

Namaste—the Indian Way of Greeting

Folding hands together with a smile to greet, Namaste is a common cultural practice in India. Namaste or Namaskar or Namaskaram is a common verbal salutation in India. It is a customary greeting when one meets or takes leave of others.

While saying Namaste, one commonly does this by a slight bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards, in front of the chest. It can also be done without words and carries the same meaning.

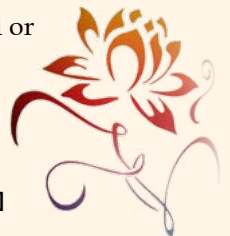
Namaste is derived from Sanskrit and is a combination of two words, *namah* and *te* (a shortened variant of *tubhyam*). *Namah* means 'bow', 'obeisance', 'reverential salutation' or 'adoration' and *te* means 'to you' (dative case of 'you'). Therefore, Namaste literally means 'bow to you' translated as 'I bow to you'.

Namaste is also a friendly greeting in written communication. When the hand position is higher, it usually means reverence and/or worship. The expression with hands placed on top of one's head is usually the sign of utmost reverence or respect. The gesture Namaste represents and acknowledges the belief that there is a Divine spark within each of us. Hence, Namaste means, 'I bow to you' or 'the divine within me greets the divine in you'. The gesture is widely used throughout Asia and beyond. It appears in c.4000 years ago on the clay seals of the Indus Valley Civilization.

In Telugu, the gesture is known as Namaskaramulu or simply Namaskaram. In Tamil, it is known as *kumbidu*, which is composed of *kumbu* meaning 'to cup hands' and *idu*, 'to do'. Vanakkam in Tamil too means the same. In Kannada, the gesture is known as Namaskara. In Japan, the Namaste hand gesture is used in prayer and healing sessions and is called Gassho. Namaste is also in vogue in Sri Lankan and Nepalese cultures. Sikhs also fold their hand as in Namaste, but their greeting is Sat Sri Akal.

Another way of greeting common in India is *pranam* or *charana-sparsh*, the touching of elder's feet. It is an act of showing respect. When greeting, children touch the feet of their elders in the family while people of all ages will bend to touch the feet of a great guru, murti or icon of a God or Goddess.

One can do Pranam in the way of Ashtangana (touching the ground with knees, belly, chest, hands, elbows, chin, nose, temple) or Bhumishtha (bowing forehead down and touching the ground). There are, however, many variations in offering pranam depending upon one's health, availability of time and other factors. □



Lighting the Lamp

Called *deepak* in Sanskrit, meaning lamp, a lighted oil lamp is considered a sign of auspiciousness and goodness. Light is considered as a symbol of auspiciousness, prosperity and abundance in the Indian tradition. Light is also associated with brightness of mind and understanding.

Oil lamps are commonly used in Hindu temples as well as in home shrines. Generally the lamps used in the temples are circular, either hanging or with a stand, having grooves for five wicks. They are made of metal and either suspended on a chain or screwed onto a pedestal. There will usually be at least one lamp in each shrine, and the main shrine may contain several. Usually only one wick is lit, and all five are lighted only on festive occasions.

In the home shrine, the style of only one wick. There is usually a piece of In many houses, the lamp burns all day, but or both the times. In some houses, the lamp in any other lights are turned on at night. Rows of Deepavali festival.

A hand-held oil lamp and incense sticks puja ceremony. In the North of India, a ghee. On special occasions, used for puja, the most tiers of wicks.

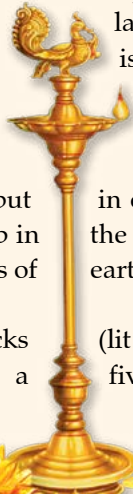
In South India, there lamps (called *vilakku*) that are traditional rituals, some of the offerings as well:

1. *Deepalakshmi*, a brass lamp with a depiction of goddess Sri Lakshmi over the back piece. they are usually small-sized and have only one wick.

2. *Nilavilakku*, a tall brass or bronze lamp on a stand where the wicks are placed at a certain height.

3. *Paavai vilakku*, a brass or bronze lamp in the form of a lady holding a vessel with her hands. This type of lamp comes in different sizes, from small to almost life-size. There are also large stone versions of this lamp in Hindu temples and shrines of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, especially at the base of columns and flanking the entrance of temples. They have only one wick.

4. *Thooku vilakku*, a brass or bronze lamp hanging from a chain, often has multiple wicks. □



lamp is usually different, containing metal that forms the back of the lamp. in other homes, it is lit at sunrise or sun set the home shrine is supposed to be lit before earthen lamps are lighted on the occasion of

(lit from the lamp) are also used during the five-wick lamp is used, usually fueled with various other lamps may be elaborate having several

are a few types of oil common in temples and smaller ones are used for



Prasada—the Sanctified Food

Commonly the term Prasadam or Prasada or Prasad brings to an Indian's mind a food item that one gets in a temple or after a puja at home. Prasad is not just 'after effect' of a puja or temple visit but it is something that is first *offered* to a deity in a temple or puja and only then it becomes prasada.

Prasada is a Sanskrit term. It literally means 'a gracious gift'. Anything, usually an edible food, which is first offered to a deity, saint, Perfect Master or an Avatar and then distributed in His or Her name as a good sign is considered prasada. Prasad is then considered to have the deity's blessing residing within it. Going to a temple includes receiving some prasada in some form and bringing it home for distribution to others.

Often a separate utensil or plate is kept aside to be used only for offering to the deity. First a devotee makes an offering of flowers, fruits, or sweets—which is called *naivedya*. He keeps it before an image or portrait of deity and allows sometime to pass. During that time, it is believed that the deity 'enjoys' or tastes a bit of the offering, which is then temporarily known as *bhogya*. This now-divinely-invested flower or fruit or sweet is called prasada and is received by the devotee to be partaken, worn, and or kept as a sacred souvenir. Prasada is usually distributed to devotees or family members.

In some traditions, a devotee eats only prasada, i.e., everything they eat is first offered to their chosen deity. It is not one of the items in their meals but the entire meal should be first offered to God and then eaten.

While preparing the prasada, utmost care is taken to maintain its sanctity. Care is taken not to taste it while cooking. It is not for one's own consumption but as an offering to God. It is also believed that giving prasada to others brings merit to the giver and the receiver is blessed with God's grace.

One should receive prasada with due respect. One's hands should be cleaned and preferably, one should receive it with right hand or both the hands cupped together as a mark of respect for the deity. While receiving or eating prasada, one should ensure that no part of it falls on the ground or is shown disrespect. After consuming the prasada, one should ritually wash one's hands.

Psychologically speaking, prasada is a physical representation of peace and joy that resides in one's own heart. The Gita speaks of maintenance of inner poise (*manah prasada*) as an important spiritual discipline. One should always be cheerful and calm. It is one of the mental austerities. External prasada is a gross representation of inner prasada, or peace. □



Bhajan—the Tradition of Devotional Singing

A Bhajan is essentially a devotional song sung in temples or puja rooms, individually or collectively. A Bhajan may be a full-fledged composition in praise of a deity such as Rama, Krishna, Ganesha, Durga and so on, or it can be just a few *dohas* (couplets) strung together. Often the last stanza of a Bhajan ends with the name of the composer in a spirit of supplication.

Generally a Bhajan is a type of prayer-song, seeking God's mercy and help, a prayer of strength, purity and other spiritual virtues. Many Bhajans have as their subject stories or episodes from Hindu scriptures, the teachings of saints and descriptions of gods and goddesses. A harmonium, tabla/dholak/mridangam, and tala (two brass circular discs joined by a thread, used for keeping time/rhythm) generally accompany bhajan-singing, though it can also be sung without any accompaniments.

Bhajan-singing has many forms. It may be as simple as the recitation of a mantra or kirtan or as sophisticated as the singing in classical ragas or a kriti. The lyric of a Bhajan may be in Sanskrit or any other Indian language (of late, some Bhajans have been composed in English and other non-Indian languages). There are some regional names for certain compositions such as abhang in Marathi, Dasarpadagalu in Kannada, Guru Bani in Sikh tradition, Swaiyye in Brij tradition (Mathura-Vrindavan) and so on. Whatever be its form or style, a Bhajan is essentially a song expressing love for the Divine.

Some of the Bhajan traditions are Dhrupad, Sufi qawwali and the kirtan or song in the Haridasi tradition. Some of the greatest saints in India have been composers and singers themselves such as Nanak, Kabir, Meera, Purandara Dasa, Andal, Sadasiva Brahmendra, Tyagaraja, Surdas and Tulsidas.

Traditions of bhajan such as Nirguni ('to God without attributes'), Gorakhanathi (followers of Guru Gorakhnath), Madhura-bhakti (bridal-attitude to God) and the traditional South Indian form of Sampradya Bhajan each have their own repertoire and style of singing.

Sampradya Bhajan is based on Kirtanas (songs) and Namavalis (songs composed of names of Hindu gods like Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, etc.) sung in a specific order.

Bhajans are also taught or sung in some schools. In some schools the morning assembly begins by singing a Bhajan.

In modern times, many Bhajans sung in Hindi films too have become part of the popular culture, though classical or traditional way of singing

Bhajans is considered authentic and more satisfying. These days many music albums by popular singers as well as classical singers focus on Bhajan singing. Some of them are quite evocative yet retaining the spirit and poetic structures of a Bhajan. □



India's Folk Dance and Music

Indian folk dance and music tradition is a rich tapestry of diverse and numerous hues, thanks to India's vast cultural diversity. Most of the folk music of India is dance-oriented. It is difficult to separate the folk music from folk dance as they often go together. While most of these are connected with a religious event or person or place, some of them are based on season (such as harvest or spring season) or aim at celebrating the birth of a child, a wedding and religious festivals. Performed to express joy, they bring people together.

This dance-music tradition of common folks has many forms and sub-types such as bhangra, lavani, dandiya and Rajasthani. Although the arrival of movies and pop music weakened folk dance and music's popularity, availability of multimedia technology in recent times has greatly revived these traditions.

Most of the folk music-dance is area specific and reflects the geography and local history and beliefs of the people. Here are some of well-known forms of Indian folk dance and music:

Bihu (Assam) is the festival of New Year of Assam falling in mid April. This is a festival of nature and mother earth where the first day is for the cows and buffalos. Second day is for the man. Bihu dances and songs accompanied by traditional drums and wind instruments are essential part of this festival.

Baul music (Bengal) celebrates celestial love expressed in earthy terms. Bauls are singing minstrels and have among them both Hindus and Muslims. They can often be identified by their distinctive clothes and musical instrument. The Baul songs are mainly based on divine love of Krishna or devotion to the Divine Mother.

Bhangra Dance (Punjab) is done with classic style traditional Punjabi dresses, and with instruments including a Dhol, Chimta, Tabla, etc. It was originally performed during the harvest season, but now is a popular form of celebration for any event such as weddings and festivals.

Tippani Dance (Gujarat) comes from the Chorwad region of Saurashtra. In Tippani dance women take a wooden rod to beat the floor, which has iron/wood piece at one end, to make it stronger in opposite rows. It requires much alertness and skill to take part in this dance.



Indian Classical Music

India's classical music tradition has a history spanning millennia and has developed over several eras. It remains fundamental to the lives of Indians today as sources of spiritual inspiration, cultural expression and pure entertainment.

The two main traditions of classical music are Carnatic music, found predominantly in the peninsular regions, and Hindustani music, found in the northern and central regions.

Hindustani music tradition goes back to Vedic times around 1000 BC. It further developed circa the 13th and 14th centuries AD with Persian influences and from existing religious and folk music. The practice of singing based on notes was popular even from the Vedic times where the hymns in Sama Veda were sung as Samagana, and not chanted.

Developing a strong and diverse tradition over several centuries, it has contemporary traditions established primarily in India but also in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Hindustani music was not only influenced by ancient Hindu musical traditions, historical Vedic philosophy and native Indian sounds but also enriched by the Persian performance practices of the Mughals. Classical genres are dhrupad, dhamar, khyal, tarana and sadra. Light classical or semi-classical music include the following genres, among others: thumri, dadra, ghazal, chaiti, kajri, kaththa and tappa.

Carnatic music, on the other hand, is commonly associated with four modern states of south India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Carnatic music is mainly sung through compositions, especially the kriti (or kirtanam)—a form perfected of singing. Purandara Dasa is considered the father of Carnatic music. Sri Tyagaraja, Sri Shyama Shastri and Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar are considered the trinity of Carnatic music. Carnatic music is also usually taught and learnt through compositions.

Both the systems of music have the same basic elements of *shruti* (the relative musical pitch), *swara* (the musical sound of a single note), *raaga* (the mode or melodic formula), and *tala* (the rhythmic cycles). They form the foundation of improvisation and composition in both Carnatic and Hindustani music. □





Aarti—the Act of Waving of Lights

Aarti (or aratrika/arathi) is an essential part of all pujas. Sometimes it is performed independent of a complete puja. It is a simple act wherein a small metal lamp with a handle, with lighted wicks soaked in ghee or camphor, is waved before a deity. Arati is done at temples, in private puja rooms, to sacred rivers like Ganga, and sometimes even to welcome a guest.

The term Aarti also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity, when lamps are being offered.

Aarti ritual can be traced to the Vedic fire rituals, or homa.

Though it primarily means waving a lighted oil/ghee lamp, the full ritual of arati includes waving a conch with water, a piece of cloth, a flower and a whisker or hand fan made of peacock feather or some such material. It is symbolic of offering all the five elements of nature (*pancha bhuta*) to God. Lighted lamp represents fire (*agni*). Water-filled conch represents water (*aapa*). The cloth, with its natural pores in its fabric, symbolizes ether (*aakasha*). Flower represents earth (*prithivi*) which has smell as its singular property. Hand fan or a whisker represents air (*vayu*). Thus the whole universe represented by its elementary constituents is offered symbolically to the God by way of His worship. Arati is done to emphasise the glory of God, the All-pervading One. At the end, the worshipper bows down before the deity, symbolizing complete surrender.

Commonly, Arati means waving a metal lamp (silver, brass, bronze or copper) around the form of the deity, generally accompanied by a song and musical instruments. It is waved in a circular and clockwise manner around the deity.

After the Arati, the lamp is placed in a plate, the Arati plate, which is taken around the assembled devotees who slide over their forefingers and palm over the lamp and touch them with their eyes or forehead. It is an act of partaking of the sanctity of the sacred fire. At times, devotees leave their money offerings in the arati plate. The plate may also contain flowers, incense and wet rice grain.

Arati is performed one to five times daily, and usually at the end of a puja or bhajan session. While performing the aarti, the worshipper faces the deity of God (or divine element, e.g. Ganges river or a sacred tree) and concentrates on the form of Divine by looking into the eyes of the deity. It is believed that eyes are the windows to the soul and hence looking them immerses one with the divine being of the deity. Arati marks an auspicious beginning or conclusion of an occasion. □



Classical Indian Dance



Bronze image of Nataraja

India has a rich heritage of classical dance forms. Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's national academy for performing arts, confers classical status on eight Indian classical dance styles: Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, Odissi and Sattriya.

In Hindu mythology, dance is believed to have been conceived by Brahma, the Creator. Brahma inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the *Natya Shastra*, a treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. Bharata Muni used *pathya* (words) from the Rigveda, *abhinaya* (gestures) from the Yajurveda, *geeta* (music) from the Samaveda and *rasa* (emotions) from the Atharvaveda to form the *Natyaveda* (body of knowledge about dance).



Kathakali

In ancient India, dancers usually performed in temples, on festive occasions and seasonal harvests. Dance was regularly performed before deities as a form of worship.

Brief descriptions of the classical Indian dance:

Bharatanatyam, dating back to 1000 BCE, is usually accompanied by classical Carnatic music and is popular in Tamilnadu. Its inspirations come from the sculptures of the ancient temple of Chidambaram.

Kathakali (*katha*, 'story'; *kali*, 'performance') is a classical dance-drama from Kerala. This dance is particularly known for dancer's elaborate costume, towering head gear, billowing skirts, and long silver nails.



Manipuri

Chanting of Mantras—Invoking the Presence of Divine

In many temples and homes in India, especially in south India, one hears Sanskrit verses being chanted in a certain structured way, in a melodious cadence of rising and falling sound. This type of chanting is called Veda Patha.



In the Vedic tradition, Primal Sound is referred to as Shabda Brahman or 'Word as the Absolute'. Maitri Upanishad (VI.22) states: 'He who is well versed in the Word-Brahman, attains to the Supreme Brahman.' A good portion of the Vedantic literature elucidates the use of sound as a spiritual tool. They assert that the entire cosmic creation began with sound.

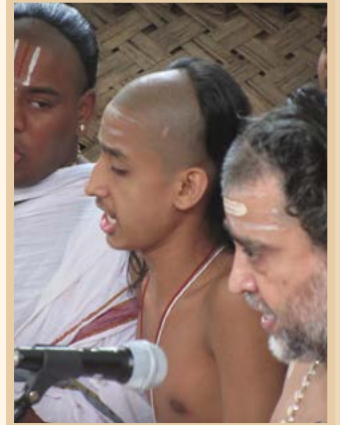
Mantras, or sacred sounds, are used to pierce through sensual, mental and intellectual levels of existence (all lower strata of consciousness) in order to purify the mind and attain spiritual enlightenment. Vedanta-sutra (4.22) declares, 'By sound vibration one becomes liberated.'

There are two ways of reciting the mantra-literature. One is called Veda Patha or Vedic chanting (with several well organized sub-sections) and Parayana or ritual or daily recitation of a hymn or mantra. Some of the popular Vedic hymns are Shanti Patha, Purusha Suktam, Narayana Suktam, Durga Suktam, Sri Rudra Prashna and others.

Veda Patha or Vedic chanting consists of several pathas, 'recitations' or ways of chanting the Vedic mantras. This is considered the oldest unbroken oral tradition in existence. In 2003, UNESCO proclaimed the tradition of Vedic chant a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

The various pathas or recitation styles are designed to allow the complete and perfect memorization of the text and its pronunciation, including the Vedic pitch accent. The students are first taught to memorize the Vedas using simpler methods like continuous recitation (*samhita patha*), word-by-word recitation (*pada patha*) in which compounds (*sandhi*) are dissolved and *krama patha* (words are arranged in the pattern of ab bc cd...); before teaching them the eight complex recitation styles.

The other tradition of mantra-chanting is called parayana. It is a ritual chanting of hymns like Aditya Hridayam, Vishnu-sahasranama, Lalitha-sahasranama, and other hymns in praise of other gods and goddesses. One of the most popular parayana books is *Durga Saptashati* (also called *Chandi* or *Devi Mahatmyam*), describing the glory of Divine Mother in 700 verses. It is widely read by millions of devotees all over India. □



The Indian Tradition of Sacred Body Marks

Whether it is a Tilak or a Vibhuti or a sandal paste on the forehead, one sees many types of religious marks used by Hindu devotees all over India. These marks are external symbols of people's religious beliefs and position. Just as in other faiths have their customs, Indian tradition too has its unique practices. These markings are made either as a daily ritual, or on special occasions, and denotes which particular lineage, or *sampradaya* the devotee belongs to.

Let us have look at some of these:

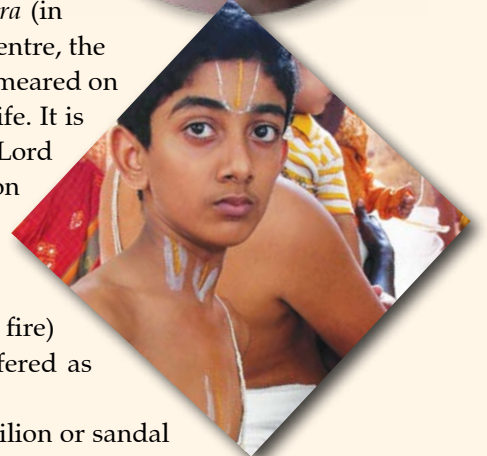
Vibhuti / Bhasma or sacred ash is associated with the devotees of Shiva. It is applied on the forehead as a *tripundra* (in three horizontal lines). When applied with a red spot in the centre, the mark symbolizes Shiva-Shakti. Sometimes ashes are simply smeared on the forehead, without drawing any line. Ash is symbolic of life. It is what remains when all the wood is burnt away. Similarly, the Lord is imperishable Truth that remains when the entire creation of innumerable names and forms is dissolved. Ashes also remind of the ephemeral nature of life. 'Vibhuti' also refers to glorious attributes of the divine.

Generally, Bhasma is the ash from the Homa (sacrificial fire) where special wood along with ghee and other herbs is offered as worship of the Lord.

Tilak (tilaka or tika) is long vertical line or two of vermilion or sandal paste on the forehead. It is indicative of a devotee of Vishnu. There are variations (according to one tradition there are 19 ways of Tilak!) with regard the material used or certain additions to the mark. These differ from sect to sect. Tilak can be applied to twelve parts of the body: head, forehead, neck, both upper-arms, both forearms, chest, both sides of the torso, stomach and shoulder. Sometimes Tilak is put to indicate that a person has been to temple, irrespective of the denomination he belongs to. Even devotees of Divine Mother use it.

Urdhva Pundra is the mark applied by followers of Sri Vaishnava. It is applied by drawing the figure 'U' vertically on the forehead, with a red vertical line in the middle. Two lines are representative of the feet of Lord Narayana and the red line of Divine Mother Lakshmi. Also called Namam or SrichurNam, this type of mark is used by all priests and devotees of Vishnu temple in south India. It is made by sandal paste or gopichandana.

Most of these marks are put daily or on special occasions. Also, at times, special mantras are chanted while putting these marks. □



Sanskrit—the Language of Indian Culture

‘Sanskrit and prestige go together in India. The very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige and a power and a strength to the race,’ said Swami Vivekananda.

Sanskrit is the primary source of Indian cultural traditions. Though now it is primarily written in Devanagari script, earlier Brahmi, Grantha and other scripts were also used. Many of India’s other indigenous scripts such as Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and other are also used for writing Sanskrit. Today, it is listed as one of the 22 scheduled languages of India and is an official language of the state of Uttarakhand.

The term Sanskrit means ‘the cultured language’. The oldest surviving system of Sanskrit grammar is called *Ashtadhyayi* (‘Eight-Chapter Grammar’) of Panini (probably 4th century BCE). Other popular works on Sanskrit include books such as *Laghu Sidhanta Kaumudi* and a number of books in different Indian languages.

The pre-classical form of Sanskrit is known as Vedic Sanskrit, with the language of the Rigveda being the oldest and most archaic, its oldest core dating back to as early as 4500 BCE. A significant form of post-Vedic Sanskrit is found in the Sanskrit of two great Indian Epics—the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Whatever be its antiquity, Sanskrit is of a superb structure; ‘more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar.’

Classical Sanskrit is the standard register as laid out in the grammar of Panini. Its position in the cultures of Greater India is akin to that of Latin and Greek in Europe and it has significantly influenced most modern languages in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The corpus of Sanskrit literature encompasses a rich tradition of poetry and drama as well as scientific, technical, philosophical and dharma texts. Sanskrit continues to be widely used as a ceremonial language in Hindu religious rituals and Buddhist practice in the forms of hymns and mantras. Spoken Sanskrit is still in use in a few traditional institutions and its use is on rise in some parts of India and even beyond where there have been attempts to revive it. The Sahitya Akademi has had, since 1967, an award for the best creative work written that year in Sanskrit. In 2009, Satyavrat Shastri became the first Sanskrit author to win the Jnanpith Award, India’s highest literary award.

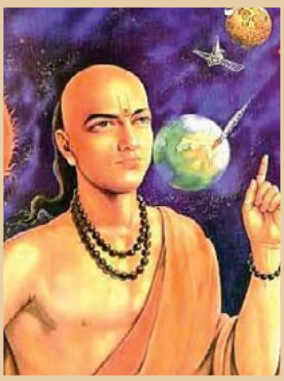
European scholarship in Sanskrit was begun by Heinrich Roth (1620-1668) and Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681-1731). This scholarship is regarded as responsible for the discovery of the Indo-European language family by Sir William Jones and it played an important role in the development of Western philology, or historical linguistics. □

Aryabhata, the Great Indian Mathematician

Aryabhata (476–550 CE) was the first in the line of great mathematician-astronomers from the classical age of Indian mathematics and Indian astronomy. His most famous works are the *Aryabhatiya* and the *Arya-siddhanta*.

Aryabhata mentions in the *Aryabhatiya* that it was composed 3,630 years into the Kali Yuga, when he was 23 years old. This corresponds to 499 CE, and implies that he was born in 476.

Aryabhata was born in Taregna, a small town in Bihar, about 30 km from Patna (then known as Pataliputra), the capital city of Bihar State. In Taregna, Aryabhata set up an Astronomical Observatory in the Sun Temple. It is also speculated that Aryabhata might have been the head of the Nalanda University as well. [Some archaeological evidence suggests that Aryabhata could have originated from the present day Kodungallur which was a historical capital city in Kerala.]



Aryabhata is the author of several treatises on mathematics and astronomy, many of which are lost. His major work, *Aryabhatiya*, a compendium of mathematics and astronomy, was extensively referred to in the Indian mathematical literature and has survived to modern times. The mathematical part of the *Aryabhatiya* covers arithmetic, algebra, plane trigonometry, and spherical trigonometry. It has 108 verses and 13 introductory verses, and is divided into four padas or chapters:

The *Arya-siddhanta*, a work on astronomical computations, is known through the writings of Aryabhata's contemporary, Varahamihira, and later mathematicians and commentators, including Brahmagupta and Bhaskara I.

It also contained a description of several astronomical instruments.

A third text, which may have survived in the Arabic translation, is *Al ntf* or *Al-nanf*. It claims that it is a translation by Aryabhata, but the Sanskrit name of this work is not known. Probably dating from the 9th century, it is mentioned by the Persian scholar and chronicler of India, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni.

The *Aryabhatiya* presented a number of innovations in mathematics and astronomy in verse form, which were influential for many centuries. The extreme brevity of the text was elaborated in commentaries by his disciple Bhaskara I (Bhashya, c. 600 CE) and by Nilakantha Somayaji in his *Aryabhatiya Bhasya*, (1465 CE). He was not only the first to find the radius of the earth but was the only one in ancient time including the Greeks and the Romans to find the volume of the earth.

While he did not use a symbol for zero, the French mathematician Georges Ifrah explains that knowledge of zero was implicit in Aryabhata's place-value system.

Aryabhata worked on the approximation for pi (π). After *Aryabhatiya* was translated into Arabic (c. 820 CE) this approximation was mentioned in Al-Khwarizmi's book on algebra. □

Darshan—the Indian Idea of ‘Sacred Seeing’

Darshan, a Sanskrit term widely used in most Indian languages, means ‘sight’. Derived from the Sanskrit root *drik*, to see, the term darshan is most commonly used for ‘visions of the divine’ to mean, ‘seeing’ a deity (especially in image form), or a very holy person or artefact. One could ‘receive’ darshan or blessing of the deity in the temple, or from a great saintly person, such as a guru.

In the sense ‘to see with reverence and devotion’, it could also refer to a vision of the divine or being in the presence of a highly revered person. In this sense it may assume the meanings closer to audience. As goes the saying, ‘By doing darshan properly a devotee develops reverence for God, and God develops affection for that devotee.’

It is difficult to define since darshan is an event in consciousness—an interaction in presence between devotee and guru; or between devotee and image or sculpture, which focuses and calls out the consciousness of the devotee. In either event, a heightening of consciousness or spirituality is the intended effect. In the Bhagavad Gita (11.9-12), Arjuna is granted a ‘vision’ of God thus:

O King, Krishna, the great Lord of Yoga, revealed to Arjuna the true majesty of His form. . . Everywhere was boundless divinity, containing all astonishing things, wearing divine garlands and garments. . . If the light of a thousand suns were to rise in the sky at once it would be like the light of that spirit.

Further, in Indian culture, doing pranam (touching of elders’ feet as an act of showing respect) is an integral part of darshan. Children touch the feet of their family elders while people of all ages will bend to touch the feet of a guru, *murti* or icon of a Deva (God) (such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna). While going to have darshan, a devotee is expected to carry some fruits or flowers or some money as a mark of respect. In ancient times when a student approached a teacher (*rishi*), he was expected to carry pieces of dry wood sticks (*samitpani*) as a mark of humility and submission to discipline. As the rishis lived in forests and performed daily yajnas (fire-sacrifices), carrying wood symbolized the students’ willingness to serve and learn.

The term darshan also means ‘philosophy’, especially in the context of the six systems of thought (*shad darshan*) of Hinduism. Philosophy, in this sense, means ‘seeing’ life or the ultimate reality. A philosopher, hence, is called a *darshnik*, a ‘seer’. □



Indian Languages— the Cradle of Indian Culture

The rich literary tradition of Indian Culture has been nurtured over the ages through numerous languages spoken in India. They are a treasure-house of stories, folk lore, beliefs, practices, history, life-style details, dance, drama and other aspects of the culture.

Indian languages belong to several language families, the major ones being the Indo-Aryan languages (a branch of Indo-European) spoken by 74% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 24% of Indians. Other

the Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-

families and isolates. The Schedule of the Indian referred to as the According to languages are spoken speakers, 122 by more languages that have in the history of India government of India has official language.

There is no consensus about the specific time and place the modern north Indian languages such as Hindi-Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sindhi and Oriya emerged, but AD 1000 is commonly accepted. Each language had different influences, with Hindi-Urdu (Hindustani) being strongly influenced by Persian.

The Dravidian languages of South India had a history independent of Sanskrit. The major Dravidian languages are Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu. A good percentage of the vocabulary used in Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada is borrowed from Sanskrit. The Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages of North-East India have long independent histories.

Most languages in the Indian republic are written in Brahmi-derived scripts, such as Devanagari, Kannada, Eastern Nagari-Assamese/Bengali, Telugu, Oriya, Tamil, etc., though Urdu is written in an Arabic script, and a few minor languages such as Santhali use independent scripts.

In 2004, the Government of India declared that languages that met certain requirements could be accorded the status of a 'Classical Language in India'. Languages thus far declared to be Classical are Tamil (in 2004), Sanskrit (in 2005), Kannada and Telugu (in 2008).

Besides, India has hundreds of active dialects in use. These have contributed to the development and sustenance of a syncretic cultural ethos that have withstood the test of times. □

India's Traditional Clothing

India is a land of colourful attires. The recorded history of clothing in India goes back to the 5th millennium BC in the Indus valley civilisation where cotton was spun, woven and dyed. The cotton industry in ancient India was well developed, and several of the methods survive until today.

Clothing in India varies from region to region depending on the ethnicity, geography, climate and cultural traditions of the people of that region. There is great diversity in terms of weaving, fibres, colours and material of clothing. Colour codes are followed in clothing based on the religion and ritual concerned. For instance, Hindus wear white clothes to indicate mourning while Parsis and Christians wear white to weddings.

Here are some samples of the popular Indian attires:

Dhoti, a six feet long white strip of cotton, ornamental or a flat and simple one, held in place with the help of a knot of a belt around the waist is worn by men. In south India men wear long, white sarong like sheets of cloth known as Mundu. In north and central Indian languages like Hindi, Marathi and Oriya, these are called dhoti, while in Telugu they are called Pancha, in Tamil they are called veshti and in Kannada it is called Panche/ Lungi. Over the dhoti, men wear chaddar or shirts.

Salwar kameez, a women's wear, is the traditional wear of women in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. It has gained popularity in other parts of India.

Ghagra Choli or Lehenga Choli is the traditional clothing of women in Rajasthan and Gujarat and parts of Punjab and Hararyana. It consists of long skirt-like garment for covering the lower half of the body.

Pattu Pavadai or Langa davani is a traditional dress in south India, usually worn by teenage and small girls. The pavada is a cone-shaped garment, usually of silk, that hangs down from the waist to the toes. It normally has a golden border at the bottom.

Saree or sari, a women's wear, is a long unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine metres in length that is draped over the body in various styles. There are various traditional styles of saree such as Sambalpuri Saree from East, Kanchipuram from South, Paithani from West and Banarasi from North among others.

Turbans

Besides, men wear turban either daily or on special occasions. These are worn in many regions in the country, incorporating various styles and designs depending on the place. Many types of headgear such as Pagri, Taqiyah and Gandhi cap are worn by different communities



South Indian veshti (dhoti)

Dara Shikoh

The Mughal Prince Who Translated the Upanishads into Persian

Dara Shikoh, the Shahzada of the Mughal Empire, was the eldest son of Mughal King, Shah Jahan. He is known for his translation of the Upanishads into Persian.

He was favoured as a successor by his father and his sister Princess Jahanara Begum Sahib, but was defeated by his younger brother Prince Muhiuddin (later the Emperor Aurangzeb) in a bitter struggle for the imperial throne.

Dara was born near Ajmer in 1615 and was married in 1633. As was common for all Mughal sons, Dara was appointed a military commander at an early age. In 1642, Shah Jahan formally confirmed Dara as his heir. But in 1657 the illness of emperor Shah Jahan triggered a desperate struggle for power among the four Mughal princes. After a year of bitter struggle, Dara was defeated by Aurangzeb and Murad and was brutally assassinated. Subsequently Aurangzeb took over reins of the Mughal Empire.

Dara Shikoh is widely renowned as an enlightened prince of the harmonious coexistence. He was an erudite champion of mystical tradition of Islam and Hinduism. He was a follower of Lahore's famous Qadiri Sufi saint Hazrat Mian Mir.

Dara subsequently developed a friendship with the seventh Sikh Guru, Guru Har Rai. He devoted much effort towards finding a common mystical language between Islam and Hinduism. He heard about the Upanishads while in Kashmir in 1640 and was inspired to translate them. Towards this goal he completed the translation of 50 Upanishads from its original Sanskrit into Persian in 1657. His works were edited by pundits from Benares living in Delhi. He wanted that the message of the Upanishads should reach Muslim scholars. His translation is called *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Greatest Mystery). His most famous work, *Majma-ul-Bahrain* ('The Confluence of the Two Seas'), was also devoted to a revelation of the mystical and pluralistic affinities between Sufi and Vedantic speculation.

Dara Shikoh also established a library (in Delhi, now run as a museum by Archeological Survey of India) and was also a patron of fine arts, music and dance. Many of his paintings are quite detailed and compare well to a professional artist of his time. He is also credited with the commissioning of several exquisite, still extant, examples of Mughal architecture.

Dara Shikoh was a quintessential liberal thinker. In recent times, he has been a subject of many books, novels and plays. □



A Peep into Indian Dining

Like in other cultures, proper habits of eating and drinking are an important part of Indian culture. These habits differ from place to place, depending on local customs, traditions, and even weather.

Indian cooking uses an extensive array of utensils for various purposes. But in general, cutlery is not used for eating, as many foods—such as roti and sabzi (bread and curry in Hindi)—are best enjoyed when eating with the hand.

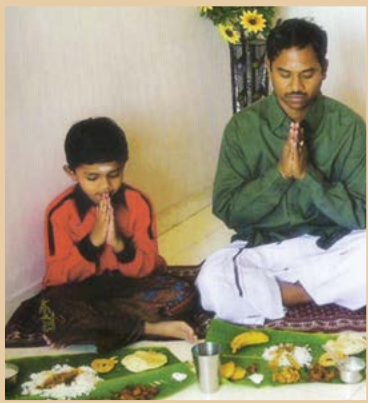
Sitting cross legged on the floor or on mat, and eating with one's hands is widely in vogue, though dining tables are commonplace these days. One has to thoroughly wash hands before one starts eating (which is not a requirement for eating with cutlery as in Western dining practice). Irrespective of whether one takes food with cutlery or with right hand, one is expected to wash hands before and after partaking food.

Not all Indian foods should be eaten with the hands, however. If the food is soupy, such as many daals, spoons can be used. Additionally, foods such as rice are eaten with spoons in both North and South India, more so in case of formal occasions as in a restaurant or a buffet where food is not served on banana leaf.

The concept of '*uchchishtam*' (in Sanskrit) *etho* (in Bengal), *aitha* (in Orissa), *jutha* (in North India), *ushta* (in Western India), *echil* (in Tamil Nadu), *echil* (in Kerala), *enjal* (in Karnataka), or *engili* (in Andhra Pradesh) is a common belief in India. It can refer to the food item or the utensils or serving dishes, that has come in contact with someone's mouth, or saliva or the plate while eating. It may also

refer to leftover food. It is considered rude and unhygienic to offer someone food contaminated with saliva. It is, however, not uncommon for spouses, or extremely close friends or family, to offer each other such food and is not considered disrespectful. In certain cases, as in the first lunch by the newly-weds, sharing food from each other's leaves/ plates may be thought as an indication of intimacy and bonding.

The cardinal rule of dining is to always use the right hand when eating or receiving food and not the left. The left hand is not used to eat so that it can be used for serving food from the serving dish onto your plate using serving spoons, tongs, etc. In many parts of India food is served on leaves such as banana and Sal leaves. It is customary in parts of India to recite a prayer before eating for example: *brahmarpanam brahma havih brahmagnau brahmanahutam brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamadhina*. (Gita, 4.24) 'Any means of offering is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, the fire in which the offering is made is Brahman, and the one who offers is Brahman. Such a person who abides in Brahman indeed gains Brahman'. □



Shilpa Shastra The Ancient Indian Approach to Architecture

Shilpa Shastra is an umbrella term for numerous Sanskrit texts that describe manual arts, the standards for religious iconography, prescribing among other things, the proportions of a sculptured figure, as well as rules of native Indian architecture. It includes such arts or crafts as carpentry, architecture, jewellery, acting, dancing, music, medicine, poetry and so on.

There are numerous traditions of Indian architecture. These ancient traditions, with many sub-traditions, are area specific and deeply connected to religious and social history of various areas such as Dravidian architecture, Bengal architecture, Rajasthani architecture, Gujarat architecture and so on. Often many of these schools of architecture are named after the periods of various royal dynasties that ruled a given state or region such as Cholas, Pallavas, Hoysala, Chalukya, Badami and so on. The modern Indian architecture has been influenced by many other sources such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam as well as from French and English style of architecture.

An important aspect of the Shilpa Shastra is Vastu Shastra (also vastu veda, 'science of construction'). While Shilpa Shastra explicitly deals with sculpture-forming statues, icons, stone murals, etc., Vastu Shastra is concerned primarily with building architecture-building houses, forts, temples, apartments, etc.

Vastu Shastra deals with the idea of how the laws of nature and element affect human dwellings. The designs are based on directional alignments. It is applicable especially to Hindu temples, and covers other domains, including vehicles, vessels, furniture, sculpture, paintings, etc. The foundation of Vastu is traditionally ascribed to the sage Mamuni Mayan in South and Vishvakarma in North India.

According to Vastu Shastra, the world comprises five basic elements known as the *pancha maha bhuta*. These are earth (*bhumi*), water (*jala*), air (*vayu*), fire (*agni*), and space (*akasha*). Vastu Shastra holds the view that there is an invisible and constant relation between all the five elements. Thus, people can improve their conditions by designing their buildings by understanding the effectiveness of these five natural forces.

In Indian architecture, the dwelling is itself a shrine. A home is called Manushyalaya, 'human temple'. It is not merely a shelter for human beings in which to rest and eat. The concept behind house design is the same as for temple design. Also, Vastu Shastra takes help of Vastu Purusha Mandala which constitutes the mathematical and diagrammatic basis for drawing a design. It is the metaphysical plan of a building. Purusha refers to energy, power, soul or cosmic man. Mandala is the generic name for any plan or chart which symbolically represents the cosmos.

While Vastu Shastra had long been essentially restricted to temple architecture, there has been a revival of it in India, in recent decades. It has become quite popular due to the efforts of some well-known Vastu Shastra experts in recent times. Due to their efforts, many people these days take guidance for undertaking any construction, especially dwelling units. □

Ayurveda—‘the Science of Life’

Ayurveda, ‘the knowledge for or science of long life’, is the Indian system of traditional medicine and is now a widely recognized form of alternative medicine.

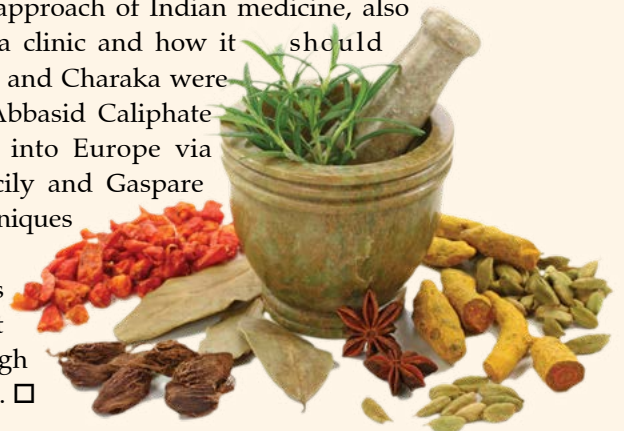
The earliest literature on Indian medical practice appeared during the Vedic period in India, i.e., in the mid-second millennium BCE. The *Sushruta Samhita* and the *Charaka Samhita*, encyclopedias of medicine compiled from various sources from the mid-first millennium BCE to about 500 CE, are among the foundational works of Ayurveda. In Indian mythology, the origin of ayurvedic medicine is attributed to Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods.

Ayurveda holds that five elements of earth (*prithivi*), water (*jala*), fire (*agni*), air (*vayu*) and space (*akasha*) compose the universe, including the human body. Ayurveda describes seven types of tissues of the body, known as the *saptadhatu*. They are plasma (*rasa dhatu*), blood (*rakta dhatu*), flesh (*mamsa dhatu*), adipose (*medha dhatu*), bone (*asthi dhatu*), marrow and nervous (*majja dhatu*), and reproductive fluid (*shukra dhatu*).

Ayurvedic literature deals elaborately with measures of healthful living during the entire span of life and its various phases. It stresses a balance of three elemental energies or humors: *vayu* / *vata* (air and space—‘wind’), *pitta* (fire & water—‘bile’) and *kapha* (water and earth—‘phlegm’). According to ayurvedic medical theory, these three substances or *doshas* are important for health, because when they are in balanced proportion, the body will be healthy, and when they are not in proportion, the body will be unhealthy in various ways. It also believes that each human possesses a unique combination of *doshas*. Ayurveda stresses the use of plant-based medicines and treatments. Ayurveda also focuses on exercise, yoga, and meditation. Chanting mantras too has been a feature of ayurveda. Several philosophers in India combined religion and traditional medicine.

Ayurveda has a long history, and is one of the oldest organised systems of medicine. The Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien (ca. 337-422 AD) wrote about the health care system of the Gupta empire (320–550) and described the institutional approach of Indian medicine, also visible in the works of Charaka, who mentions a clinic and how it should be equipped. The medical works of both Sushruta and Charaka were translated into the Arabic language during the Abbasid Caliphate (ca. 750). These Arabic works made their way into Europe via intermediaries. In Italy, the Branca family of Sicily and Gaspare Tagliacozzi (Bologna) became familiar with the techniques of Sushruta.

In India, over 100 colleges offer degrees in ayurvedic medicine. The Indian government supports research and teaching in ayurveda through many channels at both the national and state levels. □



The Tradition of Indian Culinary

While cuisine deals with material ingredients, it has a deep connection with one's religious and cultural beliefs also. The Indian cuisine is rich and varied, thanks to variations in local culture, geographical location (proximity to sea, desert, or mountains) and economics. It also varies seasonally, depending on which fruits and vegetables are ripe. Given the range of diversity in soil type, climate and occupations, these cuisines vary significantly from each other and use of locally available spices, herbs, vegetables, and fruits. Indian food is also heavily influenced by religious and cultural choices.

Here are some samples of Indian culinary tradition, although it is encyclopedic in spread and variety:

Bengali cuisine is found in the states of Tripura, the Barak Valley of Assam, and West Bengal itself. Bengali cuisine has a high emphasis on the chilli pepper and tends to use high amounts of spice altogether. The cuisine is known for subtle flavours with an emphasis on fish, vegetables, lentils, and rice.

Tamil cuisine is characterized by its use of rice, legumes, and lentils, along with distinct aromas and flavours achieved by the blending of spices such as curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chilies, cinnamon, clove, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg and coconut. Tamil food is characterized by tiffins, which is a light food taken for breakfast or dinner and meals which are usually taken during lunch. Dosa and idli are some of the popular dishes and are eaten with chutney and sambar.

Goan cuisine is mostly seafood based; the staple foods are rice and fish. These are often served with coconut milk. The cuisine of Goa is influenced by its Hindu origins, four hundred years of Portuguese colonialism, and modern factors.

Gujarati cuisine is primarily vegetarian. The typical Gujarati thali consists of roti (rotli in Gujarati), daal or kadhi, rice, sabzi/shaak and papad. Many Gujarati dishes are simultaneously sweet, salty, and spicy. In mango season keri no ras (fresh mango pulp) is often an integral part of the meal

Maharashtrian cuisine is known for the popular dishes such as puran poli, batata wada, masala bhat and wada pav. Shrikhand, a sweet dish made of strained yoghurt, is a main dessert of Maharashtrian cuisine. The cuisine of Maharashtra can be divided into two major sections—the coastal and the interior. The Konkan, on the coast of the Arabian Sea has its

