



Gitanjali 2023

An Ohmkaram Publication



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(Kerala cultural organization based in St Louis, MO)

www.ohmkaram.org

Joint Food Drive Success

Ohmkaram helped 'Sewa International' with their St. Louis food drive initiative. The two organizations joined forces to make a significant impact on local hunger. Ohmkaram collected over 500 pounds of non-perishable food items for the collaborative food drive. Including contributions from Ohmkaram members, a total of over 1000 pounds of food was delivered to the Saint Louis Food Bank, supporting those in need. A big thank you to all the contributors.



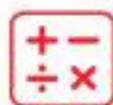
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From the desk of Gitanjali's Editorial team...

As we stride into the new year, through Gitanjali, we turn our gaze to the year that has been for Ohmkaram in 2023. After COVID, this is the first year we have attempted to release a full fledged version of the magazine.

With AI being so accessible in 2023, we sought its help for a fitting cover page to this edition of the magazine. While working at it we come to realize the rich cultural landscape that defines the essence of Kerala.

As another year passed us by, we take this opportunity to revisit the highlights of the year through photographs. In addition to the annual celebrations for Onam and Vishu, we were able to come together to bring to stage a dance drama of the story of Ayyappa. The fun we all had at the annual outdoor picnic and Vallamkoli is evident in the captures.

This edition of Gitanjali features write-ups and artwork contributed by adults and young minds from Ohmkaram. It also spotlights a few tried and tested recipes shared by experienced hands. There are also articles about some of Ohmkaram's undertakings. We appreciate the members who have taken the time and effort to chip in to this endeavor. This publication wouldn't have been possible without the hours of work put in by each of the volunteers.

Being away from the homeland, it is the role of organizations like Ohmkaram to keep our culture and traditions alive and we try to imbibe that in everything we do. Members of this community are its strength and whatever has been accomplished would have been impossible without each of your contributions. We are thankful for the opportunity and strongly believe we will be able to keep the momentum in the year ahead.

Enjoy Gitanjali!



**Wishing you all a very
Happy New Year,**

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Dear Ohmkaram Members,

I would like to express my sincere thanks to each and every one of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as Ohmkaram's President for the year. Ohmkaram provides an opportunity for our members to keep our rich Kerala Hindu culture front and center and teach our next generation about it. Our role in the state of Missouri is to serve as Brand Ambassadors for the culture we all come from. We also use it as a platform to do community service and facilitate member interactions. Our members may come from various parts of India but share a common spirit of community as a Malayalee.



The year 2023 was about continuing the process of recovery from Covid pandemic and enjoying public gatherings again. We organized the Anniversary, Vishu, Onam, Vallom Kali and picnic events this year, as we do every year. In addition, we also organized a much-appreciated Special program (Sree Ayyappa Swamy: A Divine Warrior Prince & Amrithavarshini). In addition, many of our members also participated in the Sewa International for Saint Louis effort by collecting cans for donations. As always, the Malayalam School kept up its mission of providing Malayalam literacy to our next generation. Thanks to the efforts of some of our members, we were able to secure record funds from the Missouri Arts Council (MAC) and Regional Arts Commission (RAC). We were able to provide scholarships to two deserving STEM students in Kerala.

We have made a great impact in the community for the past 18 years, thanks to dedicated volunteer leaders who served on the Executive Committee, and various committees. Today Ohmkaram is more visible in the greater Saint Louis area as a representative cultural, philanthropic, and social organization. In the past years, we have channeled our volunteering efforts through serving at the Food Pantry, helping with St. Charles River cleanup, donating school supplies, supplying PPEs during COVID, and helping with relief funds for the Kerala flood, Chennai flood, Nepal Earthquake etc. Going forward, we should grow these efforts and find more ways to give back to the broader community. Since Ohmkaram is completely volunteer based, it is important for all of us to make the effort to participate and share the burden. I would also encourage everyone to share their thoughts and comments. They are very important to us and will help the organization serve the community better.

On behalf of the Ohmkaram Executive Committee, I would like to thank all the many volunteers who helped with organizing all our programs and giving your valuable time and energy to making them successful. I also want to thank the rest of the Executive Committee and Board members for the guidance and support throughout the year. As the new committee is being formed, I request all members to extend them help and support.

Sincerely,

Sunil Elanayar

President 2023

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AI Revolution 2023: A Glimpse into the Future of Creativity

By: Sona Mukesh

Cover page photos were generated by AI

As we bid farewell to 2023, it's impossible to ignore the profound impact that artificial intelligence (AI) has made on various aspects of our lives. From revolutionizing the way we work to transforming our creative endeavors, AI has become an indispensable force. In this article, we will delve into the remarkable differences AI has made in 2023, with a focus on innovative tools that have changed the landscape of design and creativity.

AI in Image Generation:

One of the standout developments in 2023 is the evolution of AI-powered image generation tools. Microsoft Designer is a free AI-powered design tool that is integrated into the Edge browser. It allows users to generate and customize designs for various purposes, such as social media posts, flyers, greeting cards, invitations, logos, and more. Microsoft Designer is powered by DALL-E 2 technology, which creates new and original images based on written descriptions. Users can also provide additional specifications such as location, color palette, size, or art style, as well as the app assisting with size and alignment, ensuring consistency across content. Microsoft Designer is available as an official app in the Microsoft Store. Users can access it directly from Edge's sidebar, without opening a separate tab or program. This souvenir's cover page images were generated using Microsoft Designer.

Beyond Microsoft Designer, several other tools have gained prominence in the world of AI-driven image generation like DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, Jasper, Dream by Wombo.

AI in Content Creation:

In 2023, content creation has become more efficient and dynamic, thanks to AI-powered writing assistants and language models. OpenAI's GPT-4, the latest iteration of the Generative Pre-trained Transformer, has set new standards for natural language understanding and generation. Writers now have access to a tool that not only assists in drafting content but also understands context, tone, and nuances, leading to more engaging and coherent pieces.

AI tools like Copy.ai and Writesonic have also gained popularity for their ability to generate marketing copy, blog posts, and other written content with minimal input. These tools leverage advanced natural language processing algorithms to understand user prompts and deliver content that aligns seamlessly with the desired style and intent.

AI in Personalized Experiences:

In the realm of personalized experiences, AI has become a driving force behind tailored recommendations and user interactions. Platforms like Netflix and Spotify employ AI algorithms to analyze user behavior, preferences, and historical data to offer personalized content suggestions. This not only enhances user satisfaction but also contributes to the success of content delivery platforms.

Moreover, AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants have become more sophisticated, providing users with intuitive and personalized interactions across various industries. From customer support to healthcare consultations, AI is playing a crucial role in delivering efficient and customized services.

As we reflect on the year 2023, it's evident that AI has not only made a difference but has redefined the way we approach creativity. From image generation to content creation and personalized experiences, AI tools have become integral to our daily lives. The landscape of design and creativity is evolving rapidly, and as we embrace these advancements, we can anticipate even more exciting possibilities on the horizon. The year 2023 marks a significant milestone in the AI revolution, laying the foundation for a future where technology and creativity work hand in hand to shape our world.

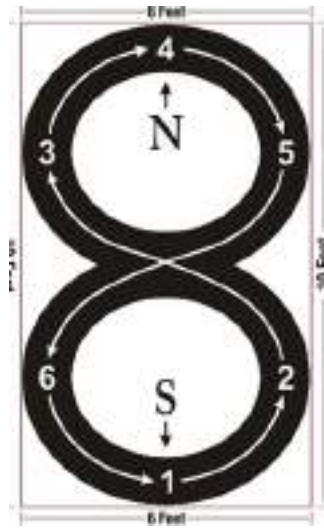
Chat GPT was used to generate most of the content of this article :-)

Why walk in the shape of “EIGHT”?

By: Kalyani Ganesh

In medical terms they say, “Use it or Lose it!”. The more we use our muscles the more they are flexible and make us look young and active, so walking not only helps us stay healthy it also helps us stay young. Because we tend to walk more in the Spring and Summer, enjoying the nature we only stay active during these periods and our walking declines in the winter months.

During fall and winter, we all stay home due to weather and holidays times, but even in the winter months we can keep up our regular walking by walking in the shape of an EIGHT! Yes, think of the shape of an eight and start walking in that shape and you will achieve all the same benefits as walking outside during spring and summer.



Walking everyday for 30 minutes can improve our overall strength of body and mind, especially when you walk with a friend/ company. We tend to walk more and easily lose weight and we also get more benefits like increasing cardiovascular fitness, strengthening bones, reducing excess body fat, and boosting muscle power and endurance.

Studies show that walking can also reduce your risk of developing conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers.

So, try to walk in the shape of an eight this winter and observe the benefits. Share your experiences with your family and friends. I hope this article motivates everyone to keep walking no matter what and get our 10,000 steps up even in the winter!

As the saying goes, “Health is Wealth”. Stay healthy, enjoy good health, happy holidays and happy new year!

Ohmkaram's Little Artists

Paradise By: Vedhika Rajesh, 2nd Grade



By: Aathmika Byju, Kindergarten



By: Gauri Nandika Pillai, 6th Grade



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The Nemmara-Vallanghy Vela

By: Saketh Subramanian, 11th Grade

I was born in the United States. However, I had the good fortune to have lived in India for a few years of my childhood where I used to attend a very colorful cultural festival in our hometown in Nemmara, Palakkad - the “Nemmara-Vallanghy Vela” or just "Vela" as the locals call it. From those memories along with some local insider details from my family, I want to write about the “Nemmara-Vallanghy Vela” and all the things that make it so special.

In some ways, the "Vela" is not as well-known as the "Thrissur Pooram". However, of late, the Nemmara-Vallanghy Vela is garnering a lot of publicity with each passing year in this social media age drawing visitors from different part of the country and abroad. Both the Vela and Thrissur Pooram are very similar in the way they are celebrated including the rituals and the theme of the festival.

First, a few facts about the Vela:

What - The Vela is the celebration of the birthday of the presiding deity of Nellikulangara Bhagavathy. This is a festival that brings together colors, local art forms, fireworks and elephants.

Where - The festival is celebrated on the grounds of the Nellikulangara Bhagavathy temple in Nemmara. Nemmara and Vallanghy are two neighboring "desams" (counties, to use the US analogy) in Palakkad. The Kaavu is situated on the foothills of the Nelliampathy hills, which is a very beautiful tourist attraction by itself.

When - The main day of the festival is on the 20th of Meenam on the Malayalam calendar which is always either April 2nd or April 3rd of each year.

In the 20-day span from the Kodiyettam day till the day of the Vela, there are many wonderful rituals and celebrations like Kummatti, Karivela and Aandivela. Each of these is a unique ritual celebrating the Goddess. During the week preceding the Vela, a procession of the deity comes by close to midnight along with people decked in various costumes and performing various local dance forms stopping at each house in the neighborhood. I, especially, used to enjoy the Karivela, watching the people with faces blackened with charcoal perform local songs and dances.

The day of the Vela is a very busy one. This festival is essentially a competition between the two “desams” - Vallanghy and Nemmara. It brings people from far and wide, recently even from abroad, to see the festival. The two competing sides, Nemmara and Vallanghy, have their own temples but converge at the common Nellikulangara Bhagavathy Temple in the evening which is then followed by a series of rituals, panchavadhyam, lighting effects and display, and fireworks.

The Vela has something in it for people of all kinds – the kids, the laymen, the tourists, the local art/music connoisseurs and the elephant enthusiasts. There are so many layers and so many levels at which you can appreciate and explore each little aspect of this cultural bonanza depending on where your interests lie, your level of local knowledge and the eye for detail.

One of the most enchanting things about the festival are the elephants. The best elephants in the region are assembled by both sides – Nemmara and Vallanghy – based on a bidding process for each elephant. The bidding can get extremely competitive and run up high figures for some of the most prized elephants in the region. The elephants are the stars of the show and appeal to young and old, the laymen and the local elephant “nerds”.

The deity of the Goddess that's boarded onto the elephant, the "Thidambu", is something that everyone looks forward to with great anticipation. Another matter of great discussion among the locals each year is the "quality" of the elephants on either side - the length and girth of the tusks, the height of the elephants, the tail and so many other finer details. Similarly, the elephant decorations such as the hues of the decorative umbrellas and the fans ("Venchamaram") are part of the unique charm of this festival.

Each desam sets up an 'Aana Panthal' using bamboo and wood for housing the elephants on the day of the festival. The Pandhal is a grand spectacle with lighting displays that's getting more sophisticated and spectacular with each year. The Panchavadhyam, the traditional percussion ensemble, is rendered by the best of the best local artists/troupes.

The fireworks is another star attraction. The fireworks at the Vela is said to upstage even that of the Thrissur pooram. What's more, it is considered the best and the loudest in Asia, if not the whole world.

After the festivities in the evening, the celebrations and rituals continue past midnight into the wee hours of the next day morning. People call it the "Rathri Vela". It is attended by the diehard fans who can't get enough of the evening festivities.

A spirit of friendly rivalry between Nemmara and Vallanghy underpins the entire Vela celebrations. The day following the event, the locals on each side would engage in friendly banter on who "won" the different events - the Panchavadhyam, the Thidambu, Thidambu Aana (elephant that had the Thidambu), Aana Pandhal, Kuda Mattam (hues of the umbrellas) and fireworks. On a lighter vein, there's also an overall "winner" of the Vela and the winner is always different depending on which side you ask.

The "Vela" is a core part of the cultural identity of the natives in the region and the sense of belonging it generates lives on with expatriates who migrated outside Kerala many decades ago. The Vela is a celebration of the spirit of Kerala and its art forms, transcending castes and even religions.



Breaking 5

By: Anvika Malugu, 6th Grade

My heart was pounding, my mind was racing and I felt like throwing up. I felt a shiver run down my spine. I ran down the stairs to get my socks and shoes, put them on as fast as I could, ran to the car, opened the door, and headed into Park's martial arts. "Bye Dad, I'll see you in a bit," I told my dad as I left the car.

"Ok, do well" he suggested.

As I headed in, walking past the parents and the other students anxiously waiting there I started to feel less lonely.

Oh maybe I'm not the only one that's scared, I thought. I quickly put my shoes on the shelf and walked towards the bench to sit and patiently wait for my dad to come.

I have been holding my boards this whole time, not knowing it's tiring my hands. I've just been so distracted by all this It's rather hard to remember what I'm supposed to do.

After a few minutes of waiting, my Dad comes in and I get up to go tell him, "We are going to be starting in a few minutes," "It's already 11:24!"

"Oh really," "OK, well I'll go sit over there, Because I think your instructor is coming out." He pointed across the room and I quickly turned my head to look over.

Oh no! He is!!! I cried in my mind.

Ok well, nothing I can do now except try my best! I paused. Yeah but what if my best isn't good enough, what if I can't remember one of the forms, or what if I forget how to break the board!!

As all these thoughts rushed to my mind I quickly pushed them away.

What's the point in trying all this if I can't even believe in myself?! I will try my best and c'mon I mean I did all this preparation in just 1 month when it takes everyone else 6!

"Ok everyone go sit in the back room we will be starting very shortly." My head instructor says as he goes and sits at his table with all the other head instructors.

I swiftly walk into the back room and see many students sitting there waiting. Some practiced stretching and one was even crying. I quickly spot Sofie, my best friend at the time, with her short blonde hair in a ponytail, and run over to her.

"Hey! How's it going?" I ask as I sit down and see her cracking her long pale-colored fingers.

"Not good! I'm terrified but also excited" she exclaims. Instructor John peeks his head through the window, his belt and uniform all messed up from testing.

"Hey, we're going to start calling everyone's names to come to line up and get started." Oof, here we go! I take some deep breaths and go on with it.

"Jackson Smith, Jackson loves to play baseball." As I heard all these introductions I realized that I was next! I am not ready at all. Hmm, I think that I'm missing something but I just can't remember quite what it is.

I look over my shoulder and see this kid playing with a loose piece of wood from the boards.

OH! I forgot all about my boards! I look around for them and get super scared. I see in the mirror reflection I see my dad in the room I was in. He had them kept safely with him.

I took a sigh of relief and said everything was fine which is what I told myself but then I heard, “Anvika Malugu, Anvika Loves to play volleyball and-” Uh oh I jumped up as fast as I could and went out the backroom and bowed. OK, we practiced this yesterday. I remember what to do! Wait, do I? Yeah, I do! Okay, now I go sit where the other kids are sitting and wait. They call a bunch of other names and we finally begin.

First, we do blue, purple, brown, and high brown forms. It took a whole lot longer than I was expecting but it was fun. Then we do red and high red, same thing. The mid-front snap kick I whisper to Sofie

“Woah! This is quite a workout.” I noticed she had a very confident look on her face and that she looked like she had been doing this for years. Then comes sparring. I hate sparring! It’s just not fun and takes up way too much time. But, we have to get it over with. Oh Thank god I got paired up with the nicest instructor, Instructor Kate she will help me. After we got paired up we began.

I tried to remember as much as I could but some of the sparring techniques just weren't coming to me. “ Even if you mess up no one will notice, there are like 40 other kids here!” Kate explained to me.

“ Oh yeah, you're right,” I responded by defending her punch. I look over my shoulder to see the head instructor looking at and discussing me.

“OK, one more color belt sparring and that's it” Kate informed me. Even if that might have been a good thing for her, it was scary for me because next is breaking. Board Breaking is the thing that I was the most scared of. I have broken boards before but I have never broken 5 boards at once! Do you know how scary that is?

“Everyone grab your boards and come sit in a line at the back of the dojo” Instructor Penelope called out to everyone. As I see everyone else go to their parents and grab their boards, obviously I follow.

“ You’re doing good, but make sure you break all those boards. That is one of the most important parts of this whole thing.” My mom told me as she handed me the boards.

“ Yeah, I will,” I said, kinda disappointed in myself.

I walked over to the instructors and sat down, I made sure to sit by Sofie so that I wouldn’t feel lonely. I nicely stacked my boards one on top of another and saw Sofie do the same.

“ C’mon up Avni” Instructor John called out. As I watched her grab her boards and set them up, a contraption made it a little easier to break the boards.

“ Hyah!” She screamed. BAAM! Oh my god, that looks hard.

“Woah she did that so easily” I whispered to Sofie. I heard claps behind me sounding like a sharp loud sound and forgot all about the parents sitting right behind me.

“Excellent Avni! Who wants to go next?” I shot up my hand as fast as I could making sure he saw me.

“Haha ok, Anvika come on up.”

I stand up as fast as I can but I'm holding back the urge to throw up. Sofie looked worried and like she didn't want to do it anymore.

I set my boards up one by one putting the spacer in between to make it as easy as possible. I take a step back to make sure I have enough space to break the boards. I pull up my fist slowly, stretching it right behind my head to get ready to blast my hand. I tighten my fist to ensure that I will most definitely break these boards, I take a big deep breath in and swing my arm down as fast as I possibly can, feeling the air resistance slow it down at the slightest bit.

I feel my hand crack into the smooth board and break into a bunch of tiny pieces flying all over the room like a bird across the sky. I slowly come up from being on my knees while I hear all the parents and other students clapping like I had just achieved something so great. Wait, maybe I did? I grab all the pieces from the floor and return to my spot.

“ Ahhh good job” !!! Sofie exclaims to me.

“You too,” I responded.

I twisted my head around spotting my parents and their proud faces, it was one of the first times ever.

I started to feel something on my hand hurt and turn red. I looked over at Sofie staring at her hand just like me. I

make sure that everything is fine even though I see a little cut where it's pulsating red and burning a little. I shake it off and see everyone else break their boards. Just as enjoyable as actually breaking them.

Looking back on that day, I realized I never should have felt so scared and worried. Doing something that makes you happy and excited is never something to be afraid of. It is okay to be scared at first but never overcoming or not reflecting is not. Even just trying your best is one of the greatest things you can do to be the most successful you ever can. That was one of the most meaningful days of my life, it taught me a very important lesson, and I'm so glad that I never gave up!



Cultural Differences: Kerala and the U.S.

By: Nandhana Anish, 8th Grade

If someone from the U.S. were to go to Kerala without any background knowledge, or if it was the other way around, that person would experience great cultural shock. The cultures in America and Kerala are undoubtedly different, but they are similar in certain ways. And as different as they may be, they have also influenced one another in some aspects. The three largest cultural differences between the two countries are the clothing, food, and holidays.

The first major cultural difference between Kerala and the U.S. is clothing. In the U.S., the average person usually wears a very casual outfit, typically consisting of garments such as t-shirts, hoodies, shorts, leggings, etc. In Kerala, however, everyday wear is seemingly more elaborate. Women normally don churidars, while men usually wear mundu. Now that things are more modern, though, the American clothing style has started to influence India; people have begun to switch over to a more informal clothing style similar to the everyday style in America. When it comes to special occasions, females in the U.S. usually wear more expensive outfits such as dresses, and males wear attire such as suits. In Kerala, ladies wear saris, and men wear kurtas.



Moving on, another distinction is food. In America, a standard lunch generally contains quick, ready-to-eat items such as sandwiches, soups, or leftovers. A typical lunch in Kerala includes rice with a variety of curries and sides like sambar, pickled mangoes or limes (achaar), or aviyal. Nowadays, Indian food is getting more attention in the States, whether it be over the Internet or in real-world examples. American desserts like apple pie and cheesecake contrast greatly with desserts from Kerala, which include different varieties of payasam, ela ada, unniyappam, and many more.

Finally, holidays are the last major difference between the two countries' cultures that will be brought up here. Common holidays in the U.S. include Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Independence Day. In Kerala, the two main holidays are Vishu and Onam. Factors such as place, religion, and history play a major role in the celebration of holidays, though. For example, the U.S. celebrates Independence Day to celebrate the day it became an independent country, July 4th, 1776. Another example is Kerala, which has 14 districts. Each of these districts has its own specialties; slang, religions, traditions, etc. However, the majority of these places celebrate Onam and Vishu, the two most well-known and celebrated holidays in Kerala. Christmas, a common holiday in the U.S., is also starting to be celebrated by some in Kerala, and awareness of holidays originating in Kerala seems to be increasing in the States.

As different as things may be in two different countries, understanding of either country's culture is very important. The cultural differences between each country have a great influence on each other. They improve things, and open peoples' eyes to different ways of viewing life. However, no matter where one lives, one must never forget their own roots--where they're truly from.



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Ohmkaram Kitchen Delights

Chakka Puzhukku Recipe

By: Latha Balakrishnan



Ingredients:

❖ Jackfruit-Green(slices) -400gms (packet available in most of our local Indian grocery stores-freezer section)- see picture



- ❖ Coconut grated - 1/2 cup
- ❖ Green chillies -3 (or depending on how spicy you prefer)
- ❖ Cumin seeds - 1/4 tsp
- ❖ Turmeric powder - 1/4 tspn
- ❖ Shallots - 2 or 3 small - optional

Note: someparts of Kerala -people also add garlic cloves to the above(totally optional)

❖ For seasoning: coconut oil(preferably)-2 tblsp, 1/2 tspn -mustard, 2 dry red chillies-halved, shallots -2 sliced, curry leaves - a few. You can also add 1 tbsp of grated coconut (optional)

❖ Salt per taste

Instructions:

- ❖ First wash the jackfruit slices from the packet and drain.
- ❖ Cut the slices into small pieces. Add the cut pieces into a pan, add turmeric ,salt and enough water for it to cook . Place the pan on the stove on medium heat.
- ❖ Meanwhile, in a blender add the grated coconut, green chillies, cumin seeds, shallots(optional) and grind coarsely.
- ❖ Once the jackfruit on the stove is cooked and in thick consistency add the coarsely ground paste to it and stir well. Make sure salt is per taste. Stove can be switched off.
- ❖ Finally for seasoning, use another small pan - add to it oil. Once oil is hot, add mustard. Once it crackles, add chillies, sliced shallots and curry leaves. Add this to the cooked curry and stir. Ready to serve:)
- ❖ This dish can be eaten by itself or with chamanthi or with pickle. can also be eaten as a side dish for porridge or even rice. It is delicious:)



Healthy Overnight Oats Recipe

By: Kavitha Anish

Instructions:

❖ In a glass jar, add fruits, dry fruits, and nuts of choice. When I make this for myself, I usually add 2-3 diced strawberries, 1/2 of a chopped up banana, and a handful of blueberries as my fruits, 2-3 diced dates and a handful of raisins as dry fruits, and a handful of walnuts, cashews, and almonds as nuts.

❖ Next, add 1 teaspoon of flaxseed powder and 1 teaspoon of chia seeds to the jar. Then, add in 2 tablespoons of old-fashioned oats.

❖ Afterwards, add 1 tablespoon of honey and a pinch of cinnamon powder.

❖ Finally, add one cup of milk or almond milk. However, using more than just a cup is recommended, since the other ingredients tend to absorb some of the milk.

❖ Seal the jar and keep it in the fridge overnight. Take out in the morning once ready to eat. If you're a fan of more cold food, you can eat it as soon as you would like, but it's better to wait a few minutes before eating.

Ingredients:

- ❖ Fruits of choice (Desired amount)
- ❖ Dry fruits of choice (Desired amount)
- ❖ Nuts of choice (Desired amount)
- ❖ Flaxseed powder (1 tsp)
- ❖ Chia seeds (1 tsp)
- ❖ A pinch of cinnamon powder
- ❖ Honey (1 tbsp)
- ❖ Old-fashioned oats (2 tbsp)
- ❖ Milk or Almond Milk (1 cup, add more if needed)

Mussels Fry

By: Anjana Prayaga

Ingredients:

1. Shallots -5
2. Garlic – 3 Flakes
3. Ginger – Small piece
4. Green Chili – 4
5. Chili Powder – 1tsp
6. Turmeric Powder – 1 tsp
7. Coriander Powder - 1 tsp
8. Garam Masala - ½ tsp
9. Curry Leaves
10. Oil as required.
11. Salt to taste

Instructions:

❖ Clean mussels well.

❖ Grind all ingredients from 2 to 8 and marinate mussels.

❖ Keep it aside for 30 minutes.

❖ Heat oil in a pan, add marinated mussels, salt, and curry leaves.

❖ Keep stirring until the mussels are well fried.



Kerala's Burger - A Twist on the quintessential 'Parippu Vada' Recipe

By: Kavita Menon

Crispy crunchy mouthwatering parippu vadas. The sizzling hot vadas are always a hit. Who doesn't like them? This recipe turns the classic parippu vada into a delicious burger that is also vegan friendly as it doesn't include any dairy or other animal products. Baking makes them healthier while carrots and beets are a nutritious addition.

Ingredients:

- ❖ Channa dal – 1.5 cups
- ❖ Toor dal – 1/2 cup
- ❖ Onions – 1 big
- ❖ Vegetables (any of your choice - Beetroot, Carrots, Cabbage) – in total 1 cup
- ❖ Ginger – 1” stub
- ❖ Green chilies – 2-3 depending on how spicy you want it.
- ❖ Cilantro
- ❖ Rice flour – 3 tablespoons (may need few spoons extra)
- ❖ Chili powder (optional) – 1 teaspoon or according to your spice level.
- ❖ Regular or Vegan Worcestershire sauce (optional) – 1.5 tablespoons
- ❖ Salt
- ❖ Oil – 2-3 teaspoons

Instructions:

- ❖ Soak the dals in water for about 3 hours.
- ❖ Peel and chop the vegetables - onions, carrots, beetroot etc. along with ginger, green chilies and cilantro. Alternatively, you can use a food processor to chop them.
- ❖ Scoop out the dals without any water and put them in the blender jar.
- ❖ Coarse grind them. If they are not grinding well, add 1-2 spoonfuls of water at a time.
- ❖ Grind with as less water as possible.
- ❖ After grinding the dals, transfer them to a mixing bowl. Add the chopped veggies, salt, chili powder according to your taste.
- ❖ If you are using Worcestershire sauce, add it now. Vegans can use Vegan Worcestershire sauce. Worcestershire sauce has sodium in it, so adjust the amount of salt in the recipe.
- ❖ Add rice flour to bind the mix. Test out the mix by taking a small ball and shaping it into a sphere. Flatten it into a patty.
- ❖ If the patty forms without breaking, the mixture is of right consistency. Else add some more flour. Rice flour absorbs the excess moisture and acts as a binding agent.
- ❖ While you shape your patties, preheat the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit for baking. You could also shallow fry the patties on a skillet. Either method is fine, choose the one that works for you.
- ❖ Baking times vary from oven to oven. If the patties are thick, the outer portion will cook fast and inner will remain uncooked. To prevent this, shape them so that the burgers are between 1/4 inch and 1/3rd inch thickness. Baking for longer can lead to rubbery patties. So, the first time you are making these, keep a watch on them.
- ❖ Take a nonstick tray and coat it with cooking oil or vegetable spray. Then, set the patties on them. Cook them for about 15 mins on one side.
- ❖ Using a brush apply some oil on the top of the patties and then carefully flip them. Bake for another 10-12 mins.
- ❖ Using a toothpick, check for the doneness. If the toothpick comes out clean, then your patties are ready.
- ❖ Turn off the oven, remove the patties, and let them rest while you get ready to serve.
- ❖ Serve the patties on burger buns or sandwich bread with ketchup, sauce or a dressing of your choice. Layer it up with lettuce, tomatoes, cheese or any other toppings. Vegans can skip the cheese. Your Kerala Burger is now ready!

Fish curry Recipe

By: Savitha Krishnan

Ingredients:

- ❖ Fish 2 lbs
- ❖ Onion
- ❖ Tomato
- ❖ Garlic
- ❖ Ginger
- ❖ Green Chillies
- ❖ Tamarind paste

Instructions:

- ❖ Prepare fish by thoroughly cleaning the fish first and marinating it with salt, 1/2 tsp chili powder, and 1/4 tsp turmeric powder.
- ❖ In a hot vessel with 2 -3 tablespoons of coconut oil, temper mustard seeds, curry leaves, and a pinch of fenugreek seeds.
- ❖ Sauté 3 medium sized chopped onion, 4 garlic cloves, 4 green chillies and half-finger-sized ginger until the onion is light brown.
- ❖ Add 3 big chopped tomatoes, along with 1 tablespoon of chili powder and half a tablespoon of coriander powder.
- ❖ Once the oil separates, add a bit of tamarind solution, followed by the marinated fish.
- ❖ Simmer on low heat for 5-10 minutes, then turn off the stove and garnish with chopped cilantro.

Unniappam Recipe

By: Latha Unni

Ingredients:

- ❖ 1 cup rice soaked in water for 3 hours
- ❖ 1 small banana
- ❖ ¼ cup rice flour
- ❖ ⅛ cup wheat flour
- ❖ 1½ cup grated jaggery dissolved in 1 cup water and strained
- ❖ ½ tsp ginger powder
- ❖ ¼ cup coconut, thinly sliced and deep fried in ghee, till slightly brownish.



Instructions:

- ❖ Finely grind rice with 2 cups water.
- ❖ Add banana, rice flour, wheat flour, jaggery water and ginger powder. Blend well. The consistency of batter is thinner than for idli but thicker than for dosa. Add water or additional rice flour, as needed.
- ❖ Transfer to a bowl and stir in coconut pieces.
- ❖ Heat appam maker or aebleskiver pan, half fill with oil and adjust heat to medium.
- ❖ Then pour batter to each cup, till half full.
- ❖ As soon as they get bubbly around the edge and the bottom looks browned, turn over with a fork. Continue cooking until lightly browned on all sides. Remove with a skewer, drain oil and let cool on a plate lined with paper towel.
- ❖ Makes approximately 50 pieces

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Oil can be replaced with ghee or ¼ tsp ghee added to each cup while cooking unniappam.

Korean Vegetable Pancake Recipe

By: Seema Nair

This Korean pancake is a savory pancake that is paired best with a dipping sauce. It can be eaten for breakfast or enjoyed as an after-school snack. You can also use whole wheat flour instead of all-purpose flour for a healthier version, but the taste may vary a bit. The vegetables can be customized to your liking as well, that is, you can make it with only scallions if you like or add more vegetables like sweet potato, bell pepper, mushrooms etc. You can also make a seafood version and use just Shrimp and scallions, which is a very popular dish in Korea. Traditionally it is made the size of a small pizza and cut into smaller pieces before serving, but of course you can make small regular sized pancakes as well.

Ingredients:

For Pan cake:

- ❖ All Purpose flour or (regular pancake mix) – 1 cup
- ❖ Rice Flour – 1/4 cup
- ❖ Salt – 1 tsp (or more if needed)
- ❖ Cold Water – 1 ½ cup
- ❖ Red Onion - ½ of medium size (thinly sliced)
- ❖ Zucchini – 1/2 cup (fine julienne, matchstick size)
- ❖ Scallions or green onions – 1 bunch (thinly sliced, matchstick size)
- ❖ Carrot – 1/2 cup (fine julienne or matchstick size)
- ❖ Cabbage – 1 cup (thinly sliced, matchstick size)
- ❖ Green Chili – 1 or 2 chopped.
- ❖ Oil- 3 to 4 spoons

For Dipping Sauce:

- ❖ Low Sodium Soy Sauce – ¼ cup
- ❖ Rice Wine Vinegar (or regular vinegar) – 2 tsp
- ❖ Garlic – 1 tsp grated
- ❖ Green Onions – 2 tsp chopped.
- ❖ Sesame Oil – ½ to 1 tsp
- ❖ Sesame seeds – ¼ tsp toasted. (Optional if using sesame oil)
- ❖ Red Chili flakes – ¼ tsp or less as per taste.
- ❖ Sugar - a pinch
- ❖ Salt – if needed or as per taste.



Instructions:

- ❖ Combine all ingredients for dipping sauce in a small serving bowl and set aside.
- ❖ Next combine flour, salt and 1 cup water to make a smooth batter. Add all the vegetables to the batter and mix well. Add more water to make a pancake consistency batter (not too thick or thin.) Heat a 12-inch pan, swirl a couple of tablespoons of oil evenly in the pan.
- ❖ When it is hot, turn the heat to medium and add a couple of ladles of batter and spread evenly. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes.
- ❖ Lift the sides to see if the bottom is golden brown, if so, then flip the pancake, and press down gently with the spatula.
- ❖ Add some oil around the pancake and cook for another 4 to 5 minutes. Flip it again and cook for another minute or two.
- ❖ Remove it to a serving plate. When all the pancakes are done cooking, cut them up into smaller sizes and serve with the dipping sauce. Enjoy!!

Paan Coconut Ladoo -A Sweet Leafy Craving Recipe

By: Remya Prashob

Ingredients:

- ❖ 1 1/2 cup desiccated coconut unsweetened
- ❖ 1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk
- ❖ 5-6 paan(Betel)leaves
- ❖ 4-5 teaspoons gulkand (rose petal preserve)
- ❖ 4-5 teaspoons tutti frutti
- ❖ 4-5 teaspoons sugar coated fennel seeds
- ❖ 4-5 teaspoons chopped cashews/almonds
- ❖ 1 teaspoon ghee (clarified butter)
- ❖ more desiccated coconut for rolling



Instructions:

- ❖ To a food processor, add chopped paan leaves and condensed milk. Pulse till both are well combined. Set aside.
- ❖ Heat ghee in a pan on medium heat. Once ghee is hot, add desiccated coconut and roast for 2-3 minutes on medium-low heat.
- ❖ Add the condensed milk - paan mixture and stir to combine.
- ❖ Cook for another 2 minutes on low heat, mixture will thicken. Remove from heat and let the mixture cool down a bit.
- ❖ Grease your hands with little ghee, take small portion from the paan-coconut mixture, flatten it and add 1/2-1 teaspoon of gulkand/ tutti frutti/fennel/chopped nuts in the center.
- ❖ Bring the edges together and roll to form a ladoo.
- ❖ Roll the prepared ladoo in desiccated coconut. Repeat the same process with the remaining ladoos.
- ❖ Keep the paan coconut ladoo refrigerated.
- ❖ Enjoy the unique blend of tradition and innovation in every mouthwatering Paan Ladoo bite.

Salad Recipe

By: Reshma Sunil

When we plan to make salad, we think about something with green leafy vegetables along with some protein and sauce or for an Indian salad, we would add tomatoes, onions and chilies chopped into yogurt and served with biriyani or rice. Here is a completely different type of salad recipe that I created on my own and it can be served as an appetizer or as a complete meal especially for dinner. It is yummy and healthy and at the same time refreshing.

Ingredients:

- ❖ 1 cup Black beans
- ❖ 1 cup yellow corn
- ❖ 1 Ripe Mango
- ❖ 1/2 Pineapple
- ❖ Bell peppers 1 each of Red, Orange, Yellow and Green
- ❖ Onion
- ❖ Cucumber
- ❖ Tomatoes
- ❖ Pomegranate
- ❖ Jalapeno peppers
- ❖ Lemon juice
- ❖ Jeera Powder
- ❖ Chat masala
- ❖ Cilantro
- ❖ Salt

Instructions:

- ❖ Soak 1 cup of black beans and cook it and drain. You could also get 2 cans of black beans from the store, completely remove the water and wash in cold water. I prefer BPA free Organic black beans.
- ❖ Cook 1 cup of yellow corn in hot water (don't overcook) and drain it.
- ❖ Chop all the other ingredients into small bite sizes. For tomatoes and Jalapenos make sure you remove the middle part before chopping, otherwise the salad will be watery and spicy. Add all the other ingredients and mix it well. Add salt to taste.

Enjoy your Yummy Salad





ABHINAYA

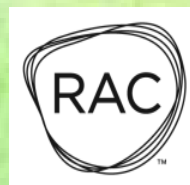
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### **A Not- For- Profit Cultural Organization to Promote Classical Dances of India**

*Abhinaya was founded in 1993 with the goal of enriching the cultural diversity of the greater St.Louis area. It is dedicated to present Classical Dances of India by professional artists from all over the globe. Being the first Indian organization in the area to do so it has already created an impact on the ethnic community as well as the art world of St Louis.*

*Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Odissi, Manipuri*

*Mohini Attam, Yakshagnana, Kathak*





## **|| Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa ||**

**By: Vinay & Kavita Menon**

The Sabarimala temple, located in a remote location in the forests of the Western ghats is a famous pilgrimage site dedicated to Lord Ayyappa. It is accessible only by foot from the river Pamba and attracts millions of devotees every year.

The pilgrimage of Sabarimala is rigorous, unique and challenging. Devotees, known as Ayyappas, observe a strict 41-day penance, during which they practice celibacy, follow a strict vegetarian diet, and lead a simple and austere life. The pilgrimage ends with a journey to the Sabarimala temple during the Mandala season which starts in mid-November and ends in third week of December.

The Makaravilakku festival, in mid-January, is a significant event where a celestial star, known as Makara Jyothi, appears in the sky. Devotees believe that witnessing the star is auspicious and brings blessings from Lord Ayyappa.

### **The History of Sabarimala:**

Demoness Mahishi, sister of Mahishasura who was killed by Goddess Durga in a fierce and bloody battle, wanted to avenge her slain brother. So, Mahishi undertook penance and obtained a boon from Lord Brahma that no living being except the offspring of Vishnu (Hari) & Shiva (Hara) could slay her.

Considering herself invincible because of the boon, Mahishi went on a rampage in the Devaloka and began harassing the Devas. The Devas in turn pleaded with Lord Vishnu to help them. To fulfil the conditions of the boon that no one except the son of Lord Shiva & Vishnu could kill Mahishi, Lord Vishnu assumed the female persona of Mohini. A child was born of the union of Mohini and Lord Shiva. Now, the question was, who would raise the child?

King Rajashekara of Pandalam was a just and wise ruler well-liked by his subjects. The region was in a golden period during his regime. Despite all this, the King and the Queen were sad. They had no children who would inherit the throne after the King.

King Rajasekhara was a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. One night, he had a dream that he would soon be blessed with a baby. Few days later, on one of his hunting trips into the forests near the river Pampa, King Rajashekara heard an infant's wails. He followed the sounds and came upon an adorable baby thrashing its arms & legs. The baby looked divine & exuded radiance. Astounded, the King stood watching. A sage passing by advised the King to take the baby home and raise the baby as his son.

And that's how the baby boy Hari-Hara (Vishnu-Shiva) puthran grew up under the care of King Rajasekhara. Since there was a golden bell around the baby's neck, the baby was named Manikandan.

Manikandan had a happy childhood in the Pandalam palace. He was given instruction on many subjects. In the meantime, the Queen mother gave birth to a baby boy. The whole palace rejoiced at the birth of the prince. Both Manikandan and his brother grew up with lots of love.

Under the guidance of tutors, Manikandan became an expert in martial arts, especially Kalaripayettu and attained mastery over weapons. Then one day, King Rajasekhara proclaimed that Manikandan would become the King after him. Everyone except a minister in the court applauded the King's decision.

The minister had some nefarious plans of his own. He poisoned the Queen Mother's ears against Manikandan, and suggested ways on how she could get rid of Manikandan to make her son as the next King. One of the ways he told the Queen was to fake a stomachache and send Manikandan on an errand to bring milk of a tigress to relieve her sickness.

In the forest, Manikandan realizes the purpose of his birth - which is to kill the buffalo-headed female demoness Mahishi. He fights and kills the cruel Mahishi ending her regime of terror over the Devas.

When Mahishi is killed a beautiful woman emerges and desires to marry Manikandan. But Manikandan says that he is a Brahmachari and cannot marry. The beautiful woman is adamant and tells Manikandan that she will wait for the day when he will change his mind. She comes to be known as Malikapurathiamma. It is believed that, even today, Malikapurathiamma awaits patiently for Manikandan in the hopes that one day he will marry her. There is a shrine dedicated to Malikapurathiamma in the Sabarimala Ayyappan temple premises.

With the asuri Mahishi dead, the Devas rejoice. To show his gratitude, King Indra assumes the form of a tigress and other devas turn into cubs. And then, led by Manikandan they return to the Pandalam palace.

When Manikandan reaches the palace, to the immense surprise & amazement of people present, he is seen riding the ferocious tigress accompanied by her cubs. Scared people flee for their lives. They now realize that Manikandan is a divine person and fall at his feet asking for forgiveness.

Manikandan tells his father, the King, that he has decided to leave the Pandalam palace. The King pleads with his son to stay back, but Manikandan says the purpose of his life on earth has been accomplished. He says that it was the time for him to return to Devaloka as the task of killing Mahishi for which he took the incarnation has been completed. A tearful King and remorseful Queen bid farewell to Manikandan. He is just **12 years** old at this time.

Just before leaving the palace, Manikandan performs miracles. As Gurudakshina, he heals his teacher's dumb & blind son. By now Manikandan is respectfully called as Ayyappan by people (Ayyan meaning 'Protector' and Appan meaning 'Father').

Soon after Ayyappan meets the knife-wielding muslim robber Vavar who challenges him for a fight. Vavar too recognizes Manikandan's divinity and becomes his trusted follower.

When Manikandan tells his father about his desire to retire, King Rajasekhara requests to let him build a temple or structure. He asks for a suitable place for the temple. Manikandan shoots an arrow that lands at a place where a Sanyasini called Sabari undertook penance during the period of Lord Rama. This place in the hills was known as Sabarimala or Sabari Hills.



King Rajasekhara builds a temple with ***pathinettam padi*** or the ***18 steps*** for his son under his instructions. It is believed that the idol of Lord Ayyappa was carved by Lord Parasurama himself and was installed on the day of Makara Sankranthi. This is also the day when the celestial star Makara Jyothi, symbolic of Lord Ayyappan emerges in the sky.

### **Essence of Swamy Ayyappan:**

तत्त्वमसि । तत्त्वमसि । Tatvamasi – “I am That” is a philosophy prevalent with Lord Ayyappa. It represents the physical and mental state of a devotee at the culmination of their 41-day Vratham (austerity period). The Sabarimala pilgrimage is the only one that refers to the devotee as “Swami”.

As devotees climb the eighteen holy steps of the Sabarimala Temple, they see the words 'Tat Tvam Asi' inscribed at the entrance. This Sanskrit mantra means "I am that" or "you are that". In simpler terms, it means that the one you seek (God) is within yourself. You are the one that you seek. God is in you. This is the essence of Swamy Ayyappan's pilgrimage.

A devotee starts the Vratham on the first day of Vrischika masam and ends on the 11th day of Dhanu masam of the Malayalam calendar. This period of 41 days is called the Mandala masam. It begins with one wearing a Mala made of Tulasi beads. A Guru Swami – one who has been observing this Vratham for more than 18 plus years and visited Sabarimala - serves as a guide and leader for you.

The expectations from an individual embarking on this holy journey are that they should give up eating non-vegetarian food, follow celibacy and live a pure and non-materialistic life. These are not mere rules and regulations but rather prepare you to assimilate and spread the utmost amount of positive spiritual energy that is gathered during the austerity period.

As days go by the inner self becomes closer to the Brahman. In fact, you are referred to as *Ayyappa or Maalikapuram* throughout this period. During this time, visiting local temples and taking part in bhajans is an experience that cannot be expressed in words. The chants of *Swamiye Ayyappo, Ayyappo Swamiye* reverberates in you. The vibrations these chants create energizes you and lets you see the world from a different perspective. *You will understand and realize life can be lived simply.*

### **The realization of oneness with the Brahman will slowly start emerging!**

In modern times due to multiple reasons (like job etc) individuals do not observe the complete 41 days Vratham. Closer to the end of their Vratham, all Ayyappas and Maalikapurams start their journey to Sabarimala. Before they embark on the journey, the ritual of ***Kettu Nira*** is performed. This is typically performed in a temple with other Ayyappas and Maalikapurams under the direction of the Guru Swami. The Kettu or bag is made up of two sections. Each section will hold a coconut and there is a significance to the coconut that is put in the front section.

The coconut is emptied of its water and filled with ghee under the chants of *Swamiye Swamiye Swamiye* until the coconut is full. The Brahman inside you is being poured into the coconut. The emotions and vibrations for the ones doing this process is a slow realization that you are becoming one and closer to seeing Him at the abode.

***Remember now, Brahman and you are one, Tatvamasi!***

The ***Irumudi Kettu*** is carefully carried on the head or shoulder depending on one's physical abilities during the journey to Sabarimala. Devotees come in large numbers from all over the world. Everyone is an ***Ayyappa or Maalikapuram***, imagine that!

The journey culminates with a blissful darshan of the Lord and some amount of sadness that the austerity period is over. We can practice some of the austerities in our daily life and do not need to wait for the Mandala masam to start!

**Note:** There are many popular stories associated with Lord Ayyappan among the devotees. These differ from one to another depending on the imaginations of the narrator and also due to them getting passed down through generations. The above writeup is based off from both varied sources and the authors' own experiences while participating in the various rituals during the Mandala season.

**|| Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa ||**

























# **Ohmkaram's Special Program (Part 1) Story of Amrithavarshini Dance Drama**

**By: Aditya Vishnu Pillai**

Sargam School of Performing Arts presented the dance drama Amrithavarshini to depict the story of Samudra Manthan in the event “Sri Ayyappa Swamy” hosted by Ohmkaram.

Samudra Manthan (churning of the milky ocean) is one of the most significant stories in Indian mythology.

The mountain of knowledge and consciousness in humans that are being pulled by both evil and good thoughts within oneself distresses the human life. The ocean of mind is washed out of its evil thoughts and led to attain immortality (moksha) when one gains yogic nature. The win over the evil thoughts of mind that gives all enormous power to eventually attain moksha is explained beautifully with the Samudra Manthan story.

The story starts with all gods losing powers to demons due to a curse on them by Sage Durvasa. The demigods go to Lord Vishnu for help, who advised that only the nectar, at the bottom of the celestial milky ocean can make them strong again, and they would become immortal. However, the ocean would need to be churned for the nectar to appear on the surface, and this was a task they couldn't do alone. They would need to seek the help of the demons for this.

For the churning, demons and demigods sought the help of the mountain Mandara to serve as the churning rod. Vasuki, the king of snakes, was approached to serve as the rope for the churning and to be bound around Mount Mandara. The demigods were to pull one end of the giant serpent, and the asuras, the other. The demons held the head of the snake, while the demigods held its tail. The churning went on for 1,000 years.

The force of the churning was so great that the mountain began to sink. Vishnu then took the form of a huge turtle (Kurma avatar) and, like an island, supported the mountain on his back. The first thing to come out of the ocean was a terrible poison. Lord Shiva swallowed the poison to save the living beings.

A total of 14 valuables emerged from the ocean, which were divided among the devas and the asuras. The Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi emerges too and chooses Vishnu as her consort. Finally, Dhanvantari, the divine physician emerged, with the pot of nectar.

The demons show their evil nature and fight with Gods to consume the Nectar. At that moment, Vishnu takes the form of Mohini to ensure that only the Gods get the Nectar and distribute the nectar among the Gods. A demon named Svarabhanu disguised himself as a God and drank some nectar. Mohini realizes the danger of the demon getting nectar and cuts off his head with her discus, the Sudarshana Chakra. The act happened before the nectar could reach his throat. This led to the head and body separated and attain moksham (liberation) to form Rahu and Ketu—two separate entities that became shadow planets in the astrological system of India.

Regaining their strength after consuming the nectar, the Devas defeated the Asuras and regained their kingdom.



## Ohmkaram's Special Program (Part 2) – Swamy Ayyappan's story

By: Kavita Menon

Kerala's Pandalam Prince's journey from Manikandan to Swamy Ayyappan was performed as a dance drama by Guru Prasanna Kasturi's Soorya Performing Arts during Ohmkaram's annual event conducted on 17th June 2023 at the St. Louis Hindu Temple's Community Center.

The program was the second half of a two-part series. Talented performers and artists danced and enacted dialogues to charm the audiences. Efforts put in for the drama were visible in all aspects of the program. Costumes, makeup and dances showed painstaking attention to detail undertaken to maintain the authenticity of the story.

The props especially stood out with the **pathinettam padi** 18-holy-steps being the highlight of the show. It was a huge enterprise and involved the combined efforts of parent volunteers and students. Along with the music, during the climax, it made for a surreal experience for the audiences. Many in the audience chanted slogans in tune with the background score as it played.

Overall, the first-ever performed dance drama in America, showing Prince Manikandan's journey, was very successful and received lots of great reviews and applause amidst multiple requests for a repeat performance during the Mandala season.

Program credits:

Lyricist - Vasudevan sir for sahityams in Malayalam; Music direction - Chaami sir; Singer - Nanda Kumar; Other musicians - Vivek V Krishna, Veena Gopal Venkataramana; Keyboard and Percussion - Various artists; Nattuvangam – Pulikeshi sir; Music recording - Aravind studio; Choreographer - Guru Prasanna Kasthuri.





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## **Temples of note in Kerala**

**By: Amritha Navjith and Sona Mukesh**

Kerala is home to numerous temples that showcase stunning architecture and vibrant rituals. Dedicated to various deities, they attract pilgrims and tourists alike contributing to Kerala's reputation as a hub of spiritual and historical significance.

### **Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple**

Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, this temple is renowned for its unique blend of Dravidian and Kerala style architecture with intricate stone carvings, mural paintings, and a majestic seven-tiered gopuram. Here, the incredibly large idol of Lord Padmanabha is enshrined in a reclining posture (Ananthashayana) on the celestial multiple headed serpent Adi Shesha. Devotees take darshan through three doors- one to see the head, the middle to see Lord Brahma emerge from a lotus on the navel and the other side where His feet can be seen. Lord Vishnu is seen here with his consorts, Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Bhu Devi. Also, his right hand rests on the Shiva Linga. Interestingly the moolasthanam (original source) of the temple is considered to be in Ananthapuram, Kasargod, the northernmost district of Kerala. The temple garnered global attention when immense wealth was discovered in its vaults during an inventory a few years ago.



### **Guruvayur Temple**

Believed to be over 5000 years old, Guruvayur is dedicated to Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The temple's architecture reflects the classic Kerala style with its high gopuram and intricate wood carvings.

Guruvayoorappan is worshiped here as revealed to his parents Vasudeva and Devaki at the time of his birth, with the four arms carrying the conch Panchajanya, discus Sudarshana, mace Kaumodaki and the lotus. The idol is made of a unique "Patalanjana" stone and is believed to have self manifested. Guruvayur is known for its vibrant festivals and the temple hosts numerous rituals and daily poojas. A famous devotee of Kannan, Melpaththur Narayana Bhattathiri composed Narayaneeyam, a devotional Sanskrit poem at the age of 27.





### **Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple**

Surrounded by 18 hills and the dense forests of the Western Ghats, this temple dedicated to Lord Ayyappa is perched atop a hill at 1574 ft above sea level. Devotees climb 18 stairs before entering the sanctum symbolizing their detachment from worldly desires. They burn coconuts at a fire pit, signifying the burning of their sins. The idol here is said to be made of panchaloha. The temple is a significant spiritual and cultural landmark and sees millions of visitors every year during Mandala Kaalam even though it requires a rigorous 41-day penance to enter the premises.



### **Vadakkunnathan Temple**

Vadakkunnathan temple dedicated to Lord Shiva is enclosed by a stone wall enclosing an area of 9 acres. This temple in Thrissur has classic Kerala architecture with a gopuram on each side in addition to the koothambalam featuring intricate wood carvings. The 16- foot Shiva lingam in the sanctum is covered by ghee offering, which is believed to have never melted in centuries. The temple is renowned across the world for its celebration of Thrissur Pooram. But it is to be noted that the deity doesn't partake in the Pooram festivities.



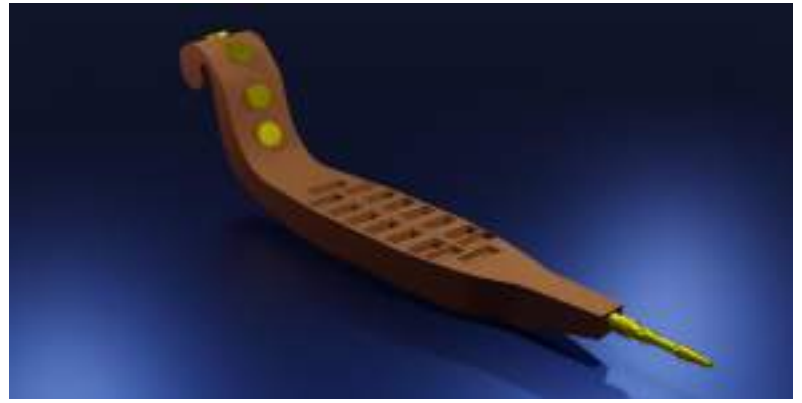
### **Chottanikkara Bhagavathy Temple**

Situated in Ernakulam, the temple is associated with Bhagavathy along with Lord Vishnu. Rituals here start early morning around 4:00 a.m. as Sree Mookambika Saraswathy is believed to attend the morning rituals before the doors of the sanctum in Mookambika are opened. She is worshiped in a white sari in the morning as Saraswati and at noon as Mahalakshmi in a bright red sari with elaborate shringar. In the evening she is worshiped as Mahakali or Durga draped in blue. Guruthi Pooja performed in the evenings are especially significant. It is said to have therapeutic effects on women with mental suffering. People who feel impacted by evil spirits also visit this temple for relief.



# Chundan Vallom

By: Savyaharan R Nambiar, 5th Grade



When my mom asked me what I was going to write for the magazine, I didn't know what to do! But then, my dad gave me an idea. He told me I should make a chundan vallom, a boat native to Kerala, using a 3D software called Blender. I have been playing with Blender for quite sometime and I like it a lot.

My family has a show-case piece of this boat and my dad showed it to me. He also told me about the history of the boat. A long time ago, in Kerala, our forefathers were trying to fight our enemies out at sea and forfeit seemed like the only option. They then came up with a good strategy and plan. They would make a boat that only needed two or three people to help row it forward and make fake people out of the resources they had. They sometimes used clay or other materials and had skilled artists make the fake people. When they sent these boats out to sea, the enemies would waste their brain power and weapons against boats full of almost nonliving human figures. Then the boats with the real people would come and attack. And it was usually us that won!

Anyway, my dad reminded me of Blender and that I've made good progress with it to make 3D models. He told me I should use Blender for this project. And I did! But I will be honest here, it was challenging and hard to make it look good. And for the colors of the boat, it was hard as well. I made a simple version of the boat for the first day of the project. That way, I could see what I could do, needed to do, and see the mistakes I needed to correct. So time flew by and I made version after version after version with each one getting better and fewer mistakes. But like I said, this was a hard project and very time consuming. But I knew I had a project to finish and a goal to reach. So I kept on working and made each one better than the last.

Finally, the last day came of this project and I needed to combine together all the knowledge I learned and make the best boat yet. So minute ticked after minute, hour after hour and so on. Finally everything was ready. I clicked "Render" and presto poof!-my boat was finished. Thus, that's how I made the 3D model of the chundan vallom in Blender!

# Mahabali

By Sreelakshmi R Nambiar, 2nd Grade



Once there lived a demon king named Mahabali. He was kind and giving and had a wish. The wish was to rule the world! Including Hell, Heaven, and Air. To gain power he did lots of battles and yagyas. All the gods got scared and approached Lord Vishnu. At once, Vishnu took an avatar of Vamana, the dwarf Brahmin boy and asked Mahabali for three pieces of land. Mahabali immediately said Yes! The Brahmin immediately grew the size of a giant. The first step was on Heaven. The second step was on Earth. The Brahmin went to Mahabali and asked “Where should I keep my next step?” Mahabali Said “You may take the next step on my head.” Lord Vishnu turned to his true form and kept the step on Mahabali’s head and granted Mahabali the “Paathaal Lokam” to rule forever. Lord Vishnu pushed Mahabali into Paathaal Lokam. Lord Vishnu thanked Mahabali for his good behavior and let him visit Kerala once every year, which is celebrated as “Onam”!

## HOPING FOR SUNSHINE

Poem By: Prarthana Rajesh, 8th Grade



The world is dark,  
The clouds gather and thunders,  
It rains for hours and hours,  
And maybe for days  
After it rains, darkness looms,  
It takes a while for the darkness to subside.  
Days, weeks, maybe months  
The darkness hurts.  
There are going to be times,  
When you feel like the world is over  
Times when you feel like there’s nothing you can do.  
You will make mistakes,  
You will lose people you love,  
There will be obstacles guarding your goals,  
You will have regrets,  
But focus on overcoming these hardships,  
Conquering these challenges will help you be stronger.  
Trust me,  
There will be Sunshine.



## **My Taekwondo Adventure**

**By: Anshuman Nair, 4th Grade**

I started my journey as a white belt student and I was really excited about it. I had my first intro class and the instructor started teaching me the basics of taekwondo. She taught me punches and basic kicks. This was also the time COVID hit. This means at the time I was doing zoom classes. I continued zoom classes for the next six months until I was yellow belt.

When things started to get better, I moved from online class to in-person class. I was totally nervous when I met my instructor. My instructor introduced me to the class. Then she introduced me to my partner. My instructor told the other kids to demonstrate the things that we do in-person. By the way, I was in the beginners class which means we were in the second lowest class. As we progressed I also started to get more comfortable with my in-person classes.

But then after multiple tests, I graduated from the beginners class and moved into the advanced class. My new belt was a camo belt. When I went to the advanced class for the first time I had the same instructor. But there were different students in the advanced class. A lot of them were higher belts than me. It was also going to be a long journey since there were 12 belts to pass. But I kept going. Along the way, I participated in multiple tournaments and got some prizes too.

Taekwondo taught me how to have courage, respect others, to be a good listener, to have self esteem, and to be honest.

I passed camo, camo decided, green, green decided, purple, purple decided, blue, blue decided, brown, brown decided, red, and red decided. I made lots of friends along the journey. Finally I had graduated from the advanced class and moved on to the hardest class aka black belt class. It took me about two and a half years to reach this goal. I probably will be a Black belt 1st degree by the middle of 2024. I am very proud of myself for making this so far. Next time if you want to defend yourself, I prefer you go to chesterfield ATA martial arts for kids.

## **Mookambika Temple**

**Location: Kollur, Udupi district, India**

**By : Souparnika R Nambiar, 7th Grade**



Goddess Mookambika is said to be the name given to Goddess Shakti after she killed the demon Mahishasura (also known as Kaumasura). According to Hindu Religious Scriptures there are three forms of the Goddess - Mahakali, Mahalaxmi & Maha Saraswathi representing Valour, Wisdom, and Strength. To restore cosmic balance Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu called upon their wives Parvati Lakshmi and Saraswati. Together they all combined their powers to make a goddess. Goddess Kali. Then goddess Kali set out on her lion and killed Mahishasura. Then her devotees built a temple so that they could pray to her, therefore earning her the name Mookambika.

## Souparnika River

By : Souparnika R Nambiar, 7th Grade



It is believed that Garuda (eagle) called Suparna performed penance on the banks of the river and attained salvation thus the name became Souparnika. It is also believed that the river absorbs the elements of 64 different medicinal plants and roots as it flows, therefore it cures diseases of those who bathe in it.

Souparnika River is a river flowing through Kundapur and Gangolli in western India. It joins with the Varahi River, Kedaka River, Chakra River, and Kubja River and merges into the Arabian Sea.

Running down the foothills of the Western Ghats, a dip in this holy river is believed to be very auspicious. Devotees visiting the famous Mookambika temple come here to bathe as they believe it is a sacred act.



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# **Truth is One**

## **By: Sudhir Kozhikal**

Each of the four Vedas can be characterized into two distinct groups viz 'Karmakanda' which deals with action (and results) from a metaphysical standpoint, and 'Gnanakanda' that deals with the knowledge of the absolute truth (Brahman). Upanishads are part of Gnanakanda, and since Gnanakanda appears at end of the Vedas, it is also known as Vedanta. Three distinct philosophies sprouted from Vedanta which are Advaita, VishishtAdvaita, and Dvaita. There were three popular philosophers (or guru) who were great proponents of each of these philosophies. They were Sri Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya.

### **Advaita Vedanta of Sri Adi Shankaracharya:**

Spiritual genius Sri Adi Shankaracharya appeared in Kalady, Kerala during 8th century CE who interpreted Vedanta through the strict principles of Advaita. Advaita Vedanta considers Brahman as the underlying reality, which has no attributes or qualities. The world is engulfed in Brahman everything we see and realize is Brahman, which is the absolute transcendent reality beyond the world and all creatures. The world, the universe and all creatures (atma) are part of Brahman. He went on to suggest that that Atma and Bharaman are the same, all the sufferings we undergo is because of the fact that we don't recognize this truth due to our ignorance. Moksha (liberation) can be attained by identifying that the Atma is one and the same as the Brahman.

### **VishishtAdvaita of Sri Ramanujacharya:**

Sri Ramanujacharya appeared in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu during 11th century CE. He rejected Shankara's interpretation as far too extreme and radical, and interpreted the scriptures according to principles of VishishtAdvaita (qualified nondualism or non-duality with distinctions). He proposed that Lord Vishnu is the ultimate reality, and has limitless powers and infinite attributes (like creator, protector, destroyer etc.). He said that the whole world is Vishnu and every individual (Atma) in this world is a part of Vishnu. You can attain liberation by absolute surrender to Vishnu and reaching him after death.

### **Dvaita of Sri Madhvacharya:**

Sri Madhvacharya appeared in Pajaka, Karnataka during 13th century CE, he rejected both Shankar's and Ramanuja's interpretation and he advocated a simpler interpretation based on Dvaita (dualism). As per Madhvacharya the ultimate reality is Vishnu but he is separate from the world and individuals (Atma). He further propagated five kinds of differences (Doctrine of Difference) viz: Difference between material things, differences between material things and Atma, differences between material things and Lord Vishnu, differences between individual Souls, and differences between each soul and Lord Vishnu. According to him Moksha or liberation is attained by getting the grace of lord Vishnu through devotion in in the current life and the other.

### **At a very high level we can simplify each of these philosophies as below.**

**Advaita:** Bhraman alone exists all else is just name and form.

**VishishtAdvaita:** Lord Vishnu exists along with material world and individual soul, which are all parts of Vishnu.

**Dvaita:** Lord Vishnu exists along with material world and individual soul, but they are all separate from each other and Vishnu.



Here's an example of how sadhus from each of these schools of philosophy will interpret an ocean standing from the shore.

The **Sadhu from Dvaita school** will describe that 'This Ocean is vast and every wave born from the ocean, and are individually sustained by the ocean and eventually returned back to the ocean'. This is how Madhva compares Vishnu (Ocean) to individual Atma (waves) and how they are all different. Also the waves depends on the Ocean but the Ocean is independent.

The **Sadhu from VishishtAdvaita school** will describe that 'Every single wave is part of the Ocean and this vast Ocean possess countless waves as Vishnu possess countless attributes. And each wave is a tiny part of the Ocean as each Atma is a tiny part of Vishnu's infinite divinity'.

The **Sadhu from Advaita school** will describe that 'The vast Ocean and all the countless waves are nothing but water, everything is made of water and its just water alone' As Shankara said all that exists is Brahman alone.

This reminds me the four Mahavakyas, from Vedas which further enhances this Advaita philosophy.

I would like to conclude that if it wasn't for Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta we all will be worshipping in a Vihara chanting 'Buddham saranam gacchami.....'

## Wrestling: Embracing the Grind, Celebrating the Journey

By: Vaibhav Nair, 11th Grade



As I stepped into the dungeon a palpable sense of isolation hung in the air. Each group seemed locked within its boundaries. The atmosphere crackled with an unspoken tension, and I couldn't shake the feeling that I was about to embark on something unfamiliar. The session kicked off with warm-ups, the collective energy in the room rising as we geared up for what awaited. The air buzzed with anticipation as we moved through the exercises, and beads of sweat began to form on my forehead. Little did I know, this was just the beginning of a journey that promised challenge and self-discovery.

Disbelief washed over me like a wave—I had just endured the most challenging workout of my life. Every inch of my body was drenched in sweat, a testament to the intensity of the session. The cotton stuffed in my nose, a makeshift barrier against the possibility of my bloody nose getting on the mat, served as a stark reminder of the physical toll. Exiting the dungeon, the stark shift in temperature hit me. The room had been a furnace, radiating with the collective heat of everyone's presence. Stepping into the cooler air, my sweat-soaked clothes clung uncomfortably to my body, creating an odd sensation that sent shivers down my spine. It was a peculiar mix of relief and discomfort, a physical manifestation of the trials I had just faced in that intense workout. The thought of enduring another three grueling months of daily, five-days-a-week workouts felt daunting. Amid these intense sessions, questions about my purpose and goals echoed in my mind, often leaving me to wonder why I subjected myself to such rigorous training.

However, as time marched on, the relentless routine became a part of my daily existence. Suddenly, the season reached its conclusion. Relief washed over me; no more relentless workouts, no more painful reminders of each session etched into my body in the form of cuts and bruises. I had gained back three precious hours every day. It was a welcome change, but an unexpected void began to emerge.

As days turned into weeks, I found myself missing the grind—the camaraderie forged in those intense workouts, the thrill of stepping onto the mat for a match, and the burning desire to compete and emerge victorious. The competitive spirit within me, once ignited, refused to be extinguished. It became clear that amidst the exhaustion and challenges, I had discovered a passion that transcended the physical toll, leaving me yearning for the exhilaration of the sport that had become an integral part of my identity. A powerful revelation echoed in my mind, a gem of wisdom shared by my coach: "It's not about the destination; it's about the journey." At first, it sounded like a cliché, but reflecting on it, I realized the profound truth it held. In my relentless pursuit of the end goal, I had overlooked the significance of the daily grind—the very essence of the journey. Somewhere along the way, I had become so fixated on reaching the finish line that I failed to appreciate the sheer effort I poured into each day. The ability to work tirelessly towards a goal had become a routine, taken for granted in the grand scheme of my aspirations. It dawned on me that I possessed all the physical tools necessary for success and had cultivated the mental fortitude required for the challenges that came my way.

In that moment of reflection, I gained a newfound appreciation for the journey. The daily grind was not merely a means to an end; it was a testament to my commitment, resilience, and the gradual transformation occurring within me. Each bead of sweat, every bruise, and the mental battles I faced were integral parts of the journey, shaping me into a person capable of conquering not just the destination but relishing every step of the way.

## **Arrows of Honor: A Tale from the Kurukshetra War**

**By: Meenakshi Kadungath, 10th Grade**



We all have sweet memories of parents or grandparents telling us stories. So do I. My mom would tell me all kinds of stories when we were settling down for bed. Today, I am going to share one of my personal favorites, a story related to the great epic Mahabharata, set during the time of the Kurukshetra War. So settle down and get comfy!

Duryodhana seethed with anger as he paced around his small tent. Even after all this time, they were still no closer to defeating the Pandavas. The Pandavas were strong, intelligent, and loyal to one another, but Duryodhana was sure that his brothers and allies outmatched them in efficiency, skill, and number. The fact that they were on the losing side of the war made him bitter and resentful.

Temper fraying past his breaking point, Duryodhana strode from his tent, the cool evening air chilling him to the core. Soon, he arrived at his uncle's tent, with dark thoughts at the forefront of his mind. Bhishma was not only Duryodhana's uncle but also the head of his armies. That meant, in Duryodhana's point of view, that he was to blame for the Kauravas' lack of success.



Duryodhana entered Bhishma's tent, and found him sitting at a low table, reviewing maps. Upon hearing footsteps, Bhishma looked up, unsurprised to see that it was Duryodhana.

"Duryodhana," Bhishma greeted. "How may I help you?"

Duryodhana, his face thunderous and pinched with anger, replied, "We have been fighting for days! We have more numbers, we have more allies. We should've won by now. Instead, we are no closer to winning this war than when it began." His words were harsh and he wasn't thinking clearly in his bitter rage. "I know that the only reason you are fighting for us is because of your vow. You want the Pandavas to win, don't you? I know you aren't faithful enough for this role!"

When he heard this, Bhishma too, became upset. With great care, he took five arrows from his quiver and started chanting mantras. Duryodhana, greatly confused, watched Bhishma quietly. At last, Bhishma declared, "Tomorrow, I will kill the Pandavas with these five arrows!"

When he heard these words, Duryodhana became greatly excited. "How, Uncle, how?" Bhishma explained that he had put his life force into these five arrows. "If you shoot these arrows with the Pandavas in mind, they are sure to be killed." Duryodhana was thrilled. But then, as he thought it through, he became suspicious. What if Bhishma destroyed the arrows, or 'accidentally' misplaced them? "Wow, Uncle! Thank you. I will take these and keep them safe until tomorrow." Excited, he left the tent of Bhishma with the five arrows in his possession.

Meanwhile, Lord Krishna received the news of these five arrows from his spies. He had already been worried about something like this, and so he knew of the perfect way to get rid of them. Lord Krishna hatched a plan, and called for Arjuna, instructing him on what he must do. Arjuna, understanding the seriousness of the situation, quickly agreed and went off.

Stealthily, Arjuna crept into Duryodhana's tent. When Duryodhana saw him, he instantly picked up his weapon, but when he realized who it was, he lowered it. He knew Arjuna was an honorable man and wouldn't attack him like a coward.

"What do you want, Arjuna?" Duryodhana asked.

Arjuna spoke softly. "Do you remember when I saved you from the Gandharva soldiers? You promised me a boon, which I said then that I will collect when I need it."

Duryodhana became instantly worried. "Yes?"

Arjuna smiled. "I have not yet asked for anything. I wish for the boon today, Duryodhana. I ask for the five arrows that you have, the ones that Bhishma imbued with his life force."

Duryodhana, being a true warrior and a man of his word, could not break a promise. Grudgingly, he handed over the five arrows.

As soon as Arjuna left, Duryodhana rushed over to Bhishma. He told Bhishma of what had occurred and requested that he make another set of arrows.

Wearily, Bhishma shook his head. "I cannot, Duryodhana. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. I put years of penance into those arrows and have nothing left to give". It was at that moment that Duryodhana knew that he had blown his chances away and that this was not going to end well for him and his allies.

This story contains a great deal of morals that we could learn from. However, I'm going to point out the one that I was struck by - it is the high value that these men placed on their word. Even Duryodhana, who is the villain in the story, surrendered the arrows only because of a promise given years ago. Duryodhana could have refused to give up those arrows, which would have changed the course of history, but he did not.

# Our solar system

By: Avyukth Nair 4th Grade



We live on **Earth**. The Earth is part of a bigger area called the solar system. The solar system contains **8 planets, 5 Dwarf planets**, more than 250 moons and lots of asteroids and comets. It also has the great glorious sun. The sun is the biggest object in our solar system. Its so big that it could fit 1.3 million Earths.

The sun's temperature is extremely hot. The temperature on the surface of the sun is 5,500 degrees Celsius, reaching a staggering 15 million degrees Celsius at its core. The sun gives heat, light and keeps our planet in place. Without sun, life on Earth wouldn't exist. There are 8 planets in our solar system namely Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.

**Mercury** is the first of the four **terrestrial planets**. This means it is a planet made mostly of rock. The planets closest to the Sun—Venus, Earth, and Mars—are the other three. Mercury was a god in Roman mythology. **Earth** and **Venus** are similar in size. The two planets are very close to each other as they orbit the Sun; because of this, Venus is the most visible planet in the night sky. Of all the planets, Venus is the one most like Earth. In fact, Venus is often called Earth's "sister" planet. Almost 1.5 million species of animals and plants have been discovered so far, and many more remain undiscovered. While other planets may have small amounts of ice or steam, Earth is two-thirds water, creating the perfect conditions for a breathable atmosphere.

**Mars** may be the reddish color of Mars, or the fact that it can often be easily seen in the night sky. The planet Jupiter is the first of the **gas giant** planets. Made mostly of gas, they include Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Its diameter is 11 times bigger than Earth, and its mass is 2.5 times greater than all the other planets combined. **Saturn** is the second largest planet. Rings around Saturn are brightest and most colorful. These rings are made mainly out of ice particles orbiting the planet. **Uranus** is the first planet so far away from the Earth that it can only be seen with the use of a telescope. Uranus is so far from the Sun that it takes 84 years to complete an orbit of the Sun. It is the only planet that spins on its side, so each pole is tilted away from the Sun for half its orbit. That means each night and day lasts 42 years. **Neptune** appears to be a beautiful bright blue because of the methane clouds that surround it. It is the most distant planet from the Sun. It takes a very long time—165 years to orbit the Sun.

All these planets travel in the path called Orbit. **Pluto** is a Dwarf planet. Pluto and other Dwarf planets are lot like regular planets. The big difference is size. Dwarf planets lack the gravitational force needed to pull in.



# Beyond Chicken Nuggets: Fixing the Flaws of School Nutrition

By: Hritika Malugu, 10th grade



My stomach grumbles in class. When is lunch? I think, Third lunch starts in... AN HOUR? As I can't stop thinking about all the delicious food that I could be eating, I watch the clock and its every tick. Tick, tock, tick, tock. Finally, there goes the bell. I rush to the cafeteria line waiting for the aroma of baked goods mixed with the ripe smell of freshly cut fruit. I really was starving. The smells start to jump at me, so this is when I realize that my expectations are no where near reality. I run through the options I have to eat, and nothing's looking promising. A hamburger? No, I can't eat that. Macaroni and cheese? The cheese is gray; I will not be eating that. Some sort of irradiated meat? That looks vile, unappetizing, and suddenly very unhealthy all at the same time. The hunger rushes to my brain, but my taste buds reject any thoughts of food.

I sat through the rest of lunch with an intense gloom on my face; it had felt like I was watching paint dry. From this day onward, I had never bought school lunch again; it really was the end of an era. The lack of balance between nutritional and enjoyable lunch is a huge problem in schools right now because some students rely on provided food for their nutritional intake and others need guidance on making healthy decisions; however, this problem may have a solution: increasing access to more desirable food with lower fat and less added sugars which will be beneficial because students will have a maintained interest in eating school lunch while in turn creating a healthier environment.

School lunches that are unhealthy or even distasteful are harming students across the country because those without access to better nutrition are forced to either skip lunch or make unhealthy decisions. Ever since the 1980s, as an effect of budget cutbacks, school lunches have been worsened by the day. While this may seem like a simple problem that has very minimal effects on the United States, for "17 million children, school lunch may be the only consistent food nutrition they can count on." There is a plethora of issues affecting way too many people within this system considering the presence of hyper palatable foods (HPF), higher fat and more added sugar foods (HFS), and the lack of lower fat and less added sugar foods (LFS). Even if this problem seems to have a simple solution, the effects of it are spreading fast; "using a standardized definition of HPF, [a study] demonstrated that HPFs have saturated the US food environment, comprising 69% of food in the US food supply as of 2018." Continuing onto this, even small children and infants "consume >50% of daily energy from HPF." Think about the families who already struggle through financial issues that constantly forget about the importance of health-conscious foods; although it may be hard to pick these people out in a public setting, the effect of food intake can affect ones social, academic, and active lifestyles. It's substantial that Congress works towards improving the nutritional value of school meals while keeping it in the students best interest to consume it as well.

These schools would take the funding put to foods with more refined carbohydrates that promote issues like obesity and diabetes and allocate them to reducing the cost of school meals to low-income families. Within this system, the schools still need to stay true to serving fruits and vegetables as well as avoiding hyper palatable foods. According to A. Hawkes, who is part of the Tri-County Health Department, some certain districts have "started the process of moving toward increasing scratch-cooked items" meaning that these districts are looking for a healthier lifestyle.

This same program allowed for increased opportunities relating to physical fitness and decreasing access to

unhealthy foods. In the end of the day, it's crucial to understand that although school lunches present an extraordinary problem, there is so much open opportunity for districts to utilize the resources they are given to this well-supported cause. Although I may be complaining about my relationship with school food, it's nothing compared to the fact that "one in five children live in a household in which they are 'food insecure,' not sure what or when their next meal will be." Some students truly rely on school food, and it's not a time to be putting this issue to the side. It's important that we advocate for those who don't have the means to do it themselves and hold our nation accountable for the mass issue we are contributing to.

## **First Map of America**

**By: Dhruv Menon, 11th Grade**

Created by German Cartographer, Martin Waldseemüller in 1507, the Waldseemüller Map was the first breakthrough in the history of cartography.

The Waldseemüller Map was made at a time when exploration and discovery were reshaping the very way people lived and was revolutionary in its depiction of the New World. This was the first map to have America on it. This came to be because, Waldseemüller named the newly discovered lands "America" in honor of the explorer Amerigo Vespucci.

Waldseemüller's map represented the spirit of curiosity and the hunger for knowledge, a considerable characteristic of the Renaissance era.

Different from the Ptolemaic model of traditional maps that were produced before this, the Waldseemüller Map utilized cylindrical projection. Cylindrical projection was another major change compared to the previous cartographic norms. This approach highlighted the need for greater accuracy relating to geographical features and the limitations of earlier mapmaking methods.

Furthermore, the Waldseemüller Map demonstrated advancements in printing technology during the Renaissance. The map was one of the first printed maps considered large-scale and contributed to the spreading of geographical knowledge during this period. This spread of knowledge was crucial, as it shaped public perceptions of the world and established connections between the different regions.

Despite its pioneering contributions, the Waldseemüller Map was largely forgotten for centuries. It wasn't until the early 20th century that a copy of the map was rediscovered in a German castle. Recognizing its historical significance, scholars and historians have since celebrated the Waldseemüller Map as a testament to the intellectual and exploratory zeal in the Renaissance period.

In conclusion, the Waldseemüller Map occupies a unique place in the history of cartography. Beyond serving as an example of geographical knowledge during the Renaissance, it led to the numerous discoveries made in this period. It was considered to be a foundation for a large number of expeditions and it changed the way we humans look at our world. Without it, our world would be a different place!





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# 7 Principles of Quantum Mechanics from Bhagavad Gita

By: Dr. Sudhir Prayaga



Generally, it is construed that religion and science are incompatible and that religion cannot explain many scientific observations. However, I feel that Hinduism is an exception to this rule and compatible with most scientific phenomena as per our current scientific understanding. In this article I am attempting to compare the major principles of Quantum Mechanics and how it is covered in Bhagavad Gita.

## Principle-1 The Quantum Entanglement

The Nobel prize for Physics in 2022 was awarded to Alain Aspect, John Clauser and Anton Zeilinger for their work on quantum entangled photons. Quantum physics deals with explaining the nature of reality scientifically at the subatomic level. Quantum entanglement, a primary feature of quantum mechanics, in simple terms is when two particles interact even when they are far apart in space. Gita says that the supreme consciousness, which is ever present and whose form we cannot imagine, in the form of subatomic particles (anoraniyam) or photons (adithya varnam), can control and interact across the multiverse or dark matter (thamasa parasthad), and responsible for everything that we know.

കവിം പുരാണമനുശാസിതാര മണോരണീയംസമനുസ്മരേദ്യഃ  
സർവ്വസ്യ ധാതാരമചിന്ത്യരൂപ മാദിത്യവർണം തമസഃ പരസ്താത്

kaviṁ purāṇam anuśhāsītāram aṇor aṇīyāṁsam anusmared yah  
sarvasya dhātāram achintya-rūpam āditya-varṇam tamasaḥ parastāt ...Gita 8.9

Gita describes an organism as a machine (yantra) and the conscious-self or ishvara rides this machine as a passenger. Ishvara in his aspect of material controller directs the machine by way of the laws of maya (Gita 18.61). This verse from Gita provides a mechanistic view of the biological phenomenon scientifically.

ഈശ്വരഃ സർവ്വഭൂതാനാം ഹൃദയേശ്വരജ്ഞ തിഷ്ഠതി  
ഭ്രാമയൻ സർവ്വഭൂതാനി യന്ത്രാരൂഢാനി മായയാ

īshvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānāṁ hṛid-deśhe 'rjuna tiṣṭhathi  
bhrāmayan sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā ... Gita 18.61



## Principle-2 Kinetic Nature of Subatomic Particles

Quantum Mechanics describes the nature of physical reality through kinetic interaction of subatomic particles. It assumes that these subatomic particles are in constant motion and interaction (science has no answer to the question why it is so), without which there is no existence. Similarly, Bhagavad Gita also says that nothing in the universe can remain motionless because of the nature of their qualities or ‘gunas’. Ancient Hindu philosophers (or scientists) had already recognized this fact.

ന ഹി കശ്ചിത് ക്ഷണമപി ജാതു തിഷ്ഠത്യകർമകൃത്  
കാര്യതേ ഹവശ്യഃ കർമ്മ സർവ്വഃ പ്രകൃതിജൈർഗുണൈഃ

na hi kaśhchit kṣhaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhatyakarma-kṛit  
kāryate hyavaśhaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛiti-jair guṇaiḥ ... Gita 3.5

Our Vedas teach us that everything in the universe is in constant motion, except the Brahman or the Akshara. Anything that is in motion should be in comparison to something immovable, for the universe that is the immutable Akshara or Isvara. Now modern science also agrees with this concept, that everything in the universe is in constant motion, from subatomic particles to cosmic bodies. Until a few centuries ago people in the west thought that earth is flat and motionless. Gita also says that the whole universe functions due to yagna by the supreme consciousness (Akshara).

കർമ്മ ബ്രഹ്മോദ്ഭവം വിദ്ധി ബ്രഹ്മാക്ഷരസമുദ്ഭവം  
തസ്മാത്സർവ്വഗതം ബ്രഹ്മ നിത്യം യജ്ഞേ പ്രതിഷ്ഠിതം

karma brahmmodbhavaṁ viddhi brahmākṣhara-samudbhavam  
tasmāt sarva-gataṁ brahma nityaṁ yajñe pratishṭhitam ... Gita 3.15

## Principle-3 Particle Nature of the Universe

Physicists now demonstrate that the whole universe is pervaded or enveloped by what is called the Higgs field, without which the universe may not exist. Higgs field is carried by particles called Higgs Bosons (named after physicist Peter Higgs and Indian physicist Satyendra Nath Bose), the so-called ‘God particle’. It is held together as beads on a string and provides mass to all other subatomic particles and thus crucial to the formation of the physical universe that we know. The allegory used by physicist ‘the God particle’ says it all, that there is no existence without these particles pervading the whole universe. A sloka or verse from Bhagavad Gita (7.7) says exactly this, that the Brahman is everything in the universe. That everything in the universe is strung on Brahman like jewels on the thread of a necklace, analogous to how Higgs Bosons are held together to make up the universe.

മത്തഃ പരതരം നാനൃത്കിഞ്ചിദസ്മി ധനഞ്ജയ  
മയി സർവ്വമിദം പ്രോതം സൂത്രേ മണിഗണാ ഇവ

mattaḥ parataraṁ nānyat kiñchid asti dhanañjaya  
mayi sarvaṁ idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva ... Gita 7.7

#### Principle-4 Wave Nature of Reality

French physicist Louis de Broglie in 1924 first proposed that matter behaves like waves. Now the wave particle duality forms a central concept in Quantum Mechanics. All matter exhibits wave like behavior, although at macro levels of our observation the wave like behavior of objects is too small for us to notice. Gita says that the photons or light (theja) emerging from the sun envelops all of earth, it is also the light in moon and fire, is the nature of Brahman. Unlike a particle, only wave form can be present everywhere. Thus, it says that God is omnipresent and envelops everything that is animate or inanimate in the universe.

യദാദിത്യഗതം തേജോ ജഗദ്ഭാസയതേവിലം  
യചന്ദ്രമസി യചാഗൗ തത്തേജോ വിദ്ധി മാമകം

yad āditya-gata tejo jagad bhāsayate ' khilam  
yach chandramasi yach chāgnau tat tejo viddhi māmakam ... Gita 15.12

#### Principle-5 Something Cannot be Created Out of Nothing

According to Einstein's famous equation  $E=MC^2$ , energy can be created from matter and vice versa. It can only change from one form to another but cannot annihilate matter or energy. Thus, the universe is a closed system with constant amount of matter and energy. This principle is explained in Bhagavad Gita (2.16), that something cannot be created out of nothing, and something cannot be destroyed into nothing. According to Hindu philosophy, there is no beginning or end. It is always present and changing from one form to another.

നാസതോ വിദ്യതേ ഭാവോ നാഭാവോ വിദ്യതേ സതഃ  
ഉഭയോരപിദ്യഷ്ടോ നതസ്ത്വനയോസ് തത്ത്വദർശിഭിഃ

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate satah  
ubhayorapi dṛiṣṭo 'nta stvanayos tattva-darśhibhiḥ ... Gita 2.16

#### Principle-6 The Uncertainty Principle

An essential feature of Quantum Mechanics is that it is generally impossible, even in principle, to measure a system without disturbing it. The process of measuring itself changes the system. Gita says that Brahma is outside of everything, it is also inside everything, it takes the form of the movable objects, and it is the one that becomes immovable objects. And due to its fineness and subtlety, it is impossible to be understood. That Brahma is situated far away from every object, and it is also situated near every object. This concept is also made very famous by the Beatles song 'within you and without you', written by George Harrison.

ബഹിരന്തശ്ച ഭൂതാനാമചരം ചരമേവ ച  
സൂക്ഷ്മത്വാത്തദവിജ്ഞേയം ദൂരസ്ഥം ചാന്തികേ ച തത്

bahir antaśh cha bhūtānām acharam charam eva cha  
sūkṣhmatvāt tad avijñeyam dūra-stham chāntike cha tat ... Gita 13.16

#### Principle-7 The Exclusion Principle

The Austrian physicist Wolfgang Pauli discovered the exclusion principle in 1925. It says that two similar particles cannot have the same position and velocity. Gita says the Akshara brahman cannot be defined, its location is unclear, but it is everywhere (Gita 12.3).



യേ ത്വക്ഷരമനിർദ്ദേശ്യമവ്യക്തം പര്യുപാസതേ  
സർവ്വത്രഗമചിന്തും ച കൂടസ്ഥമചലം ധ്രുവം

ye tv akṣharam anirdeśhyam avyaktaṁ paryupāsate  
sarvatra-gam achintyañcha kūṭa-stham achalandhruvam ... Gita 12.3

The Bhagavad-Gita provides a philosophical framework for the understanding the nature of the observer and the nature of the observer's interaction with rest of the universe. This is akin to what modern physics and Quantum theory propose, a description of observations, the subject, and the object of observations. What is incredible is that the Hindu philosophers and Maharishis have conceptualized these principles or ideas thousands of years ago while it took scientists like Einstein and Max Planck in 20th century for the westerns science to catch up. Unfortunately, we are undermining our own rich knowledge and heritage hidden in many of our books.

Everything in this article is my interpretation only and I am solely responsible for any errors or misinterpretations. My other articles can be found on my blog - [prayagaprinciples.blogspot.com](http://prayagaprinciples.blogspot.com).

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# **Is Human Interaction Required for Happiness?**

## ***An Analysis of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics***

**By: Lakshita Senthil**

In his book *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle deeply explores the idea of the purpose of human existence. He questions that while we know that humans aim for good in their lives, what is the chief good they aim for? Upon much speculation, he concludes that this chief, self-sufficient good is happiness or eudaimonia. He proposes that this happiness is directly linked to virtues, or states of character, that are developed over time. He defines happiness as achieved when all necessary virtues are also achieved through relevant virtuous action. But the question then becomes: do these virtues, and in extension happiness, require human interaction? While Aristotle certainly emphasizes that human interaction not only enhances but rather is a requirement for a happy life, it can also be imagined that under a modified, less demanding definition of happiness virtues can be developed in pure solitude and isolation, releasing any need for human interaction to achieve a happy life. In this essay, I will first summarize Aristotle's line of reasoning as to why human interaction is required for happiness and then propose an alternative definition where happiness occurs in degrees and by logical reason and analysis of the text, explain how such happiness can be achieved in only isolation.

Aristotle wrote *Nicomachean Ethics* with a central theme of connecting happiness to moral virtue. First, he establishes that happiness is distinct from certain other virtues such as honor, pleasure, and reason, as happiness is something "no one chooses for the sake of these, nor in general for anything other than itself." This self-sufficient happiness has another aspect added to it, that involves the exercise of reason, as "the function of a man is an activity of the soul which follows or implies reason." Reason is a crucial aspect setting humans apart from other living things, and therefore when finding the happiness involved in human life, one must consider the function of a man. This ability to reason also becomes core in the concept of virtue, as it is "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason." So, moral virtue is essential to a good life and happiness. In addition, the virtuous person can never be miserable as they will always do what is right even when it is painful. Happiness involves attaining these virtues over time and acting accordingly in the right way to live well. At the same time, Aristotle admits that certain goods are necessary to have happiness while others (such as fame) only enhance the happiness of a virtuous person. Regardless, the practice of virtue is most important in determining happiness.

According to Aristotle, having human interaction not only enhances but is also crucial to living a happy life. For example, he mentions that the happiness of one person is related to that "for parents, children, wife, and in general for his friends and fellow citizens, since man is born for citizenship." In this way, Aristotle contends that the function of a man is to be social, as being a good citizen is for the betterment and involvement of society as a whole. In another example, by saying "a supremely happy man will need friends" Aristotle explains that friendship - a social act - is a virtue and external good, and essential to a happy life as it allows for actively practicing virtuousness. Considering that reasoning is a core of happiness and virtue, Aristotle examines "deliberation," saying "we call in others to aid us in deliberation on important questions, distrusting ourselves as not being equal to deciding." Here, he points out the value of human connection and friendship in decision-making. By strengthening our capacity for deliberation, other people can assist us in acting virtuously by helping us think through ways to improve the happiness of ourselves and our community, highlighting the importance of human interaction to reasoning.

To further his point, Aristotle discusses various examples in which virtues can only be developed through social interaction and therefore shows how a virtuous life directly correlates to a social life. One major example of this is the virtue of universal justice. In Book V, Aristotle explores that this virtue is the highest of all virtues, as it requires practice



for oneself and the relations with society as a whole. As a second example, the virtue of friendliness is “concerned with the pleasures and pains of social life.” A good friend would respond to others by responding with approval and resenting the right things and the right time. Another example is truthfulness, a mean between self-deprecation and boastfulness where the person “loves truth, and is truthful where nothing is at stake...will avoid falsehood as something base.” Finally, there is an example of the virtue of Ready Wit, which involves tact and is important to good conversation and to avoid being uninteresting, avoiding “indecent language” at the right times. All of these virtue examples given by Aristotle are those that can only be developed in a social context, thereby implying how a social context is necessary for happiness.

While Aristotle establishes his viewpoint of human interaction being a requirement of happiness, it can also be argued that his definition of happiness is not as realistic. By proposing a different definition where happiness is something that comes on a spectrum for different people and therefore does not require all virtues, it can also be said that many different virtues and good actions can be formed in a purely isolated context, thereby allowing happiness to exist without a need for human interaction.

Aristotle’s argument claims that happiness is something to have or not have, but the reality may be a little more nuanced. Further, he elaborates that every virtue is a mean between two vices - that is excess and deficiency. Particularly focusing on deficiency, because it is considered a vice, it is also considered as damage to virtue, as “it is the nature of such things to be destroyed by defect and excess, as we see in the case of strength and of health.” Therefore, Aristotle implies that without all the traditional virtues (justice, temperance, courage, and practical wisdom) present, a happy life cannot exist. However, that seems unrealistic and an alternate definition of happiness can be proposed: happiness is present in degrees. For example, let us take the virtue of magnificence, which as described in Book 4 is concerned with the generosity of money, usually for the benefit of a community or state. According to Aristotle’s argument, someone in a financially unstable situation who cannot afford to donate that amount of money would be deemed deficient in magnificence and considered unhappy. However, despite this, they may possess other virtues such as the virtue of courage which allow them to reach happiness. Similarly, let us perceive the virtue of justice. As described in book 5 justice has to do with proper relations with others. However, if someone has most other virtues despite this virtue, they can be happy in varying degrees. In the case of justice, this realistic change in definition means human interaction would not be necessary to be happy.

Honing in on a specific virtue - the virtue of courage, Aristotle mentions the virtue only in the context of certain social fears, but surely other undescribed fears can be faced in pure isolation. He describes how persisting despite fears of “evils, e.g. disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death” is the hallmark of a courageous person. Furthermore, he describes “Citizen-soldiers seem to face dangers because of the penalties imposed by the laws,” giving the majority of his argument to an example where the fears are more social (as they are concerned with law and war). Courage involves pain and is therefore an admirable core virtue of happiness, as “it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant.” Taking pain as a mark of this particular virtue, we should examine other fears overcome in pure isolation from society. These can be considered fears of self-understanding: that is forgiveness, confrontation, and self-reflection leading to the discovery of passions and goals. The concept of self-understanding is daunting because it is unknown. The pain comes from delving deeper into where one’s behaviors originated. So, to face this process alone is something feared but doing such self-growth despite pain is courageous and therefore develops the virtue of courage. Therefore, this action of self-discovery leads to happiness in an isolated context.

In addition, while Aristotle largely focuses on the traditional virtues, it must be noted there are plenty of other

virtues that require an isolated environment as opposed to a social context. For example, the virtue of independence can only be developed without being reliant on others. Being in solitude allows for the best environment to develop a more powerful and original mind required to think for yourself, make important decisions on your own, do things on your own, and come up with solutions to problems and challenges by trusting yourself. With Aristotle's virtue definition, virtues are intermediates between two extremes when they are voluntarily chosen by reason. The virtue of independence can have two extremes: Dependence and then Hyper-Independence (due to trauma). Furthermore, one would choose to act in independence to better work towards goals and that is by reason. Therefore, this virtue of independence is indeed a virtue according to Aristotle's definition.

Many other virtues exist that would develop in only a solitary state and also follow Aristotle's definition. Aristotle also acknowledges other virtues left undescribed in the text exist, saying "at the same time it will become plain how many they are" in the sense that there are too many to describe in the text. Furthermore, he never says this is the maximum amount of virtues as he has described, unlike many other instances where he explicitly mentions there are only a certain number of options. Among these, one example could be the virtue of intuition (also pursuing what your original intuition says). Solitude allows one to recenter themselves, introspect, and develop an intuitive perspective on life. Society and others can taint your view of reality, as their thinking molds your own and therefore weakens your intuition. Another virtue that does not require human interaction to develop is self-discipline. Similar to intuition, outside influence can negatively affect this virtue and also involves the strength of mind, and therefore this virtue requires one to be alone. It involves the ability to control emotions and overcome weaknesses, pursuing the right actions and goals regardless of temptations to abandon the effort due to difficult circumstances. With all of these examples, there are surely many more that can develop only in a socially isolated context of living. Because they are proven to be virtues according to Aristotle's definition of virtue, and because of the previous understanding that virtues (though not all are needed) are crucial to living happily, developing only virtues that require a state of solitude rather than human interaction can dispel the need for socialization in living a happy life.

In conclusion, though Aristotle proposed that human interaction is not just an enhancement of happy life but rather a necessity, it can be said that human interaction is not needed to develop virtues required for happiness under a modified definition of happiness compared to that of Aristotle's. Because not everyone can develop every single virtue to be happy as Aristotle proposes and that is unrealistic, it can be proposed that as long as most virtues are present happiness can be developed to different degrees for different people. Furthermore, Aristotle did not focus on fears involved with a solitary state, and by analyzing such fears one realizes overcoming those fears allows for the development of the virtue of courage. Finally, many virtues can be developed without a social context, and developing many such virtues allows for happiness to exist without any human interaction.





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Selection of the scholar and the amount of the award are decided by the scholarship committee. You can be a part of this activity by volunteering to run the program or donating some money to the fund. For more information please check the scholarship tab at <http://www.ohmkaram.org/scholarship.html>.

One of the scholarships offered this year was made possible by the contributions of the general public during the special program "Sree Ayyappa Swamy: A Divine Warrior Prince ". A second scholarship was offered with contributions from members of Ohmkaram.

Ohmkaram is extremely grateful for the contributions of Mastercard and Rakesh Sekhar. Those contributions were very helpful in providing scholarship to needy professional students.

### **This year's scholarship has been awarded to:**

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>Sudheesh Subramanian, 2nd year Mechanical Engineering, NSS Engineering College, Palakkad. He is the son of a daily wage worker, mother being a housewife.</p> |  | <p>Alka Jayan, 3rd Year B.Sc. Medical Imaging Technology, SRM Institute of Medical Sciences, Chennai. She is the daughter of a merchant, mother being a housewife.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|





# മലയാളം സ്കൂൾ Malayalam School of Saint Louis

Malayalam School of Saint Louis is entering its 17th year of service to the community. Malayalam School of Saint Louis is a voluntary organization open to the public and free to attend. It is an affiliate program sponsored by Ohmkaram, a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayalees in St Louis, Missouri, USA. Malayalam School was started with the perception for the need to educate our next generation of Malayalees growing up in St Louis.

Malayalam School of Saint Louis has been operating remotely, with classes and other activities conducted exclusively via Zoom. The school meet every Saturday and runs from August through May every year. All classes are run by dedicated volunteer teachers. Graduates of Malayalam School are proficient in reading, writing, and speaking in Malayalam.

Malayalam School of Saint Louis is a registered study center of Malayalam Mission, Government of Kerala since 2018 and Malayalam school is also affiliated with USA Missouri Zone, and Missouri Chapter. We offer Certificate Course (Kanikkonna), Diploma Course (Suryakanthi), Higher Diploma Course (Ambal) and Senior Higher Diploma Course (Neelakurinji). The successful completion of the Neelakurinji course will be awarded the 10th Standard equivalent certificate.

## Malayalam School Annual Day 2023



**Kanikkonna course certificate awarded** to Abhijith Nair, Devananda Anoop, Hritika Malugu, Mithra Menon, Omkaar Alakkassery, Saketh Subramanian.



Teachers: Anjana Prayaga (Coordinator), Kavitha Vijayaraghavan, Sona Prabhakaran, Seeja Rakshesh, Sangeetha Santhosh, Sreemani Rajesh, Binu Suraj

More information about the school is available on its website. <http://www.ohmkaram.org/MalayalamSchool.html>  
Email: [malayalamschool@yahoo.com](mailto:malayalamschool@yahoo.com) | Call: Anjana Prayaga at 636-293-1174



is a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayali Hindus in the Greater St. Louis area of Missouri, USA.

**Ohmkaram** is created with a **vision** to encourage active participation in the **Hindu culture**, foster **cooperation** and **unity** among **Kerala Hindus** throughout St. Louis and adjoining cities. In the midst of a collage of cultures, it is easy to forget and even lose track of many subtleties of our tradition that give a meaning to our identity. The **mission** of this organization will be to **rejuvenate** and **reinforce** the Kerala Hindu traditions. Participation and **involvement** of our **youth** will be facilitated enabling them to appreciate our **cultural roots**. This Organization will also serve as a platform for effective **networking** of Hindus from Kerala, or anyone interested in Kerala Hindu culture. This association will try to provide **Hindu cultural resources** not available through other sources in the Greater St. Louis area.

### **2023 Office Bearers**

#### **BOARD of DIRECTORS**

**Sudhir Prayaga (Chairman)**

**Amritha Navjith**

**Mrudula Senthil**

**Raj Unni**

**Sona Prabhakaran**

#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Sunil Elanayar (President)**

**Kalyani Ganesh (Vice President)**

**Puja Natesan (Secretary)**

**Rajesh Raman (Joint Secretary)**

**Ajaidas K Chandradas (Treasurer)**

**Valsa Pradeep K (Assistant Treasurer)**

### **OHMKARAM MEMBERS BENEFIT**

**Ideal for CHILDREN to learn and PRACTICE Kerala and Hindu TRADITIONS and create a CULTURAL IDENTITY**

**MALAYALAM SCHOOL for children and adults to learn to speak, read and write Malayalam**

**Celebrate VISHU & ONAM TRADITIONALLY in full grandeur**

**Participate in ANNUAL PICNIC and other periodic SOCIAL MEETINGS and gatherings**

**FULL ACCESS to Ohmkaram FINANCIAL STATEMENTS and right to ELECT Board and Executive MEMBERS.**

### **JOIN US**

**You will feel at home.**

### **HELP and SUPPORT US to**

- preserve & promote our rich culture
- instill traditional values in our children
- provide a cultural IDENTITY to our children





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