



January 2014

# Life Illustrated

Life | Religion | Reality

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## We appeal to you oh lord to be our G.P.S.

As we enter into this New Year let our thoughts rekindle the fire of devotion and our actions fuel that devotion and words convey that divine feeling that is the product of a divine state of mind.

Hey Bhagwan be our **G**uide, our **P**rotector and our **S**ustainer and forgive us for our past impieties.

- Pandit Roopnauth Sharma

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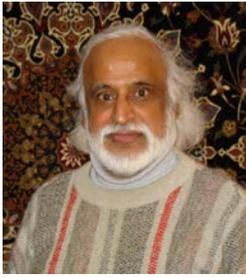
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# Remembering a Forgiving Spirit



DR. SEHDEV KUMAR

**“It Always Seems Impossible Until It is Done”**

- Nelson Mandela

In 1964, after 27 years of incarceration on a remote and isolated island, when Nelson Mandela was finally freed from the prison by the apartheid government of South Africa, his jailor told him, “You are free now.” He is said to have retorted, “I was always free.”

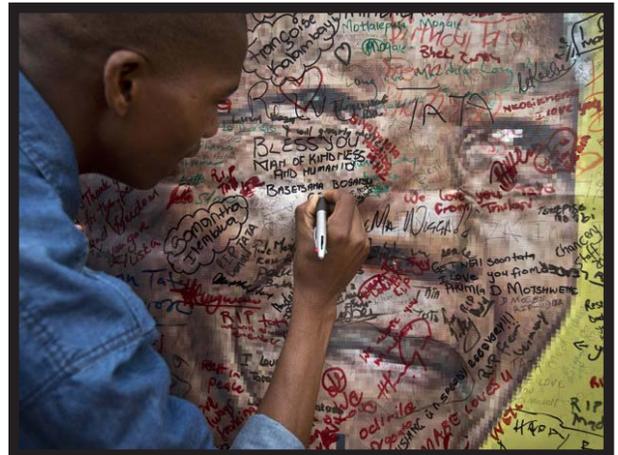
Breaking stones under scorching sun and locked up behind iron bars can make anyone bitter and vengeful. But when a man can still live with a sense of freedom and forgiveness, as Mandela did for almost three decades under the most harrowing conditions, one cannot but be awed by his character. His jailor on the island was one of the persons invited to his presidential inauguration in 1994.

During his long years in jail, on one Christmas eve, as he and other inmates presented the 2500-year old Greek play, *Antigone*, Mandela himself played the role of the tyrant king Creon, who is faced with ‘moral idealism’ on one hand and ‘political realism’ on the other. He agonizes about his choices as he utters:

*“Of course you cannot know a man completely, his character, his principles, sense of judgment not till he’s shown his colour, ruling the people, making laws. Experience, there’s the test.”*

It is, as though, in his heart, Mandela was already struggling to find what is the right thing to do when one is faced with profound moral dilemmas as a ruler.

Of the three great champions of freedom of the last hundred years – Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela – two died at the hands of assassins. Mandela came close but instead, most steadfastly he chose to celebrate life with daunting forgiveness, as he recited lines to his fellow-prisoners from the poem *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley (1849–1903):



A well-wisher writes a message on a poster of Nelson Mandela on which he and others have written their messages of condolence and support

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.*

Yet, as he said again and again, “There is no easy walk to freedom.” Even as he experienced the dehumanizing vagaries of the apartheid in white-ruled South Africa, during his long years in jail, he had understood that for his country to survive and flourish, it must be a ‘Rainbow Nation’ in which there had to be equal space for the three million whites, however tyrannical their history of oppression of the blacks.

Mandela transformed what could have been, the frenzy of vengeance, a blood bath of the white minority when he introduced history's first ever Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Justice had to be sweetened with forgiveness. "Without memory, there is no healing," Archbishop Tutu, the Chairman of the Commission asserted. "We remember so we can forgive. Without forgiveness there is no future."

Thus for the first time in the long and convoluted human history, under Mandela's judicious leadership, South Africa said 'No' to appraisals and counter-appraisals, that have been typical of all human conflicts, from the Treaty of Versailles after World War I to Bangladesh to Rwanda. Almost single-handedly, Mandela had ushered in the new Age of Forgiveness between nations and peoples.

After his release from prison in 1990, Mandela was welcomed everywhere - Canada, USA, Britain - as a great freedom fighter. In 1998, when Mandela visited Canada he was awarded an honorary Order of Canada and in 2001 he received an honorary doctorate from Ryerson University in Toronto. In 1990 when Mandela visited India, he was honoured with the country's highest civilian award - "Bharat Ratna,". He also travelled to Gandhi's ashram at Sabarmati; coming to India, he said, was "a homecoming, a pilgrimage to the shrines of great leaders and a great people who we shall always admire."

Indeed, it was a hundred years earlier, in 1890s, that Gandhi had started his struggle for freedom in South Africa, and formulated his principals of *Satyagraha*. Men like Mandela - like Gandhi and King before him - cannot be, and must not be, judged by how much they achieved, but by what they inspired us to dream.

*Dr. Sebdev Kumar, Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo, now lectures at the University of Toronto on Bioethics and Science/Religion Dialogue. He is author of many books including, 'Vision of Kabir', and 'Lotus in the Stone' and 'Jain Temples of Rajasthan'.*



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# Being Spiritual from Moment to Moment

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**MAITRI BHATT**

With the advent of globalisation, today our lives have become very hectic and mechanical. The terms like Spirituality, Religiousness, Meditation, and Growth of one's inner self and attaining Nirvana have become next to impossible to achieve.

In the current scenario, every human being is in a frenzy to accomplish all his responsibilities and as efficiently as one can but in this process one is losing connection with one's inner being: the self consciousness. Thus we have to rush to the external sources to get back and hold on to our mind, body and soul.

For me, the term 'Spirituality' means Awareness in every little chore one does throughout the day. We often perform monotonous tasks keeping our mind running in various secondary thoughts, which results in inefficiency and dissatisfaction at the end of the day. When we are totally involved and are conscious of every little thought and action that we do all day, then and there Spirituality emerges. We are in a rendezvous with our inner self- which is a total bliss. The highest and purest form of Happiness is harmony and oneness with one's own self-- the inner consciousness.

Hence Spirituality is not an alien subject which needs to be explained by an external source but is purely the most beautiful aspect of contact with one's inner being. When we pour our heart, mind and body in any ordinary task like cooking, feeding our children, working or exercising, we are meditating. Meditation is the best and the ultimate medium of getting a glimpse of our existence in the most sublime manner.

Our entire life is sum of all precious moments that we live each day, so we should thrive to derive happiness in every little deed we do rather than pining for a huge cause which is a very vague possibility as we cannot predict what future holds for us but can shape our present for sure. We spend our major life span in fulfilling our duties and nourishing our families, therefore when we

think of reserving some time for ourselves, after finishing all the duties we end up leaving no time and energy for our spiritual growth.

Thus it would be more beneficial to practise spirituality in our everyday life without waiting for retirement. As there is always something or the other to take care of, leaving no surety or guarantee for a latertime. When one has learnt the art of awareness in the process of current life span one will be definitely at one's best at destination.

I strongly believe that the journey should be equally beautiful, enjoyable and worthy as much as the destination or the goal. It is the quality and the inputs that we have imbibed in the process of everyday life that determine the achievement of our success.

---

*Maitri Bhatt, originally from Gujarat, is a young mother and lives in Mississauga, ON.*

# RAM MANDIR YOUTH



## TOMORROW'S CHANGE



The Ram Mandir Youth group has grown since the last time you saw us. We have grown closer and more efficient as a team producing more spectacular and world-changing ideas to promote our culture and heritage throughout the community.

The product of our many fundraising events, the Penny Drive and most recent bake sale, has resulted in us collecting \$660.00 for the "Doobay Renal Centre" a dialysis clinic in Guyana.

As the Youths of Mississauga Ram Mandir we get together once monthly to discuss and collaborate our ideas for upcoming events. If you are interested in getting involved join us on our Facebook group for updates on current events, plans for future goals and upcoming meetings

We are looking forward for another exciting and successful year as a group - one that will not only bring us closer as a successful team but as closer friends.

-Ram Mandir Youth

# *Brave New World in Canada: Why the Charter of Values?*



AMRITA KUMAR-RATTA

Over the last four decades, since the proclamation of the Multiculturalism Act in 1971 by Prime Minister Trudeau, Canada's ethnic mix and multicultural profile have been changing far more dramatically than ever before. Protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, diverse cultures have been coalescing dramatically, making Canada a 'Brave New World', an incredible cultural mosaic.

Thus the recent tabling of Bill 60 – popularly known as Quebec Charter of Values – has struck many as blatantly 'un-Canadian'; it has aroused concern and protest across the country about the hidden agenda behind the Bill, and how it would impact on the freedom and culture of people of many minority groups.

Quebec itself is a unique minority nation in North America, and has a special status in Canada. But for the last four decades, Quebec too, like the rest of Canada, has been a destination for immigrants of many different faiths and ethnicities; for a long while, however, Quebec was principally a province of Francophone Catholics. The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s greatly reduced the influence of the Catholic Church in education, healthcare and politics, and since then, Quebec has prided itself on being a secular nation, though with a Catholic heritage.

In 2007, a small town of Herouville in Quebec passed a controversial 'code of conduct' for immigrants, which included a rule against stoning women, or burning them alive, and against excision (female genital cutting). It also objected to carrying weapons to school (e.g., the Sikh kirpan), and refused any accommodation for prayer in schools.

Its obvious 'Islamophobia' sparked a fiery debate about the rights and freedoms of minorities, leading to the creation of a Commission for Reasonable

Accommodation in 2007/08.

This Commission – known as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission for Reasonable Accommodation – noted that while integrating newcomers is a challenge for all Western societies, Quebec has an unusual dynamic, where the Francophone majority is at the same time an insecure minority in Canada. Confronted by the cultures of immigrants, Quebecers have time and again feared the erosion of the French-Canadian culture. That might explain why the issue of reasonable accommodation was more hotly debated in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada.



## **Charter of Values**

In light of the above, in September 2013 officially came Bill 60, which set out to redefine public space in strict secular terms, prohibiting public sector employees from wearing or displaying 'conspicuous' religious symbols such as a kippah, turban, hijab/niqab and larger religious pendants.

Though there are provisions in Bill 60 for hospitals and universities to opt-out, turban-bearing Sikh

men, kippah-bearing Jewish men, hijab/niqab bearing Muslim women, and large Cross-bearing Christian men and women are to be prohibited from donning these symbols as public-employees, as teachers, nurses, doctors, day-care workers, clerks, and others.

As expected, this bill has triggered a fierce public debate all over Canada and has propelled hot-button questions: What is the meaning of secularism, and who is to define it? To what extent can, or should, a sovereign secular state intervene in the lives of the people? How is religious and cultural freedom of all citizens in Canada, including Quebec, to be guaranteed under its Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Over the last decade, most noticeably France has banned the use of certain headdresses and other overt symbols religious symbols in public spaces and institutions. Significantly, even Turkey – a predominantly Muslim country – has for decades banned the use of hijabs and burqas for women in public institutions. There are in fact many individuals – even amongst Muslims -- who argue that certain symbols and headdresses are not necessarily Islamic, such as a niqab, a hijab and a burqa; and hence banning them is not denial of religious freedom.

There are others who argue that women are forced to don these headdresses by patriarchal and religious institutions, and are thus denied equality and freedom -- A freedom that the law is meant to protect.

Bill 60 has been challenged by all political parties, and is most likely to be challenged in the Supreme Court of Canada. Despite controversy and criticism, however, Premier Pauline Marois' government has vowed to forge ahead with the proposed bill in order to ensure religious neutrality of the secular state and to bolster the principle of gender equality.

### **What is Secularism?**

The idea and necessity of a secular state in the West – the separation of politics and religion – is profoundly linked to the history of Europe and the religious warfare that so extensively defined it.

However, in the past sixty years, the idea of secularism has taken root all over the world; it has, in fact, come to define a modern state, whether in India, Italy, Japan, Mexico or Turkey. A secular state, as it has been variously constructed across the globe, purports to be officially neutral, or non-partisan, in all matters of religion; it supports neither any particular religion, nor any religious activity.

Accusations of 'pseudo secularism' and of flagrant violation of claims of secularism by various minority religious groups against a state that claims to be secular are rampant all over the world. One may ask: how secular are countries like Egypt, or Greece or India? Or even the United States, where, to the objection of many secularists, "In God we trust" was adopted as the official motto of the country in 1956, and has been inscribed on its paper currency since 1957, at the height of Cold War, to counter the 'state atheism' of the Soviet Union.

In the context of Canada, and other countries, with many religious and ethnic minorities emerging as important 'vote banks', politicians of all parties enthusiastically participate in many religious functions and celebrations, as a way of showing equal respect for all religions and communities. Increasingly then, secularism is emerging not as a denial of all religions, or even as indifference towards them, but as social and cultural acceptance and celebration of them all.

Perhaps this is the true Canadian way; and something we Canadians should continue fighting for. As we wait for the Supreme Court ruling on the Quebec Charter of Values, let us not simply affirm our acceptance of all religions and cultures, but rather live in celebration of them.

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*Amrita Kumar-Ratta is a Master's student in Global Affairs at Munk Centre at the University of Toronto. Co-founder of 'Save the Girls', she has written extensively about multicultural issues in Canada.*

# When the World Turns Topsy-Turvy



Remember Julie Andrews in the *Sound of Music* when she sings, “These are a few of my favourite things.”

Well, life moves on, and the vivacious, beautiful Julie Andrews turned 70. So, she sang anew about her now favourite things, to the standing ovations of thousands in New York.

Sing along ... it is hilarious and a great celebration of life. – Editor’s Note

## **Then:**

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens  
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens  
Brown paper packages tied up with strings  
These are a few of my favorite things

## **NOW:**

Botox and nose drops and needles for knitting,  
Walkers and handrails and new dental fittings,  
Bundles of magazines tied up in string,  
These are a few of my favourite things.



## **Then:**

Cream colored ponies and crisp apple streudels  
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles  
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings

These are a few of my favorite things





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Balanced diet is a vital part of a child's proper growth. Meals are provided in the school and our bundles of joy are encouraged to eat nutritive food. They enjoy eating with their peer group and adopt good eating habits. Table manners are part of their mealtime.



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Physical development is an integral part of Child development. Yoga, Sports Day, activities stimulating Gross motor and fine motor both are part of the system.



Stress is laid on boosting confidence and we encourage children to learn performing arts.

Acting out plays, taking part in school shows, learning dance and music leads etc. With all these, personality is groomed leading to positive self image and recognizing interests in the child.



Health checkups, birthday celebrations, outdoor activities, craft making, teaching music and dance etc are the part of MHS.



***MHS RECOGNISES THE INNER POTENTIAL OF EACH CHILD AND PROVIDES AN ENRICHED ENVIRONMENT TO AID THEM GROW INTO A SUCCESSFUL AND GOOD BEING SERVING THE SOCIETY AT LARGE.***

***COME BE A PART OF MHS .....***

# *My Experience as a First Year University Student*

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TARISHA A. BENIPRASHAD

For many, the first year of university is a new fun and exciting experience. For others, it can be a difficult transition. The first year of university is a different experience for everyone as it often makes one question their interests and passions, and forces students to discover what they really want to do for the rest of their lives. If you decide to move out of your home to attend university, that can add an entirely different set of challenges. Regardless of whether or not you feel you're prepared, the many facets of post-secondary education can be overwhelming; especially during your first year.

Most people think that moving out from home is all fun and good times, but more often than not it can be just as taxing as finishing your first year of university. On the other hand in my opinion, living in a dorm is one of the coolest experiences university has to offer. As a young person who has always had her own room and private space, it was exceedingly difficult to adjust to sharing a dorm room with another person. Having to sleep just feet away from my roommate and using a communal bathroom shared with the rest of the floor was not something I was ecstatic about, and it took some getting used to, but it was worth the experience. Getting to live with hundreds of other people going through the same experiences, and who share the same fears and concerns can be incredibly comforting when going through the transition from high school to post-secondary. Parents will always be the number one support system; financially and emotionally, but nothing compares to talking to peers who truly understand your feelings and who are going through the exact same thing. Living with a roommate can either be the best decision you make of your university life, or the worst. I heard tons of horror stories about terrible roommate experiences before I began university, which ultimately led me rooming with an acquaintance from high school. If you're a

student entering university and trying to make the decision whether to choose the random roommate option or not, my advice is do it! If you don't have the option to live with a close friend, definitely sign up for a random roommate assignment. I've seen tons of seemingly lifelong friendships formed that way, and I would undoubtedly choose a random roommate if I could go back and change my decision. With all that said, getting along with a roommate is the least of the worries of a first year student; a different and strange living arrangement can add a lot of stress to a student's life but academic worries can be all-consuming.

The transition from a one building high school to a 33+ building campus was undoubtedly intimidating. Finding my classes was a job in itself. Trying to effectively take notes and pay attention to a professor in a lecture hall of 500 kids was a hundred times harder. The learning system in university of lectures, labs, and tutorials can be a difficult adjustment for students, and is completely different from what most are used to, after being taught in small classes for the past 12 years. Yet another concern of many first year students is submitting their first paper. Research papers, reports or essays are something that simply can't be avoided in university no matter what your major is. So getting the proper format down is of the utmost importance. These may all seem like daunting tasks, but the key is to take things one step at a time and not to overwhelm yourself.

These are only a few of the concerns that I had during my first weeks of university, and I'm sure many other students shared my feelings of doubt and anxiety. If you're about to enter your first year of post-secondary, here is my advice to you: If you're living with a roommate be prepared to compromise. Don't let yourself be engulfed by worries and feelings of anxiety; as long as you try your best you'll do great. And to the parents of these students: you did a great job getting them this far, continue to be loving and supportive.

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*Tarisha Beniprashad is currently a student at McMaster University, pursuing an honors degree in English and Communication Studies.*

# *Significance of Early Childhood Cultural Education*

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**MEESHIKA SHARMA**

*“We reach backward to our parents and forward to our children and through children to a future we will never see, but about which we need to care.”*

*- Carl Jung (Swiss Psychoanalyst)*

Well depicted in the above lines is the prominence of nurturing your children in the best way and it starts from giving the finest education complimented with the understanding of their culture that imparts good values. By educating our children in all spheres we are not just aiding them to be successful, but also investing in generations to come.

Knowledge of values and culture, along with academic edification lay the foundation of a bright future. In this fast growing competitive world, academic qualification is important to grow but in imparting that, at times we forget how important it is to communicate understanding of one’s culture and values to children from the initial years of development.

The child when born is ‘Tabula rasa’- ‘a blank tablet’, as suggested by an English Philosopher ‘John Locke’, clearly stating that whatever children acquire through experience and learning in their early childhood years is important in determining the adult personality.

Clear as crystal is the importance of Early Childhood Cultural Education. The more children know about their culture from the initial years of learning, the more they feel attached to the same. Knowledge conveyed in the right way helps them to understand what is right and wrong and teach them to respect other cultures too. Ignorance always leads to confused actions. Children with knowledge of their cultural beliefs are able to reflect the outcome of their actions. They learn to attain success in a positive way and accept failure with an enthusiasm to move towards success. As our culture is a categorisation of distinct intellectual or philosophical points of view, rather than a rigid, common set of beliefs, it teaches children to attain the best of life. Openness of mind is crucial to move towards our goal and serve all.

Let us all venture to make our culture live for years by imparting cultural education to our children and in turn let our children make the best of their learning and understanding of their culture by becoming efficacious God’s creatures.

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*Meeshika Sharma is a full-time teacher at the Mississauga Hindu School and also works as an administrator at Mississauga’s Ram Mandir.*

# The Power of Prayer

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**PANDIT ROOPNAUTH SHARMA**

Since the beginning of time mankind has accepted the concept of a divine being that exists in an omnipresent form and as such we make reverence with great belief that there is an entity that is listening. We bow our heads in supplication to that higher being declaring that we are subjugated to the natural order of that divine force/entity. This we call prayer or appeal to God. This action of praying is common to all people and it takes different forms and continues to evolve as we progress in time.

To the practitioner each act of prayer constitutes a form of appeal to the divine and rightfully so. However, the question of what we are appealing for determines the value of the action as it relates to praying to GOD.

When someone makes an appeal to another person or group there is an expectation that the appeal will be fulfilled. For example if I ask for a loan of funds or a piece of bread or someone's forgiveness I expect something in return. When I do not get what I requested I feel rejected and I may even harbor animosity to those who have not favored me. In addition when we are victimized by society we want to complain to a higher authority therefore in our declarations to God we relate our misery and ask for his support to punish those who have hurt us. We even demand that he does something and we even threaten to stop believing in him if he does not do what we ask.

By this form of prayer we are declaring our expectations for our action of praying. As such we are setting ourselves up for disappointments. If we have expectations there will be disappointments. Thus prayers must be without expectations. One may ask the question that I am a person in need should I not appeal to God for help? Is he not my father who has the ability to grant all things? Or I am ill and need to be healed should I not

appeal to God for him to use his healing powers? These are all very logical questions from our point of view. But what about from God's point of view he could respond by saying that I have done everything that I can for you based on your Karma.

The Bhagwat Geeta tells us that Bhagwan Krishna says, "four categories of people pray to me. Those who are in deep trouble and want instant Relief, those who have expectations to achieve some goal or credit for their actions, some who are always demanding my attention to do service for them and the rare group who wants to know me and build a life long relationship with me so that they may enjoy my gift of Moksha"

As we pray we must identify which category we belong to and determine if we are treating God as our servant or our life long companion in the role of father, mother, brother, sister, and all other human relations.

It is said in the Bhagwat Geeta that Bhagwan Krishna declares that the those who seek to know me and to nurture their relationship with me "Sach may preeya," they love me while the others only want to use me.

---

*Pandit Roopnauth Sharma is the founder and Spiritual Leader of Mississauga's Ram Mandir, a Hindu temple, where he attends to a community of over 3,000 families on all religious and social matters. He is also the founder of Canada Hindu Heritage Centre (CHHC). CHHC is focused on addressing the social, economical and cultural and needs of the Hindu community. Pandit Sharma is also the driving force behind projects related to family issues, poverty, youth violence and low-income housing.*



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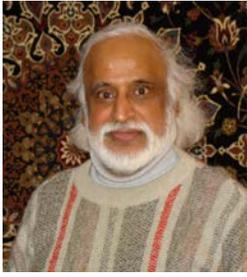
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# Tree of Bliss & Eternity



DR. SEHDEV KUMAR

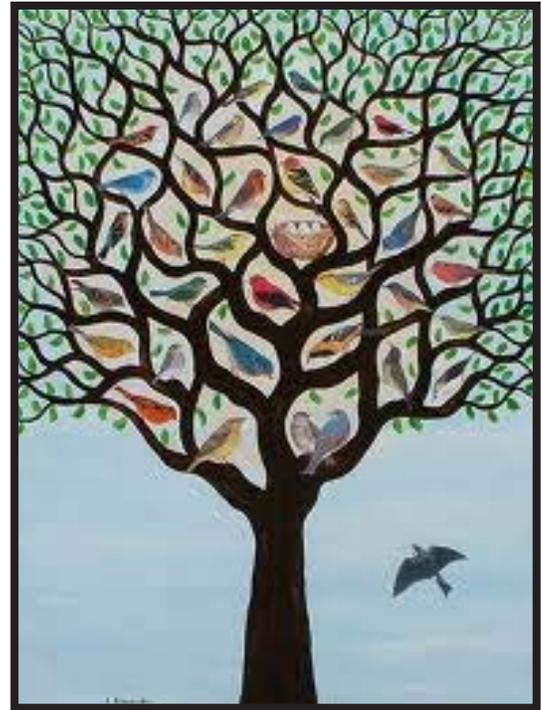
Christmas is a festival of the Christians all over the world; as a festival, however, for many of us who have chosen Canada as our home, it is the season for celebration, of Christmas Trees, and of feasts and music, gifts and blessings. For us, and our children, the Christmas tree is not merely a Christian symbol of goodwill; it belongs to all of us.

A tree is a tree is a tree, but when as a symbol it travels through history over millennia and across lands, cultures and communities, it becomes symbolic of life, of life's journey, and its falls and blossoming. Indeed one cannot find a culture, however remote and however ancient, that does not have a symbolic reference to some tree.

Then why is it that some people are said to be offended to see a Christmas tree in a school, or office or in a Parliament Building? Do we have to be so blatantly secular to deny and erase all symbols that have marked the human journey so gloriously in all seasons – in the winters of our discontent no less than in the springs of our joy?

In the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, in 1573 was built a mosque by Sidi Saiyyed, a slave. In one of its windows is carved a palm tree – a symbol of paradise – in such exquisite details, and with such finesse, that it must be one of the finest works of art ever created by human hands.

That a slab of stone could be chiselled with such delicacy, and with such mesmerising sense of harmony, speaks volumes about the Muslim artisans who were forbidden to make an image of a human, or even of an animal, in a mosque or in their other sacred monuments. But to employ their genius – and genius it was – the same artisans created exquisite figures of Jain, Hindu and Buddhist deities all across India. They traveled from one part of the country to another; their sons became their pupils; in their hands a piece of marble



or limestone or even granite was as malleable as ivory. With an ordinary hammer and a chisel they created works of such grandeur that they do not cease to speak to us even today, hundreds of years later.

The Tree of Life in the 16th century mosque in Ahmedabad in India has sometimes been referred to as Kalpa Vriksha – ‘the tree that fulfills all wishes’, with reference to Hindu mythology. Indeed, for centuries Hindu sages and seers are known to sit under the shade of the fig tree to seek enlightenment, hold discourses and conduct Vedic rituals. The Bodhi Tree under which Gautama is said to have sat and become the Buddha is a peepal tree, venerated to this day.

The tree of life teaches us differently. In the illuminating words of German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “All theory, dear friend, is gray, but the golden tree of life springs ever green.”

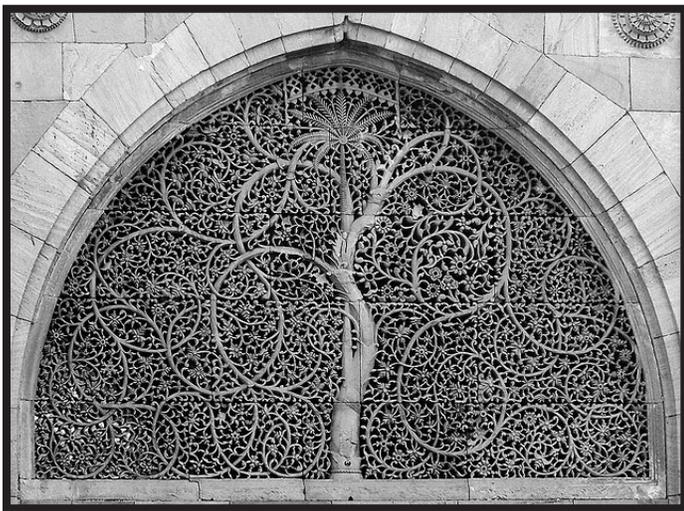
Whether in Ahmedabad or in Jerusalem, in Kashiji in India, or in the sacrificial pit at Sanxingdui in Sichuan, with bronze trees, as high as 12 feet, dating back to 1200 BCE; in German paganism or in Norse mythology, we see the human story being narrated time and again with the same alphabet of life to weave the same dreams: a tree laden with fruit, a tree with thick foliage providing shelter to a weary traveler, a tree rendering an abode for serenity and contemplation: “A

soothing tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a wound to the spirit.” “[Wisdom] is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that holdeth her fast.”

In the Book of Ezekiel, the vision of restoration of the prophet for the weary hearts and spirits includes: “Along the river, on either bank, will grow every kind of fruit tree with leaves that never wither and fruit that never fails; they will bear new fruit every month, because this water comes from the sanctuary. And their fruit will be good to eat and the leaves medicinal.”

It is thus that Charles Darwin in his search for an abiding and endearing metaphor for the great ladder of evolution refers to the Tree of Life in his revolutionary book, *On the Origin of Species*:

*“From the first growth of the tree, many a limb and branch has decayed and dropped off; and these fallen branches of various sizes may represent those whole orders, families, and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are known to us only in a fossil state. As we here and there see a thin, straggling*



*branch springing from a fork low down in a tree, and which by some chance has been favoured and is still alive on its summit, so we occasionally see an animal like the Ornithorhynchus (Platypus) or Lepidosiren (South American lungfish), which in some small degree connects by its affinities two large branches of life, and which has apparently been saved from fatal competition by having inhabited a protected station. As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications.”*

One winter day in 1992, standing under a snow-laden evergreen tree, near Lake Columbia in the City of Waterloo in Canada, my father revealed to me the secret of happiness: “To plant trees under whose shade you

would not sit.”

It is a message I have struggled to carry all these years.

To feel a part of this sumptuous Tree of Life, in this great country that we have made as our home, I and my children set up and decorate a Christmas Tree with the same gusto as others from Europe and Americas do. We decorate it, place gifts under it, share our yearly joys and bounty with each other, and feel restored in our hearts and spirits that we celebrate a symbol that is part of our human heritage. It exalts our spirits and deepens our being, because it reaches out to touch the sky, it bears fruit. And because it never forgets its roots!

---

*Dr. Sehdev Kumar, Professor Emeritus at the University of Waterloo, now lectures at the University of Toronto on Bioethics and Science/Religion Dialogue. He is author of many books including, ‘Vision of Kabir’, and ‘Lotus in the Stone’ and ‘Jain Temples of Rajasthan’.*

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# Hidden in the Shade



KAMINI PERSAUD

I was recently introduced to an equity focus group in my school where we discussed the topic of Shadism. Though this is not a “dictionary official” word, it gives meaning to a rising social issue within the colored community. Shadism is the hidden form of racism within colored communities, discriminating by the shade and pigmentation of your skin. In other words, within in the African and Asian communities, it is being seen as more desirable to be “light-skinned” or have a fairer complexion. In an ever-changing society of youth whose ideas and questions change the world. It is common to find yourself in a situation where you start questioning your own ideas, world and social beliefs.

When discussing Shadism, the topic of Pigmentocracy also arises. Pigmentocracy refers to the value system that was instilled into the minds of the people of colonized countries when the Europeans were invading. This value system relates social status, regality and respect to white or pale skin which was seen in the European colonizers. The message that was then conveyed was that in order to be respected and have a high social status, you needed to have the lightest skin tone. Dark brown and black skin tones were frowned upon and not viewed admirably. (Harris) Throughout history, this value system based on skin tone has affected people in many different countries, tracing back to the time of the slave trade in the United States when having “The Mighty Drop”, as scholars referred to it, of black blood in your family blood line labels your generation and generations to come as tainted and damaged. In more recent history, we can look to the Dominican Republic for a prime example of blatant Pigmentocracy. Since President Rafael Trujillo’s rein in 1930, the Dominican Republic has been using skin color to define it’s citizen’s against the citizens of neighboring Haiti. In the DR, the state will classify skin color: white (blanco), light indigenous (indio claro), dark indigenous (indio oscuro), almost black (moreno) or black (negro) on legal documents such as a driver’s license. This system allows people to identify whether you are Dominican (the middle categories) or Haitian (the last category). This Pigmentocracy was the underlying tool in the Haitian massacre in 1937 when Trujillo ordered the massacre of Haitians

in the DR border regions. The victims were identified by their skin color and by their creole names. (Eureka) It was very hard for me to believe that in the multicultural country that I live in, this issue of Pigmentocracy was growing within our own homes and schools. I started asking the question, why do the darker skinned kids drop out of school while the light skinned kids are going onto university? As of this year, the drop out rate of black kids in the Toronto District School Board is marked at 40%. Why are the highest income earners in Canada of European decent? Elderly, Caucasian, men create the “1%” of wealthy Canada. (Hernandez) More personally, why am I still affected, after all these years, by the European standard of beauty and living?

As religion is a part of the way I live my life, I looked to Hinduism to help me re-evaluate this overwhelming sense to be “light-skinned”. I found peace in the example of Lord Krishna, known as the “dark one” whose dark blue skin is often a very prominent feature on him. As the embodiment of melody and destroyer of pain Lord Krishna has countless tales of his adventures and life, rarely being affected by the shade of his skin. It is not looked upon as an impurity, but more as a gift, a unique characteristic of a divine being.

Quite obviously, as a teenager growing up in a city where more than half of the population was born outside of Canada, Shadism isn’t always the issue for me. Very clearly, we are all born with specific traits and attributes that make us who we are and physically pass on the legacy of our families through our embodiment. With rising stigmas and social bars, however, it’s not very hard to be doubtful of the way you should be striving to be like. For now, I can be content knowing that I have the ability to filter out the invisible racial barriers and proceed with becoming a strong, successful woman of Indo-Caribbean decent.

---

*Kamini Persaud, an aspiring young journalist, is in her final year of highschool at Etobicoke School of the Arts and hopes to continue her education in the media field.*

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# Spinach Quiche Recipe



**MADHU MISTRY**

## **Ingredients:**

250 ml self-raising flour  
125 ml olive oil  
5 ml salt  
125 ml boiling water

Bind together and leave aside.

## **FILLING:**

1 Bunch Fresh Spinach  
1 Potato medium boiled & mashed  
1 Onion finely chopped  
1 ml Salt  
5 ml Green Chillies chopped  
3 ml Ginger crushed  
3 ml Garlic crushed  
10 ml Lemon Juice  
5 ml Butter

## **METHOD:**

Clean wash and finely chop spinach. Braise onion in 5ml butter. Add Spinach and rest of Ingredients. Cook all together till liquid is dry.

## **WHITE SAUCE:**

25 ml Cake Flour  
15 ml Melted Butter  
1 ml Salt  
250 ml Milk  
15 ml grated Cheddar Cheese

## **METHOD:**

Melt butter, add Flour, Milk, and Salt cook for 1 minute to make white sauce.

Add white sauce to Spinach mix.

Pat dough on to a pie plate, add Spinach mix and sprinkle with grated Cheddar cheese.

Bake at 350 degree for about 20 minutes or until golden brown (depending on your oven temperature).

Eat Spinach quiche with white Sauce and enjoy while freshly hot baked.



# *Ah, the Challenges of being a University Student*

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**NADIA RAMROOP**

University: a place where children become adults. It is insane when I think about how fast my first semester as a university student has come and gone. It feels as though my first day of school was just yesterday. The intimidation I felt when I walked into a lecture hall filled with 400 other students. It was a unique experience which I will never forget.

University experience so far has been a roller coaster of emotions for me. There are days when I am incredibly happy. However, there have been times when I am stressed out and I feel like the world is moving too fast for me. The stress of midterm tests in addition to the constant quizzes, labs, and other weekly assignments just consume your life and sometimes you feel like there is not enough time to finish it all.

In the university atmosphere you are required to be more independent and you realize your ability to succeed relies on you and your work ethic. If you were able to pass high school without studying, do not plan to do the same thing in university. You need to commit lots of time and effort into your studying.

To me there is no comparison between being a student in the university and the high school. In high school you are very guarded and protected by the lovely teachers. They try their best to accommodate your needs so you can do well. They truly care and help you succeed, no matter what. But this is not the same in university. True, your professors want to see you do well. However, they are responsible for teaching hundreds of students so it is very unlikely that they will be able to accommodate your needs. If you need help and go to them during their office hours, you tend to be there with 20 other students. In high school I was used to getting help from my teachers on a one-on-one basis. They took time out of their lunch break or even after school to ensure you received the help you needed.

However, as stressful as life is at the university, there are still a lot of positive aspects of university. The freedom

you have to study something you love and enjoy with all your heart is very rewarding. I love science and I thoroughly have enjoyed the biology and chemistry labs I have taken part in this past semester. They are very interesting and are on a much higher level compared to the labs I performed in high school. Also, it is incredible meeting people who have the same passion as you. A lot of my new friends are avid science lovers and it is great that we have so much in common. It ensures that we always have something to talk about whether it is homework, or the latest episode of *The Big Bang Theory*.

I think university has been an eye-opening experience for me. I have seen that the world is a scary place that waits for no one. I am looking forward to the challenges that lie before me and I know that my hard work and commitment will guarantee my success.

---

*Nadia Ramroop is currently University studying science and attends the Ram Mandir regularly.*

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# Words of Wisdom

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*"Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere."*

- **Rigveda, 1-89-i**

*"I get up,*

*I walk*

*I fall down.*

*Meanwhile, I keep dancing."*

- **Rabbi Hillel, 110 BCE**

*"Is it possible that beauty exists to enrich our soul, to open our heart, and to expand our mind? The opening heart is the most beautiful flower of all. The greatest beauty in the world is compassion and love, shining free of attachment and grasping."*

- **Tarhang Tulku, Buddhist teacher, b. 1934**

*"To doubt everything and to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both free us from the necessity of reflection."*

- **Henri Poincare (1854-1912), French mathematician**

*"Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and mis-guided men."*

- **Martin Luther King (1929-1968), American Civil Rights Leader**

*"All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed towards ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom."*

- **Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Swiss-German physicist and pacifist**

*"The mastery of nature is vainly believed to be an inadequate substitute for self-mastery."*

- **Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), American theologian**

*"Every leaf of the tree becomes a page of the sacred scripture once the soul has learned to read."*

- **Sa'di, (1210-1292), Sufi Master**

*"Everybody can be great. Because anyone can serve. You don't have to have college degree to serve. You don't have to know how to make your subject and your verb agree to serve... You don't have to know the Second Law of Thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."*

- **Martin Luther King (1929-1968), American Civil Rights Leader**



*“The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science and art. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, he who can no longer wonder and stand in rapt awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. ... The Cosmic religious experience is the strongest and oldest mainspring of scientific research.”*

**- Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Swiss-German physicist and pacifist**

*“The purpose of art is the lifelong construction of state of wonder.”*

**- Glenn Gould (1932-1982), Canadian pianist**

*“If seed in the black earth  
can turn into such beautiful roses*

*What might not*

*The Heart of Man*

*become in its*

*Long journey towards the stars!”*

**- G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), British author**

*“What God said to the Rose  
and caused it to laugh in bloom*

*He said it to your heart*

*And made it a hundred times more beautiful.”*

**- Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-1273), Sufi sage-poet**

*“To see a World in a Grain of Sand*

*And a Heaven in a Wild Flower*

*Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand*

*And Eternity in an Hour.”*

**- William Blake (1757-1827), British poet-visionary**

*“The Eye with which*

*I see God*

*Is the same Eye*

*With which God*

*Sees me.”*

**- Meister Eckhart (1260-1326), German theologian-mystic**

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