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*Some articles use the masculine pronoun when referring to God, in keeping with convention and to avoid the clumsiness of constructions such as 'He or She' or 'Him or Her.'*

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**January 2020 3**



# Dharma

Children, *dharma* is what preserves the intrinsic nature of an object. The dharma of a lamp is to shed light, that of the eyes is to see, and that of the heart is to pump blood throughout the body. It is only when each organ in the body acts according to its dharma that we can lead healthy lives. Similarly, the universe can maintain its harmony only if all living beings follow their dharma properly. The sages of Bharat (India) called the principle that sustains the harmony of the universe 'dharma.'

One can travel safely only if the vehicles on the road obey traffic rules. Similarly, it is only when each individual carries out his dharma sincerely that society can prevail and progress. The country can progress only if each citizen lives a life rooted in dharma. This is just as true for the family also. Peace and prosperity will prevail in the family only when each member lives honestly and behaves considerately.


A teacher must discharge his duties when he goes to school. However, his dharma at home is different.

He must be a father to his children and a brother to his siblings. Therefore, one's dharma varies according to place and circumstance. Dharma is doing the right thing at the right time in the right way.

That said, we all have a dharma that is higher than all other dharmas, our *parama-dharma* (supreme dharma): to realize the perfection within. Suppose a butterfly lays its eggs on a leaf. If an egg is destroyed, the purpose of its life will not be fulfilled; the same is the case if it dies during the larva or pupa stage. It attains the supreme goal of its life and fulfils its purpose only when it has metamorphosed into a butterfly and its beauty and innate

talents have become fully manifest.

There is divinity in each and every one of us. That is our true nature. To realize this is the parama-dharma of every human being. Realization does not refer only to one's own salvation, but a state in which one sees oneself in everyone. However, today, we are unable to understand the true value of the wealth that life is. We squander life away on trifling pleasures.

We must overcome this tendency. We must live with discernment and right knowledge. We must see God in ourselves as well as in every animate and inanimate being in this universe and thus fulfil our life. 

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## *Amma's South Indian Tour 2020*

- January 23 – 24 **Madurai** Brahmasthanam Festival
- January 26 **Tiruvannamalai** (Evening program)
- January 29 – 30 **Chennai** Brahmasthanam Festival
- February 1 – 2 **Coimbatore** Brahmasthanam Festival
- February 4 – 5 **Kozhikode** Brahmasthanam Festival



# Abhayavarsham30

by satish, singapore

About two weeks before Christmas, during the evening bhajans, Amma casually mentioned the coming together of six planets, and rhetorically wondered what was going to happen. Hearing this, many in the hall felt

unease and even fear. She then smiled and said, “Don’t worry, children. Let us pray to the Almighty.”

Was Amma being a doomsday prophet? No, She was, as always, reflecting ‘ground realities,’ as it were. At the same time, She places Her faith in something higher: the efficacy of prayer and the potency of divine power. Her reassuring words assuaged everyone’s sense of anxiety.

True enough, the three days from December 25 – 27, 2019, saw the coming together of six planets: Jupiter, Mercury, Saturn, Ketu, Sun and Moon. Usually, not more than two converge at the same time. There was also a solar eclipse on the 26th. Eclipses are said to increase *rajas* and *tamas*, i.e. the spiritual energies of passion and lethargy respectively, in the environment. These abnormal astrological conjunctions were said to portend doom, and those born under certain birth stars

were supposed to be especially susceptible to the malign astral influences.

Many devotees came to Amritapuri; many adhered to Amma’s advice to intensify their *sadhana* (spiritual practices). Whether or not they were physically with Amma, Her umbrella of protection ensured that no major calamity struck earth in those days.

\* \* \*

Most people are susceptible to fear, no matter how rational they may consider themselves to be. Fear eclipses one’s innate confidence. Amma is trying to restore our self-confidence, not in the sense of pride but faith in the Self, i.e. God.

When the cloud of fear cast by the malign planetary positions was passing, Amma had a program at the Amrita Sanskrit Higher Secondary School in Parippally, Kollam. The program on December

Was Amma being a doomsday prophet? No, She was, as always, reflecting 'ground realities,' as it were. At the same time, She places Her faith in something higher: the efficacy of prayer and the potency of divine power. Her reassuring words assuaged everyone's sense of anxiety.

27th was, appropriately enough, called *Abhayavarsham*<sup>50</sup>. 'Abhaya' literally means 'fearless,' it also connotes protection. The name alluded to the three decades of protection that Amma has been showering ('*varsham*') on the students of this school.

In 1989, Amma was asked if She could take over a bankrupt orphanage in Parippally. At that time, the buildings had no toilets, many of the children slept under makeshift shelters, and food was inadequate. Amma readily agreed, diverting funds set aside for building the ashram's Kali Temple to renovate the

orphanage. No expense was spared to ensure that the children received nutritious food and medical care. The infrastructure was upgraded, and the residents were given an all-round education, with special emphasis on the study of Sanskrit and the arts. Most importantly, the children were brought to Amma regularly, and Her love and affection won them over, infusing joy and laughter in their lives where there had mostly been pain, tears and uncertainty. Thus, Amritaniketan ('Amrita Home'), as the orphanage was renamed, came into being. It was the M.A. Math's first

educational institution, and the first of many humanitarian projects the Math was to launch in the coming years.

That morning, Amma arrived shortly after 11 a.m. After She sat down, the crowd settled down in anticipation of Her satsang. To everyone's surprise, Amma said that, instead of speaking, She wanted to hear from the alumni.

Quite a few came forward to share their experiences at Amritaniketan. Saumya shared how her years at Parippally had been the most formative in her life, as they had taught her and other students "humility, the willingness to share, and the ability to forbear. These are the hallmarks of our collective identity. I am a proud alumnus of Parippally!"

Perhaps the most poignant testimony came from Radhika. She and her younger sister had witnessed the traumatizing sight of their mentally diseased

father murdering their mother in cold blood. The two girls were taken to Amma, who told them, "Why fear? Amma will look after you. Don't you have Amma for you?" Radhika said, "How can I even begin to explain how much relief, how much comfort and strength, those words from Amma gave my sister and me?" Radhika eventually graduated with an MBA; her sister is pursuing the same degree now. Amma also arranged Radhika's marriage to a devotee. Towards the end of her speech, she said, "When I think about what life would have been like without Amma, what the fate of two young orphaned girls would have been like..." Holding back her tears, she said, "I don't know what to say. Even thanking Amma will never suffice for all that She has done."

Some of those who shared their experiences were from Attappadi, a tribal settlement nestled in the valley below the



Nilgiri Hills. One of them was Nanjan, now an assistant engineer at the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). His story was yet another tale of how he triumphed against all odds by Amma's grace. His parents did not want him to go to school. Br. Tyagamrita Chaitanya, who was then in charge of Amritaniketan, won over his parents, and brought Nanjan to Parippally. Amma encouraged him every step of the way, especially when he found the going tough. Finally, he passed 12th grade and enrolled in the Ettimadai campus of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. His lack of fluency in English and the daunting demands of college education so discouraged him that he wanted to leave. As he did not have enough money to return home, he started skipping classes. Amma learnt about this, called him and, instead of taking him to task, lovingly encouraged him to try his best.

Eventually, with Amma's encouragement, he passed all his examinations, graduated and became an engineer. Nanjan said to applause, "Every single student from Attappadi who has passed 10th grade studied in one of Amma's schools." On that day, 18 busloads of devotees from Attappadi participated in *Abhaya-varsham*<sup>30</sup>.

The common theme of all the speeches by the alumni was undying gratitude to Amma, who had uplifted their lives. Amma then spoke. In Her talk, She said, "It is said that one should not forget the path one has taken in life. What this means, in brief, is 'be grateful.'" She said that one of the main problems in life was the lack of gratitude. Amma said that education was not just about science and mathematics, but equally, if not more so, about loving and sharing, helping each other, humility and patience. Her words were a lyrical

summation of the alumni's testimonies.

Amma started darshan. There were cultural performances by the students and alumni, including the *panchavadyam*, an ensemble of five traditional percussion instruments, and dances by the natives of Attappadi, as well as more reminiscences by alumni. The panchavadyam is traditionally performed by males. With Amma's encouragement, many girls in Paripally took up this art and went on to win several state championships in panchavadyam.


The function ended with Amma singing two bhajans: '*Mata Rani*' and '*Tandam Tanannai*,' both of which got the crowds up, clapping boisterously and dancing.

When Amma got into Her car, twilight was setting in. The scorching heat and harsh glare of the afternoon had eased. A cool breeze was blowing and stars were

starting to twinkle in the pale indigo sky.

\* \* \*

Who is lucky, and who, unlucky? It is hard to say. Fate is not entirely inescapable. Through effort, we can alter the course of destiny. More pertinently, divine grace can redeem our lives in ways we can never imagine. *Abhayavarsham*<sup>50</sup> eloquently testified to this truth. The lives of the students and alumni of Paripally are rich in gratitude, an attitude that lends a pleasing humility to their disposition. *Abhayavarsham*<sup>50</sup> was, in fact, nothing less than a thanksgiving.

Let us also strive to cultivate gratefulness. We have a lot to be thankful for. We have Amma with us. We are blessed to be living at a time when we can turn to Her for help and when we can witness Her relentless acts of goodness. Let us thank our lucky stars. 



EXPERIENCE

# Lollipop Heroine

by bri. nirupama  
(maria elena orona),  
u.s.a.

**I**n the summer of 1988, I had the good fortune of meeting Amma in Santa Fe, New Mexico. When many of us first come to Amma, we are filled with ideas about who we are, what we can do, and what we have accomplished. Our egos are deeply invested in these notions even though we come to Amma with deep pains and doubts. If we surrender these burdens to Her, She will slowly shatter our false perceptions. Amma says, “The mind is a big lie, and the world is a projection of that lie. Both are unreal. The world exists only because the mind exists. The mind is responsible for all your problems. It creates doubt and makes you suffer. It causes all your anger, hatred and jealousy. It prompts you to act indiscriminately and even to do evil. It inevitably pushes you into a

state of misery. The mind is hell.” Amma also says, “The ego is a product of the mind. Therefore, the ego is also a lie. It is unreal. Your existence will become full and perfect only when you get rid of the mind and ego.”

Having lived with Amma for many years, I feel that I am being both filled and emptied at the same time. Amma gives the example of fresh water being poured into a container of salt water, diluting the water’s salinity gradually. *Awaken, Children!* (Volume 6) describes the purifying effects of Amma’s presence:

Amma’s darshan is a wonderful and divine healing process. Her touch heals the wounds caused by a painful past. Her presence purifies, uplifts and carries us toward our true Self. Amma is purity embodied. Thus, all those who come in contact with Her are transformed and

cleansed. In some cases, the purification can be seen, while at other times, it is subtle. How many of Amma’s devotees are familiar with the seemingly innocent hug that transforms lives and the look that causes hearts to melt. Whether you are aware of it or not, whether or not you feel worthy, this purification happens. Just as an iron piece is magnetized when it is rubbed constantly by a powerful magnet, an ordinary soul is transformed into a spiritual being through constant contact with and the companionship of a *mahatma* (spiritually illumined soul) like Amma.

Let me share one of Amma’s *lilas* (divine play), in which I played a part. It took place at Amma’s San Ramon ashram during Her 2000 U.S. Tour. It

was around 10 or 11 p.m. on a Devi Bhava night. I was visiting Manohari at the Seva Desk, relaxing and enjoying the night. Suddenly, a woman came running up and excitedly said, "One of your guys up there needs help!"

She had come running down from the meditation field. Manohari assured her that she would call security, and picked up her walkie-talkie. She then turned to me and said, "Why don't you go up there and take a look at what's going on?"

I got up, tied up my hair, and proceeded to make my way to the meditation field. I walked leisurely, sucking on a See's Candies lollipop, a childhood favourite that I enjoy even as an adult. Yum! When I got to the field, I could not see anything other than a single figure standing in the middle of the field. To my left, I saw what appeared to be a pile of clothes in the bushes. I walked closer and heard a

voice coming from it: "Hey, can you give me a hand?" It was James from Australia, asking for help. James was one of our security guards on tour. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I realized that the pile of clothes was actually two men: some man had pinned James to the ground. I immediately began to pull this man off James. The young man began to struggle. To avoid being attacked, I threw him to the ground, face first, and pinned his right arm behind him in an arm lock. He was struggling to get to his feet, but I was not about to let him do that. I increased the grip I had on him. I did not feel angry or perturbed, but his persistent struggling began to annoy me. I was afraid I might hurt him if he did not stop struggling. After a few minutes, Atmaran, another security guard, showed up. He leapt onto the man and restrained him from the other side. After this, the man

stopped struggling, exhausted. Atmaran looked at me with a big smile on his face. I could not tell if he was smiling because a woman had rescued his partner or because I had a lollipop in my mouth. Maybe it was both!

Throughout the whole ordeal, that lollipop never left my mouth. I actually finished sucking the lollipop while Atmaran and I were holding the man down.

In a very short time, the story reached our beloved Amma, who thought it was the funniest ever! The Malayalam speaking girls told me that She was telling everyone at the house She was staying in about the girl with the lollipop who rescued James! She would laugh and laugh while narrating the story. I guess Amma was also impressed that I knew karate. Her version of the story was that a girl was casually walking up the trail with a lollipop in her mouth when she saw a crazy man on

James. She walked up to the crazy man, hit him with her lollipop, and sent him flying! Well, I guess every heroine needs a lollipop!

This little drama was obviously Amma's lila, and I was just a puppet in Her hands. I know this because everything happened so effortlessly. My mind was calm and present. I had no fears, anxieties or worries. I was not thinking about what might happen nor was I paralyzed by past memories. I was in the moment, responding to James's request for help.

Swami Ramakrishnananda once said, "When you achieve something great, know that it is the Guru's grace at work." I know this. To think I was the doer would have been a big mistake. Therefore, I never went to Amma to tell Her about this experience. I tried to avoid getting puffed up from it. Also, I see Amma as Kali, my *ishta devi* (preferred form of divinity), and I know that if Kali saw any trace of

pride in me, I would see Her sword soon enough! Even though I tried to avoid that sword, my beautiful Kali eventually let me have it.

On the last day of the tour, the staff had a picnic with Amma in Boston, right before She was to leave for India. In San Ramon, a member of the staff had given me a certificate: the Lollipop Heroine Award! Thinking that Amma would get a kick out of seeing it, I brought it with me to Boston, hoping to show it to Her eventually. While Amma was busy serving everyone plates of food, I passed the award to Swami Ramakrishnananda and asked him to show it to Amma. He agreed.

After She finished serving everyone, Amma asked a few people to share stories. One of these was James. Amma said “karate,” and James asked, “Where’s Nirupama? Where’s the award?”

Oh no! I tried to hide behind my plate. James then told

Amma the story of how I had rescued him, and Swami Ramakrishnananda showed Amma the award. She took it in Her hand and narrated a story: “There was a fire raging so badly that the fire trucks that kept coming were afraid to go near it. Suddenly, out of nowhere, one fire truck rushed straight into the fire. This gave the other firemen courage and they followed behind. Soon, they put out the fire. The firemen were so proud of the bravery of that fireman that they wanted to give him an award. They held a banquet in his honour and expressed their appreciation. Then they asked him if he wanted anything. He said, ‘Yes, I’d like to have the brakes fixed on my fire truck!’”

He had rushed into the fire only because the brakes in his truck were not working! Amma held up my award and asked, “Is this what Nirupama’s award is for?”

No one said a word. Kali’s sword had just come flying my

way to cut those traces of ego and pride attached to this experience. My mind raced back to that evening, and I began probing the motives behind my actions that night. Then Amma turned to James and said, "I asked you to tell your side of the story. The fire truck story was for you!"

James had no choice but to relate how he had gotten himself into that predicament. It was very funny, and everyone laughed at his tale. Amma then asked Swami Ramakrishnananda to read aloud the words on the award for everyone to hear. She then imitated me sucking on the lollipop. She rolled Her eyes from side to side like an innocent child, and then pretended to hit the bad guy with the lollipop. This made Her laugh and laugh. She looked at the award for quite some time with a big smile. She then announced to everyone that the fire truck story was not about me. She said, "Nirupama was

courageous and took the man down with the same effort as sucking a lollipop!"

I guess Amma had to knock my ego down a few notches before complimenting me. She then asked me to receive my award. I sat there, frozen, my face still red from embarrassment. She then yelled, "Nirupama!"

I stood up and walked to Amma, who kissed me on the top of my head and handed me the award. We must learn to accept everything from the Guru graciously.

The words on the plaque were as follows:

### *Lollipop Heroine Award*

*Nirupama Orona*

*is hereby declared a heroine for*

*courageous actions taken without*

*losing her lollipop in the line of duty.*

*Remember, Amma says:*


*"To become a hero is to become a zero."*



The lollipop is the real hero of the story. It is a symbol of child-like innocence. What gave the story its charm is the fact that I never let go of that lollipop, or that the lollipop never let go of me. Maybe Amma was teaching me never to let go of one's child-like innocence, no matter what. In so doing, one attains perfection.

Amma says, "Trust in a perfect master alone will help you drop the ego and all ego-centric thoughts, and thus enable you to embrace death lovingly. Live life beautifully. The beauty that permeates your life will manifest in the beauty of your death. Yet, this beauty in life is possible only when you surrender to a real master. Surrendering to a real master is surrendering to the

whole of existence. A real master teaches you to accept everything that happens in life. He helps you to be thankful for both good and bad, right and wrong, enemy and friend, those who harm you and those who help you, those who cage you and those who release you from the cage. The Master helps you forget about the dark past and the bright future full of a thousand promises. He helps you live life in the present moment with all its fullness. He lets you know that the whole of Nature — everything, everybody, even your enemy — is helping you evolve and attain Perfection."

My humble salutations to my most beloved Amma, who is teaching us all the power and beauty of being in the moment. 

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## *If you're coming to Amritapuri for darshan...*

Please note that darshan tokens will be distributed only until 2 p.m. If you wish to go for darshan, please obtain your darshan token before 2 p.m. Thank you.

DIARY

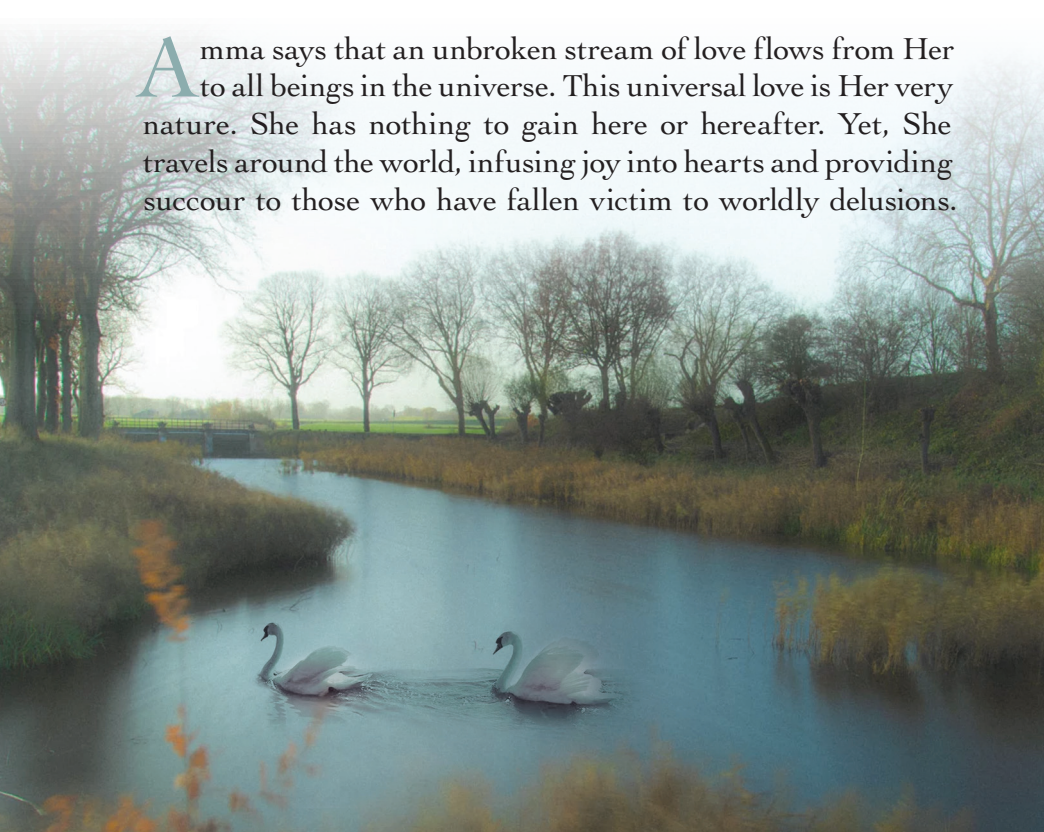
# Amma's Tours

by Padmaja Gopakumar, India

*“Mabatmas (spiritually illumined souls), who are ever calm and magnanimous, are like the spring season: they live only for the good of humanity.”*

— *Vivekachudamani, 37*

Amma says that an unbroken stream of love flows from Her to all beings in the universe. This universal love is Her very nature. She has nothing to gain here or hereafter. Yet, She travels around the world, infusing joy into hearts and providing succour to those who have fallen victim to worldly delusions.



Truly, Her arrival is like the advent of spring.

Amma tries to take everyone, both the Indian and international ashram residents, with Her on the Indian Tours. Often She asks, “Children, aren’t you coming?” She then adds, “It’s not a picnic. There will be opportunities to do *seva* (selfless service) and to practise renunciation and patience.” As encouragement, She says, “Don’t waste such opportunities. You may not get them again.”

If we approach the tour with an open mind instead of anticipating cumbersome moments that are likely to arise during the long and strenuous journey, and if we are ready to change our mindset instead of trying to change the circumstances, we will see that all hindrances are inconsequential. Amma takes care of everything.

A group of about 700 set off on the North Indian tour in the wee hours of February 18, 2019. Curious onlookers

watched as the long convoy of ashram vehicles (buses, cars and trucks) trailed Amma’s car along the highways. The first program was the Mysuru Brahmasthanam festival. On the way there, the tour group stopped for lunch at a *goshala* (cowshed) in the suburbs of Coimbatore City. The bus stopped on the main road. We walked in the scorching heat into a village and reached an elongated *goshala* by the side of a field. We had arrived just after the harvest. Bales of hay were scattered here and there. Streams of potable water were flowing under shady trees. The place was a cool sanctuary.

To make the place comfortable for their guests, the villagers moved the cows, cleaned the cowshed and courtyard, and spread plastic bags on the floor for us to sit. Amma did not want to sit in the courtyard but inside the cowshed. Amma’s chair was placed in the middle of the cowshed, which had no walls. We sat around

Her — inside the cowshed, outside and even on the half-walls. Amma sang bhajans and ate with Her children, after which She asked people to tell stories.


A young Swedish man told the story of a football competition that takes place every year in a village of football fans. The villagers would attend the football match with loaded rifles. Every year, the team from the village would win the competition, and the villagers would cheer by firing their rifles into the air. Once, a newcomer to the event asked the villagers, “What will you do if your team loses?”

One of them replied, “The players know in which direction we will fire then. Fearing bullets in their chest, our team has not lost so far.”

As always, Amma discerned a spiritual principle in this story. She said, “Children, success is guaranteed if we pay total attention to anything we do. In this story, it was fear that motivated the players to

concentrate. Even then, it led to success. That is why the ancients used to say that we should have *bhaya-bhakti* (fearful devotion) to God. Actually, there is no need to fear God, who is the embodiment of Love. Even then, if people desist from doing wrong out of fear for God, that is not a bad thing, is it? If we face any challenge with the proper attitude, we can turn it in our favour.”

Before the journey resumed, Amma said, “Children, chant your mantra while imagining that your *ishtha-devata* (preferred deity) is travelling with you. Those who believe in a formless god can chant their mantra while imagining they are becoming one with nature. Don’t waste time chatting.” She paused for a while before saying, “*Orttu japikkanam. Orttukondu japikkanam* (“Remember to chant. Remember God while chanting”).

Amma’s instructions are like gleaming gems — small but priceless. 



# Gist of the Gita

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

## Prologue

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* offers a holistic philosophy of life. It is meant not only for spiritual aspirants and seekers of spiritual liberation but for everyone, i.e. for all those people trapped in *samsara*, the cycle of birth

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This series of articles first appeared in the *Darshanam* magazine in 1975.

and death. Its beacon-light shines eternally for those on this tumultuous voyage of life. The *Gita* has inspired many commentaries and will continue to inspire more. Nevertheless, no commentary is complete; none can be. The wide array of commentaries only goes to show the immeasurable greatness of this monumental work.

The leading lights of *Advaita* (Non-dualism), *Vishishtadvaita* (Qualified Monism) and *Dvaita* (Dualism) *viz.* Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya respectively, wrote commentaries on the *Gita*, as did luminaries from the last century, including Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Gandhiji, Vinoba Bhave and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

The *Gita* is a large mirror that reflects the image of one who comes before it. But let us not forget that the mirror is not the reflection; the reflections are in the mirror. The

commentaries of these great thinkers are priceless. Their works are splendid reflections of their inner expansiveness.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave's commentary stands apart from other commentaries. More than just a commentary, it is a seminal work of rare beauty, a captivating memoir that uses the *Gita* as a sounding board for expatiating on his exalted spiritual experiences. It is a crystal-clear distillation of the philosophy of a free-spirited intelligence. Although his commentary synthesizes *bhakti* (devotion), *jnana* (knowledge) and *karma* (action), he privileges pure devotion over the others. He was deeply influenced by the *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) and devotional poets of India, particularly Jnaneshwar of Maharashtra. He was a fervent reader of *Jnaneshwari*, Jnaneshwar's commentary on the *Gita*.

Vinoba Bhave's own commentary flickers with the gentle glow of the solitary devotee

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers a holistic philosophy of life. It is meant not only for spiritual aspirants but for everyone, i.e. for all those trapped in *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death.

who has bathed in the holy waters of a tender devotion that surpasses knowledge, surrendered himself whole-heartedly at God's holy feet, and experienced the immense satisfaction of divine grace. Devoutly reading his commentary on the *Gita* as a spiritual practice will confer inner purity. The Malayalam translation of Vinoba Bhave's commentary used to be sold for a nominal sum years ago and became very popular. However, it is hard to gauge how many people actually studied it with the fervid spirit of the faithful. Indeed, that noble work ought to be studied daily.

To understand the essence of Vinoba Bhave's commentary, I felt that it would be

good to summarize the commentary's 18 chapters in 18 articles. I am aware that any summary will be reductive as far as the spirit of the original is concerned. Nevertheless, the summary can reflect the image of the original, can't it?

I began my work, which I envisaged as a transcreation, on Vinoba Bhave's birthday, and completed it in two weeks. It was no herculean task, rather, a light undertaking. And so, with heartfelt prayers that both Lord Krishna, who dispensed the ambrosial advice, and Sage Vyasa, who compiled His advice, bless this endeavour, I present in condensed form the wisdom writ large on each petal of the *Gita*-lotus.

# Chapter 1: Yoga of Arjuna's Dejection

Just as my mother's breast milk nourished my body, the nectar that oozes from Mother Gita has been nourishing my heart, mind and intellect all these years. Words cannot explain the bond between the *Gita* and me. My life has been flowing along on the currents of the *Gita*, whose surfaces I surf and whose depths I plumb.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a jewelled lamp blazing in the heart of India. For millennia now, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have been influencing the people of India profoundly. Both are dharma texts: the *Ramayana*, a splendid exposition of ethical jurisprudence, and the *Mahabharata*, a lofty and weighty sociological work.

In the *Mahabharata*, the author Sage Vyasa paints a nuanced portrait of the world

in which elements of light and dark commingle, while himself remaining aloof from it. The *Bhagavad Gita* is his message to the world. Containing the essence of all knowledge, it is a complete and holistic science of life. However, the study of the *Gita* will benefit us only if we gain the composure that characterized Krishna, who preached the *Gita*, Arjuna, who received the sacred advice, and Vyasa, who compiled the dialogue.

The Lord's advice begins with "*Asocyananvasocastvam...*" ("You grieve for those who should not be grieved for...") (2.11). To understand it, we must first understand the context in which it was uttered.

Seeing Arjuna's pathetic and cowardly disposition, Krishna rebukes him with



sharp and stinging words. Then He begins expounding on transcendental knowledge. Actually, Arjuna was no coward but an intrepid, accomplished and formidable *kshatriya* (warrior). War was recreation for him. How did he become confounded? What made him want to flee from the battlefield and abandon his dharma?

It was the sight of his adversaries. He saw arrayed before him his cousins, teachers and wise men. His attachment to kith and kin clouded his intellect. But unwilling to admit this weakness openly, he resorted instead to a fine sermon on the sins of violence! His speech was not based on any understanding of the Truth but was merely intellectually sophisticated rhetoric. The fact is, he was not averse to violence at all. He was a kshatriya, and fighting righteous wars was a kshatriya's dharma. However, at that point, he began to regard his

vocation with misgivings. That was his mistake.


Lord Krishna teaches the science of refining one's nature gradually by following one's dharma. However revolting it may be, following the dharma suited to one's nature (*svadharma*) is always more laudable than emulating the dharma of another (*paradharmā*), no matter how delectable that dharma might seem. The whole purpose of the *Gita* is to dispel any delusion that might arise from following *svadharma*. Eventually, Arjuna is freed of delusion. This liberation from delusion is the goal of the *Gita*, which is also the aim of the *Mababharata*, something that Sage Vyasa makes clear at the beginning of the epic.

Another point worth noting is Arjuna's forthright nature. In fact, the very word 'Arjuna' means one who is straightforward and sincere. Guileless, he would speak openly about everything. He was also the

Lord's faithful servant, one who had surrendered wholly to Him. Arjuna did not just entrust the control of his chariot's horses to Krishna, he also handed over the reins of his own mind and intellect to the Lord, and stood with folded palms before Him. If we have Arjuna's artless devotion, love and soul surrender, God will come to our rescue. Lord Krishna was not Arjuna's alone; He ever resides in the lotus of our heart.

Let us also pray to that embodiment of love and

compassion in this manner: "O Lord, I take refuge in You. Who else is there other than You to show me the way? You are the only Guru! O Lord, please show me the path. I will follow that path."

If we can pray like this with a sincere heart, the merciful Lord will become our charioteer on this difficult journey of life and lead us along the path to the Goal. We can then taste the sweet nectar of the *Gita* and thus fulfil our birth. 

*(to be continued)*

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Share your experiences, poems or artwork, and inspire thousands. Even if you think your contribution is small or insignificant, it may be of great value to many.

All submissions are subject to approval and may be edited. Send your submission to M.A. Mission Trust (address on contents page) or email it to [matruvani@amritapuri.org](mailto:matruvani@amritapuri.org). If you are submitting artwork, please email scanned images. By submitting your artwork or article, you give your consent to have it published.

# Lessons from the Ramayana

by c.v. rajan, india

The *Ramayana* is not mythology. It is revered by Hindus as one of two '*Itihasas*,' which means 'thus it happened.' Hindus consider the *Ramayana* to be the true story of Rama, an ancient king of Ayodhya who is revered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the Preserver in the Hindu Trinity. The epic was composed by the great sage and poet Valmiki, who took care of Sita, Rama's wife, during the turbulent finale of Her life.



Lord Rama lived during the *Treta Yuga*, an age characterized by high moral standards. The subsequent ages saw a steady decline in *dharma* (righteousness). Thus, the *Ramayana* provides insights into the lofty moral and ethical values that people cherished in times past. Reading it now, one can draw inspiration and succour, especially during difficult times.

Here are some of the lessons one can learn from the *Ramayana*:

## 1. Goals of Life: Artha, Kama, Dharma & Moksha

In the pursuit of material wealth (*artha*) and sensual pleasure (*kama*), people often lose sight of the higher goals of human life. Through the characters of Ravana and Vali, for example, the *Ramayana* makes clear that these two aims should never be pursued

at the expense of *dharma*. The ultimate goal of life is spiritual liberation (*moksha*), which can be attained only by renouncing *artha* and *kama* and by following a dharmic life.

## 2. Monogamy

During the *Treta Yuga*, the practice of polygamy was prevalent among men, and for a king to have numerous wives was an acceptable social norm. Rama's father, Dasharatha, had three wives in addition to concubines. In contrast, Rama remained wedded to Sita alone and was faithful to Her for life. He set a good example for future generations of men, and His conduct is now considered the gold standard for respectable men in society.

## 3. Adherence to Truth

Dasharatha had immense love and affection for Rama. He



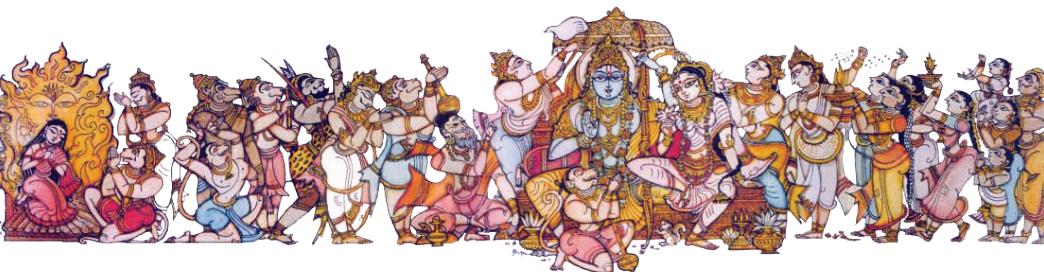
could not bear even a moment's separation from Him. When Sage Vishvamitra asked him for help in keeping away the demons disturbing his penances at his forest hermitage, Dasharatha readily agreed. However, when the sage asked the king to send young Rama with him to fight the demons at the forest, Dasharatha was shocked. Nevertheless, he agreed to part with Rama in order to keep his word.

Later, when his second wife Kaikeyi demanded that her son, Bharata, be crowned king, and that Rama, the rightful heir, be exiled to the forest, Dasharatha was aghast. Even so, he did not exercise his kingly authority and veto her request. He fulfilled the promise he had given Kaikeyi long ago — that he would grant her two boons whenever she asked

for them — at the expense of his own life; he died soon thereafter because of the shock and the pain of separation he experienced from Rama's banishment.

#### 4. Honouring Father's Word

Kaikeyi asked for the two boons the night before Rama's coronation. Rama accepted both demands with utmost calmness. He did not show even a trace of disappointment, though He knew that He was the rightful heir to the throne. As a *kshatriya* (warrior), He had every right to question these unjust demands. However, once He learnt that His father had given his word to Kaikeyi, He did not think twice. For Him, '*pitru vakya paripalanam*' (honouring one's father's words) was one of the highest duties.



## 5. Beware Vicious Counsel, Heed Sagely Counsel.

Kaikeyi was essentially a good-natured woman. However, she allowed herself to be brainwashed by her maid Manthara into demanding the two atrocious boons from Dasharatha. Though she resisted Manthara's vicious counsel initially, Kaikeyi's mind was eventually poisoned. Did she gain anything as a result? No. In fact, she lost her beloved husband. She also lost the affection of her only son Bharata, who severely censured Kaikeyi for her cruelty.

When Lakshmana, Rama's brother, heard that Rama was to be banished, his response was unlike Rama's. Lakshmana was short tempered, and like a true kshatriya, became furious with the injustice meted out to his older brother. He wanted Rama to fight for

His rights. Lakshmana also wanted to fight his father and imprison Kaikeyi. With calming words, Rama pointed out the need to uphold dharma. His sage counsel not only pacified Lakshmana, it also made him resolve to relinquish palatial comforts and to accompany Rama to the forest, despite the latter's objections.

## 6. Non-covetousness

Bharata could not even tolerate the idea of ascending to the throne that rightfully belonged to his elder brother. The wrath he felt towards his mother was a measure of his high moral standards. His first response was to persuade Rama to return and become king. With this plan, he went to the forest in search of Him. Rama refused to comply with Bharata's request, and persuaded him to become ruler of Ayodhya. Out



of respect for his brother, Bharata took Rama's sandals, carried them on his head back to Ayodhya, and placed them on the throne. He refused to be anything more than a regent, a caretaker of the kingdom that rightfully belonged to Rama.

### 7. Beware Dubious Attractions

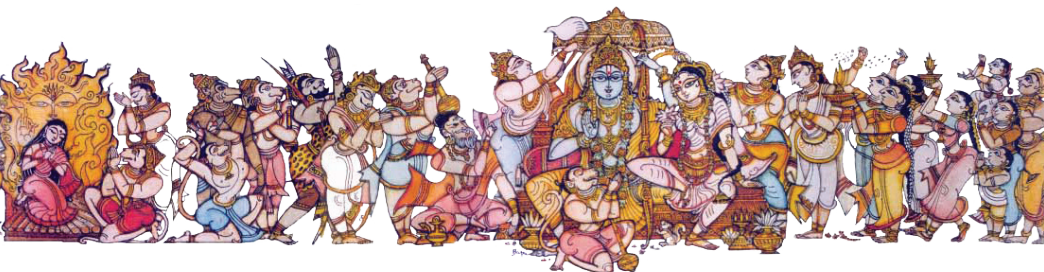
During their forest sojourn, Sita saw a beautiful golden deer, and asked Rama to capture it for Her. She ignored Lakshmana's warning that the deer was likely a demon in disguise. Because of Her incessant demands, Rama had no choice but to go after the deer. As a result of the separation from Him, Sita was abducted by Ravana.

### 8. Beware One's Words

The golden deer was actually a demon named Maricha. As

Rama was killing the demon, it committed its last act of mischief. Mimicking Rama's voice, it called out "Hey Lakshmana! Hey Sita!" and died. On hearing these cries of distress, Sita urged Lakshmana, who was guarding Her, to go and help Rama. Lakshmana tried his best to persuade Sita that Rama was fine, but failed. In a fit of rage, Sita accused Lakshmana of wanting to have an illicit relationship with Her in Rama's absence. Shocked by this abominable accusation, Lakshmana left at once, leaving Sita alone. That was when Ravana abducted Her.

Some interpreters of the *Ramayana* say that the ordeal of fire Sita had to undergo after being liberated from captivity in Lanka was not really to prove Her chastity; it was to absolve Herself of the sin of levelling the terrible



accusation against the saintly and devout Lakshmana.

## 9. Respect for Women

When Ravana was carrying Sita away in his aerial vehicle, they were spotted by Jatayu, the old and once powerful bird. At once, Jatayu rose into the air and fought valiantly with Ravana in an effort to release Sita. Ravana severed his wings. Before taking his last breath, Jatayu managed to convey the news of Sita's abduction to Rama, who, moved by the old bird's gallantry and noble sacrifice, bestowed upon him the ultimate gift of moksha.

## 10. Divine Love Transcends Caste and Creed

Guha, the tribal chief, was full of devotion to Rama. He ferried the Lord, Sita and Lakshmana across the Ganges, and

humbly refused payment for his service. Impressed by his devotion, Rama warmly embraced Guha.

Shabari, an old hunter woman of low caste, became a staunch devotee of Rama after hearing about His greatness. When Rama was wandering the forests in search of Sita, He visited Shabari's hut. The old woman, overwhelmed by love for Rama, offered Him fruits after nibbling each one to make sure they were sweet enough for Her Lord. Her pure heart and innocent devotion drew Rama's grace.

## 11. Humility

One of the greatest characters of the *Ramayana* is Hanuman, a minister of the dethroned monkey king Sugriva. Hanuman was brainy, brawny and wise. Though adorned with numerous gifts including deep





scriptural knowledge, immense physical power, great diplomatic skills, and a silvery tongue, his humility was unsurpassed. The moment he met Rama, he was bowled over by the Lord's divinity and charm, and he committed himself to being Rama's lifelong servant. The great feats he subsequently performed in Rama's service were unparalleled. The humility Hanuman displayed despite his greatness was unfathomable.

## 12. Greatness of True Friendship

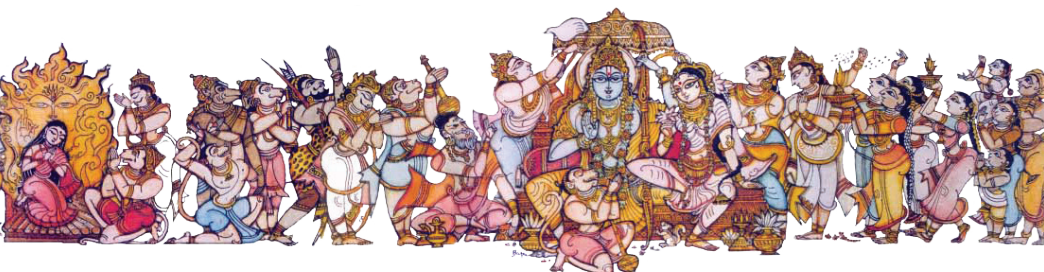
After Rama befriended Sugriva, the Lord promised to help him regain the throne, which his brother Vali had usurped. Vali had also unlawfully taken Sugriva's wife. Sugriva and Rama teamed up to kill Vali and restore Sugriva to the throne. When they had

succeeded in this mission, Sugriva helped Rama find Sita. He also helped Rama wage war against Ravana in order to liberate Sita from captivity.

## 13. Fair Play

Ravana's younger brother Vibhishana was very righteous. He rebuked Ravana for abducting another man's wife to satisfy his own carnal desires. When Ravana expelled him from the kingdom, Vibhishana went to Rama and surrendered to Him. Despite the reservations Sugriva and others had, Rama accepted Vibhishana wholeheartedly.

During the first fiery combat between Rama and Ravana, the Lord destroyed all of Ravana's weapons and armour. Though Rama could easily have killed Ravana then, He did not. Instead, Rama asked Ravana to retire for the day



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and to return to the war field the next day, fully armed, for it was unrighteous to kill an unarmed person.

#### 14. The Need for the Highest Standards in a King

After killing Ravana and freeing Sita, Rama asked Sita to prove Her chastity by jumping into a fire. This *agni pariksha* (fire ordeal) is often considered the most controversial of Rama's deeds. Sita humbly submitted to the trial and emerged unscathed, after which Rama accepted Her.

Later, after He became King of Ayodhya, He learnt that a washerman had spoken ill of Him for accepting Sita after She had been with another man for months. Rama,

whose love for Sita was unfathomable and who knew that She was pure, made the most painful decision of His life: to relinquish Her. He did this because, as ruler, He felt that He ought to uphold the highest standards of personal probity.

One can go on discussing these and other lessons of morality that can be found from an in-depth study of the *Ramayana*, surely one of the greatest sources of guidance on right living. That it continues to be a source book of dharma speaks of its timelessness. The *Ramayana* is also a wondrous saga, one that appeals to children and adults alike. Its appeal transcends religious, linguistic and geographical barriers. May all continue to draw inspiration from it. 

## AMRITA AND UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA JOIN HANDS TO PROVIDE IMPETUS TO EDUCATION AND RESEARCH



*Amma and Dr. Liesl Folks*

**December 12th, 2019, Amritapuri:** A Letter of Intent (LoI) was signed by Amma, Chancellor of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, and Dr. Liesl Folks, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, University of Arizona, to initiate a multidisciplinary partnership in education and research.

This partnership, aimed at offering globally relevant world-class programs, will lead to integrated and dual-degree

programs at the bachelor's and master's levels in disciplines such as Engineering, Biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Social Sciences, Medicine, Public Health and Agriculture. The program will enhance Amrita as the study-abroad site for students from the University of Arizona and vice versa, and will engage more than 200 students annually for a minimum of one semester at the two-partner university. This Lol marks one of the largest ever international university collaborations in India.

Dr. Liesl Folks said, "The University of Arizona shares Amrita's commitment to enriching life for all, its dedication to innovation, and its spirit of compassion. We look forward to working together across multiple disciplines to expand human potential and to care for the world around us.

Dr. Venkat Rangan, Vice-Chancellor of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, said, "Inspired by Amma's leadership, Amrita's profound mission of imparting Education for Life to its students and carrying out compassion-driven

research for humanitarian benefit and sustainable development will be further enriched by global impact through this synergistic and strategic partnership with the internationally renowned University of Arizona."

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham was recently recommended by the Ministry of Human Resource Development as an Institution of Eminence (IoE), which mandates that the university develop innovative programs of high quality that will be internationally recognised. This Lol will pave the way for developing unique, interdisciplinary degree programs at an international level. For example, a student may receive a B.Tech. degree in Mechanical Engineering from Amrita and a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering or Material Science from UArizona. This revolutionary educational initiative will be a gateway for Amrita students from a variety of disciplines to receive complimentary degrees and direct admission to graduate programs in the U.S. These collaborative curricula will also open doors to

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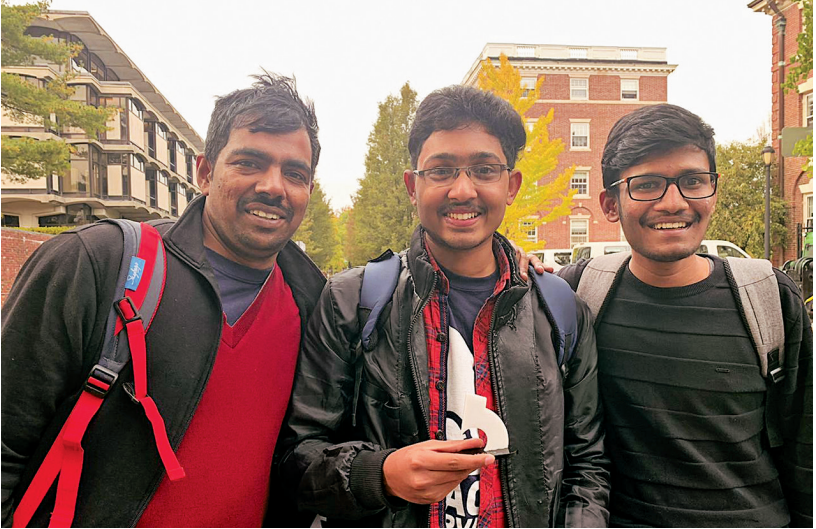
competitive U.S.-based internships and jobs, thus broadening future placement prospects for Amrita students.

The Lol will also lay the foundation for exchange programs for faculty as well as undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students; collaborative partnership and participation in Live-in-Labs®, Amrita's multidisciplinary experiential learning program in rural India; joint research projects; and joint research centres in strategic areas relevant to both UArizona and Amrita. This collaboration aims to develop a platform for transforming education from a classroom-based delivery model

to a restructured and adaptable student-centric model that will enhance student-faculty engagement and learning outcomes. Most importantly, it will create thinkers and innovators for solving societal problems.

A major goal of the partnership will be to engage in translational research to develop solutions for global sustainability and humanitarian challenges. The key focus areas will include all Engineering disciplines, Biotechnology, Nanotechnology, Molecular Medicine, Social Sciences, Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, Pharmacy, Global Media Studies, Agriculture and Sustainable Development.

## ELDERLY TRACKING SYSTEM WINS AMRITA FIRST PRIZE AT HACKHARVARD HACKATHON



(left – right): Dr. Shriram, Kowshik and Anudeep.

**December 2019, Coimbatore:** An tracking system for the elderly created by a team from Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham — comprising J. Anudeep, Kowshik G., and Dr. Shriram K.V. — won first prize in the ‘Elderly’ category (Medicine Support) at the HackHarvard Global Hackathon. The fully-functional system can be used indoors, outdoors and even in restrooms.

The online hackathon competition, conducted by Harvard University and hosted in partnership with Zhejiang Lab and Alibaba Cloud Tianchi, challenges students to use technology to identify problems within their local communities and to develop potential solutions.

The innovative wearable device raises an alert if the person trips or falls, so that caregivers can act at once. Six hundred teams from all over the world participated in the contest. The team from Amrita was the only one from India invited to Harvard in October 2019 to present the product. The prize

included a trophy and cash award of \$2,000.

Dr. Shriram teaches Computer Science at the Amrita School of Engineering, Coimbatore. Anudeep is a final-year B.Tech. (Electronics & Instrumentation) student, and Kowshik is a final-year B.Tech. (Electronics & Communication) student.

## **VIRTUAL REALITY GAME TO REDUCE LOWER-BACK PAIN WINS AMRITA FIRST PRIZE**

**November 12, 2019, Depok, Indonesia:** A student team from the department of Computer Science & Engineering (CSE), Amrita School of Engineering (ASE), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, won the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) Region 10 (Asia-Pacific) Humanitarian Technology Project Competition 2019.

The competition aims to develop technological solutions for the benefit of resource constrained and vulnerable communities. Two teams from CSE participated in the international project competition,

which was held at the University of Indonesia, Depok.

The winning team, Team Bend, developed a Virtual Reality (VR) game to reduce lower back pain, which is rampant among young professionals, especially those working long hours as coders in IT and service industries. The tagline for the project was 'Gaming is not an addiction but a therapy.' The team competed against student innovators from Japan, China, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, and won.

Dr. Sasangan Ramanathan, Dean, Faculty of Engineering,



(left – right): Team Bend (Mohan Karthik, Kishore Ramesh, Ragul P., Nehal Ram Surya), Prashant R. Nair (Mentor); Team Unorthodox Inc. (Sudharshan S., Rajasekar M., Manojkumar V.K., Ragul S.V., and Udhaya Aakash)

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, said, “In recent times, our students have been performing remarkably well in premier international and national competitions and hackathons like HackHarvard Global Hackathon, TCS EngiNX Digital Eminence Challenge and Smart India Hackathon. The next generation is gearing up to tackle future challenges.”

Team Bend comprised students from the 2016 – 2020 B.Tech. CSE batch: Kishore Ramesh, Mohan

Karthik V., Nehal Ram Surya B. and Ragul P. They were mentored by Prashant R. Nair, Associate Professor, CSE, ASE, Coimbatore. Prof. Prashant also mentored another CSE student team from the 2017 – 2020 batch, Team Unorthodox Inc., comprising Rajasekar M., Manojkumar V.K., Ragul S.V., Sudharshan S. and Udhay Aakash R. This team participated in the finals and was ranked among the top five for the project. 🌸