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HARE KRISHNA NEWS

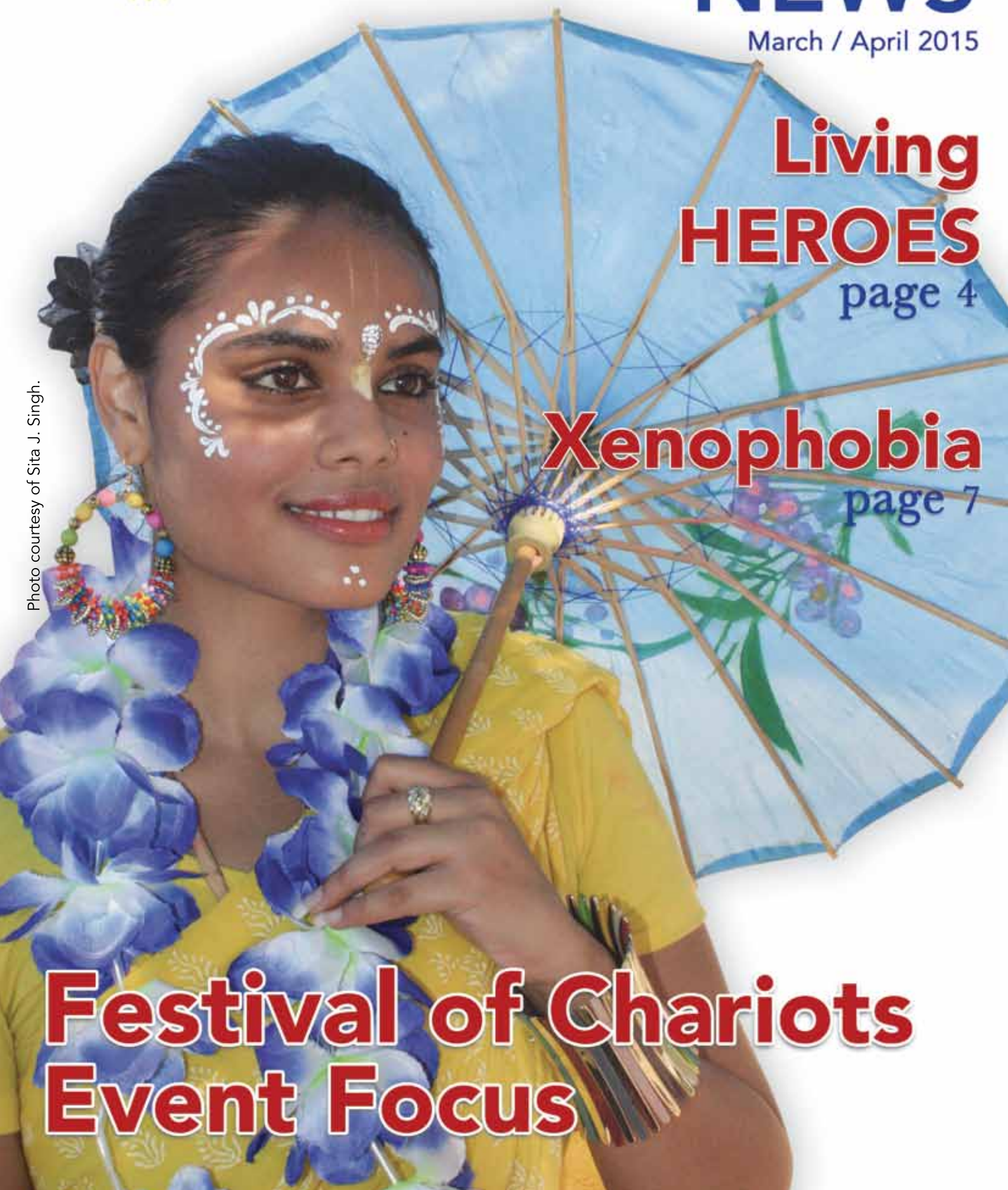
March / April 2015

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**Festival of Chariots
Event Focus**

Photo courtesy of Sita J. Singh.



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On the Cover

Yamuna Singh at the 2014 Chariot Parade.

Ed's Note

Many people believe that the Durban Festival of Chariots is for Indians. Not so. This is a multi-racial festival starting with God Himself with His black smiling face, His brother's white smiling face and His sister's yellow smiling face. It is a festival of God, of chariots, colours, mantras, cultures, music, dance, drama, food and Vedic lifestyle. So yes, the roots come from Vedic culture but it is not an exclusive culture. This is the culture of the ancients...when the world was a better place. People lived a higher quality of life honouring themselves, the world around them, and most of all, the Creator.

In our pursuit for common ground, we have ironically focused on what makes us different. But I say black Jagannath is the Rainbow Nation's God along with white Balaram and yellow Subhadra Devi. They show that colour is just colour.

For the first time, we have divided the Hare Krishna News into sections. You will find all the great news and columns you have come to love in the first part, and then a six-page Event Focus on the 27th Durban Festival of Chariots (DFOC).

In the first part, our Myth Buster explains why the "bedsheets," SSRRT (Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple) Focus shares the history and brevity of the first devotee, His Grace Kshudhi Prabhu who was only nineteen years old, in South Africa in 1973. SSRRT Connect covers what you can expect in the coming weeks to Rama Naumi; you are challenged to follow Lord Rama's example in Family Matters, and the Vedic View discusses xenophobia. Our storyteller narrates the story of the happiest, poorest *brahman*, Sudama.

The DFOC Event Focus (which starts from the back cover) covers new, background- and need-to-know information. It includes from the chariot parade routes, puppet theatre, an exclusive interview with drama writer and director Bhaktimarg Swami, to the gift shop preview. The children's activity (which adults will love too) teaches us how to make a garland for Lord Jagannath. A child of the temple shares his twenty-one years of Festival of Chariots wisdom.

I will be backstage assisting Bhaktimarg Swami with the dramas at the festival. I hope to see you in the audience.

Warmest wishes

Rasa-sthali Dasi

PS. I would love to hear from you.

Write to me at rasasthali@iskcondurban.net

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Bedsheets and Ponytails

Myth Buster

By Ananta Gauranga Das

Could my eyes be trusted? It seemed as if I was under false pretence that Apartheid was eradicated decades ago. In my naivety I thought, "how could a radical cult openly disseminate their separatist propaganda at the University of KwaZulu Natal?" I felt compelled to approach this group of ten or so hoodlums and give them a piece of my mind. "The group dressed in white bed sheets must be in cahoots with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)," I thought, "and their shaven heads indicate allegiance to the Skinheads." Much like sharks encompassing their prey upon the scent of blood, they assembled in a circle formation. Their leader, with microphone in hand, was a mountain of a man and as I got closer he seemed to grow bigger. Can't turn back now. Our eyes locked, and with a searing gaze I rebuked him, "Don't you know this is the Rainbow Nation? Why not go back to the cave you crawled out from, you Neanderthal." After a prolonged calculating glance, he said, "The best weapon against hatred is not hate, it's compassion. Holding on to hate is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Just chant and be happy." At times it can be brownish, lumpy and noxious ...today I had stuck my foot in it.

It was my first day of orientation at Howard College and my discovery of the Hare Krishnas, who are fun-loving, kind-hearted people. Actually, calling them caring and compassionate would be like describing the Nazis as rude, it just doesn't capture the half of it. Appreciating their likeable and effortless charm, we got to chatting. Their garb however bewildered me. I couldn't make heads or tails of it. "What's with the outlandish dress?" I asked Chaitanya Das, "No offence, but you guys look like you throw on this ensemble by rummaging through the wardrobe of a destitute drag queen, in the dark." And the face paint coupled with a shaven head and ponytail, that's too much, I thought.

Chaitanya Das explained

"What's with the outlandish dress?"

that the dress or Vaishnava attire is emblematic of the society. God is the cynosure with the motif of elevation of consciousness weaving through the tapestry of our existence. Men dress in *dhoti* (a long rectangular piece of un-stitched cloth, wrapped around and knotted at the waist and pulled through the legs, resembling something like a Bharatanatyam dancer's outfit) and *kurta* (a simple shirt with square sleeves and a top pocket).

On closer inspection, their attire reminded me of the Samurai of ancient Japan. Appropriate I thought, as they are the spiritual warriors of the 21st century. Women dress in *saris* (elegantly wrapped around the waist, with one end draped over the shoulder). Their clothing helps them and people become cognisant of God by acknowledging them as emissaries of Divinity. Consummate admiration for their regalia ensued when I gave their outfits a try. Comfortable, practical, and amazingly I felt like an urban sage. I was sold. Keeping a shaven head or short hair is akin with the ethos of simplicity. The "ponytail" devotee men sport is called a *sikha* (a tuft of hair at the back of our heads) which identifies us as devotees of Krishna and in India distinguishes us from other philosophical schools of thought.



Srila Prabhupada teaches by example.

The manner in which the Hare Krishnas dress and ornament themselves offer them security in South Africa, a country notorious for somewhat lax return policies of "borrowed" items. Who unless insane would approach you saying, "Hey man give me the mud on your face, or else." Incidentally, the sacred earth on our faces is called *tilak*, indicating that one's body is a temple and the property of the Supreme. *Tilak* is placed on various energy sites (*chakras*) on the body to enhance meditation, the forehead being the most prominent point.

In retrospect, I impulsively judged a group of people based solely on misunderstood externals. Hare Krishna dress is not Hindu or sectarian, nor is it a fashion statement. Vaishnava attire is tailored to self realisation, an expression of love to the Supreme Being.

Living Heroes

SSRRT Focus - History

By Rukmini Devi Dasi

"Shoot him," said the man with the crowbar. Kshudhi felt the cold metal against his skull and chanted Hare Krishna like never before. His nimble nineteen-year old body was tucked under the bed. The other four men with guns hesitated. They attacked the house knowing that a Johannesburg vegetable merchant had kept cash there, but were they ready to kill for it?

Less than two years before, Kshudhi had purchased a copy of *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya* from a book store in Los Angeles. The book introduced him to *bhakti*, the means of approaching God selflessly. One day, he sat on his favourite 'meditation rock' and called out to God, asking Him to please show him how he could serve Him. He opened his eyes and in front of him stood a Hare Krishna devotee. Kshudhi had never seen one before. The devotee had instinctively wandered off from his *harinam* group to Kshudhi. That was how Kshudhi's *bhakti* journey began. In the early 1970s, Krishna consciousness under the direction of its founder, Srila Prabhupada, was making its debut around the western world at breakneck speed. Every devotee wanted to be a part of the action. In that spirit, Kshudhi, together with Rishi Kumar Swami (who was twenty years old), had set out for South Africa hoping to share Srila Prabhupada's message.

And now, just days into their mission, they were facing death. Were it not for their bold hostess who locked the thieves in and shouted for help, the dream of ISKCON South Africa could have come to an abrupt halt. But even in danger, Kshudhi felt Krishna's presence and protection; he was part of a divine master plan.

Without skipping a beat, the young foreigners set off for Durban hoping to gain assistance from the Indian community there. They were two white preachers in the heart of the Indian community at the peak of apartheid, living life on the edge, and never returning to the same place, shop, or person for fear of being caught. Equipped only with a list of possible sympathizers, they went from person to person, spoke at community gatherings, and eventually were offered a base at a beach cottage in La Mercy. They ordered four thousand of Srila Prabhupada's books, propagating a message that was in direct contradiction to the ruling thoughts of the time. Within the cold concrete of apartheid, seeds of spiritual unity were being sown.

But time was running out. Within four months, Kshudhi's visa would expire. In December of 1972 his parents came to visit. They had placed their teenage son in Srila Prabhupada's care and now he was on a lethal mission in Africa. And as if that was not sacrifice enough, they helped further by providing a car and a stock of incense which he could use to generate an income and keep his project afloat. In Johannesburg



Kshudhi Prabhu in the Tulasi garden.

they attempted to renew his visa but Kshudhi was unexpectedly detained and taken in for questioning by the secret police. As Kshudhi ascended to the notorious eleventh floor of the John Vorster Square, he was painfully aware of the large number of apartheid activists who had "committed suicide" by being pushed out of the building. Kshudhi was close to the window and stared out.

"So you think you can fly?" asked one of the officers. Kshudhi waved out the window and said, "My mother is an attorney from Los Angeles and she is down below. It may be a bad political move to throw me out while she is watching. What do you think?" It was a narrow escape from the brink of death. They refused to renew his visa, forcing him and Rishi Kumar Swami to leave to Mozambique and re-enter the country for an automatic four-month visa extension.

Upon returning, the word of their illegal gatherings spread and the secret police were hot on their trail. They were missionaries in a foreign country instilling a message of love in a war zone. The only devotees they had were each other and a handful of good-hearted supporters. They owed a debt to the book publishers for the spiritual books they had shipped in. And the government was determined to hunt them down. It was too much for the young swami

so one day Rishi Kumar wrote Kshudhi a note: 'Dear Kshudhi, decided to split.' He had left the country. Kshudhi was alone. It was a moment of pure desolation. Who could blame him if he would walk away? He had tried everything he could, risked his life at every turn. In desperation he wrote to Srila Prabhupada who dropped all matters on hand and immediately replied to his fledgling spiritual son who was bravely holding fort.

"I am very much pleased by the responsibility that you have taken to spread Krishna consciousness in South Africa at such a young age. Just like our Narada Muni who was left alone, somehow or another you were also left alone by Krishna's arrangement. I am praying to Krishna that you will have the strength and enthusiasm to carry out His mission." (Kshudhi Prabhu's personal letter, Jan 1973)

Srila Prabhupada's blessings replaced Kshudhi's despair with an irrevocable determination to continue against all odds. He was spurred into action ordering more *Bhagavad-gitas*, a best seller on their book list, and sourcing help to get the incense sales in top gear. The police raided the La Mercy beach cottage in his absence. Kshudhi was forced to head south towards the Cape to escape them. In Grahamstown he met Greg Castel who would later become Gokulendra Das, the first initiated South African devotee.

Srila Prabhupada simultaneously sensed the dangerous position Kshudhi was in and was arranging for another devotee, Pusta Krishna Swami, to help. As Kshudhi left for Durban on the last Friday in May 1973, he was arrested. The police wanted to him deported immediately, but Kshudhi hid his visa trying to buy himself time. He had only until Monday morning to either produce the visa or be imprisoned. Time was of the essence. He called his successors Pusta Krishna Swami and Janakaraja Das, from England, impelling them to come to South Africa that very day and volunteered to help

with their ticket costs. He called his mother asking her to send him a ticket to America immediately. In the weekend he showed the two new arrivals his operation procedures and introduced them to all the persons who were helping him. He gave them the car and told them to go as far away from Durban as possible. In his stay, Kshudhi had shared the vision of Krishna consciousness with many South Africans. And with the sale of books and incense, he single-handedly cleared the debt owed to the publishers.

It was a narrow escape from the brink of death.

On Monday, June 1st, Kshudhi handed his expired visa to the police. For eight long hours they interrogated him, screamed at him in Afrikaans and threatened to force him to eat meat. Kshudhi boldly presented his American citizenship. America was practically the only country to support South Africa at that time. "If you harm me," Kshudhi threatened back, "I'll do everything in my power to change that." Finally, because he was already in possession of a paid ticket, they approved his flight to America on the next day. "You're banning me now," Kshudhi remarked with calm conviction, "But, in the future I will return and you will be long gone."

And true to his words, the Hare Krishna Temple in Durban, the fruit of Kshudhi's and other pioneers' efforts, sits like a serene golden lotus amidst bustling central Chatsworth. Millions of people have contacted it in some form or another and with invisible hands it reaches out to schools, universities, and communities all over Kwazulu-Natal and broader South Africa. In keeping with his promise, Kshudhi Das now returns yearly. Although older, he still has an innocent, child-like air. It bears testimony to the unwavering faith that has made him a victor. It's easy to see why Krishna chose him to fulfill such a vital mission. He is down to earth and a people's person with the soft heart of a true teacher. He has no cape, no statue of recognition, no badges upon his shoulders. You might miss him. But he remains a hero living among us.

Is God Dead?

Srila Prabhupada Speaks

Sun reporter: "What do you try to teach, sir?"

Prabhupada: "I am trying to teach what you have forgotten."

Sun reporter: "Which is what?"

Prabhupada: "That is God. Some of you are saying there is no God. Some of you are saying God is dead. And some of you are saying God is impersonal or void. These are all nonsense. I want to teach all the nonsense people that there is God. That is my mission. Any nonsense can come to me-I shall prove

that there is God. That is my Krishna consciousness movement. It is a challenge to the atheistic people: This is God. As we are sitting here face to face, you can see God face to face, if you are sincere and if you are serious. That is possible. Unfortunately, you are trying to forget God. Therefore you are embracing so many miseries of life. So I am simply preaching that you become Krishna conscious and be happy. Don't be swayed by these nonsense waves of *maya*, or illusion." London, September 11, 1969

*Srila Prabhupada-lilamarita Volume 4, Chapter 30,
London - A Dream Fulfilled*

Me, Me, Me...or We?

Family Matters

By Krishangi Radhe Dasi

Life can sometimes be harsh and we may feel that we are given a raw deal. Imagine a royal prince, bound by honour, banished from civilization to uphold his father's promise. Would you walk away from your rightful throne to uphold virtue? The *Ramayana* sets the tone for any familial relation — tears and laughter, love and distress, joy and suffering.

Selfless sacrifice means to not hold on to something that can sabotage a meaningful relationship.

The characters of the *Ramayana* come alive through the plot, the narration is superb and the themes still hold true in today's world. A major difference that sets the *Ramayana* apart from any fiction is that our central hero, Lord Rama, is not a human being but the Supreme Being. Rama is an incarnation of the Supreme Lord playing the role of a human being. The relationships that we see between Rama and His associates are human-divine relationships.

These relationships embody selfless sacrifice, which is increasingly relevant in society where lifestyles and relationships suffer because of the 'me' factor superseding the 'we'. In many cases it is due to selfishness that relationships are neglected and therefore deteriorate. Observe our conversations: our body language, our choice of words, or our attention to the dialogue — can we honestly say that we are offering our 100% to the other? In the *Ramayana*, we see how the characters are immensely content through the paradigm shift of 'I' to 'we'.

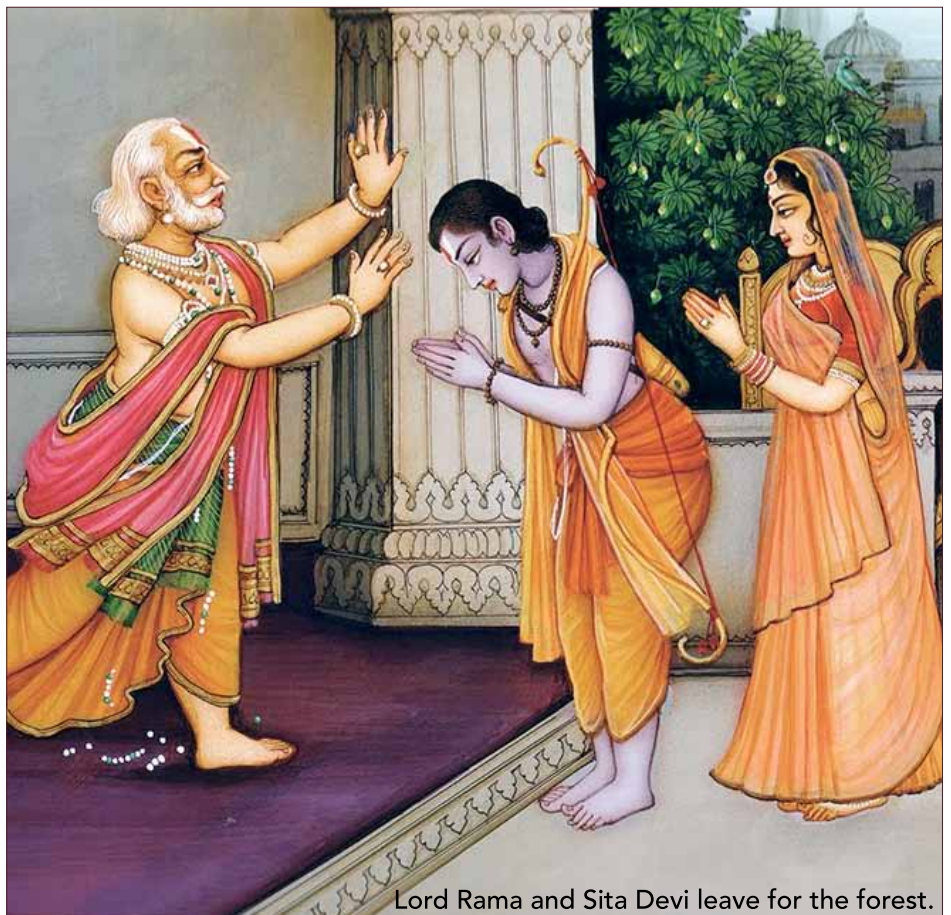
As a son, Rama upheld the word of his father, King Dasaratha, and accepted His exile to the forest without a word of protest, doubt or hesitation. This reveals the bonds of parenthood, and the true appreciation of father and son.

Rama's wife Sita, is famous for her selfless sacrifice of abandoning the safety and comfort of the palace and choosing to accompany her husband on exile. This is a sterling example of the matrimonial bond; embracing life's challenges in the spirit of love and togetherness. Lakshmana also chose to stand unflinchingly by the side of his elder brother Rama, a reflection

on the sweet nature of real brotherhood. Another sibling relationship to note is between Bharata and Rama. Bharata refused to accept the throne that rightfully belonged to Rama. Again focusing on 'we' instead of 'I'.

One might question the practicality of making these types of sacrifices in the modern world. Is it really possible? The answer is simple: all the pastimes of Lord Krishna and His associates invite us to appreciate the value systems and principles behind them. We already make many sacrifices daily but these sacrifices may not always be selfless. Selfless sacrifice means to not hold on to something that can sabotage a meaningful relationship, to openly love and see how your actions can build a better relationship. When we take the trouble to appreciate and gather wisdom from the timeless Vedic stories, we can appreciate the relevance of devotional principles.

Now, are you up for a challenge? For just one week, try to be more aware of your choices in your familial relationships. Make a conscious effort to eradicate the temptation to make 'I' decisions. And to help you along, think of the various personalities in the *Ramayana* and their choices. Make a record of conscious 'we' decisions and the result thereof. After a week, reflect on how your relationships have been enriched.



Lord Rama and Sita Devi leave for the forest.

Xenophobia

The Vedic View

By Venu Gopal Das

"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People learn to hate..." Nelson Mandela

The last bout of attacks on foreign-owned shops in Soweto has brought to question the issue of Xenophobia. The word 'xenophobia' refers to the "dislike or fear of foreigners." Are South Africans xenophobic?

A significant contributor to the South African economy is tourism. Statistics show that eight million people visited our country in 2014, most of whom praised the easy going locals. Secondly, there is no hostility shown towards foreign professionals who have legal permits and contribute positively towards society. So, where does our hatred for Amakwerekwere originate?

Most South Africans will happily acknowledge that we are angry, frustrated and stressed about mismanaged resources and service delivery in the nation. Between the blackouts, bankruptcy of state-owned institutions and the theatrics in parliament, the last thing we need is trouble from 'outsiders,' especially "illegal immigrants." To date nobody knows how many foreigners reside in South Africa illegally. A safe estimate would be approximately 8.5 million; a number larger than even the biggest minority race group in our country. These people do not pay taxes, yet use our facilities, some resort to crime and occupy many jobs. The Lindela Repatriation Centre in Johannesburg is one of many detention facilities responsible for deporting illegal immigrants. They reported "the government spends R8-million a month to send these people back home, most of whom return illegally within a week." Out of this dire situation hatred is born.

The Vedas provide numerous accounts detailing the shortcomings of our current age. Corrupt governments who have no interest in the people, result in individuals needing to flee their countries in search of basic necessities elsewhere. The *Srimad Bhagavatam* explains that as time progresses, basic resources will diminish and leaders will become corrupt. People will experience famine, a multitude of diseases, violence and live in constant anxiety." This is an uncanny resemblance to the situation across Africa and other third world nations. This Age of Quarrel will influence us so deeply that by the end it is predicted that "family ties will extend no further than the bond of marriage," and one's parents or children will be seen as merely an obstacle on the path of satisfaction [SB 12.2.12-16]. Forget



xenophobia, at this rate we should start worrying about *syngenesophobia*, the fear of family members. However the strain on our resources and corrupt leadership is not an excuse for citizens resorting to violence, individuals bear responsibility for their own emotions and actions. How should a person deal with hatred?

The basis of the Hare Krishna philosophy is that we are not the body, but spiritual in nature. However, due to constant contact with material influences we have created a consciousness in which we identify each other based on appearances, nationality, race and wealth. As long as we identify with the body we will continue to create stereotypes and discriminations. Mr. Mandela further goes on, "...if we can learn to hate, we can be taught to love..."

Vedic wisdom teaches us how to love. It reveals the nature of the inner-self at the deepest levels. This enables us to develop respect for others, and ultimately foster a love for God. The Vedas train us to become transcendental; by interpreting incidents from a spiritual perspective, we attempt to overcome the miseries of the mundane. Lord Krishna states that we should see with equal vision a sage, an elephant, a dog or dog-eater [BG 5.18]. From a spiritual perspective we understand that a variety of different body types exist but beyond the body is something more profound.

To whatever extent xenophobia exists in our country, we should bear in mind that instead of aggravating such hatred we should aspire to create a consciousness which focuses on similarities, the most fundamental being identifying ourselves as spiritual entities. Through the teachings of the Vedas, ISKCON is trying to create such a platform—a home in which the whole world can live.

HAPPY

Soul Stories

By Nikunja Vilasini Dasi

Pharrell Williams was happy when he won three Grammy awards for his "Happy" song. The insightful words "happiness is the truth," suggest that everything we do is aimed to capture and drink the elixir of happiness. After all, we are by nature pleasure-seekers. But often we misidentify happiness to be the absence of pain, the relief of suffering, or the fleeting enjoyment of worldly things. If this were true happiness, then why is it that amidst the glitz and glamour of super stardom or fabulous riches often lie depression, despair, and discontentment. We turn to relationships which tend to fulfil us more than material acquisitions do, but often these too end up in disappointment or sorrow. We may then question; are we looking for happiness in the wrong place?

Vedic stories of long ago depict the commonly-used phrase "happiness comes from within"—a happiness that is waiting to be released and experienced. One such story, of Sudama, illustrates how we can access this eternal joy. Sudama was an impoverished *brahman* yet was peaceful and happy. He maintained himself and his wife with whatever came of its own accord. His wife, however, was distressed from seeing Sudama in that condition. She pleaded with her husband, "Isn't it true that Lord Krishna, the husband of the goddess of fortune, is your personal friend. I've heard that He is compassionate to *brahman*s and willing to grant them shelter. Please approach Him.

Lord Krishna is now the king of the Bhojas, Vrishnis, and Andhakas and is living in great opulence with His 16 108 queens in 16 108 palaces. Surely, He will be merciful to you and give you abundant wealth." Sudama could not think of begging from the Lord except for pure devotion to Him. But after his wife's persistent requests, he thought that a wonderful opportunity to see his friend awaited him. He requested his wife to give him something that he could take to Krishna as a gift. His wife begged four handfuls of flat rice from the neighbours and tied it up in a torn piece of cloth. Taking this gift with him, Sudama left for Dwaraka, immersed in thoughts of Krishna.

When the saintly *brahman* reached Dwaraka and entered the precincts of Krishna's palaces, he trembled in bliss. Krishna spotted Sudama from His palace and immediately ran to meet him. He welcomed Sudama with His embrace and smothered him with tears of joy. Krishna, the Lord of the Universe, seated Sudama on his own bed, washed his feet, and then sprinkled that water on His own head. He then offered him fragrant sandalwood,

...we are by nature
pleasure-seekers.



Krishna bathes Sudama's feet.

aguru and *kumkuma* pastes, and worshiped him with incense and lamps. Queen Rukmini fanned the *brahman* whose tattered clothing covered his thin frail body. The palace servants were astonished to see Krishna, the king of Dwaraka, honour this poor shabbily-dressed *brahman* with such grandeur.

Taking each other's hands, Krishna and Sudama reminisced and talked about their childhood school days. Their service to their guru had strengthened the bond between them. Krishna remembered how their guru had once blessed them when they had risked their lives to fetch firewood during a torrential rainstorm. Relishing this memory, Sudama said, "O almighty Lord, you are the source of all auspicious goals of life. Residing with me in the home of our spiritual master was simply one of your pastimes in which you played the role of a human being."

Krishna smiled. Knowing Sudama's heart, He asked, "My dear friend, what gift have you brought for me from home? I relish even the smallest gift offered to me by my pure devotee." Sudama bowed his head. He felt embarrassed to offer his meagre gift to the Lord. The Lord snatched the bundle of flat rice from the *brahman*'s garment and exclaimed, "What is this? Have you brought this for me? Indeed, these few grains of rice will satisfy not only Me but also the entire universe." Saying these words, the Lord ate one palmful, and when He was about to eat the second, Queen Rukmini stopped Him. She knew that



Krishna eating one palmful of Sudama's offering was sufficient for his great opulence in this life and the next.

After spending the night at the Lord's palace, Sudama, intoxicated in bliss, set off for home while Krishna accompanied him a little way down the road. Sudama thought, "Lord Krishna is known to be devoted to His devotees, and now I have personally seen His devotion. He has embraced this poor beggar even though it is known that He only embraces His queen and His brother Balaram. He did not give me any riches thinking that I will forget Him in the perverted happiness of attaining wealth, which will only lead to pride. Instead He has given me the treasure of His association, making me supremely wealthy and happy."

Thinking of the Lord's benevolence, Sudama finally reached home, but instead of his

humble home he saw glittering celestial palaces with exquisite courtyards and gardens. Men- and maid-servants, as effulgent as demigods, welcomed him with song and music. Sudama was even more awed to see his wife whom he could barely recognise because of her youth and beauty. She resembled a demigoddess, adorned with jewels and dazzling garments. When he went forward to meet her, his body also became young and handsome, bedecked with fine clothing and jewellery. He understood that

just like a merciful rain cloud, Krishna had poured upon him the most abundant riches.

Still, Sudama remained equipoised. His happiness came from serving the Lord and pleasing Him. Sudama had experienced how the unconquerable Supreme Lord becomes conquered by His own servants. His devotees' love infuses Him with happiness beyond measure. And when the devotee sees His pleasure grow, they also become jubilant. These transcendental waves of ecstasy in each others' reciprocation of love increase unlimitedly. Sudama understood that the successes of material life and mundane relationships cannot satisfy the soul. The soul, which is an infinitesimal part of God, can never be happy separated from Him. Although Sudama did not seek his personal happiness, the more he revived His relationship with the Lord, the more he experienced the fruits of bounteous happiness.

In the Durban Festival of Chariots, we also see Lord Krishna's divine joy in the form of Lord Jagannath. In this unusual deity form, the Lord's face appears as if bursting with happiness. His smile reaches the corners of His wide eyes. He is certainly amazed by something. Another story tells of how the Lord became enraptured by His devotees' love. This time, the *gopis*, the cowherd maidens of Vrindavan, were the reason for His bliss. The *gopis* were so consumed by love for Krishna that their existence centred on making Him happy. His happiness simply increased theirs. Remembrance of him, serving Him, glorifying Him, and chanting His names, always kept them connected to Him.

The soul's connection to God gives everlasting sublime joy. And only in this state of happiness can the words of Pharell Williams hold true, "My level's too high, bring me down, can't nothing bring me down."

Rama Naumi

SSRRT Connect

By Krishangi Radhe Dasi

What comes to mind when you think of Hare Krishna? Song, dance, good food, vibrant colours, traditional dress? Add all these components and it is sure to equal a Hare Krishna festival. Festivals are something to look forward to and the Sri Sri Radha Radhanatha (SSRRT) Temple does not hold back on offering spectacular and flavourful events. It is not an exaggeration to say there is a festival at least once a week at the temple; simply take a look through the Vedic calendar.

On Saturday, 28 March, we observe Rama Naumi (the appearance of Lord Ramachandra). The all-day programme will allow you to increase your devotion by bathing the Deities of Sita-Rama Laksmana and Hanuman, join in the *bhajans* and hear stories from

the *Ramayana*. We are proud to host Shubha Vilas Das, author of the Indian best-seller, *Rise of the Sun Prince*, Part One of his seven book series, *Ramayana: Game of Life*. Shubha Vilas displays both flare and wisdom in presenting this classic and connecting the story to today's world. He will be the main speaker and is sure to take you deep into the roots of the timeless *Ramayana*. He brings the newly released *Shattered Dreams*, part two of *Game of Life*. This book is a hit in India with a steady climb in the best-sellers list. You can get your copy signed at the Rama Naumi festival.

Shubha Vilas is also well-versed in the *Mahabharata* and will be doing presentations at various institutions across Durban from March 19th - each promising to be a festival on its own. Keep an eye on our website and social media for programme schedules.

I would love to hear from you:
communications@iskcondurban.net

EVENT GUIDE



Rama Naumi: Fast until sunset
Appearance of Lord Rama
28 March | Saturday



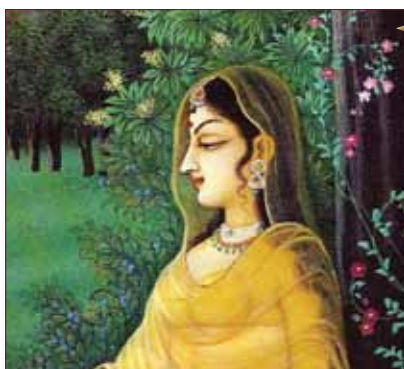
27th Durban Festival of
Chariots
3-6 April 2015



Sri Hanuman Jayanti
Sri Krishna Vasanta Rasa
4 April | Saturday



Sri Gadadhara
Pandit's Appearance
18 April | Saturday



Srimati Sita Devi's Appearance
Srimati Jahnava Devi's
Appearance
27 April | Monday



Nrsimha Caturdasi:
Appearance of Lord
Nrsimhadeva
2 May | Saturday
Fast until dusk

EKADASI

Fast from all grains, beans and legumes.

This fast awards spiritual benefits and detoxes the body and mind.

16 March | Monday
Break fast 06:47 - 10:01
17 March | Tuesday

31 March | Tuesday
Break fast 06:06 - 06:40
1 April | Wednesday

15 April | Wednesday
Break fast 06:15 - 06:40
16 April | Thursday

29 April | Wednesday
Break fast 06:23 - 10:03
30 April | Thursday

14 May | Thursday
Break fast 06:33 - 10:05
15 May 2015 | Friday



Sri Jayananda
Prabhu's Disappearance
1 May | Friday



Sri Madhavendra Puri's Appearance
Sri Srinivasa Acarya's Appearance
3 May | Sunday

Mantra Gigs

Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple | Every Friday night at 7pm
Victoria Street Market | Saturday mornings at 10am



+27 31 403 3328 | www.iskcondurban.net | temple@iskcondurban.net | WhatsApp +27 81 759 0191 | DurbanKrishna



Durban

Festival of Chariots



Event Focus



3-6 April



Old Durban Drive In

What's On...

Durban Festival of Chariots

By Govinda Mohini Dasi

Durban is the "place to be" over Easter. But with so much to choose from, how to decide? What about the Durban Festival of Chariots (DFOC)? It has it all: music, dance, food, entertainment, adventure park for children, shopping, soul awareness, healthy lifestyle expo — and most of it is FREE. Many Durbanites and tourists over Easter expect to see the three colourful Chariots glide down the beach front accompanied by beating drums, ringing cymbals, girls in elegant saris, and choreographed dance. Yes, it is festival time again. Lord Jagannath the Lord of the Universe, accompanied by Balaram and Subhadra Devi mount their chariots and widely smile at everyone.

The chariot procession, in my opinion, is one of the most memorable moments of the festival. You too can experience the power of prayer by joining the chanting and dancing in front of any of the three chariots. Hundreds of individuals take part in pulling their Lordships along the freshly swept path. The idea is that we are pulling Krishna into our hearts.

I say, skip your exercise session but leave on your running shoes, because this is definitely a workout you won't want to miss.

Every king needs his castle, and the devotees make this a reality by creating that for Lord Jagannath with the on-site Jagannath Mandir. It is the sweetest feeling to be able to offer the Lord something as a token of your appreciation and love for Him.

You can even offer the Lord your very own hand-made garland. Check out the Ropes of Love article on page 3 and follow the simple instructions. You can also spend some time enjoying the constant melodious chants and *aratis* in the Mandir.

I once heard that shopping is cheaper than a psychologist, and do we have retail therapy. The gift shop is a must. Read our interview with Haripriya, the buyer for the shop on page 6 How about retail for your soul — our book store will be

stocked with books for beginners, intermediate and advanced spiritual seekers, as well as for children. Be on the lookout for "Shattered Dreams" by Shubha Vilas, author readings and book signings and book specials. "The more you read, the more you know. The more you learn the more places you will go" (Dr. Seuss). If you enjoy light reading then *Back to*



Chariot Parade Routes

Friday, 3 April, 10.30am

Starting opposite Tropicana Hotel on OR Tambo Parade (Upper Marine Parade) at the car park, proceeding north towards Blue Waters Hotel. At Blue Waters Hotel, turning left going down Sandile Thusi Road and then turning left into Sylvester Ntuli Road and finally entering the festival site. This route is 2.8km.



Monday, 6 April, 5pm

Starting at the festival site, turning right into Sylvester Ntuli Road, turning left at the robots into Somtseu Road, then left into Snell Parade, heading towards Blue Waters Hotel, then turning left going down Sandile Thusi Road and then left into Sylvester Ntuli Road and finally entering the festival site. This route is 1.5km.

DFOC Directory

Festival Management

Anuradha Devi Dasi (BCS)	082 728 5154
Balaram Das (KDS)	082 881 4521
Prabhanu Das	082 924 3009
Swarup Damodar Das	083 778 3328
Umesh Prakash	082 897 1382
Upendra Das	082 899 2923

Main Events

Bhakti Cloud Lounge (Youth)

Rukmini Devi Dasi 084 579 1080

Cultural Entertainment

Anuradha Devi dasi (BCS) 082 728 5154

Jagannath Mandir

Priya Darshini Devi Dasi 082 072 0797

Q&A (Discussions)

Balaram Das 082 877 0753

Retail

Haripriya Devi Dasi 084 640 0031

Ramvijay Das 084 550 4101

Vedic Lifestyle Expo

Sunil Mohan Das 083 775 0171

Godhead magazine is for you.

Bhakti Cloud Lounge is for the youth. Come in for "Dance Master" with Bhaktimarg Swami; drum beats; Vraj & Friends (rock group); hip hop; drama, and so much more. Bhakti Yoga Society will host the finals of the Poetry Competition which begins weeks before on five campuses across Durban. Five finalists will be selected from each campus with the final round at the Bhakti Cloud Lounge.

"The quality of a play is the quality of its ideas" (George Bernard Shaw). Watch the splendid ideas of His Holiness Bhaktimarg Swami come to life as he stages exhilarating performances. You can read about his creative process and what he is producing on page 5. For the children's theatre there are two puppet shows by Blue Boy Productions. Ntswaki's Adventure, the charming story of a herd boy who loves nature, was staged at the Catalina Theatre last year. The show teaches responsibility for our planet. The other show is about Krishna, the loving Blue Boy of Vrindavan, with His playful attitude and joyous dealings with His devotees. The puppet theatre will be at the Children's Adventure Park.

We introduce the Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Shop. You are invited to take a walk or guided tour into Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple; after all it is our



temple, your temple and Srila Prabhupada's family. Check out the new merchandise in commemoration of the Temple's 30th anniversary. We also offer you the chance to give back to the Deities through facilities like Take care of Krishna, Deity *maha-prasad*, and temple restoration initiatives. Look out for exclusive gifts when signing up for any of the programmes.

Last but certainly not least, the Vedic Lifestyle Expo offers yoga, sitar recitations, Ayurvedic

medicine and cooking demos, Vaastu (Vedic science of placement), and ragas (Indian classical music) for healing — tools to help you live a more holistic lifestyle.

So come dine out, catch a show, do some yoga, dance a little, sing a lot and listen to your soul.

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Ropes of Love

For the Kids

By Yamuna Devi Dasi

If I were a flower where would I be?
High up on a mountain or way up on a tree?

If I were a flower I would like to be
On the neck of Lord Krishna,
please pick me



You will need:
60cm length of string
a long needle
about 3 bunches of flowers. (Ideally fragrant flowers)

Radhika, my nine-year-old daughter wrote this poem and said she would love to be this special kind of flower. Lord Krishna declared that He accepts a leaf, water or a flower, if offered with love [BG.9.26]. It is not how much of what we give but the devotion in which we offer it, which is the essential quality for pleasing God.

This strung "rope of love" embraces the Lord and represents the devotee's inner devotion and service. My daughter realised she can't be that special flower just yet, and so she went into the garden and picked some flowers to make her garland. You can also offer your "rope of love" to Lord Jagannath at the Festival of Chariots. NB. Parental assistance essential.

How

Work on a clean surface. Thread the string through the needle. Lay out the flowers in the order or pattern you like. You can also use leaves. Remember to keep larger flowers towards the centre. Garlands often have a centre "spot" so you can start there. For your spot choose your largest or most attractive flower and thread through the stem as close to the cylix as possible. Then thread flowers through their centres from the bottom up and place them tightly against each other. When you are finished thread the needle on the other side and repeat the process. Make sure your knot is tied well at the end. Congratulations, your garland is done and ready to be offered to Krishna.

Jamming for Jagannath

Youth Column

By Purush Soodon

What are the most important days in the year for you? Mine are the four days over the Easter weekend when the Durban Festival of Chariots take place every year. I am twenty-one years old and have been to twenty-one festivals. This magnificent festival has captured my heart because of the way that people come together to celebrate Lord Jagannath's parade. From when I was little, I noticed that people came from different cultures and race groups. Rich or poor, anyone and everyone came together to share one heart, to be unified in the will to praise the Lord.

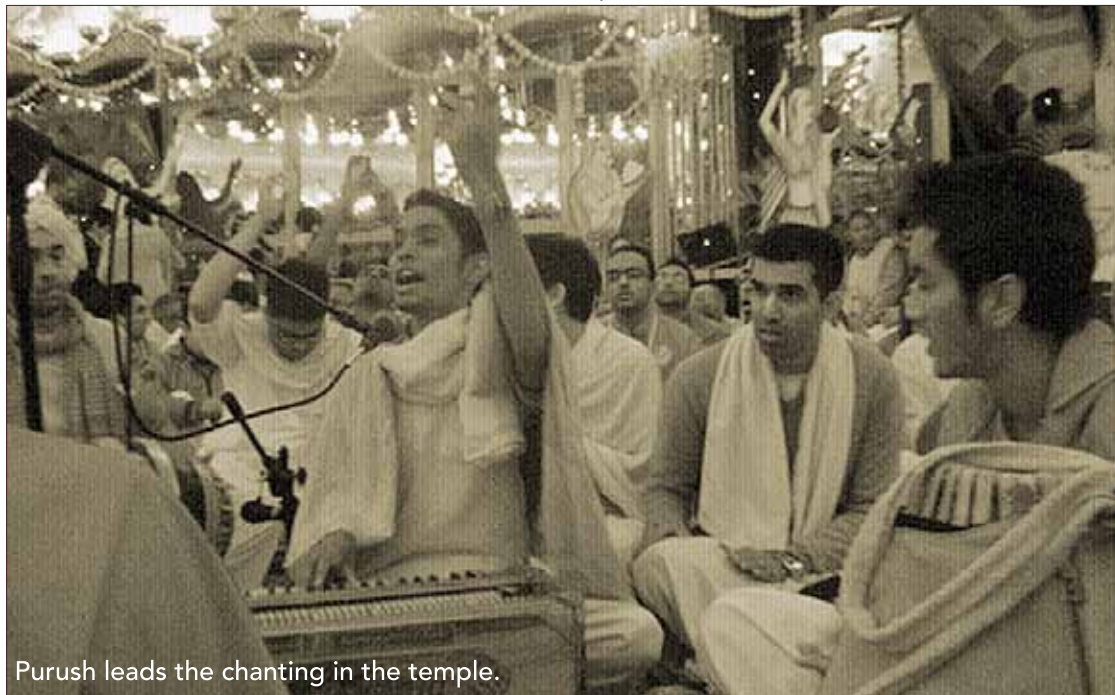
I am privileged to have been born in the temple and I lived there until I was seventeen years old. As a young school student, I remember waking up each

This festival is an ocean filling our hearts with love and grace...

we pull the Lord into our hearts too. This is why the chariot festival is so important to me.

Just as I have chanted the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* during the chariot parade in my childhood, over the years I have increasingly developed a taste for chanting. I have observed and experienced that when one chants the *maha-mantra* with real intent of love for God, and sings and dances with grace, its power allows us to connect with ourselves, each other, and the world around us on a much deeper level. The potency of just dancing and singing can develop friendships like no other meditation therapy can. This meditation has enabled me to get a glimpse of God's beauty. Lord

Jagannath's form catches one's attention instantly, with His arms coming out straight at you, His body rounded without any visible legs, and His perfectly round white eyes staring intently at you.



Purush leads the chanting in the temple.

I work as a Trainee Accountant and have invited many of my friends and colleagues to the festival. A few years ago a work colleague, who is from a Zulu background, attended. His highlight was watching a drama performed by devotee actors from Soweto. He told me: "This festival is an ocean filling our hearts with love and grace, no matter what our backgrounds." His words made me appreciate how fortunate we are to have an event of this

morning, grabbing my drum and excitedly waiting to greet the Lord in the temple. But when the smell of wood burning and that early morning "potjiekos" aroma filled my nostrils, I knew the Festival of Chariots was here. There was a buzz of excitement and an influx of people from all over the world. The whole community was uplifted by all the activity.

As a child, my highlight was to catch the sweets thrown from the chariot. This developed my understanding that the Lord comes to share His mercy in many ways. The large decorated wheels of the chariots and people holding on to the thick ropes pulling the chariots down the beach front always caught my attention. It is understood that by pulling the chariot

magnitude and diversity.

A famous quote by Doris Day says, "I like joy; I want to be joyous; I want to have fun, I want to smile, and I want to make people laugh. And that's all I want. I like it. I like being happy. I want to make others happy." This quote aptly describes how I feel during the festival and what inspires me to serve everyone who attends. I invite you to come and participate in the festivities. You will see me at the open air arena jamming mantra. Let the spiritual atmosphere and God's holy names captivate your heart and fill it with joy — take it from me, this will be my twenty-second time.

The World's A Stage

From an interview by Rasa-sthali Dasi

Bhaktimarga Swami is the walking monk...he has walked across Canada six times. He is also a director of Vedic dramas, playwright, musician and master of movement. This is his sixteenth visit to South Africa and on each visit he has staged two major productions at the Durban Festival of Chariots. And this year is no exception.

Although Maharaja has no formal training, he has staged dramas on all continents and in several languages. His love for dramas began long before he became a monk. He recalls being awestruck by Charles Laughton's rendition of "The Hunchback," Gregory Peck's role as Atticus in "To Kill A Mockingbird," and Bette Davis's version of "Elizabeth the 1st." And in high school he really enjoyed "The Merchant of Venice" at Canada's Stratford Festival. The opportunity to channel his creative energies came in 1976 when the Canadian community of devotees moved into a large building and had ample space for cultural events.

I have assisted Bhaktimarga Swami these past fifteen years and am struck by his weaving of dramatics, music, soundtrack, dance and dialogue. He explains that his concepts arise from reading the books of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. He said, "I wouldn't call it reading 'between the lines' but I do get a surge of inspiration when for example I read that the parents of Krishna were imprisoned for years. I can't help imagine what that must be like, for a couple to live in such conditions. I want to be self-stimulated and at the same time really stir my audience to the point of elevating the consciousness to some degree."

He continues, "Music is rather a mystical thing. I have a considerable number of friends in the music industry. When I hear a great piece that comes my way, it conjures up images, and since my mind has been entrenched in Vedic themes for years, I put the two together. That is where the magic begins. I listen to a moving piece and I begin to picture movement on a mental stage. With choreography it's always good to try to draft into my crew those who have strengths in the area of dance, athletics, or martial arts. The audience craves for some physical demonstrations. I also contribute to dance segments."

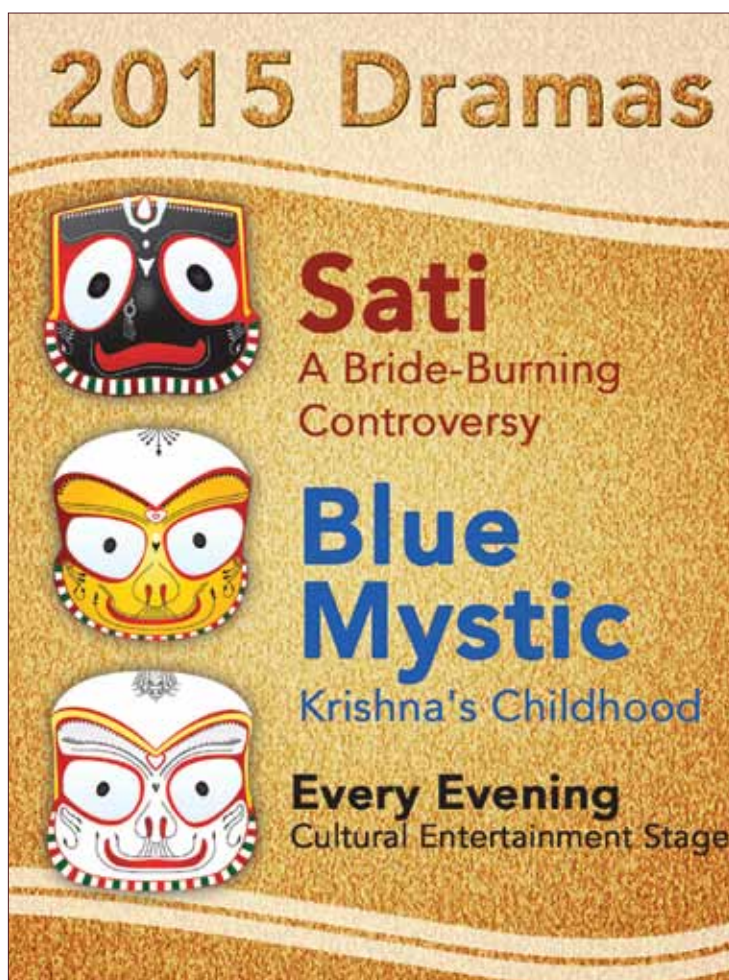
Maharaja is famous for working with young people, and he elaborates, "When engaging youth, all their abilities can apply. Even if the production is merely thirty minutes, there is an incredible effort that goes into it. Pooling these resources from the young is a superlative engagement. I've seen miracles when a shy kid breaks out of adolescent self-consciousness

because of the incredible teamwork. They learn the pastimes of the Creator. They have a 'blast' and learn discipline all in one."

This year Maharaja will be staging "Sati" and "Blue Mystic." He says, "Sati is a controversial topic which entails bride-burning. This story centres around Shiva and Sati. I feel it does justice to a riveting tale of loyalty and commitment. It is a strong endorsement to a wholesome divine couple."

And about Blue Mystic: "Blue Mystic is an old piece of mine that I recently pulled out and gave more body. It is a new take on Krishna's earlier life up until Him killing Kamsa. In the scripting I really felt the need to insert an advisor, who would embody the ill counsel that the tyrant Kamsa had received. I also hope to add some richness to Kamsa's character, and at the same time to have him sometimes appear human despite his madness. 'Blue Mystic' has a wonder that has excited the North American and Indian audiences. Expect some surprises."

Maharaja concludes, "With dramas it is easy to accept the raw truth about life in a palatable way. Who doesn't want to be entertained? And if you can enlighten simultaneously, it is a real plus. Shakespeare referred to the world as being a stage. When is there not a drama in someone's life? Turn life's events on to a devotional track and you should expect enhanced hope and joy."



"If I were a rich girl..."

but you don't have to be, according to Haripriya, our buyer for the Durban Festival of Chariots Gift Shop. Rasa-sthali interviewed Haripriya soon after her return from a buying spree in India.

1. What can we expect new this year?

Silk saris from Chennai, an American Diamond jewelry range. The latest fashion *kurti* tops - straight-cut, calf-length, georgette *kurtis* (Indian-style shirts) sure to give a taller silhouette. There will be stretch *sari* blouses with net sleeves and stylish *gopi* digital-print handbags suitable for the workplace.

2. How do you decide what to select?

The decision is based on price, quality, style, variety and customer requests. This guarantees that all shoppers will be satisfied, from budget to high end.

3. Will you have different things on sale compared to the India fairs?

Yes. We specialise in *gopi* outfits, a collection of *churidar* to *patiyala* style pants, men's *kurtas*, designed especially to South African taste. There is also devotional art, items for *puja*, and fine fragrant incense.



Devotees dressed in *gopi* outfits.

4. Can we expect value for money?

Absolutely. A tremendous amount of research sourcing new suppliers and negotiating better rates for items and freighting has ensured better value.

6. Gopi outfits have become popular not only in the Hare Krishna community but the greater community. What styles are in this year?

This year's range include simple cotton *gopi* outfits, starting from just R150. Skirt designs include full circle, panels, and formal mermaid-style. Fabrics range from cotton, to net and silk. Look out for the *bandhani* and traditional Rajasthani prints too. Also *chikan* (a type of cut-work fabric) skirts and hand embroidered georgette *dupattas* (scarves) can be individually matched.

7. What do you have for men and children?

For men: We have digital print T-shirts, silk *kurtas* (in a wide range of colours) and pure woolen shawls. For children: *Saris* for little girls, toys from the famous Little Krishna DVD series, bamboo flutes and character dolls. Fancy Indian crowns for your little prince or princess. Dreamers have glow-in-the-dark peacock feathers for their bedroom walls and T-shirts from just R40.

9. Is there any buy that you are particularly proud of?

The new range of stainless steel crockery. This high quality, durable crockery will make any supper a fine dining experience. And the new Cooking with Kurma DVD series. Kurma is a renowned Australian vegetarian cooking guru.

10. As far as devotional items, what is new?

We have a range of quality handmade incense from Bangalore, devotional art, handmade clay *mridanga* drums from Vrindavan, Tulasi neck beads encapsulated in silver and digital-print beadbags.

11. What is this year's "must have"?

For women: *Gopi* skirts, *gopi* skirts and *gopi* skirts. We have over forty styles to choose from and these versatile skirts can be dressed up or down, worn traditionally or with a modern twist.

For men: Luxury silk *kurtas* which are cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

12. Is there anything more?

With over four hundred items there is something for everyone, from the new-born baby to the great grandma. This year the store will be more colourful than ever but most importantly, cheaper than ever.