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In the past month we witnessed a global tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan. Afghan women are being pushed back from democratic and safe lives. The internet is controlled. This means that the freedom to speak through social media is curtailed. There is now authoritarian rule in Afghanistan.

South Africa is the "cradle of humanity". Having secured democracy largely through a bloodless transition, South Africa has a lot to share with the world. Many South Africans of Indian origin made decisive contributions to economic, social, and political life. While our ancestry comes from India, our lives, culture, and values are uniquely South African.

In this issue we pay tribute to the initiator of this journal, who left the shores of India, settled in South Africa, and left an indelible mark in the Arya Samaj with 47 years of selfless service. The Veda Jyoti was the brainchild of Pandit Nardev Vedalankar, whose initiative, passion and enthusiasm led to many members of the Arya Samaj assisting to translate his writings, edit articles and work on the layout of the journal. His Deep Daan concept raised funds for the printing of the journal and other publications of Veda Niketan. To this day the tradition has continued. We reprint two discourses on "Swaaha", and "Idam Na Mama" delivered by Pandit Nardev Vedalankar in his memory. Many thanks to contributors for sharing their memories of Pt Nardev thereby making this issue a special edition of Veda Jyoti.

On 21 August 2021 the 2nd Pandit Nardev Vedalankar Memorial Lecture address was delivered by Mac Maharaj. The full address is printed in this issue.

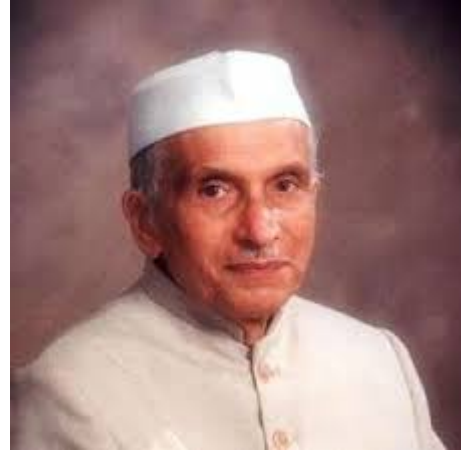
24 September is Heritage Day in South Africa. A unique South African Arya Samaj view on "Ancestry, Heritage and Culture" is shared. Thanks to Ujala Satgoor and Karuna Mohan for sharing a synopsis of their conversation at the Virtual Bridge Series webinar in November 2020.

Swami Agnivesh passed away on 11 September 2020. Karuna Mohan shares her experiences and lessons learnt from interactions with Late Swami Agnivesh. We pay tribute to his memory with an overview of his work.

The Vedic view on Pitri Paksh wraps up this issue on heritage and great leaders of the Arya Samaj that left an indelible impression on all.

Veda Jyoti Editorial Committee

Arthi Shanand, Divesh Cassimram, Karuna Mohan, Nishi Bundhoo, Ressma Rambharos, Sudhira Sham, Usha Depipersad.



Pandit Nardev Vedalankar was born in India in 1913. He was educated at the Gurukulas of Kangri and Haridwar. He studied Hindi and Sanskrit. He qualified with the title Vedalankar (Jewel of the Vedas). His education in the gurukulas shaped his life and his contribution to society where he learnt about the Arya Samaj movement and the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Panditjee came to South Africa in 1947 to teach Gujarati but soon established contact with former Gurukul colleagues and thus began his work with the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha. With his keen analytical ability, he quickly assessed the religious and cultural void and began his life's journey to fill this gap.

Many efforts initiated by him continued after his demise in 1994. These include: the Hindi Shiksha Sangh in 1948, the Vedic Purohit Mandal in the early 1950's, Veda Niketan (1963), the Gujarati Parishad (1967), the Gujarati Education Board (1986) and the Hindu Dharma Prachar Trust (1988).

Panditjee's vocation was being an educator. He started teaching Hindi in India and continued teaching both Hindi and Gujarati in South Africa. He taught Gujarati at the Surat Hindu Gujarati Shara (school) for over 40 years and initiated many other Gujarati schools across Durban. He was appointed to be a Gujarati lecturer at

the University of Durban Westville in 1975 and taught there for a decade. He began Hindi classes in the community in 1950s and at the M. L. Sultan Technical College (1959-1975). He developed the curriculum, compiled examinations, teacher training and development and established education systems for the institutionalisation of the teaching of Hindi and Gujarati. These now serve as the foundation for what continues today.

He loved his students and his students adored him – they were special to him, and he had the ability to make them feel as if each one had a special place in his life – this inspired and motivated them.



As a Scholar: Panditjee spread the word of the Vedas to all Hindus through his many religious writings. He wrote in Gujarati or Hindi and was assisted by many colleagues to translate these texts into English. His publications have been widely distributed nationally and internationally.

Based on the Vedic Prayer written Swami Bhawani Dayal Sanyasi, he compiled and edited the Aryan Prayer in 1954 to guide Hindu Prayer in our families and community. He wrote the 'Dharma Shiksha' books which were used to teach religious and moral studies in the Gujarati Schools.

He wrote a book on 'Arya Samaj & Indians Abroad' with Manohar Someraji. He compiled and wrote several religious tracts including Gayatri Mantra, Ideals of Hindu Marriage, Five Principles of Hinduism, Hindu Polity and Administration.

He wrote a series of four books for the Veda Niketan (the Elementary, Basic, Essential and Spiritual Teachings of Hinduism) which served as the basis for teaching children and adults about Hinduism and for which examinations were also compiled (Dharma Prathamik, Pravesh, Prakash and Praveen Exams) which continue to be administered in South Africa and other countries (USA, UK, Canada, Fiji, Suriname).

His seminal piece is the 'Shastra Navanitam' or Concise Study of Hindu Scriptures wherein he wrote about the Revealed Knowledge in the Vedas as exposed by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, about the Wisdom of the Rishis – the Upanishads, Gita, Ramayan etc. and about the Voices of Realised Saints and Sages – Buddha, Kabir, Tiruvaluvar. This served as the text for the diploma examination, the Dharma Prabhakar.

As an Arya Samaj scholar and priest, he served the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha as its Chief Vedic Priest. He was a powerful orator, motivating and inspiring all at the functions he spoke at. He convened community satsanghs at the Vedic Temple and encouraged families to have parivaarik satsanghs in their homes.

As a Vedic Purohit: he spent many hours performing religious functions, Vedic weddings, havans and kathas in many family homes and presided over numerous funerals.

As a Cultural Leader: Panditjee understood that it was also important for the Indian community to retain their cultural roots. He initiated the Hindi and Gujarati Eistedfodds. Through these mediums thousands of children and adults gave expression to their many cultural talents: music, drama, debates, public speaking, dancing, and recital of Gita and Ramayan path. He also teamed up with the Tamil and Telegu language organisations to host an Eistedfodd Sangham where all language groups presented cultural items.

As a Social Reformer: The Arya Samaj movement was part of the struggle for liberation from British Colonialism. In India they set up alternate schools to counter the influence of British education. The Arya Samaj focused on returning Hindu Dharma to its roots, the Vedas, to free it from the superstition, meaningless traditions and rituals that assumed more importance than the original scriptures. Panditjee continued this proud tradition of social reform in his own life and in his community work in South Africa. He had an uncompromising practice of critical debate and dialogue and questioning and challenging of social and individual injustices. He practised and promoted equality of gender. In working against the caste system, he propagated that we all must live in harmony and unity. He was supportive of the movement for change in this country and sharing prayers at community meetings during their civic struggles for a better life. He led opening prayers with other faiths at CODESA and in the first democratic parliament in South Africa.

His contribution to the Arya Samaj movement was acknowledged internationally when the Arya Sarvadeshik Sabha awarded him the Arya Ratna award in Ajmer India in 1985. And, in South Africa he was honoured by the Arya Samaj movement on his 75th birthday with a celebration and a gift. As a mark of his commitment to the community, he donated a major part of the gift for Hindu prachar work.

Panditjee fearlessly promoted the Arya Samaj principles as encapsulated in the Vedas. His favourite Vedic adage was 'Mitrasya Chakshusha samikshamahe' May we look at all with a friendly eye.

DISCOURSE ON: "SWAAHA"

This discourse by Pandit Nardev Vedalankar (1913-1994) was published by Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, in its monthly Journal "Vedic Light": April 1986.

In the Yajna the Ahuti (offerings of ghee, samagri and samidha) is offered into the fire as the word Swaaha is recited. The fire of the Yajna that has been lit must be kept alive. The Yajna is generally performed by a group for the benefit of others without any thought of selfish motive. The ahuti is an essential part of the Yajna. These offerings could take different forms in life. As an act of sacrifice it is highly praiseworthy to offer one's wealth, time, knowledge, professional ability, or any form of personal service. The chief participant in the Yajna wishes to fulfil a righteous duty; success depends on whether he is prepared to make a sacrifice.

Swaaha means to offer freely with a generous heart. He who forgets his personal interest and makes a noble sacrifice would find that his deed shines with a lustre of its own.



When a farmer is engaged in agriculture, he is involved in Krishi Yajna. The seed that is sown becomes the offering and it germinates in the soil. The seed-bud is protected by

the kernel which perishes in the process of giving rise to a new life. This is a good example of Yajna with the emphasis on Swaaha. How beautifully Kabir Das expresses the same when he says: "He who wishes to worship God must first raze his home to the ground. It symbolises the abandonment of selfishness."

Swami Shraddhanand chose such a path when he resolved to offer his life to Jnaan Yajna, and a Gurukul was founded. He admitted both of his sons in this Gurukul to encourage other parents. Soon his entire wealth was donated to the institution. Subash Chandra Bose initiated his National Yajna for the independence of India. He made a call to the youth of the country to join the struggle. The response was overwhelming in the true spirit of Swaaha.

The repeated chanting of Swaaha fortifies the inner resolve to make the sacrifices that are worthy of our human existence. Until there is a total commitment to an ideal or a cause, the demon of selfishness cannot be destroyed. To realise the purpose of life and to obtain the true knowledge of God, one must surrender all one's actions and the fruit of such actions to Him.

For Adhyatmic Yajna (Yajna of the inner self), we must resolve to offer the body, its faculties and life itself towards a worthy cause. The act of surrender must be based on a clear understanding. Swaaha (Su + Ah) means that one is fully aware of one's actions which have been carefully considered. The Yajna must be performed with a knowledge of its purpose, and it must be spontaneous. One who performs Yajna is a pilgrim. On this pilgrimage he moves onward in a friendly spirit.

Yajna is a duty. It is performed without any thought of personal gain and the result is the fulfilment of its purpose. It is for this reason that Swaaha is followed by the words "Idam na mama."

The words mean: 'This is not mine. I have no personal gain to achieve. The offering is made for the benefit of all creatures.'

DISCOURSE ON: "IDAM NA MAMA"

This discourse was delivered by Pandit Nardev Vedalankar (1913-1994) at the Maha Yajna of Plessislaer Arya Samaj on 10 March 1985; and was published by Arya Samaj South Africa, in "Veda Jyoti" April 1985)

During the Yajur Veda Parayana Maha Yajna which we have just performed, each offering into the fire was made with the chanting of SWAAHA, followed by the words IDAM NA MAMA (This is not mine).

What is the significance of this simple statement? This maxim of just five and a half letters in Sanskrit contains the entire message of the Yajna.

The word MAMA denotes ownership. It alludes to the right of possession of any object. The use of NA negates the affirmative claim. It then reads: "This which I am offering is not mine." The world is replete with thoughts and actions which proclaim: "This is mine... I won this... I am the rightful owner of this or that..." The implication is that such a thing does not belong to the second person. This attitude is based on selfishness, as exemplified using the word MAMA.

It is said that we are born with nothing, and we also depart empty-handed at the time of death. Yet we do not tire of the refrain: "This is mine...this is mine." The desire to possess leads to greed and the avoidance of an equitable sharing of what the world provides and gives rise to conflicts. In the claim of ownership, there is an implicit reminder, or a warning to others not to obstruct or interfere with this possession in any way.

It is evident that MAMA (mine) is the cause of many forms of dispute. What else could be the reason for the quarrel between the haves and the have nots? Some have become the owners of vast estates, monopolies, and empires. The result is that they have thus acquired the power to influence events. Many among them openly declare the importance of their ownership. It is inevitable that opposing forces will come into being and in such a situation, conflict becomes inescapable.

The very first sloka of the Bhagavad Gita refers to a question of a similar nature. Dhritrashtra and his sons had

taken over an entire kingdom and they refused to share any portion of this with the Pandavas. This became the cause of the Mahabharata war. At the commencement of the battle, Dhritrashtra addresses Sanjay, "MAMAKAH PANDAVA SCHAIVA?" (What is the dispute between my sons and the Pandavas?). Dhritrashtra did not have sight, but those who dispossess others of what rightly belong to them, are truly blind with pride. The question of "MAMAKAH" is that of a troubled mind. Such antagonisms have generally led to wars of mutual destruction. "This is mine and not yours," is the resounding echo, and what besides strife, could be the result? We find strife and misery today because the Vedic maxim is distorted to read "IDAM MAMA" (This is mine).

The amassing of material wealth beyond one's requirements has become the order of the day. At the other extreme is hunger and poverty. The story of the dog in the manger is also applicable to mankind. The dog sat ensconced in the manger and denied the cow the right to feed on the hay that is stored there. This compares with the super-abundance of material possessions of some who are either oblivious of the dire needs of the less fortunate or have developed an attitude of callous disregard for the plight and suffering of others.

It is time that we dedicate ourselves to the true meaning of the Vedic Yajna. May the message of "IDAM NA MAMA" spread peace and happiness in the world around us.



At the time when all philosophy books were Hindi based, this was one of the first books in English which was well used to get introduced and become acquainted with Hinduism. Aligned with the GCSE O level syllabus it was always an easy and knowledgeable read.

Promod Bhai – Mauritius

Published by Veda Niketan, Arya Samaj SA

Message from the APS President Pt Arthi Nanakchand Shanand

I was privileged to have worked very closely with Pandit Nardev Vedalankarjee and had got to know him quite well. He was a man of great foresight and vision who would not be tied down by conservatism or outdated customs and traditions. This intellectual giant was totally humble—no task was beneath him!

I felt extremely honoured when Panditjee called me in 1968 to attend the inaugural meeting of the Gujarati Spardha Samiti. Since then, I have worked with Panditjee. He always said that we should have one United Gujarati body instead of having smaller (separate) bodies divided by caste!!

I learnt from this saintly man that there is good in every person. We should always encourage the weaker one to do his best!!

Also, after having studied Gujarati 1,2, and 3 at U.D.W. Gurujee awoke my love of reading Gujarati literature!

As the late Dr P.L. Patel called him, this “Niskam Karma Yogi” was a “Prince Among Men”!! He stood out by his selfless actions!

Jaymatiben Makanjee (Gujarati student at University of Durban Westville (UDW), Radio Announcer Radio Truro and Radio Lotus)

Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, I remember Pandit Nardev as someone whom everyone looked up to for guidance on all cultural and religious matters.

He was deeply respected for his vast knowledge and competence as a priest, his fairness, wisdom and humility as a human being and the quiet dignity with which he always conducted himself.

He was our family priest and very supportive of my parents Pt and Pta Sewpaul in their work as Vedic priests and Hindi teachers.

I am truly grateful for Panditji's dedication and service to the people of South Africa.

Romilla Sham

Heritage month reminds us of the bottomless foundation on which our teachings and beliefs are based. Let us go “Back to the Vedas”. The teachings of the Vedas are humanity’s inheritance.

When we speak of '**Vasudhaiva Kutunbakam**' let us live the meaning - The Whole World is One.

The **Panch Mahayajna** – The Five Great Duties point us in that direction. Let our actions transform our lives from individualism to collectivism, to bring about equality, social justice and eradication of poverty amongst all people.

The Five Great Duties to be observed by every human being covers:

Brahmayajna - acquiring knowledge.

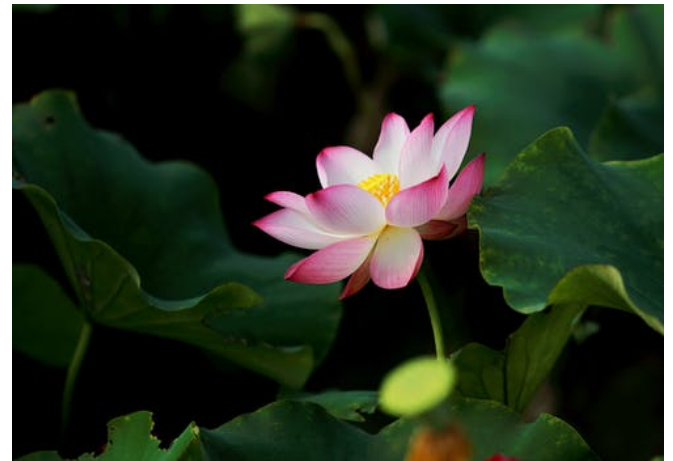
Devayajna – where a family performs Hawan daily and embraces the message of the Hawan that our actions must ultimately be for the benefit of others.

Pitriyajna - our obligations to care for our parents and elders not only in our families but in the community as well as to our domestic helpers at home.

Atithiyajna - extending hospitality to unexpected guests, even a beggar.

Bhootyajna - being mindful of the animal life around us, remembering that the animals also have feelings of happiness and pain.

Dear readers let us begin now and make our country and the world a better place.



Current Realities are Reshaping Society and Values

Speech delivered by Mac Maharaj at the 2nd Biennial Pandit Nardev Vedalankar Memorial Lecture 21 August 2021

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this Biennial Lecture in memory of Pandit Nardev Vedalankar. My point of reference is the ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - that the world is one family - which Panditji practised.

I would like to frame my presentation on the topic that "Current Realities are Reshaping Society and Values" in the context of the challenges we share with the world. In doing so, we shall better appreciate the dilemmas and challenges of South Africa.

Climate change is the greatest threat to life on this planet and will invariably result in the mass extinction of millions of different species, humankind included. The signs are there: more frequent and intense drought, storms, heatwaves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers, and warming oceans. The cause of climate change is mainly human activity, like burning fossil fuels - natural gas, oil, and coal.



The effects of climate change are pervasive. Climate change is forcing us to fundamentally rethink values and behaviour. Human society can no longer consider ourselves to be superior and holding dominion over other living creatures. Our vulnerability to nature is revealed. We are subject to the unalterable laws of nature.

Our survival requires that we restructure production and consumption because we humans depend on other living things, the natural environment, and the

interdependence of the world's peoples and countries. No country on its own can chart our survival.

The same message is embedded in the effects of globalisation. Cross border economic exchanges and deepening integration of economies make it possible for us to envisage a world without want and hunger. The share of the world's workers living in extreme poverty is falling. Between 2012 and 2021, China lifted 100 million people out of poverty.

Globalisation brings a relentless drive to deepening inequality and the continuation of an economic order that locks out many of the economies. At the same time, Hans Rosling presents evidence that over the past 200 years, all countries are inexorably moving towards the 'healthy wealthy' corner of the graph.

Globalisation has weakened the ability of states to manage their economies. The integration of the economies has been at the expense of democratic representation. Increasingly, generating incomes and creating jobs is managed through uncontested and unaccountable private institutions and market structures.



The answer, however, to removing or mitigating these harmful effects does not and cannot lie in retreating to "economic nationalism". No country on its own can fashion effective responses. What is needed is open dialogue committed to the structural transformation of the economy, supported by international trade, financial and production relations, to close the gap between the more affluent countries and the newly industrialising economies. We need to find a way to regulate the economy at both the state and inter-state levels.

Thirdly, our world is defined by the fourth industrial revolution. At the heart of this phenomenon is accelerating technological innovation generated by fusing the physical, biological, and digital worlds. There appear to be no limits to the possibilities that arise when billions

of people are connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity and access to knowledge. The potential to improve the quality of life for the people worldwide and make the citizen the centre of attention is enormous.



This revolution is evolving exponentially. Change and disruption are becoming permanent features to production, management, and governance systems. The technological revolution, combined with advances in artificial intelligence, will fundamentally alter how we live, work, and relate.

It has the potential to transform agricultural production, distribution, and consumption, and to lever us into renewable energy and out of dependence on fossil fuel energy. The goal of a Smart City is transformational. Its essentials are proper sanitation and waste management, 24-hour electricity and water supply, and efficient mobility and public transport with a network of well-connected roads. The circular economy based on reuse, recycle, and share intersects with the concept of the Smart City.



The perils of this revolution include the unequal division of spoils of technological advances, the threat of mass unemployment, the erosion of governance, and the potential abuse of robotics, genetic engineering, and cyber weapons.

While digital innovation has placed information at our fingertips, we witness how social media spreads hatred and fear. Facts become irrelevant. Truth is of no consequence. The one-liner and the tweet become potent vehicles to invoke fear, hostility and anger, the breeding ground for violence. In this way, demagogues exploit the uncertainty that accompanies change to corral people into separating emotion from reason, leading to a systematic undermining of people's faith in democracy.

According to Andrew Maynard of Arizona State University, the gap between our technological capabilities and our ability to handle them responsibly has continued to widen. Closing the gap will "depend on new partnerships being forged between experts and organisations that have insight into the complex dynamic between society and technology, and those that call the shots." And, he adds, it "will also depend on ordinary people ... being included in defining and helping determine how this ... revolution plays out."

No state, acting independently, can contain the harmful effects of climate change, globalisation and the fourth industrial revolution. The Covid-19 pandemic is forcefully making us aware that no country, no one, is safe until everyone is safe. Despite this lesson, we find a shocking imbalance in the global distribution of vaccines. The wealthiest countries have created a near-monopoly of the world's supply of vaccines, leaving countries with the fewest resources to face the worst health and human rights outcomes.



Even though the pandemic has cast a harsh light on the need to save lives before profits, the world is unable to cooperate effectively and equitably.

We need conversations and actions on the domestic and global stage, which will enable us to develop comprehensive and shared views on reconfiguring the world we live in. It is in our power, in our daily decisions, to influence how these phenomena evolve. We can shape them and guide their effects towards a future that reflects humankind's common objectives and not some narrowly defined selfish interests.

The decisions must be a shared view. Shared ownership of decisions is a pre-condition for shared responsibility for the implementation and consequences of our actions. Success will depend on the combined efforts of organisations, citizens, and governments.

This is a struggle that must be waged on the global arena as well as within countries. Let us, therefore, briefly look at the state of our democracy.

There are many features of the current situation that are specific to our country. We have the most unequal society in the world. As of June 2021, the official unemployment rate was 32,6 per cent. Young people are struggling to find jobs. Corruption is not only widespread but has become systemic. And we are witnessing a broad-ranging attack on our democracy and our Constitution.



Democracy is founded on the principle that all humans are equal. Consequently, all social constructs that discriminate between and among individuals and groups - whether they take the form of patriarchy, racism, religious intolerance, caste - violate the principle of equality.



Democracy allows for the mediation of conflicting interests in society without the conflicts degenerating into civil strife and violence to bring change. When civil strife and violence enter the political space in a democracy, the door is opened to authoritarianism or a failed state.

The promise of democracy is not to eliminate such conflicting interests but to address them in a manner that allows society to move forward. It rests on the premise of dialogue, rational discussion, and mobilisation to find ways to address one's sectional interests in the context of ensuring that the more extensive interests of society are paramount.

The impact of poverty, lack of jobs, growing inequality, and our failure to systematically deracialise our economy and society is felt in people's daily lives. There is a growing sense of being marginalised in our democracy.

The corrupters and the corrupt are exploiting these failures and shortcomings to evade the long arm of the law. As their Stalingrad tactics in the courtrooms are exhausted, their desperation outside the courts grows.

Demagogues seek to invoke fear, promote hostility, and stoke anger among the people without regard to the consequences of their actions.

Lurking beneath this reckless disregard for consequences is a systematic undermining of the people's faith in our constitutional democracy. Instead of holding the executive accountable, ensuring it carries out its mandate and does not abuse its power, they seek to disempower it. Instead of strengthening the role of parliament, they strive to immobilise it as the people's voice. Instead of

enhancing the capacity of the justice system to uphold and enforce the rule of law, they work to undermine public trust in our judiciary.

Rule by elites, authoritarianism - these cannot be the way forward. There must be a perceptible relationship between measures we undertake to address the conditions under which the people live, and work and the vision enshrined in our Constitution.

At the same time, the gap between the representatives and the institutions of government, on the one hand, and the citizenry, on the other, requires urgent attention. A democracy based on an informed and active citizenry will be better positioned to effect the structural transformation of economic relations, access to resources and a society founded on equality.

What dominates the headlines today is how authoritarian personalities and populists exploit the advances in technology.

However, these technological advances can become instruments of empowerment by making it possible for a more informed citizenry to voice their opinions, coordinate their efforts, and engage with governments at every level.

Direct democracy - government by the people - is neither feasible nor practical in modern-day complex societies. In its place, we have different forms of representative democracy in which those who govern are mandated and elected by the people to whom they are accountable.

But accountability, vital as it is, is not and cannot, on its own, be sufficient to bridge the gap between the elected representatives and the people, particularly those who feel marginalised, powerless, and voiceless.

Rather than allow the undermining of democracy to descend into authoritarianism or a failed state, we need to deepen democracy. Our constitutional democracy allows us to devise ways about decision-making to make all, especially those who feel powerless and voiceless, part of the process.

We need to nail to our mast the goal of a people-centred, people-oriented, and participatory democracy. This perspective, whose goal is the creation of a society founded on the principle of equality, should become the measuring tape against which we assess how we harness the opportunities arising in the world while striving to mitigate and contain the ability of organisations and

government to manipulate and control the digital infrastructure.

Government will have to change how it makes policies and engages with the public. The test when contemplating or making any changes must be whether it empowers or diminishes the power of the citizen. The first and the last line of defence of democracy is the people. But they will only rise to this challenge if they feel a sense of ownership - that democracy is theirs and for them.

Where the mind is without fear and the
head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of
truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms
towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not
lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let
my country awake.

By Rabindranath Tagore

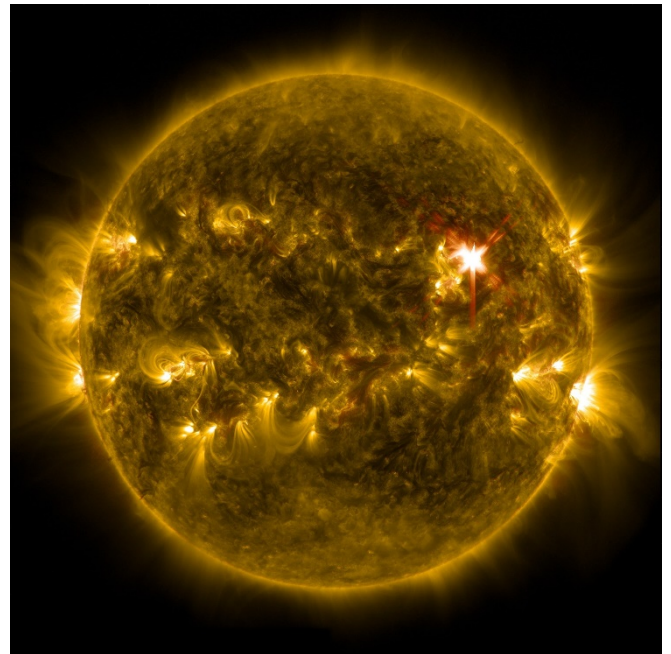
Ancestry, Heritage and Culture

Freedom from fear is the freedom
I claim for you my motherland!
Freedom from the burden of the ages,
bending your head,
breaking your back, blinding your eyes to
the beckoning
call of the future;
Freedom from the shackles of slumber
wherewith
you fasten yourself in night's stillness,
mistrusting the star that speaks of truth's
adventurous paths;
freedom from the anarchy of destiny
whole sails are weakly yielded to the blind
uncertain winds,
and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold
as death.
Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a
puppet's world,
where movements are started through
brainless wires,
repeated through mindless habits,
where figures wait with patience and
obedience for the master of show,
to be stirred into a mimicry of life.

By Rabindranath Tagore

In the modern world our identity as human beings in the third decade of 21st century is surrounded by many practices, beliefs and views that are not suitable nor adaptable to the current context we find ourselves in. We constantly search for answers. The issue of who we are, our ancestry, our heritage, our identity has many facets.

The question “who am I” is indeed a complex one, is it linked to communion with God only, or is it about finding ourselves our space as equals in the complex rapidly changing world? How does all this link to our Swadharma – our purpose here on earth?



The Arya Samaj principles explain to us that Paramathma is formless, omnipresent, endless, and infinite. The Veda is the Scripture of true knowledge, and it is our duty to learn and teach the Veda, to hear it, read it and recite it to others. There are seven other principles which teach us to work and live for truth and justice, promote the good of all, subordinate to the laws of society that promote the well-being of all, to be selfless and fearless.

The major Indian settlement in South Africa came about due to colonial rule. It was another form of slavery. As early as 1905 Arya Samaj leaders visited South Africa and set up organisations which still exist today.

South Africans of Indian origin developed fearless and committed leaders who worked tirelessly to improve their participated in resistance activity, developed sporting codes, and maintained language and cultural

activity. They organised the community to fund the building of temples, crematoria, schools, and old age homes. Notwithstanding the insurmountable difficulties and disenfranchisement, the earlier generations of leaders worked hard to set up organisations to promote dharma and protect the culture and language.

The Arya Samaj set up institutions such as the Hindi Shiksha Sangh and the Arya Benevolent Home. And, despite the mainstream social practices, the Arya Samaj encouraged, trained, and supported women to be priests.

Today we have different circumstances. Clearly, we are not sailing on the ships to South Africa, we are not indentured, we are not restricted to Group Areas and separate development – so what is our role in shaping South African society?

Identity and the shaping of status in society over time was formed by choices and exploitation of opportunities. Defining ethnic, cultural, national identity in the current milieu is necessary to understand who we are.

Identity is shaped by a sense of self, who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you. Identity is further shaped by gender, ethnicity, language, profession, socialisation and roles, image, ability, etc. This is further projected and perpetuated by the media and advertising on the one hand, and the general stereotyping of individuals and/or communities on the other e.g., all Indians are shopkeepers and curry lovers.

What is the link between Culture and Heritage? How does culture shape heritage and is there a shared culture and heritage? There are two facets to heritage namely:

A person's unique sense of family identity linked to ancestry and lineage that defines the values, traditions, behaviours, practices that make our family unique. Some families define their heritage primarily as their ethnic, cultural, or national identity. Other families can point to values that have been passed on, such as a love for education, participation in community life, a strong work ethic, or religious devotion. We honour this heritage by incorporating the positive elements in our lives – values, activities and traditions that connect us, display of heirlooms, photographs, and tangible reminders of our heritage.

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community which are passed on from generation to generation. This includes the customs, practices, places, language, objects, artistic expression, symbols such as statutes, monuments, etc. Some of the

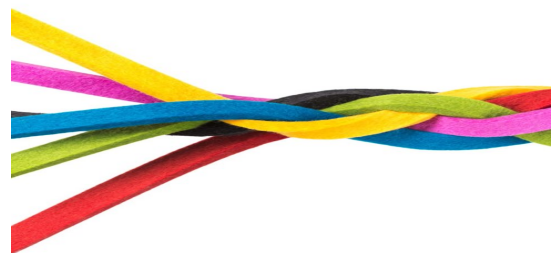
direct links to a harsh past have led to calls that some monuments must fall.



South Africa's search for heritage and sharing of culture post 1994 is still being shaped. In schools there is a mingling which in time will develop cultural integration and a mutual respect for practices. Youth see a distinct South African identity by shaping the present and future with the Rhodes Must Fall and other calls as a break from colonial past. Similar calls have emerged globally. Can the power of ubuntu and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam shape the future where the past exists in harmony with the present?

There are no complete answers to how the balance between ancestry, heritage and identity is created. This is a dynamic process! This is an ongoing conversation we all must have. We make choices that shape who we are and give form to identity. Most of us are born in South Africa. We are South Africans striving to be Arya (noble beings) first. So, what does it mean to be a South African and Arya Samaj member?

We have made and continue to make a significant contribution to our country. We can and must reach out to share our experiences and build an integrated approach to all accepting each other and understanding who we are.



Conversations with Swami Agnivesh and the South African Liberation Struggle

At the age of 28, Swami Agnivesh (1939-2020) abandoned a promising career as a professor of law and management in Calcutta for a life of activism. Born into a Brahmin, upper caste, South Indian family he shed his name, caste, religion, family, and all his property to adopt the life of a Swami and began his life's crusade for social justice and compassion.

Swami Agnivesh participated in politics as an outworking of his spirituality. He bridged politics and religion with the plank of social justice.

He won the Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award) in 2004. In 1994, he was appointed the Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. He is better known across the globe for his campaigns against bonded labor and was the founder-Chairperson of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labor Liberation Front). He was elected President of the World Council of Arya Samaj (Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha) in 2004.

He advocated relentlessly for women's rights. He took on the most controversial issues. He addressed the plight of child widows, the shameful practice of *sati*, the burning of widows on the husband's funeral pyres, and dowry deaths. He actively crusaded against the crime of female foeticide.

An environmental activist, he drew on Gandhian wisdom to advocate simplicity and sustainability and economic rights. He deplored the economics of greed that accompanies globalization.

He also championed the search for peace in violent conflicts. He led numerous initiatives to foster peace and interfaith harmony in Kashmir during the worst periods of violence. He participated in a peace march to Palestine in 2012 and was arrested. In 2010 Swami Agnivesh was appointed by the Government of India as the mediator to foster dialogue between the government and the Maoist leadership.

Swami Agnivesh spearheaded the interfaith and inter-religious movement in India and globally.

In 2011 Swamiji was a prominent associate of Anna Hazare during the "India Against Corruption" campaign. In July 2018 while supporting the tribal communities' protests over land acquisition by the state, Swami Agnivesh was beaten by BJP Yuva Morcha workers chanting "Jai Sri Ram", in Jharkhand.

He stressed the need to keep the interest of various people in society intact and well above the interest of individuals. His education in Arya Samaj persuaded him to believe that the spiritual quest of an individual was inextricably linked with his/her social life.

"Spiritual quest of an individual and one's social life complement each other like two sides of the same coin. Religion should thus, never degenerate into an exercise of escapism." Swami Agnivesh.



Karuna Mohan shares her conversations and lessons from engagements with the late Swami Agnivesh.

I share my experiences with you as we remember Swami Agnivesh who practised his beliefs through action. My conversations with Swami Agnivesh spanned three decades. I first met Swami ji on 10 September 1989. South Africa was on the brink of change. It was indeed an exciting time. Meeting Swamiji added a new dimension to my political outlook. His radiance displayed in his fearlessness and his quiet, calm disposition amidst chaos to speak the truth, to push the boundaries, and to practise social justice will remain in the collective memory of communities and individuals he interacted with.

In 1989, the Veda Dharam Sabha (VDS) of Pietermaritzburg celebrated its 80th anniversary with the theme "Peace and Unity in Diversity". Swami Agnivesh was the keynote speaker at a rally in the Northdale stadium in Pietermaritzburg on 10th September 1989. The VDS was the only Hindu organisation to affiliate to the UDF in Pietermaritzburg and denounce the Tri-cameral

Parliament. During the launch of the 80th anniversary celebrations in January 1989, the VDS held a prayer meeting calling for the unbanning of the leaders and organisations and release of all political prisoners.

Swami Agnivesh reinforced the concepts that protest and engaging with the poorest of the poor and calling for justice were correct actions, that liberation would not be obtained solely through prayer and devotion to God, but social actions against injustices and exploitation was necessary for the making of a just society. He made several visits to South Africa from 1995 onwards and on each visit, he made time to speak to me.

Among the many lessons, three messages I got from my interactions with Swamiji are:

Being a political activist is consistent with the Arya Samaj Principles

After the state of emergency in India in 1975, when the largest democracy faced a crisis, Swamiji formed a political party the Arya Sabha based on the Arya Samaj principles. He contested elections and won. He was the Minister of Education in the State of Haryana. This gave me courage to accept the nomination of my name to be on the ANC lists for the first democratic elections in 1994.

During his first visit to South Africa, he questioned why in all the homes he visited, the African people of South Africa were workers. And there were no people of other race groups sitting at the same table to eat with the family. He probed why Africans were not treated as equals, and why there was a lack of social interaction among the different race groups. The apartheid context and the struggle for liberation was discussed with him.

Indeed, he visited informal settlements and met the political activists I worked with of all faiths and races. Many of the political activists were Marxist Leninists and did not see religion as a site of struggle, some though, were influenced by liberation theology and worked with the churches to bring about liberation in South Africa.

A key issue was the mushrooming of informal settlements closer to work opportunities and on land previously owned by the Raisethorpe Arya Samaj in Pietermaritzburg. This was a class issue as well as a race issue, as most of the newly settled communities who grabbed vacant land were unemployed and African. In the recent outbreak of violence in July 2021, there was an

incident where the shacks in this settlement were burnt creating racial tensions and divisions among Indian and African communities.

During his visit in 1995, while the SACP was attempting to grapple with socialism and spirituality, a few leaders of the SACP in Gauteng had an engagement with Swamiji on race, class and gender and the meaning of interfaith engagements. Swamiji was interested in whether children were in bonded labour in South Africa. We explained that children's rights, labour rights, and gender rights and indeed third generation rights were being secured in the new constitution and legislation. We did warn him that there were new threats of human trafficking, climate change and right-wing fundamentalism lurking on the horizon globally. From these engagements I got the first lesson.

We needed to integrate with the South African society make friends across the racial lines, embrace all as we are one human family - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Lesson One

The Arya Samaj is a modern revolutionary movement

Swamiji is one of the Arya Samaj leaders in the late 20th century and early 21st century who placed the Arya Samaj on the global platform with his work on bonded labour, his commitment to social action and his interfaith work.

He embraced the LGBTQ communities and the Muslim community during the anti CAA protests in 2019. Swamiji stood for truth and justice, fought exploitation, and lived the principles of the Arya Samaj in practice through understanding the current context. His practice took Hinduism into the 21st century.

The second lesson was:

*Stand up for truth and justice,
fight exploitation and try to live
the principles of the Arya Samaj in
practice through understanding
the current context.*

Lesson Two

As a political activist this was not new to me. We had mobilised, organised and conscientized the community. But did we really understand the current context?

During a visit after the first democratic elections in South Africa, Swamiji once more picked up the issue of a lack of racial integration. I tried to explain that education will be the institution that will help to make this a reality with the new generation and in time build social cohesion. This time he indicated to me that true integration will only happen if we accept African men and women as life partners. I shared with Swamiji that within the ANC folds and in society this was already happening albeit at a slow pace.

Society will only improve if we act for the benefit of all

On one occasion when he visited me, I was head of a programme on Local and Economic Development, he discussed his book Vedic Socialism with me after he heard about the programmes on manufacturing, cooperatives, and entrepreneur development that I was working on. In this book Swamiji wrote that when many households sleep hungry and are without clothes and shelter, while other households live with excessive consumption, society cannot be free or reach liberation. Indeed, society will only improve if we act for the benefit of all.

Today with the global economic crisis South Africa and India are among the 20 countries in the world where income inequality and market distortions are widening the gap between rich and poor. Swamiji's writings and observations are relevant for democracy, economic and social justice.

From this engagement I got the third lesson.

*Work to end joblessness and
promote decent work, ensure
human dignity, secure human
rights, fight gender-based
violence and end corrupt
practices.*

Lesson Three

In May 2006 Swamiji came to South Africa for an interfaith conference. He wrote a message to me in the cover of his book on "Religion, Spirituality and Social Action" he said - "Karuna let's unite the whole of humanity for social justice" and on his book "Hinduism in the New Age" Swamiji's message to me was "satya, prem, Karuna and nyaya are attributes of our Creator, the God. Let's join hands to fulfil God's purpose." (Satya – truth; prem - love, karuna - mercy or compassion and nyaya – justice)

A year ago, we had bid farewell to a great soul who lived his dharma through karma and inspired many people from different faiths and cultures in many countries.



PITR PAKSH: Honouring our Spiritual and Cultural Heritage

In addition to the expectation that one is to lead a spiritually guided life every day: *Yajur Veda 40.15: Aum krato smara*: remember God in ALL your actions, Hindus observe several special religious occasions which are spread throughout the year. This presentation focuses on scriptural principles and teachings of truth applicable to Pitir Paksh.

Paksh is a period of two weeks according to the lunar phases. Pitra (or Pitar) is a term of respect to parents, elders, benefactors and forbears in our families and society, living and past. Pita (pronounced Pitha) also refers to God as our Divine Creator- Who takes care of all life (eg. Yajur Veda 3.24; 3.6).

The calendar serves as a guide and reminder. What happens to our forebears in the other 50 weeks?

From time immemorial, we all come from a dynasty, a lineage, and it is our sacred duty to uphold the DHARMA: wisdom, teachings, morals, and values by which they lived – our spiritual, cultural, family heritage. Pitir Paksh is a time of remembrance, honour, and tribute to all those who have sacrificed and contributed to our well-being and progress. They lived not just for themselves.

In South Africa special tribute must be given to the indentured labourers who arrived in Durban from India in 1860 onwards. Most of the South African Indian community are their descendants. With the most difficult conditions and meagre earnings through sheer hard work, they had such vision and foresight that without waiting or demanding, they took it upon themselves to build schools for material and secular progress and places of learning of worship, culture, and vernacular for spiritual development. Many such buildings still exist as monuments and testimony to their sacrifices for future generations. We must be ever indebted to them – *Pitri Rnn*, and in turn make such sacrifices for the generations ahead, not just for material and financial comforts, which must in fact be earned by our own due efforts.

Messages from the most ancient scriptures known to mankind – the Vedas and Upanishads:

Rig Veda 4.6.7: *Na yasya saaturjanitoravaari na maatarapitaraa noo chidishtau. Adha mitra na sudhitah paavako-agnirdeedaaya maanusheeshu vikshu.*

He whose mother and father are not properly loved, served and honoured, meets with worries and woes; while he whose mother and father are held in high esteem achieves bliss and admiration amongst friends and people.

Rig Veda 5.25.5: *Putram dadaati daashushe:*

Children must bring honour and glory to their parents, family, and society.

Rig 7.34.12 and Atharva 19.11.1: *...shan no bhavantu pitaro haveshu.*

May we live in peace with the advice and guidance of our elders.

Yajur Veda 13.31: *... tatra gachha yatra poorve paretaah.*

Follow the path of virtue as your forbears did.

Gita 1.38-44: *Kuldharma sanaatana dharma nashte kulam.*

When eternally relevant family values are destroyed, ultimately the family itself gets destroyed. Each generation of the family has a sacred duty to uphold the legacy of DHARMA of its forbears.

Yajur 32.14: *...Pitarascha upaasate... medhaavinam kuru.*

May we live and act with the wisdom by which sages, scholars and elders lived. This should be the greatest obituary, memorial, or tribute. NB: This mantra is a commitment in EVERY Havan / Yajna, including by a couple in the Vedic marriage ceremony (Vivah Sanskaar), paying respects to their forbears.

Yajur 19.36: *Pitribhya swadhaahibhya swadhaa namah...*

Offer food and homage - honour and respect - to our LIVING parents, grandparents, great grandparents..., who bring joy to us.

Yajur Veda 11. 83: *Aum Annapate annasya (grain)... taarisha oorjan no dehi dwipade chatushpade.*

O Lord, the Giver of food... may all LIVING beings be blessed with energy giving food obtained by superior, noble work. Bless those who give food in charity. Food, water, air is for the living.

Taittiriya Upanishad Bhrigu Valli Ch. 8: *Annam NA parichakshit, tad vratam:*

Vow to NOT discard, waste food. Note that with the reality of reincarnation, after death, **nothing** material or physical is carried over or passed over, including food. Contributions and donations may be given AT ANY TIME, even regularly in their memory and honour to a needy person, family or benevolent organisation for people, animals, or the environment.

Manu Smriti 8.17: *Ek eva suhrid dharmo nidhanepya nuyati yah. Shareerena samam naasham sarvam anyaddhi gacchati*

All **material** links perish with the death of the body. We must be honoured and remembered by our unselfish, noble, good-hearted contributions to society – dharma.

Bhagavad Gita 2.28: *Avyaktaadeeni bhootani vyaktamadhyaani...*

All relationships begin, exist and end in the present lifetime. There's no carry over / continuation of relationships.

Rig Veda 10.16.5; *...punaragne... pitribhya... tanvaa jaatavedah:*

Going forward, the soul takes birth in a new body, in a new family, a new environment to acquire greater knowledge. Each birth we get should be lived to rise to greater SPIRITUAL heights toward God realisation.

Atharva Veda 3.12.6: *... Vanshogro viraajannapa vrinkshwa shatrun...*

Vansh means lineage or dynasty, and we must strong, brave members, custodians, and trustees

of this lineage in our generation, so that we carry this forward to the next generation – our children and grandchildren, because **Rig Veda 1.190.9** advises: Children of today will be adults, elders, parents, and leaders of tomorrow.

Rig Veda 10.63.13: *...pra prajaabhir jaayata DHARMANASPARI:*

children and grandchildren are INSPIRED to follow elders who live the path of Dharma.

Rig Veda 3.17.5: *Yastvaddhotaa poorvo agne ... tasyaanu dharmam pra yajaa:*

Perform your duties efficiently, guided by the wisdom and philanthropy of your predecessors.

The 1964 movie 'Aap ki Parchhaiyan.' Lyrics by Raja Mehdi Ali Khan: *Jab tak ke hai aakaash pe chaand aur sitaare, Bhagavaan salaamat rahe ma baap hamaare:* As long as the moon and stars exist, so long shall I thank God for my mother and father.

Whilst EVERY day - time - is an auspicious blessing from God for progress of all life, this period, like other dates of importance, is observed by strict discipline and austerity, taking *saattvik* food and liquids (gentle, pure, peaceful), refraining from all meat and intoxicants of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and sensual desires. These are poison to the body, mind, soul, and environment.

An example of the rich heritage practised and passed down our lineage is the Hindu scriptural, vernacular, eternally relevant (*Sanaatan*) greeting *NAMASTE, NAMASKAARAM, VANAKAM.*

Yajur Veda Ch. 16; Atharva Veda 13.4.48; Uttar Ramcharita; Bhagavad Gita 11. 36 - 40: With the divine soul within me, I offer my respect to the divine soul within you. I honour the light, love, truth, beauty, and peace within you, because it is also within me. With all the love of my heart, with all the intelligence of my mind, with all the power of my arms, I offer my humble respects to you. In sharing all these, we are united, we are the same. Whilst each is a unique creation, we are all equal before God the Creator, before nature, before law, and before the soul within. The soul has no gender or discrimination in relationship.

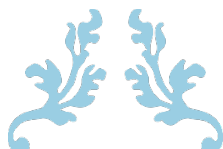
This is a most spiritual, universal greeting of peace and respect between souls, applicable at anytime, anywhere with anyone.

With the concern around the world of the spread of disease, this is a most appropriate, contact-free, hygienic greeting.

With such knowledge, let's renew the PRACTICE of our culture from scriptures, and inherited from our lineage – Pitras, and make it our sacred duty to both our past and the future; instead of inventing fashionable words that have little meaning, and change in time.

Let not our children and grandchildren say:

"You did not teach me our culture and dharma."



Veda Niketan

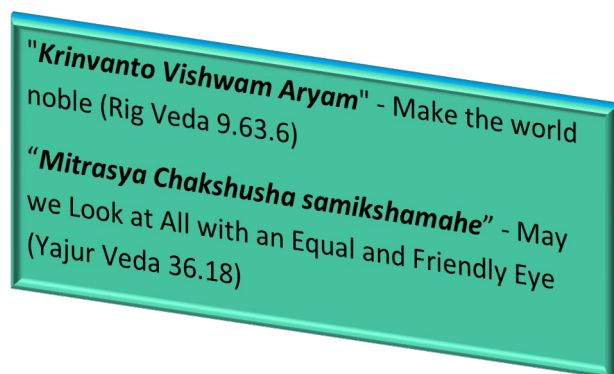
Veda Niketan delivers graded examinations for the study of Hindu Dharma in English. 2021 examinations for various grades from elementary teachings of Hinduism to the higher diploma in Hinduism will be written from 10 to 17 October 2021. We wish all students and examiners well in the upcoming examinations.

Enrolment for 2022 examinations is open. Please do encourage scholars and adults to read the books and enrol for the examinations.

To enrol for 2021 Veda Niketan Examinations and obtain copies of the books to study, contact admin@aryasamajsa.org

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