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*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ॐ

May Everybody Be Happy

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**NEWS LETTER**

Vol.8 Oct - Dec 2006

Dear Friends,

I wish you all a very happy and prosperous Deepavali. We have been very busy in organising the annual Deepavali fair and the Deepavali celebrations at the national Parliament House in Canberra.

The Deepavali Fair this year was held at Fairfield Showground, Praireiwood, NSW on Sunday the 8th October 2006 and the function in Canberra on Monday, the 16th October 2006. We had to change the venue of the fair from the Sydney Olympic Park, Athletic Centre because of the complaints of a large number of food stall holders, who were treated very badly by the Food Inspectors from the Auburn Council at the recently held India Australia fair there.

Anyway, it was good to go back to the Fairfield Showground. The whole area is fully covered, that protects it from the inclement weather. We had a large crowd. There were over 100 stalls. Further details about the function are available on our website: [www.hinducouncil.com.au](http://www.hinducouncil.com.au). Kind regards,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam  
Chairman

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### **India Independence Day**

The Federal Government of Australia payed tribute to the contribution to the nation of more than 100,000 Indians, who have chosen to call Australia home, as part of celebrations for Indian Independence Day on 15 August 2006.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Robb, addressed an Independence Day function in Canberra to mark the 59 years since India declared its independence in 1947. Mr Robb is impressed by the Indian community's dedication, commitment and contributions and its successful integration with other communities.

The celebrations for Independence Day tied in with a 10 day Friendship Festival. The celebration included dance, visual artists, yoga, drama and comedy performances. Events were staged at various venues throughout Canberra from 11-20 August 2006.

### **Ganesh Visarjan**

Ganesh Visarjan, the biggest celebration of the year was held at Sri Venkateswara temple in Helensburgh, Sydney. The colourful event was celebrated with poojas, stalls, cultural programs, children's activities, lots of yummy food and a final memorable procession of Lord Ganesha image with lots of drumming and singing to Stanwell Park Beach. Once again this year over thirty cultural, spiritual and religious organisations came together for celebration of Ganesh Visarjan.

### **Folk Dances of India**

The Sri Venkateswara temple Association Inc. (SVT) organized a major Folk Dances of India event on Sunday, 10th September 2006 to mark the 21st anniversary of the Temple's Kumbabhishekam. The entire community was brought together for a gala evening at Bowman Hall, Blacktown. The SVT Folk dance event brought together a large number of dances representing diverse regions of India. The event showcased India's rich cultural heritage and traditions.

Exciting performers, 15 group dances representing all different parts of India in its variety, colours and vibrancy from Punjab, Bengal, UP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat to Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam folk dancers.

The event gathered a capacity audience of nearly 1000 who enjoyed 3 hours of fun watching the beauty of dancers, their costumes, energy and enthusiasm.

## International Day of Peace

International day of peace was held on 21 September 2006. The United Nations General Assembly had adopted this day to encourage worldwide, 24hour spiritual observations for peace and non-violence in every house of worship and place of spiritual practice, by all religious and spiritually based groups and individuals, and by all men, women and children who seek peace in the world. This global 24 hour observation for peace is meant to demonstrate the power of prayer and other spiritual practices in promoting peace and preventing violent conflict.

The Hindu Council of Australia represented all Hindus of Australia on this day. We commenced with an invocation prayer by Sri Sridhar Bhattar, Chief Priest of the Sri Venkateswara Temple, This was followed by a speech on "Hindu Solution for Peace" by Dr A Balasubramaniam, Chairman Hindu Council and President of The Sri Venkateswara Temple. The Sahaja Yoga centre chanted Sanskrit Slokas with participation from the audience. Mr Jagdish Raniga from Brahma Kumari RajaYoga Centre also gave a brief speech on "My role for Peace on this Planet". There was a presentation on "Yoga for all - paths and Practices" by Mrs Veda Srinivasan - practising Yoga teacher followed by Asanas (Postures). The Asanas were demonstrated by Ms Anusha Srinivasan of Ayer of Iyengar Yoga School Newtown and Ms Sangeetha Easwaran of Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre. Our presentation concluded with the Shankara Shri giri, a graceful Bharatha Natyam dance by Mr Seran Sribalan from the Rasana School of Aesthetic arts.

## Navaratri (September 23rd to October 1st)

Navaratri, a nine day extravaganza commenced from September 23<sup>rd</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. During these nine days the goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga are worshipped in the form of fasts, prayers, dances and feasts. Hindu devotees flocked to various temples to offer fruits and sweets to Goddess Durga. Temples hummed with devotional hymns and chants. Navratri Dandiya Nights, non stop Indian Entertainments with Dandiya - Hindi - Bhangra songs were held throughout the week.

The upcoming Hindu festivals are:

02/10/2006 Dussehra - Vijay Dashmi  
10/10/2006 Karwa Chauth  
19/10/2006 Dhan Trayodshi  
21/10/2006 Deepavali (Diwali)  
24/10/2006 Bhai Dooj

## British Hindus Protest Being Called "Asians"

LONDON, ENGLAND, July 12, 2006: Hindus living in Britain do not want to be described as "Asian," according to a big study of the community. Instead, they want to be known as British Indian, Hindu -- or even Desi, a Hindi word growing in popularity with the young that means being rooted in one's home country. At the time of the 2001 Census the Hindu population in Britain had reached nearly 550,000. The report, Connecting British Hindus, published in the House of Commons, was funded by the Government and carried out by the Runnymede Trust and the Hindu Forum. It found concern about a "general assumption" that any brown-skinned Asian person was Muslim and shows that Hindus feel neglected, marginalized and misunderstood. One example is their funeral traditions. One Hindu says in the report: "Our rituals take two hours and crematoria do not have the time, facilities or space for these rituals. We are trying to build a crematorium, but the planning permission needs to be given." Another example was the large number of hospitals that will provide halal Muslim food but not vegetarian Hindu food.

Lord Parekh, who is a Hindu, writes in the report that the community is politically "invisible" because it makes "few noises when confronted with injustices." He says that British Hindus, drawn mainly from Asia and East Africa, have quietly concentrated on building their careers, holding families together and nurturing their children's education. In three generations, he says, they have risen to senior positions in most of the professions and have a larger middle class than any other ethnic minority except the Jewish community. Yet only two MPs are Hindu. Although relations with other communities are described as excellent, "those with Muslims leave much to be desired," the Labour peer says.

One of the findings was that although Hindus are more likely than average to own their own houses, more than a fifth live in overcrowded conditions. Traditionally, several generations live in the same house. Hindus have a high rate of marriage, fewer one-parent families, a high birth rate and a lower divorce rate than the average. Their children do better than average at school. There are pockets of deprivation and half of those surveyed reported discrimination. The Metropolitan Police in London recorded 932 faith hate crimes against Sikhs and Hindus in the month after the July 7 bombings last year. An interviewee in Leicester told researchers: "The Asian word is abused. I would rather someone called me Indian.

## **Tony Blair sported a sacred Hindu red thread on his wrist**

LONDON: British Prime Minister Tony Blair sported a sacred Hindu red thread on his wrist during heated political exchanges in the House of Commons on Wednesday.

A spokeswoman for the government said the wristband was a gift presented to Blair when he visited a Hindu temple in Neasden, north London.

Journalists spotted the thread on Blair's wrist as he was facing tough questioning from the opposition parties over a string of recent government scandals.

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## **Hinduism**

The following are some of most interesting facts about Hinduism.

### **WHY DO WE HAVE A PRAYER ROOM?**

Most Indian homes have a prayer room or altar. A lamp is lit and the Lord worshipped each day. Other spiritual practices like japa - repetition of the Lord's name, meditation, reading of the scriptures, prayers, and devotional singing etc are also done here. Special worship is done on auspicious occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and the like. Each member of the family - young or old - communes with and worships the Divine here.

The Lord is the entire creation. He is therefore the true owner of the house we live in. The prayer room is the Master room of the house. We are the earthly occupants of His property. This notion rids us of false pride and possessiveness. The ideal attitude to take is to regard the Lord as the true owner of our homes and us as caretakers of His home. But if that is rather difficult, we could at least think of Him as a very welcome guest. Just as we would house an important guest in the best comfort, so too we felicitate the Lord's presence in our homes by having a prayer room or altar, which is, at all times, kept clean and well-decorated. Also the Lord is all pervading. To remind us that He resides in our homes with us, we have prayer rooms. Without the grace of the Lord, no task can be successfully or easily accomplished. We invoke His grace by communing with Him in the prayer room each day and on special occasions. Each room in a house is dedicated to a specific function like the bedroom for resting, the drawing room to receive guests, the kitchen for cooking etc. The furniture, decor and the atmosphere of each room are made

conducive to the purpose it serves. So too for the purpose of meditation, worship and prayer, we should have a conducive atmosphere - hence the need for a prayer room. Sacred thoughts and sound vibrations pervade the place and influence the minds of those who spend time there. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated through regular meditation, worship and chanting done there pervade the prayer room. Even when we are tired or agitated, by just sitting in the prayer room for a while, we feel calm, rejuvenated and spiritually uplifted

### **WHY DO WE FAST?**

Most devout Indians fast regularly or on special occasions like festivals. On such days they do not eat at all, eat once or make do with fruits or a special diet of simple food. Fasting in Sanskrit is called **upavaasa**. **Upa** means "near" + **vaasa** means "to stay". Upavaasa, therefore, means staying near (the Lord), meaning the attainment of close mental proximity with the Lord. Then what has upavaasa to do with food? A lot of our time and energy is spent in procuring food items, preparing, cooking, eating and digesting food. Certain food types make our minds dull and agitated. Hence on certain days man decides to save time and conserve his energy by eating either simple, light food or totally abstaining from eating so that his mind becomes alert and pure. The mind, otherwise pre-occupied by the thought of food, now entertains noble thoughts and stays with the Lord. Since it is a self-imposed form of discipline it is usually adhered to with joy. Also every system needs a break and an overhaul to work at its best. Rest and a change of diet during fasting is very good for the digestive system and the entire body. The more you indulge the senses, the more they make their demands. Fasting helps us to cultivate control over our senses, sublimate our desires and guide our minds to be poised and at peace. Fasting should not make us weak, irritable or create an urge to indulge later. This happens when there is no noble goal behind fasting. The Bhagavad-Gita urges us to eat appropriately - neither too less nor too much - yukta-aahaara and to eat simple, pure and healthy food (a saatvik diet) even when not fasting.

### **WHY DO WE DO PRADAKSHINA (CIRCUMAMBULATE)?**

We cannot draw a circle without a centre point. The Lord is the centre, source and essence of our lives. Recognising Him as the focal point in our lives, we go about doing our daily chores. This is the significance of *pradakshina*. Also every point on the circumference of a

circle is equidistant from the centre. This means that wherever or whoever we may be, we are equally close to the Lord. His grace flows towards us without partiality

### WHY DO OFFER FOOD TO THE LORD BEFORE EATING IT?

Hindus make an offering of food to the Lord and later partake of it as *prasaada* - a holy gift from the Lord. In our daily ritualistic worship (*pooja*) too we offer *naivedyam* (food) to the Lord. The Lord is omnipotent and omniscient. Man is a part, while the Lord is the totality. All that we do is by His strength and knowledge alone. Hence what we receive in life as a result of our actions is really His alone. We acknowledge this through the act of offering food to Him. This is exemplified by the Hindi words "*tera tujko arpan*" - I offer what is Yours to You. Thereafter it is akin to His gift to us, graced by His divine touch. Knowing this, our entire attitude to food and the act of eating changes. The food offered will naturally be pure and the best. We share what we get with others before consuming it. We do not demand, complain or criticise the quality of the food we get. We eat it with cheerful acceptance (*prasaada buddhi*). Before we partake of our daily meals we first sprinkle water around the plate as an act of purification. Five morsels of food are placed on the side of the plate acknowledging the debt owed by us to the Divine forces (*devta rina*) for their benign grace and protection, our ancestors (*pitru rina*) for giving us their lineage and a family culture, the sages (*rishi rina*) as our religion and culture have been "realised", maintained and handed down to us by them, our fellow beings (*manushya rina*) who constitute society without the support of which we could not live as we do and other living beings (*bhuta rina*) for serving us selflessly. Thereafter the Lord, the life force, who is also within us as the five life-giving physiological functions, is offered the food.

This is done with the chant

**praanaaya swaahaa,  
apaanaaya swaahaa,  
vyaanaaya swaahaa,  
udaanaaya swaahaa,  
samaanaaya swaahaa,  
brahmane swaahaa**

After offering the food thus, it is eaten as *prasaada* - blessed food.

### WHY DO WE WEAR MARKS (TILAK, POTTU AND THE LIKE) ON THE FOREHEAD?

The *tilak* or *pottu* invokes a feeling of sanctity in the wearer and others.

It is recognized as a religious mark. Its form and colour vary according to one's caste,

religious sect or the form of the Lord worshipped. In earlier times, the four castes (based on *varna*) - Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra - applied marks differently. The brahmin applied a white *chandan* mark signifying purity, as his profession was of a priestly or academic nature. The kshatriya applied a red kumkum mark signifying valour as he belonged to warrior races. The vaishya wore a yellow kesar or turmeric mark signifying prosperity as he was a businessman or trader devoted to creation of wealth. The sudra applied a black bhasma, kasturi or charcoal mark signifying service as he supported the work of the other three divisions. Also Vishnu worshippers apply a *chandan tilak* of the shape of "U," Shiva worshippers a *tripundra* of *bhasma*, Devi worshippers a red dot of *kumkum* and so on). The tilak cover the spot between the eyebrows, which is the seat of memory and thinking. It is known as the Ajna Chakra in the language of Yoga. The tilak is applied with the prayer -

"May I remember the Lord. May this pious feeling pervade all my activities. May I be righteous in my deeds." Even when we temporarily forget this prayerful attitude the mark on another reminds us of our resolve. The tilak is thus a blessing of the Lord and a protection against wrong tendencies and forces. The entire body emanates energy in the form of electromagnetic waves - the forehead and the subtle spot between the eyebrows especially so. That is why worry generates heat and causes a headache. The tilak and pottu cools the forehead, protects us and prevents energy loss.

Sometimes the entire forehead is covered with *chandan* or *bhasma*. Using plastic reusable "stick bindis" is not very beneficial, even though it serves the purpose of decoration.

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"There is nothing that wastes the body like worry, and one who has any faith in God should be ashamed to worry about anything whatsoever."

*Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)*

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"Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet."

*Albert Einstein (1879-1955)*

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Newsletter compiled by Anusha Mahalingam

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