phys-

ical theory to understand. It tells us that there are phenomena taking place within the *yagnashala*, which science does not yet understand, but for which, in principle, some theory could be generated," he says.

On the last day, the entourage of the *yajaman* and priests went to the Triveni Ghat — at the confluence of rivers Punyawati, Leelawati and

tively peaceful and prosperous "with a general positive trend underway on many levels". Therefore, he was "looking for a place which had witnessed prolonged periods of instability and Nepal fitted the bill perfectly".

By the last day of the yagna, the residents of Panauti were already talking about the positive impact of the fire ritual — the signing of a peace agreement between warring political parties and uninterrupted electricity supply for four days in a row. Many were hopeful of things improving in their personal lives as well. Savitri, who was present on all five days, went up to the priest and asked, "Do you think my husband will stop drinking?" Mani Shankar was hopeful that his MBA-qualified son will soon land a job.

An old man who was present at the *yagnashala* on all days said, "It is a visual treat, especially for people of my generation, to see that plenty of young *ritwiks* are actively participating in this yagna."

The star of the show was the 11-year-old Dunderaj Jogalekar from Shimoga who had accompanied his father to take part in the yagna. The enraptured crowd would shout "Narayana, Narayana," every time the little boy delivered near-perfect chanting of the Vedic hymns.

So enthused are the people of Panauti that they want similar *yagnas* to take place and more often, too. A day after I landed in Delhi, Gluckman called to say that it rained in Panauti, a sure indication that the gods have accepted the *yagna* offerings. ■

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Hope On The Horizon

The Vedic Society plans to undertake 108 Maha Somayagnas at troubled spots around the world. The Nepal yagna was second in the series. The first was in Pudukcherry. Another one is planned in Kashmir next year. Gluckman says that most Somayagnas have happened in cities in India that are already rela-

eye, ear, tongue, nose and skin — and five action organs, namely, hands, legs, mouth, anus and genitals. The *sukshma sharira* or mental sheath, made up of the mind houses the intellect, ego, learnings, memories and desires. The *karana sharira* or social body, is the circumstances around us shaped by past karmas. Death claims the physical and mental sheath while the causal sheath outlives death and determines the biology and circumstances of the next birth. The practice of *tapasya* aims to destroy the third body too, an idea that is expressed allegorically in the following narrative.

Shiva's bow, made up of space and time, is the symbol of poise, while his Vishnu-ar-

row is the symbol of consciousness. The act of shooting the arrow is yoga or concentration that aligns everything — body, mind and world. Through yoga, every world is destroyed, the physical, mental and social worlds. Nothing exists except the soul, which is eternally in bliss.

It is significant that Kartik Purnima is also associated with Matsya avatar, the fish incarnation of Vishnu, his first avatar when he wakes up after his annual four-month slumber of Chaturmaas. In this avatar, Vishnu saves Manu, the first human, and the Vedas, or repository of wisdom, from *pnalaya*, the waters of doom. Shiva displays impatience with humanity's tryst with the three bodies. Vishnu grants humanity another chance — a new world after the three worlds are destroyed. This is the essence of rebirth, a chance to live life better, discover divinity through the mind and the body and the society around, rather than face destruction and let the cycle renew itself once again. ■

The author is chief belief officer Future Group/devdutt.com

SACRED RECIPE



Panchamrita

Panchamrita is a libation made to deities during puja, or worship. It is a Sanskrit name derived from two words: 'pancha', meaning five and 'amrita', meaning nectar of immortality. The five ingredients of the nectar are milk, yogurt, ghee, honey and misri or sugar-candy.

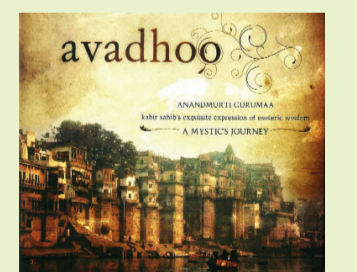
After the puja, the blessed concoction is offered to devotees as *prasadam*. Each of these ingredients symbolises human virtues. Milk is the symbol of purity; it indicates that our lives, characters and actions should be pure. Dahi or yogurt, is the symbol of love. It is dahi's quality that it makes others like itself. The intention in giving dahi to someone who is travelling overseas is to tell her not to forget the family's love. Just as ghee nourishes the body, your life should



also be spent in nourishing and developing the community. Honey is the collective effort of bees. And like bees, people should work together harmoniously. Sugar-candy is the symbol of sweetness or love. Pouring of the *panchamrita* on the deity is symbolic of God's blessings being poured into our lives.

Here's a recipe for making *panchamrita*.
Ingredients
Fresh cow's milk — 1 cup
Curd — 1 cup
Ghee — 1 cup
Honey — 1 cup and
Ground sugar-candy — 1 cup (you can use *jaggery* instead).
Method
Mix and beat all the ingredients together and store in a cool place. Over the years, the recipe of *panchamrita* has evolved to suit modern taste. Some add saffron, tulsi or mint for extra colour and flavour.

OFF THE RACK



Avadhoo
Mystica Music
Rs 150

Anandamurti Gurumaa has released a new album on the mystic saint Kabir. It includes six tracks based on his verses. The first track is 'Naiyya Mori Neeke Chaalan Laagi'. Giving an analogy of the boat which keeps sailing and neither clouds, nor rain or storm can ever obstruct its momentum, this song elucidates how the spiritual pursuit of the aspirant is protected in every way. In the next track, 'Jan Jaagat Rahiyo Bhaai', the Master issues a warning of sorts — keep a vigil so that your mind doesn't go astray. Although Kabir spoke in the common man's dialect, his verses were an expression of deep spiritual wisdom.

The End And The Beginning



When Shiva destroyed the three worlds, Vishnu created a new opportunity, writes

DEVDUPT PATTANAİK

The earth was his chariot. Meru, the axis of space, made up the shaft of his bow. Sessa, the serpent of time, made up the bowstring. The four Vedas were his horses. The starry sky was his banner. Brahma was his charioteer, Vishnu, his arrow. Thus did Shiva ride out to do battle with Tripura, the three flying cities that were causing havoc to the three worlds. Tripura could be shot only with a single arrow and so the patient Shiva was invoked. Only he had the patience to wait that long. Shiva followed the three cities for eons until the single moment when the three cities aligned in a single line. Shiva drew his bow, let loose his arrow and destroyed the three cities. Shiva smeared his body with the ashes of the three cities.

To celebrate this moment, lamps are lit on Kartik Purnima, also known as Dev Diwali, the first full moon after *chaturmaas* ends. It was on this day that Shiva came to be known as Tripurantaka, destroyer of three worlds. This is a

narrative of death and liberation.

According to Tantra, the *sharira* or body that is reborn has three components. The *sthula sharira* or physical sheath made up of five sense organs —



DEVDUPT PATTANAİK

