

Conference explores Ayurveda: science, art, and life

The Center for Indic Studies at UMass Dartmouth held an international conference on the theme, "Science and Art of Ayurveda: The Basis of Life and Living." The word "ayurveda" derives from the Sanskrit terms "Ayus" (life) and "Veda" (knowledge or wisdom). The title of this conference reflects this knowledge of how to live, as well as the balance of science and art required to achieve it.

The conference began with the showing of a feature length documentary by director Pan Nalin, "Ayurveda: The Art of Life & Being". This film has received good reviews and was enjoyed by our audience as well, including non-conferees from the university community. The technical presentations began with Kailash Agarwal, Professor Emeritus of Brown University Medical School, and a co-organizer of this conference, presenting his recent biochemical work-in-progress. He reviewed his success in the long process of developing a plant medicine into a useful drug, in this case for treating gout. This was followed, appropriately, by Boston University Medical School's Ajit Bharti who presented a case study of the tortuous route to FDA approval for camptothecin (CPT): *Plant Extract To Potent Anti-Neoplastic Drug-A Success Story*. Ayurvedic physician Akhilesh Sharma, B.A.M.S., N.D., Ph.D., consultant to corporations and advisor to governments, and a member of the organizing committee for this conference, came to the conference from New Delhi – via Finland! – to provide a review of the clinical studies of Ashokarisht for gynecological disorders, a specialty of his.

The next session was devoted to philosophic perspectives on Ayurveda. Avinash Patwardhan, who holds two doctorate degrees in medicine, spoke on "Metaphysical Substratum Beneath



Ayurveda In The Historical Context of Ancient Indian Philosophy". This was followed by Shrinivas Tilak, an independent scholar from Toronto, speaking on "Knowledge Formation in Ayurveda: A Perspective From Carakasamshita". This was rounded out by philosopher K.B. Subbarayudu, of Sanskrit Institute in Puri, India, who showed why Ayurveda is "The Basic Philosophy of All Philosophies."

The next day featured presentations on a wide range of topics accentuating the breadth of Ayurveda. UMass Dartmouth biochemist Catherine Neto opened the day by outlining her work with cranberry flavonoids – a topic with strong regional interest – for protecting humans against stroke and cardiovascular disease. Next up was physician Ariana Vora from Harvard Medical School Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. She discussed her special interest in how Eastern and Western cultural factors which influence medicine, "From Socrates to the Vedas: The Cultural Construction of Disability in Europe, India, and the American Frontier." To round out the morning, physician Jay Glaser, Medical Director of the Lancaster Ayurveda Centers in New England and Canada, spoke about the interface of clinical medicine and philosophy in his presentation, "The Concept of Agni in Veda

continued on next page

Summer Events

Center for
Indic Studies
**Indian Civilization:
Origin and Practices**
June 23, 24, & 25, 2006
UMass Dartmouth VI-153
For details contact
Prof. Bal Ram Singh
bsingh@umassd.edu
508.999.8588 phone
508.999.8451 fax

Metanexus Institute
**Continuity + Change:
Perspectives on Science
and Religion**
June 3 – 7, 2006
University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia
For details contact:
Metanexus Institute
3624 Market Street,
Suite 301
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: 215.789.2200
Fax: 215.789.2222
Email: conference2006 @
metanexus.net

Bhagirathi Staff

Sukalyan Sengupta
Editor

D Confar
Photography



Yet another vibrant seminar series

For the fifth year, the Center's seminar series presented a rich mix of Indic perspectives on topics that are critical for the present time.

Dr. Alagar Ramanujam from the Temple of Consciousness, Aliyar, Tamilnadu, spoke on, "Relevance of Indian Philosophical Systems for World Peace". He began with the observation that the spirit of enquiry, inherent in humankind, has led us to ask certain fundamental questions about the functioning universe and its origin. Knowledge about the former constitutes science and the same about the latter is termed philosophy. Our knowledge brought through science and philosophy has resulted in tremendous advances in the quality of our life. However, as philosophy gave birth to institutionalized religions, rigidity and dogmatism set in and this has become the cause of conflict and wars.

Dr. Ramanujam gave many examples to demonstrate that the Indian philosophical systems are basically free from institutional structure and therefore one finds in them the freedom to challenge accepted dogma. Thus, numerous schools of thought have evolved. He provided a synoptic view of the major philosophical systems and proceeded to discuss how a true understanding of Indian philosophical systems helps us to realize and appreciate the essential oneness of the metaphysical core of various religions. He concluded

with an emphatic statement that only a realization of the basic commonality of religions could bring about world peace.

Dr. Sri Krishna Chandaka, Director of the Yoga Health Clinic and Assistant Director of the International Yoga Research Center in Hyderabad, India, presented a lecture-demonstration class on "Yoga for Happy and Healthy Living". He began with a definition of the word "Yoga" and segued into how its practice in one's life helps produce happy and healthy living. He also demonstrated some of the basic "asanas" (postures), and meditation methods, and discussed their benefits in different aspects of life such as concentration building, proper breathing techniques (pranayama), relaxation and stress relief, much-needed in the modern day life of every individual.

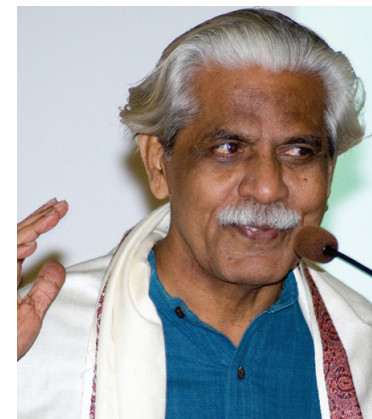
"Meditation and Modern Corporate Culture" was the topic of Mukund Apte's presentation. He is a faculty member at the Indian Inst. of e-Business Management (IIE-BM). His talk examined why corporations are turning to alternative methods to improve the productivity of the work force. Beginning with a discussion of Transcendental Meditation, Mr. Apte presented results of scientific studies conducted to determine TM's efficacy. He concluded with TM's beneficial aspects in our modern day corporate work force environment.



Mr. Mukund Apte



Dr. Sri Krishna Chandaka



Dr. Alagar Ramanujam

Ayurveda *continued from page 1*

and Ayurveda: The Digestive and Metabolic Fires in Health and Disease."

V.D. Misra, chair of the Sociology Department of Lucknow University

(Uttar Pradesh, India), traveled from India to bring us a refreshing sociological perspective on Ayurveda. Professor Bal Ram Singh concluded the conference with an overview entitled, "Science Of

Dose And Sense Of Self In Ayurveda."

This conference was an excellent first foray into the world of Ayurveda, from herbs to clinic to philosophy. Strong bonds were formed among participants.



Center and the Indian Students Association celebrate 'Deepavali'

The popular annual event 'deepavali' was a great success this academic year as well. The primary driving force for this event was the Indian Students Association (ISA) which has close to 200 members. Besides the colorful, rhythmic and vibrant performances from UMD students and Indian-American kids from the community, Dr. Amit Tandon, faculty member affiliated with the Center and faculty advisor of the ISA, presented salient features of the historical, social, and cultural significance of this festival and also highlighted how this festival is celebrated in different parts of India.

The cultural program was followed by a delicious Indian dinner.



Center marks its fourth anniversary and celebrates birthday of Gandhi

The Center marked its fourth anniversary which was synchronized with the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. The main event featured Prof. K. L. Seshagiri Rao, a scholar on Gandhi and presently at the University of South Carolina's Department of Religious Studies. Dr. Rao presented Gandhi's views on democracy. Starting with Gandhi's reading of John Ruskin's "Unto This Last" and his subsequent formulation of "sarvodaya" – welfare of all, a concept that he experimented with in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa–Dr. Rao eloquently described how Gandhi's views of democracy had no room for "tyranny of majority" but had a strong ethical and moral dimension which did not neglect individual conscience.

A panel of three respondents from the UMD community– Prof. Fred Gifun, Emeritus Professor of History; Dr. V. T. Patil, Adjunct Professor of Political Science and Center for Indic Studies;

and Ms. Lee Nason, Director of Facilities – followed Dr. Rao's main speech. Fred asked the audience to explore ways to make Gandhi's views of "self realization" more of a reality in today's world. He also opined that inculcating values of simplicity in the youth of today is the biggest challenge before us. Prof. Patil succinctly provided Gandhi's critique of western democracy and elaborated on its inadequacy in meeting the requirements of qualitative evolution of human beings. He emphasized that for Gandhi there was no dichotomy between political and private life. Nason sketched a brief history of democracy starting with the Athenians and their humiliating war against Sicily. She then explained how the founding fathers of American democracy provided checks and balances in the constitution to prevent the country from degenerating into just a concept of majority rule. Prof. Rao thanked the respondents for

their ideas and then answered a few of their questions.

The next program was a Hindustani classical music concert with Rajeev Taranath on the Sarod accompanied by Aditya Kalyanpur on the Tabla. Rajeev began the concert by explaining how Indian classical music is so impromptu and yet so classical. He began with Raga "Pat Deep"; a contemplative "alaap" was followed by a "gat" in medium "teen taal" and then by a fast "gat" in "teen taal". The audience was enthralled by Rajeev and Aditya's interactions, especially where Rajeev's notes were repeated by Aditya on the Tabla. Rajeev concluded with a cocktail of ragas called "Ragamala" where the basic raga was the "Sindh Bhairavi".

For a copy of a VHS cassette of this event, please contact Maureen Jennings / mjennings@umassd.edu or 508.999.8588.



Volunteers needed for Conference on Indian Civilization

The Center has taken a major initiative to organize a conference on “Indian Civilization: Origin and Practices” from June 23-25. The genesis of this conference was a course on Indian Civilization offered by the Center in Fall 2005 with Prof. V. T. Patil as the instructor. It soon became apparent that there was no suitable textbook for this course. Most of the civilization books are written by historians for history students; there are really no efforts in these books to introduce the concepts of the civilization itself. For example, one can find ample description of finding evidence in terms of ancient religious practices, but very little discussion on the meaning of such practices to make sense to an unfamiliar group of students. For a civilization like India, and perhaps very unique to India with more than 5,000 years old ‘living’ cultures and traditions, many of its aspects do not remain issues of academic interest but more of reality. Proper coverage of these aspects is necessary for a true understanding of modern India, not just

For example, one can find ample description of finding evidence in terms of ancient religious practices, but very little discussion on the meaning of such practices to make sense to an unfamiliar group of students.

from a historical perspective but also from the viewpoint of philosophy, science, traditions, art and music, culture, etc. To achieve the goal of publishing a textbook on Indian Civilization for an introductory course at a North American

university, we have decided to hold this conference and have requested eminent scholars in Indian civilization to present a paper at the conference and contribute a chapter of this book. Scholars who have accepted our invitation include Profs. Makarand Paranjape and R. P. Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India), T. S. Rukmani (Concordia University, Montreal, Canada), Subhash Kak (Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge), B. N. Narahari Achar (Memphis State University, Tennessee), V. D. Mistry (Lucknow University, India), Shiva Bajpai (Emeritus Professor at California State University, Northridge), N. K. Jha (Pondicherry University, India), and V. T. Patil (formerly at Pondicherry University, India and now at UMD).

If you would like to volunteer in any capacity for this effort, please contact Maureen Jennings [mjennings@umassd.edu or 508.999.8588].



Bhagirathi

Newsletter of The Center for Indic Studies
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
285 Old Westport Road
North Dartmouth, MA 02747