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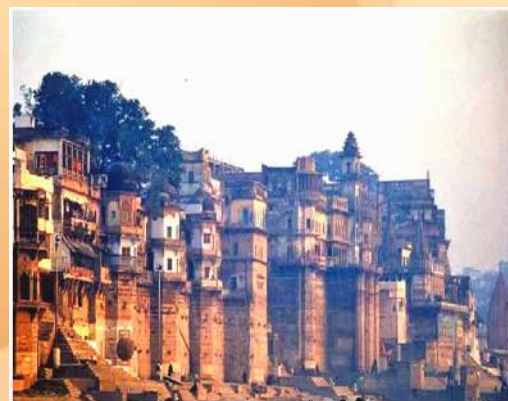
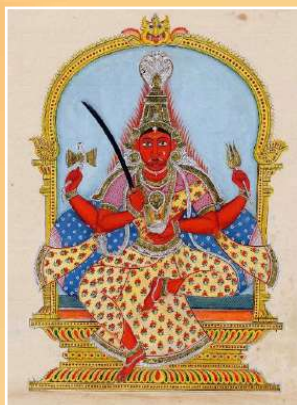
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EIACP Newsletter



Thematic Area: Conservation of Ecological Heritage and Sacred Sites of India

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From the EIACP Desk...

The **Environmental Information, Awareness Capacity Building and Livelihood Programme (EIACP)** at CPREEC of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India is the Programme Centre – Resource Partner (RP) for the thematic area of “*Ecological Heritage and Sacred Sites of India*”.

Heritage is the cultural, social and spiritual legacy that we inherit from our past and pass on to the future. Indian heritage is unique in its reverence for Mother Nature in all her manifestations. Ancient traditions, rituals and practices have embedded this reverence in religion and even in normal day-to-day living. The respect for nature and the belief that every organism on earth has a special role in life's cycle forms the core of our ecological heritage.

To maintain humankind's resilience in the face of change, it is necessary to draw on the best available knowledge, regardless of its origins. The process of updating knowledge systems provides opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of observed events and their consequences. It facilitates and leads to a joint assessment of information, resulting in new insights and innovations, and in better informed actions.

The main purpose of this “**Newsletter**” is to bring forth and publish articles concerning all aspects related to the knowledge of ecological traditions in India as well as novel interpretations and theoretical issues related to the conservation of the same.

This issue covers articles on “**Syncretism and 33 Million Deities**” and “**Significance of the Ganga as one of our holiest rivers**”.

Rig Veda teaches about a lot of major and minor deities, river goddesses, lesser known forms of major deities, village gods and demi gods of Buddhism and Jainism. Indian religions expanded their pantheons to absorb other religious beliefs. The fact that religious syncretism is the blending of different belief systems, incorporating other beliefs into an existing tradition was highlighted in the conference organized by C P Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research in Chennai. There are a lot of folk deities, forest deities, village deities, such as Shitala, Jvara, Jvarasura, Mariamman, Ayyanar and hero stones that are revered to bring rains, fertility, alleviate diseases, good harvest etc. Once Village deities – are now slowly integrated into an all-Indian pantheon. There may be millions of deities in India with individual manifestations of a particular region with people invoking the Gods to protect them and the environment.

Every Hindu takes a pilgrimage to Kashi at least once in his / her lifetime either to die a ‘holy death’ or to take a pot of river Ganga water to their home. A glimpse of connectedness can be observed when a dip is taken into the river. Adi Shankara hurled himself with exhilaration on first sight into the river Ganga. Every individual could feel an uncontrollable joy towards the river. There is a saying that ‘Ganga is imbibed with mother's milk’. Pilgrimage to Ganga is incomplete without visiting icy Gomukh. Many soul-seekers meditate, chant and pray on the riverbank in Rishikesh. From Haridwar, river Ganga proceeds towards dusty plains to Bengal and then to the sea. The meeting of the Ganga with the sea at journey's end is considered a mystic moment. There are river wardens who know every inch of the river, every rock hidden in the riverbed, every shifting sand bank, every tide. Everyone living around this holy river consider themselves as Ganga's child like Bhishma and an indivisible part of their lives both during their lifetime and after their death. Our personal journeys are incomplete without river Ganga.

CPREEC EIACP PC – RP has already published books on the “Ecological Traditions” of the sixteen (16) states of India. The Centre has, over the years, promoted and encouraged communities to adopt local traditions, practices and rituals that possess ecological significance.

The Centre also focuses on eco-restoration, conservation, creation of environmental assets and advocates the sustainable use of natural resources. The Centre has restored several degraded sacred groves in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The Centre has also documented sacred groves/forests (11,400), sacred gardens (64), sacred plants (94), sacred animals (57), sacred rivers (33), sacred water bodies (365), sacred mountains (203), sacred cities/sites (234), sacred seeds (10), sacred caves (209) and green pilgrimages (20), traditional ecological knowledge (44) and UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India (36) till date.

We would like to thank our readers for sharing their articles, photographs and also for their queries and feedback regarding our newsletters, publications and about information provided in our website www.cpreecenvvis.nic.in

We cordially invite other scholars and interested persons to share their knowledge and information by contributing popular articles and good quality photographs on the subject areas present in our website.

Cover Story

Syncretism and 33 Million Deities

The *Rig-Veda* enumerates thirty three *devas* or 'shining ones', representing primarily the forces of nature. Of these, three were important: Agni or fire, Indra or rain, and Soma, a plant. The popular deities today are two Vedic gods – Vishnu combined with a non-Vedic Narayana, and Rudra combined with a non-Vedic Shiva – and the many forms of Shakti, the supreme goddess. Agni, Indra and Soma, along with twenty eight others, became 'minor deities'. Later, more minor deities were added to the Hindu pantheon: *ashtadikpalas* (the eight guardians of directions), *navagrahas* (nine planets), *vasus* (eight attendant deities), *adityas* (12 forms of the sun), *rudras* (11 forms of Shiva), *avatars* (10 incarnations of Vishnu), along with river goddesses, lesser-known forms of the main deities, village gods and goddesses and demi-gods of Buddhism and Jainism.

The original major deities of the Vedas became minor over time, while the minor deities are today among the most important deities all over India. Of the *avatars*, only Rama and Krishna attained cult status, while Shiva is worshipped in different forms. This is how Indian religions were made inclusive and expanded their pantheons to absorb other religious beliefs. Adi Shankara recognised six cults in his time: Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta, Ganapatya, Saura (Sun) and Kaumara (Kartikēya). While the six deities remain, Surya, once the ruling deity of temples in Khajuraho, Modhera, Martand and Gwalior, has been demoted to a mere *navagraha*.

Recently, the C P Ramaswami Aiyar Institute of Indological Research in Chennai organised a seminar on minor deities in Indian art. Scholars gathered to share the plurality and

syncretism of Indian religious and social traditions, as represented in visual language. Religious syncretism is the blending of different belief systems, incorporating other beliefs into an existing tradition. This occurs when such traditions exist in proximity to each other and are catholic enough to accept each other's belief systems. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism have made many adaptations over millennia, assimilating elements of several religious traditions both in India and Southeast Asia.

Today's Hinduism is a combination of different forms of beliefs and practices. It is no longer exclusively Vedic – it is the common people's religion. Every village in India has a village deity usually associated with fertility, rains, disease and so on.

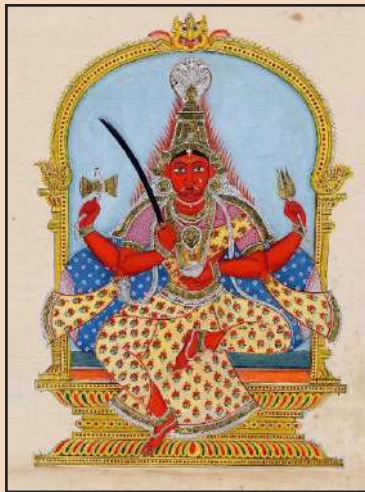


Goddess Shitala

Shitala, a medicinal deity who cooled the body, became a dreaded goddess of disease in North India. Jvara, the deity of fever, who is propitiated as Jvarahareshwara in South India, is feared as demon Jvarasura in Bengal. Mari originally meant rain and the pearl-like raindrops were *muthu-mari*. Unfortunately, their resemblance to smallpox boils made Mariamman of Tamil Nadu into a dreaded goddess of disease. Thus, popular deities could change their character as social problems arose.



Jvarahareshwar



Muthu Mariamman

Folk deities may be grouped as gods of fertility, protector deities, fetishes (like stones and trees) and hero stones. The famous Ayyanaar is a protector; other goddesses protect children, combat disease and assure fertility. The popular Ayyappa of Kerala was originally a forest deity. Indian deities are often associated with nature

and natural resources like sacred groves and waterbodies, rain, a good harvest, disease and safety. By invoking the sanctity of rivers and lakes, animals and health, people protected the environment, controlled disease and ensured a sustainable lifestyle for themselves and other life forms.

What is amazing is the similarity among rural and tribal traditions across the country at a time when there was no easy communication. For example, votive offerings of terracotta horses to the deities of the sacred groves include the horses of Ayyanaar in Tamil Nadu and Bankura in Bengal. Every state shares this tradition, yet in no two states are the horses alike: that is the greatness of the Indian potter.

The minor deities were as important as the Vedic gods. A villager would never call his local goddess, minor. She is all important for him. Sometimes, the deity gets upgraded, such as Kamakshi of Kanchipuram, whose cult expanded when Rajasimha Pallava built a new temple and a new icon. Meenakshi, originally a goddess of fisherfolk, became the reigning deity of the new Pandya capital, Madurai. New mythologies were created, but old attributes were retained. They became aspects of Shakti or Vishnu or Shiva. This is how village deities were integrated into an all-Indian pantheon.

No wonder it is said that there are '33 million deities' in India. Yet every deity is a singular manifestation of the Supreme and the most important deity of the region. They are a reminder of a time when gods were invoked to protect people and the environment, and when religion was catholic enough to absorb other gods within an all-embracing belief system.

Source : Nanditha Krishna, "Religious syncretism and 33 million deities", *The New Indian Express Chennai*, April 7, 2024 – pg. 12.



Cover Story

Significance of the Ganga as one of our holiest rivers

by Renuka Narayanan

The meeting of the Ganga with the sea at journey's end is considered a mystic moment

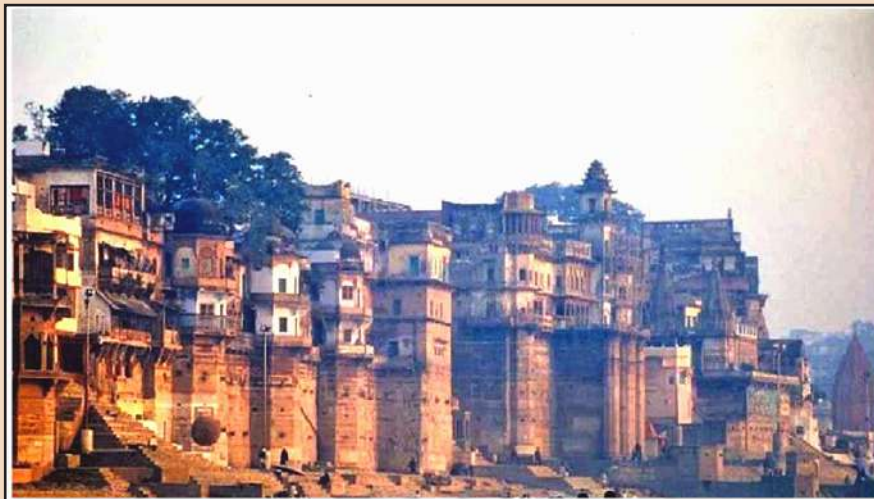


Photo | Wikimedia Commons

With the spotlight on Kashi for reasons we all know, it's interesting to look again at its cultural significance. Some come to Kashi to die a 'holy death' with the surety of salvation. Death itself is known as 'Kashi Labh', the 'Profit of Kashi', while Kalbhairav, the city's fierce guardian deity, is addressed as 'Kala-kala', the 'Death of death', like his master Shiva.

For at least over three millennia, every Hindu pilgrim to Kashi carried away a small sealed copper pot or two of Ganga water to his far corner of the sub-continent. The pot is kept in his prayer nook or room. Every time there is a death in the family, the seal is broken and a few drops of Gangajal are poured into the dying person's mouth for his or her salvation. The pots have been steadily replaced by each generation, so the Ganga may literally be found in every Hindu home across India.

No wonder there were salty local sayings about this never-ending ebb and flow of humanity in

Varanasi. The modern satirical poet 'Bedhab' Banarasi joked, 'Bedhab kabhon na chhodiyo aisi Kashi dham/Marne pe Ganga miley, jeete langra aam.' 'Never leave a place like Kashi, Bedhab, where dying, you have the Ganga, and alive, langra mangoes'.

When in Kashi, this rush of associations made me run impulsively to the Ganga's sandy edge across from the ghats and wade in deeper and deeper until I could swim a few strokes. My modest cotton tunic and pants ballooned comically in the water and a few people in wooden boats some distance away looked at me for a moment, but only for a moment, since Kashi has seen everybody and everything. A soft plop to the other side made me turn my head swiftly. A small, sleek brown body dived down and I was just in time to catch that veriest glimpse of a Gangetic dolphin.

Treading water, I looked back at the ghats with the illusion of being right in the middle of the

broadly curving river, filled by a sense of deep connectedness. It was a sodden, sandy business going back, but the epiphany was worth it. I understood why Adi Sankara, the pillar of Hinduism, rushed forward in exhilaration at his first glimpse and hurled himself into the river, crying, "Mother! Your child from the South has come to you!" I had laughed scornfully at this story as a cool undergrad at Delhi University. But to actually be in the river was quite another thing. The centuries were on the Ganga's side and it was part of my 'hard-wiring'. There was no escaping that hold.

This uncontrollable rush of joy towards the Ganga was not unique to me or my infinitely saintlier predecessors. Such spontaneous leaps are not unusual in a regular Hindu pilgrim or even a reluctant one, nor in a suddenly-overtaken casual visitor, for the idea of the Ganga is imbibed "with mother's milk", as the saying goes, and celebrated through story, song and prayer in almost every Indian language. The callous modern disregard for the physicality of the river is therefore hard to understand.

Meanwhile, the pilgrim party never stops along the Ganga's banks. It begins at its icy Himalayan source, Gomukh, with offerings of flowers. As the Ganga makes her way from the snowline down to pine forests, the pilgrim presence picks up volume with many sacred chants at the ashrams along its banks at Rishikesh. While the soul-seekers meditate, chant and pray on the riverbank, another kind of party goes on in the river itself.

Hooting and hollering, river rafters and kayakers bounce on the Ganga between the bronzed rocks on the wilder stretches of the river, in and out of rapids with terrifying names like 'Golf Course' and 'Three Blind Mice'. I, too, have been river-rafting on that stretch from Rishikesh to Haridwar, to experience the Ganga's girlish, joyful dance as she tumbles down the mountains and enters the plains, where she suddenly sobers in her flow.

From Haridwar, she turns positively wide and matronly as she proceeds further across the endless hot and dusty plains eastwards to Bengal and the sea. Hindus say she swells as she goes with the increasing load of human sin washed away in her as she flows from tirtha to tirtha (a holy place by the water).

The meeting of the Ganga with the sea at journey's end is considered a mystic moment. However, in a quirky link with the English who founded Calcutta on the Ganga's estuary, I experienced the river not from a pilgrim place but from a river warden's boat. The river warden wore a white uniform and a black kepi and his face was wrinkled around the eyes from years of peering intently at the river and its banks, taking in details others would probably not notice. He knew every inch of the river on his stretch, every rock hidden in the riverbed, every shifting sand bank, every tide.

"Do you pray to the Ganga?" I ventured when a silent camaraderie of sorts was established after twenty minutes or so of peacefully watching the river. The warden grinned. "I'm a child of this river, as much as any Bhishma. I am the Ganga, an indivisible part of her while alive. And one day, my ashes will float on her waves and disappear into her." He chuckled when I shared a very in-house Hindu verse with him from the river's upper reaches: 'Before you come here in a pot or a jar/Do spend some time alive in Haridwar'.

Chop and change as we may, there's no evading the fact that our personal journeys have never ceased to flow with the Ganga.

Source:

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2024/May/26/significance-of-the-ganga-as-one-of-our-holiest-rivers>

Renuka Narayanan, "Significance of the Ganga as one of our holiest rivers", The New Indian Express Chennai, May 27, 2024 – pg. 6.

— News —

Divine wisdom in cultures and religions

by Sacaria Joseph*



Goddess Saraswati,
circa 1886 by Raja Ravi Varma

The human tendency to attribute abstract, intricate, and often inexplicable facets of existence to a wise and supernatural entity possibly underlies the notion of various personified divine attributes, such as personified divine wisdom. By personifying them, cultures and religions render these attributes more accessible, comprehensible and relatable.

Across cultures and religions, personified divine wisdom takes myriad forms, with each tradition offering unique insights into its nature and attributes. For instance, in Christianity, it manifests as the Holy Spirit, or Logos, embodying divine illumination and guidance. In Judaism, it finds expression in Sophia (meaning, wisdom), emphasising discernment and righteous living. Taoism portrays wisdom through the concept of

Wu Wei, highlighting effortless action and harmony with the natural order. Ancient Egypt aligns wisdom with Maat, the goddess of truth, justice, and cosmic order. Norse mythology attributes wisdom to Odin, the All-Father, who possesses vast knowledge and understanding. In Hinduism, Saraswati embodies wisdom as the goddess of knowledge, music, and the arts.

Clad in pristine white, thus signifying purity and sanctity, Saraswati sits gracefully upon a lotus blossom. This flower, rooted in mud yet blooming immaculately above, symbolises her association with wisdom, enlightenment, and the blossoming of consciousness. In her right hand, she holds a book, representing the knowledge that serves as the wellspring of wisdom. In her left hand is a *veena*, its music embodying the creative expression of

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inner wisdom. This wisdom is not static but ever-evolving, nourishing and enriching the mind like the gentle flow of the water surrounding her.

The *Hamsa*, on the graceful swan that embodies balance, peace and tranquillity and is proverbially associated with the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and wisdom, serves as the celestial vehicle of Saraswati. Depicted as dwelling amidst the serene waters of Manasa Lake, the *Hamsa* symbolises the tranquil depth of the human psyche. This imagery captures the essence of the individual soul's search for self-awareness within the vast expanse of consciousness, echoing the profound journey towards enlightenment and inner wisdom.

As the divine patroness of learning, music, and the arts, Saraswati beckons seekers to plunge into the boundless depths of knowledge leading to wisdom. She guides their path not only towards enlightenment but also towards self-realisation. The ways of the divine with humans are often unconventional and mysterious, unfolding at times through the dramatic. The most appropriate human response to the profound beckoning of wisdom itself.

From behind the veil of the ordinary, the divine nudge King Janaka towards knowledge and wisdom, resulting in self-discovery. The *Ashtavakra* Gita unveils Janaka's transformative journey through his chance encounter with Ashtavakra, a man whose eight deformities masked his extraordinary knowledge and wisdom.

As a young man, Ashtavakra accompanied his scholarly father, Kahola, to a grand debate convened by their ruler, King Janaka, in his court. Throughout the profound philosophical and spiritual discussions that ensued, encompassing intricate questions and debates, the court scholars, including Ashtavakra's father, grappled with the challenge of adequately responding to his inquiries or

countering his arguments. Despite the collective efforts of the court scholars, Ashtavakra's wisdom remained unparalleled, prompting the king to seek his counsel.

Recognising the sincerity of Janaka's request, Ashtavakra agreed to share his knowledge. His teachings emphasised the significance of self-realisation for attaining true wisdom, inspiring Janaka to introspect and contemplate the self, ultimately leading to his self-realisation. Empowered by his newfound wisdom, Janaka continued to govern his people wisely and effectively, all the while remaining steadfast in his pursuit of truth – a perfect response to the divine wisdom embodied by Saraswati.

In the early days of King Solomon's reign, as the ruler of the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah, amidst the billowing smoke of the sacrifices he offered at Gibeon, a dramatic moment unfolded. The divine appeared to him in a dream, extending an offer to grant him any request he wished.

In a departure from the typical request for wealth, power, or longevity, young Solomon's plea was strikingly different. Rather than seeking earthly riches, he yearned for something far more precious and profound: wisdom.

This is yet another example of a perfect response to the beckoning of divine wisdom in the Jewish cultural and religious context. Solomon's only desire was to rule his people with fairness and discernment, a desire that resonated deeply within the celestial realm. Impressed by Solomon's humility and selflessness, the divine not only bestowed upon him the wisdom he sought but also bestowed upon him immeasurable riches and honour.

This dramatic and profound encounter of Solomon with the divine and his pursuit of wisdom laid the foundation for a reign unparalleled in history. Solomon's wisdom

became legendary, immortalised in tales such as the one where he discerned truth from falsehood amid the conflicting claims of two mothers (1 Kings 3:16-28). Under his just and insightful governance, his kingdom thrived, serving as a testament to the enduring strength found in prioritising knowledge over transient desires.

Across cultures and languages, numerous names echo through the ages, each a shimmering echo of the unseen divine essence. Like countless stars twinkling across the night sky, these diverse titles illuminate the vastness and infinite mystery of the divine. To the wise

and the enlightened, this essence takes form in myriad ways. They have referred to divine wisdom in many magnificent terms, such as the illuminating Logos, the comforting Holy Spirit, the vibrant Sophia, the effortless Wu Wei, the cosmic Maat, the wisdom-wielding Odin, and the creative Saraswati. Each name is a brushstroke, whispering its own unique understanding of the divine, yet all are part of the same breath-taking divine entity. In Indian culture and religions, they refer to it by the name, Saraswati.

Source: The Statesman Kolkata, 18/02/2024, pg.15. Accessed on April 04, 2024.



— News —

Why does Lord Krishna wear a peacock feather on his head?



Lord Krishna captivates hearts with his mesmerizing presence, often depicted adorned with a striking peacock feather adorning his crown. While his celestial beauty and grace captivate the imagination, the significance behind this distinctive embellishment holds a wealth of ancient lore and spiritual symbolism. Among the many interpretations and stories regarding the presence of peacock feathers, here is an interesting one.



From the Treta Yuga

During their Vanavasa, one day, Lord Rama and Sita were wandering through the dense jungle, they became lost and thirsty. Sita, feeling perched, asked Rama if they could find

some water. Rama prayed to nature for help. Suddenly, a beautiful peacock appeared before them. The peacock spoke, “I know where there is water, but it’s a bit tricky to find. Follow me, and I’ll guide you.”

Peacock offers help

Rama and Sita, grateful for the peacock’s offer, followed closely behind as it led them through the winding paths of the forest. However, as they journeyed deeper into the jungle, the peacock began to pluck feathers from its vibrant tail and dropped them along the way to mark the path. Despite knowing that forcefully removing its feathers might lead to its death, the peacock continues to drop its feathers and guides the couple.



Peacock's sacrifice

Finally, they reached a clear, sparkling spring, where they quenched their thirst and rested. To their dismay, they found the peacock lying



on the ground, its feathers scattered around it. The noble bird had given all it had to help them, and now it lay lifeless before them. Touched by the peacock's selfless sacrifice, Rama vowed, "I will never forget your kindness and bravery. In my next life, I will honor your memory." True to his word, in his next incarnation as Lord Krishna, Rama wore a majestic peacock feather in his hair as a symbol of gratitude and remembrance for the peacock's sacrifice.

Other stories

Numerous narratives exist surrounding the connection between peacock feathers and Lord Krishna. According to one belief, Radha ji bestowed it upon him as a token of remembrance. Alternatively, some hold that it was a gesture of devotion from the Peacock god to Lord Krishna. Lastly, there's a mixed belief suggesting that Balaram presented it to his younger brother during their playful escapades.

Source:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/soul-search/why-does-lord-krishna-wear-a-peacock-feather-on-his-head/photostory/108112604.cms>, accessed on 02 May, 2024.



— News —

The Curious Connection Between Afghanistan and Dehradun Basmati Rice

by Staff Writer, Madras Courier.



Doon Basmati, a variety of aromatic Basmati rice from Dehradun, is not found elsewhere in the world. This rice variety, with its unique flavour, is quickly disappearing due to the loss of irrigation land to urbanisation.

Dehradun's Basmati rice, a unique culinary luxury, has a fascinating history. It would not exist in India if not for the Afghans of Kunar province who were exiled here during colonial times.

Dehradun's connection with Afghanistan is almost forgotten today. The story begins with the last Durrani ruler, Shah Shujah, who was deposed by Muhmud Shah in 1809. Shujah sought refuge under Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Lahore. In return for protection, Shujah presented Maharaja with the Kohinoor.

In 1836, Dost Mohammad Khan, the founder of the Barakzai dynasty, took the throne following the Muhamud Shah's rule in Afghanistan. He was a threat to the British due to his association with Russia. So, after the first Anglo-Afghan war in 1838, the British sought an alliance with the Sikhs, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British aimed to depose Muhamman Khan and restore Shuja

as the ruler of Afghanistan. After the British victory, Khan took refuge in Barlowgunj in Dehradun; the famous Doon Basmati rice came into existence in the two years that Khan stayed in Dehradun.

The unique variety of seeds from Afghanistan was brought to the valley of Dehradun as Dost Mohammad Khan was fond of *pulao* and missed it during his exile. He brought Basmati to the Doon valley and is credited with improving its genetic variety, said Lokesh Ohri, a historian and an activist fighting to protect heritage.

In 1842, the noblemen of Afghanistan assassinated Shujah for being a cruel, reckless ruler. The British allowed Khan to regain his throne in Kabul, and he left his estate in Barlowganj; consequently, 'Bela Hissar', his residence, was turned into Wynberg Allen School.

In 1878, history seemed to repeat itself all over again. In the second Anglo-Afghan War, Khan's son and successor, Sher Ali Khan, was defeated, and his son, Mohammad Yaqu Khan, was exiled to India.

In 1879, Mohammad Yaqub Khan went to Dehradun just like his grandfather, and Khan's family would spend time shifting their homes between Dehradun and Mussoorie according to the seasons. According to the Doon historian, Ohri, Yaqub Khan passed on the Basmati seeds to a trader in Paltan Bazaar and commanded him to cultivate them in the valley. The resulting harvest turned out to be superior to the Afghan variety because of the perfect weather.

In 1919, Afghanistan achieved independence. Some Afghans returned while some stayed, acclimatised to the Dehradun lifestyle. Khan's descendants owned vast stretches of land, and most of their property was donated to the government.

Losing the grain variety is like losing "an intrinsic part of Dehradun's rich heritage". The disappearing Doon Basmati rice is a cause of concern and needs a revival. Ergo, the Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board plans to conserve and propagate this rare variety of organically produced rice besides replicating it elsewhere in the state.

The loss of Doon's unique Basmati grains is primarily due to the loss of land to urban growth. Once covered in forests and greens, generations of rice farmers have witnessed the disappearance of fertile land. The authentic variety of Doon Basmati, also known as *Oryza sativa* Type 3, has almost disappeared.

A host of other varieties are now being sold as Boon Basmati. The Doon Basmati only grows in the climate of the doon valley with running water. It cannot be cultivated anywhere else. Moreover, organic farming methods must be used without pesticides and chemical fertilisers. The rich cultural history of Dehradun depends

on the revival of this unique variety of Basmati rice. The high-quality, popular grain is passed down heritage from a connection between Afghanistan and India.

In addition to this aromatic variety of rice, Dehradun's relationship with Afghan continued for a long time. Afghanistan's last president, Ashraf Ghani, grew up in Dehradun and spent his early life listening to Tagore's tales from his grandmother.

The Afghanistan cricket team used the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Dehradun for practice after becoming a member of the ICC in 2017. Many cadets of Afghanistan went to Indian Military Academy and graduated, becoming officers.

Afghanistan and its people are in turmoil today as the political conflict has led to chaos. The Taliban has taken control of the most important towns and cities since the US withdrew its troops. The history of Doon Basmati is just another example of India's relationship with Afghanistan.

Source:

<https://madrascourier.com/insight/the-curious-connection-between-afghanistan-dehradun-basmati-rice/> accessed on June 3, 2024.



— News —

Scientists propose Unesco tag for ancient 'Sacred Groves'

by Mohita Tewari

An ancient tribal conference hall in the midst of forests will make you forget the swanky corporate offices. This hidden marvel lies in Meghalaya, diligently preserved by the Jaintia tribe, and has been discovered by the scientists from the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), Lucknow, who claimed it perfectly fits the bill for Unesco geoheritage tag.

According to the scientists, Sein Raij Tuber, the sacred grove of West Jaintia hills in Meghalaya, is a perfect example of sustainable biodiversity conservation and a tool for climate change mitigation.

With the help of Meghalaya's principal chief conservator of forests Harish C Chaudhary, scientists from BSIP and its centre for Promotion of Geoheritage and Geotourism (CPGG), who were on a hunt for a geoheritage sites, reached Sein Raij Tuber. The scientists could access this rich natural vegetation, preserved through local taboos and sanctions, only after they removed their shoes, belts and leather items.



HIDDEN MARVEL: The ancient tribal conference hall that lies in the midst of forests in Meghalaya was preserved by Jaintia tribe

The scientists were awestruck when they entered the sacred groves – a treasure trove of a large number of endemic, endangered and rare plant species conserved by Jaintia tribes, following their spiritual beliefs and traditional rituals. They came across over 600 plant species, of which only 100 are identified so far.

The team also came across ancient tribal conference halls, wells and other structures, well maintained by the tribes with zero use of plastic, concrete or any non-biodegradable material. Talking to TOI, BSIP director Professor Mahesh G Tahkkar said, “We were on a visit to the Northeast as a part of research for CPGC. While exploring some sites in Meghalaya, we came across these ‘sacred groves’, which is a true example of sustainable development and how the tribal population has maintained it using zero concrete.”

“Initially, we were a bit worried when asked to remove shoes to enter Sein Raij Tuber, as it was a dense forest. But then, we saw that the pathways made by the tribes were so well maintained that while walking for kilometres through a dark canopy of tree above us and soft humus under the feet, we didn’t get a single prick of thorn or insect bite,” he said.

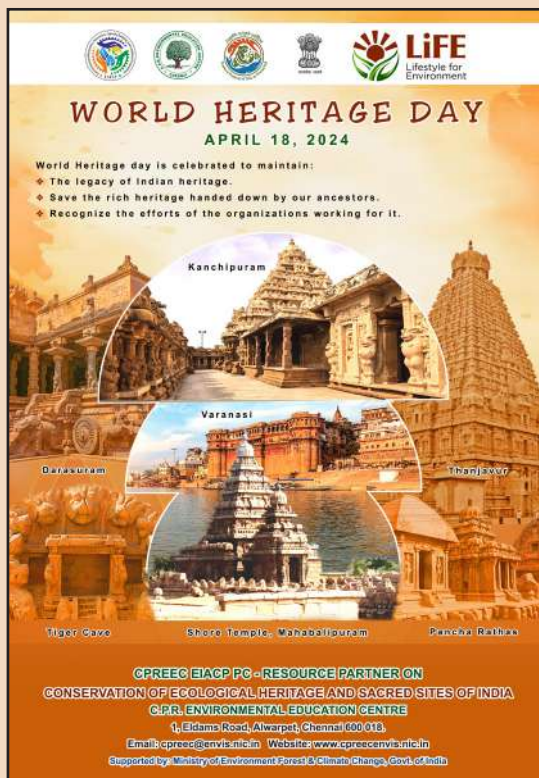
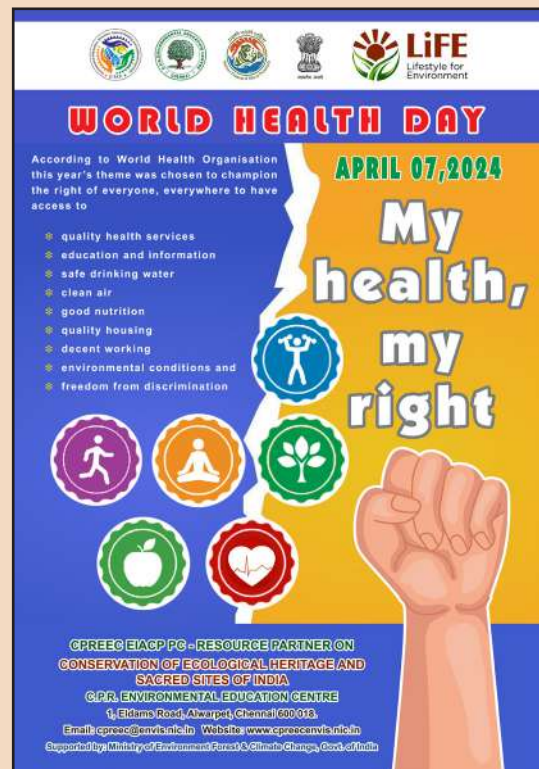
“Visitors are not allowed to take anything away from this hallowed forest, no even a pebble or a twig. This part of India, which is untold and untouched, holds a great potential of international tourism, climate, flora and fauna research and fits the bill for being a Unesco-recognised geoheritage site,” Thakkar added.

Source: The Times of India Chennai, 15/06/2024, pg. 13, accessed on June 20, 2024.

— In-focus —

WORLD HEALTH DAY – APRIL 07, 2024

As part of observing World Health Day-2024, CPREEC EIACP PC –RP, Chennai created an awareness poster on the theme “My health, my right”.



WORLD HERITAGE DAY – APRIL 18, 2024

As part of observing World Heritage Day-2024, CPREEC EIACP PC –RP, Chennai created an awareness poster

EARTH DAY - SPECIAL LECTURE – APRIL 22, 2024

CPREEC EIACP PC- RP, Chennai organized a special lecture to raise awareness about the importance of 'Earth Day'. Dr Sultan Ismail, Member, Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission and Governing Body Member, CPREEC delivered a special lecture highlighting its importance. Around 55 teachers attended the lecture.



INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIODIVERSITY – MAY 22, 2024

As part of observing International Day for Biodiversity – 2024, CPREEC EIACP PC –RP, Chennai has developed awareness posters on the theme BE PART OF THE PLAN.



CPREEC EIACP PC-RP, Ooty Field Office organized an awareness programme on the theme 'Be Part of the Plan' at Deva Matha School of Nursing, Kookalthorai, Ooty Taluk on May 22, 2024. A total of 58 students and teachers attended the programme. Awareness Posters on Biodiversity Conservation were distributed to the participants by Mr M Kumaravelu, Field Officer, CPREEC, Ooty in order to sensitize the importance of Biodiversity Conservation.



பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு குறித்த கவரோட்டி வெளியீடு

சிபிஆர்., கற்றாழல் கல்வி மையம் சார்பில் பன்னாட்டு பல்லுயிர் தினத்தை முன்னிட்டு விழிப்புணர்வு நிகழ்ச்சி நடந்தது.

ஊட்டி, மே 24: சிபிஆர்., கல்வி மையம் சார்பில் பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு குறித்த கவரோட்டி வெளியிடப்பட்டது.

பன்னாட்டு பல்லுயிர் தினத்தை ஆண்டு தோறும் மே மாதம் 24-ம் தேதி உலக நாடுகள் அனைத்தும் அனுசரிக்கின்றன. இதன் ஒரு பகுதியாக சிபிஆர்., கற்றாழல் கல்வி மையம் சார்பில் கோத்தகிரி அருகே தேவமாதா நர்சிங் பள்ளியில் விழிப்புணர்வு நிகழ்வு மற்றும் பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு குறித்த கவரோட்டி வெளியிடப்பட்டது. நிகழ்வில் கருத்துரை வழங்கிய கல்வி மைய கன அலுவலர் குமரவேலு, மணித குல பதுகாப்பிற்கு அனைத்து உயிரினங்களும் தேவை. அவற்றை பாதுகாப்பது நமது கடமை, என்றார். மேலும் இந்த ஆண்டு பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு தலைப்பாக சூழல் திட்டத்தில் அனைவரும் பங்கு வகிக்க வேண்டும் என்றார். நில இரி மாவட்ட இயற்கை விவசாய சங்க செயலாளர் ராமதாஸ், இயற்கை விவசாயம் செய்து பல்லுயிர், மண் வளம் பாதுகாப்பில் அனைவரும் பங்கு வகிப்போம் என்றார். தேவ சகோதரி டலிய பிராணசில் முதல் கவரோட்டி வெளியிட்டு பேசினார். முடிவில் விரிவுரையாளர் அனிதா கமல் நன்றி கூறினார்.

News Clipping (Dinakaran, and Maalaimurasu Coimbatore Edition dated May 24, 2024) pertaining to the Awareness programme organised at CPREEC EIACP PC-RP, Ooty Field Office as part of International Day for Biodiversity.

கோத்தகிரியில் பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு தின கருத்தரங்கம்!

கோத்தகிரி, மே. 24- நமது கடமை என்று கூறினார்.

பன்னாட்டு பல்லுயிர் தினம் ஆண்டு தோறும் மே மாதம் 24-ம் தேதி உலக நாடுகள் அனைத்தும் அனுசரிக்கின்றன. இதன் ஒரு பகுதியாக சிபிஆர்., கற்றாழல் கல்வி மையம் சார்பில் கோத்தகிரி அருகே தேவமாதா நர்சிங் பள்ளியில் விழிப்புணர்வு நிகழ்வு மற்றும் பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு குறித்த கவரோட்டி வெளியிடப்பட்டது.

நிகழ்வில் கருத்துரை வழங்கிய கல்வி மைய கன அலுவலர் குமரவேலு, மணித குல பதுகாப்பிற்கு அனைத்து உயிரினங்களும் தேவை. அவற்றை பாதுகாப்பது நமது கடமை, என்றார். மேலும் இந்த ஆண்டு பல்லுயிர் பாதுகாப்பு தலைப்பாக சூழல் திட்டத்தில் அனைவரும் பங்கு வகிக்க வேண்டும் என்றார். நில இரி மாவட்ட இயற்கை விவசாய சங்க செயலாளர் ராமதாஸ், இயற்கை விவசாயம் செய்து பல்லுயிர், மண் வளம் பாதுகாப்பில் அனைவரும் பங்கு வகிப்போம் என்றார். தேவ சகோதரி டலிய பிராணசில் முதல் கவரோட்டி வெளியிட்டு பேசினார். முடிவில் விரிவுரையாளர் அனிதா கமல் நன்றி கூறினார்.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY – JUNE 05, 2024

As part of observing World Environment Day, CPREEC ENVIS –RP, Chennai designed and released 3 Info-graphics on the theme 'Land Restoration, Desertification and Drought Resilience'.



Awareness Lecture

CPREEC EIACP PC - RP, Chennai organized awareness lecture on the theme of Mission LiFE and WED 2024 by Dr. P. Sudhakar, Director & EIACP Coordinator, CPREEC at Dr. MGR Home & Higher Secondary School for the Speech and Hearing Impaired, Chennai on June 5, 2024. 78 teachers and teacher trainees participated.



Tree Plantation Programme

CPREEC EIACP PC- RP, Chennai celebrated “World Environment Day 2024” by organizing a tree plantation programme at Dr. MGR Home & Higher Secondary School for the Speech and Hearing Impaired, Ramapuram, Chennai on June 5, 2024. Dr. P. Sudhakar, Director & EIACP Coordinator, CPREEC, initiated the plantation programme and explained the importance of trees in the environment. He distributed the saplings to the Principal and teachers.



Drawing Competition at Vijayawada

As part of World environment Day 2024 celebrations CPREEC EIACP PC – RP, Vijayawada Field Office organized a Drawing Competition for students at Sri M S Reddy Tuition Point, Vijayawada on 05 June, 2024. A total of 85 students participated in the competition.



World Environment Day Rally at Gudalur – June 05, 2024

CPREEC EIACP PC-RP, Ooty Field Office organised a Rally as part of World Environment Day celebrations at Gudalur, The Nilgiris on **June 5, 2024**. Mr Vasanth Kumar, DSP, Gudalur, Mr. Senthil Kumar, RDO, Gudalur flagged off the Rally. A total of 210 Students from PWITI, TAJ Para Medical College, Rotarians of Gudalur Valley Rotary Club, Women's group from R. K. trust participated in the Rally.



International Yoga Day Celebration – 21 June, 2024 - CPREEC-EIACP- PC-RP - Action and awareness programme on LiFE (Adopt Healthy Lifestyles)

CPREEC EIACP PC – RP, Chennai celebrated **International Yoga Day – June 21, 2024** under the theme “**Life Style for Environment**” on “**Adopt Healthy Lifestyles**” at The Grove School, Alwarpet, Chennai. A total of 370 students and 40 teachers participated and performed yoga and pranayama.



Students and teachers from The Grove School, Alwarpet, Chennai took the pledge (**selfie point**) of the Mission LiFE Awareness Programme - **Life Style for Environment**.



Abstracts of Recent Publications

- ❖ **Hemalatha. (2022).** “**Conservation and Preservation of Rock Cave Art at Kumattipatti – A Historical Perspective**”, *Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science*, Vol. 6 (4), pp. 84 – 87.

Rock arts are ancient, human-made markings or paintings made on natural stone. India is the storehouse of the world's largest and richest rock art. Rock art reflects humanity's rich, spiritual and cultural heritage as a civilized society. It also serves as a historical record, detailing the hunting habits and ways of life of the local communities. But this rich cultural heritage has to be conserved and preserved for future generations. The need for conservation arises due to many factors, like weathering and the activities of the men who scribble on such rock paintings. The present study focuses on the preservation of rock cave paintings at Kumattipatti, located in the Coimbatore districts of Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: rock cave; conservation; paintings; preservation.

- ❖ **Cinzia Pieruccini. (2023).** “**Sacred Groves, the Brahmanical Hermit, and some remarks on ahi s and Vegetarianism**”, *Cultural Ecology in the Literary Cultures of South Asia (Cracow Indological Studies)*, Vol. 25 (1), pp. 237 – 257

The term sacred grove is used to denote an area of vegetation that is afforded special protection on religious grounds. In India, where sacred groves are known by a wide repertoire of local names, such places may be found right from the Himalayas up to the far South. Sacred groves host veneration of natural phenomena or elements of landscape, but also ancestral, local, folk or tribal gods and Sanskritised deities; the use of their resources is strictly regulated. Research studies on sacred groves in India often consider them to be a legacy or archaic economic forms, possibly harking back to the stage of hunters-gatherers, and an

expression of a religiosity dating back to a remote, non-Aryan, pre-Vedic antiquity. However, main sources for our knowledge of Indian antiquity, namely the literary sources, provide no direct record of voices of such archaic societies. Nonetheless, the same sources allow us to highlight some important aspects of the sacredness anciently ascribed to vegetation, forest, and specific places therein. The present paper proposes to focus on the Brahmanical hermit's distinct relationship with the forest and examine some aspects related to food.

Keywords: sacred groves; forest; Ilā; Urvaśī and Purūravas; hermit; Dharmasūtras; Mānavadharmasāstra; ahimsā; vegetarianism.

- ❖ **Mangalagiri, S., and Madhusudhana, R. (2023).** “**Myths and Realities of Simhachalam Shrine**”, *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, Vol. 11 (8), pp. g570 – g573.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the myths associated with the very famous shrine of Northern Andhra and to rediscover the truths regarding the Simhachalam shrine both mythologically and historically. In society, to date, many believe that Simhachalam was built by Vijayanagaras or Gajapatis. Also, mythologically though this shrine is accorded much significance, many own precepts which are far away from the historical truth are associated with this shrine. Precepts for research are collected from groups of devotees both from northern Andhra and other states. Many historical books and authentic sources were gone through to put forward the realities. Finally, this article tries to untangle the myths and disclose the realities regarding the Simhachalam temple both mythologically and historically.

Keywords: Simhachalam; shrine; Northern Andhra; Visakhapatnam; Varaha Lakshmi Nrusimhaswamy; Vijayanagaras; Gajapatis; Eastern Gangas; Chalukya Cholas; Kulottunga I; Narasimhadeva I.

- ❖ **Apala Saha. (2022). “The Evolving Heritagescape in India’s Hindu Pilgrimage City of Varanasi: Contemporary Relevance and Contestations”, *Heritage and Society*, Vol. 15 (1), pp. 32 – 45.**

The three-century-old city of Varanasi stands at crossroads between choosing to preserve its Heritagescape and generating a new-age urban landscape. The paper begins by exploring the concepts of Heritage and Heritagescape by taking a contextual stand, whereby it is constructed around the core argument that heritage is a tool in the hands of the powerful and what tangible and intangible aspects of the natural and human world shall be designated and retained as heritage is only a matter of power and power relations. The paper makes a conscious attempt to critically analyse the present-day urban transformations that the city is undergoing owing to its commitment toward a Smart City Mission and the resultant destructions and the contestations that emerge as a response to that. It concludes thereafter that the Smart City Mission in Varanasi has led to manipulative handling of heritage. Though it was launched with the promise of creating urban opportunities without having to pay up for the consequences, it seems unsuccessful in winning over the soul of the city and failing in the idea of sustainability in the process. The paper uses photographs and information from the field, digital and print media, and scholarly articles to substantiate the arguments made. It is more like an analytical essay, justified through evidence from the ground.

Keywords: Varanasi; heritagescape; destructions; contestations; pilgrimage city; cultural landscape; urban transformations; smart city mission.

- ❖ **Dinu, D., Arumugam, B. (2017). “The Practice of Traditional Rituals in Naga-Aradhana (Snake Worship): A Case Study on Aadimoolam Vetticode Sree Nagarajaswami Temple in Kerala, India”, *SHS Web of Conferences*, Vol. 32 (2): 00025.**

Snakes are worshipped in different parts of the world based on the culture and traditions. Snake worship is a part of Hindu religion

and plays an important role in cultural as well as in ritual aspects in India. This study explores the ritual practices in Naga *Aradhana* in the Indian state Kerala, by taking Aadimoolam Vetticode Sree Nagarajaswami temple as a case study. This paper aims to understand the importance of *Naga aaradhana* and the practice of rituals related to *Naga Dosha* (curse of snakes), like *Kalamezhuthu*, *Pulluvanpaatu*, *Sarpamthulal*, *Sarpabali*, the annual festival *Ayilyam Mahotsavam* and the importance of *Sarpakaavu* (sacred grove) in the temple. This research is conducted using the methodology of personal interviews and video analysis. This study concludes that *Sarpakaavu* has a unique meaning and believers from different castes and religions have respect and admiration for this divinity.

Keywords: Snake worship; Naga Aradhana; Kerala; annual festival.

- ❖ **Asha, E. J., Nalla, C., Rohit, K., Akshay, B., and Yanala, A. R. (2023). “Pokkali Rice Cultivation: A Review on the Indigenous Rice Cultivation Method in Kerala”, *International Journal of Environment and Climate Change*, Vol. 13 (8), pp. 1090 – 1095.**

Kerala state’s rice consumption is predicted to be between 3.5 and 4 million tons per year, but production is just a sixth of this. In order to boost the state’s rice production, attention must be paid to traditional rice growing techniques. Thus, there is a need to understand the Pokkali rice cultivation method used in Kerala. The Pokkali style of rice farming in Kerala’s acidic, saline soil is a distinctive way of rice cultivation. A native historic salt-tolerant type of rice called Pokkali, with a 120-day growing season, can withstand flooding by growing up to a height of 1.5 meters. Chettivirippu, Vyttila 1, Vyttila 2, Vyttila 3, Vyttila 4, and Vyttila 5 are the other rice varieties cultivated using the Pokkali rice cultivation method. With this technique, a single rice crop is harvested on mounds during the low salinity part of the production cycle, with prawn aquaculture taking place during the high salinity phase.

Keywords: Pokkali; prawn farming; vyttila.

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