



# CHINMAYA PRADĪPIKĀ

## CMSD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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### IN THIS ISSUE OF CHINMAYA PRADĪPIKĀ

This quarter, though CMSD was further restricted because of COVID-19 from holding events at the ashram, Navarātrī and Dipāvalī were celebrated in a grand manner over ZOOM. The workshops on Śtrī Śakti and Basic Tenets of Sanātana Dharma were well received. Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Jayanti were enthusiastically celebrated in December and marked a fitting end to this very eventful year.

### THE MASTER SPEAKS

*It is His Grace expressing through us all.....*

*Learn to work hard all life surrendering unto Him*

*and watching interestedly both the gains*

*and the losses, all success and failure.*

*That inward stability, is the Balance of the Wise.*

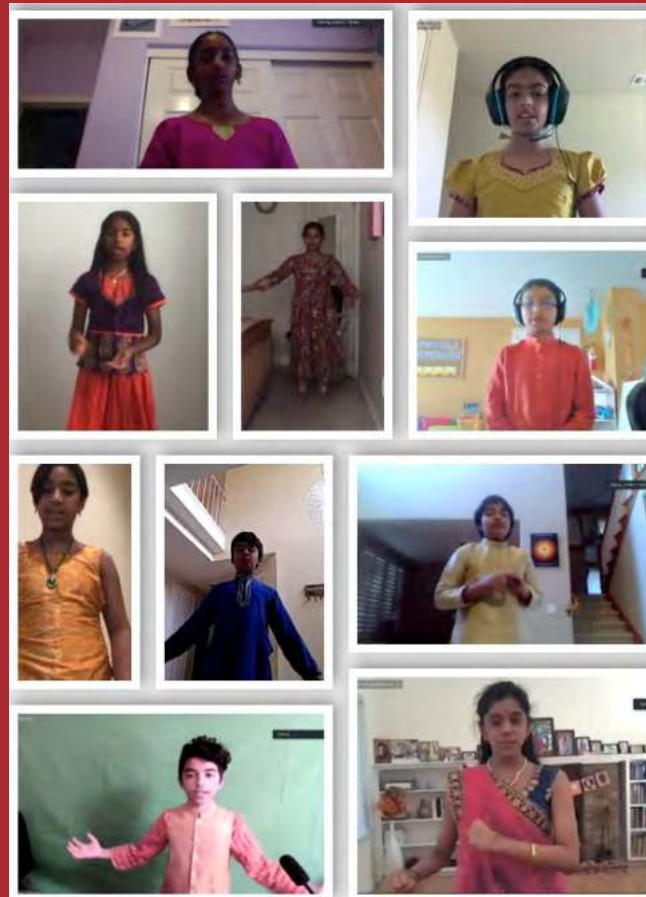


# Navarātrī Celebrations at Chinmaya Jyoti



*Navarātrī* is a very special festival that is celebrated with reverence towards the feminine aspect of the Divine throughout India and the goddesses *Durgā*, *Lakṣmī* and *Sarasvatī* are worshiped. The theme of the entire *Vedas* is reflected in the *Navarātrī* festival: Purify the mind and remove all negativities; cultivate positive virtues; gain spiritual knowledge and transcend our limitations. This is the real victory – truly the dance of joy!

## The Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī* - Presented by Grade 5



Every fifth grade presentation is unique in its own way. The *Navarātrī* presentation this year on October 18, 2020 was extraordinary. Even though the students weren't able to do the *Mahiṣāsura* play as usual, they were still able to present the story very well online. The evil *Mahiṣāsura* could not be killed by man, animal or god. All the *devatā*-s joined their powers to create the powerful Goddess *Durgā*, who kills the evil *Mahiṣāsura* and blesses the entire world. The presentation was very informative, entertaining and fun, and ended with the melodious chanting of the *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Stotram*.

- Shravani Prem, Grade 9



## Śtri Śakti Workshop on October 11, 2020



CMSD hosted a **Śtri Śakti Workshop** during this vibrant celebration of the *Devī Śakti*. The workshop was conducted by **Lakshmi Auntie**. In the workshop, I learned more about *śakti*, the divine feminine power. A few things that fascinated me the most were the meanings and symbolisms behind the common beliefs we have. We started off by learning the true definition of *śakti* as the divine feminine power which is inseparable from *Brahman* or the Infinite. I was most impressed by the power of *śakti* manifested in the three divine mothers.

Mother *Sarasvatī*, who is an embodiment of *Jñāna śakti* or the power of knowledge, teaches us that knowledge and speech must always be used to lead one to the truth. Mother *Lakṣmī* who is an embodiment of *icchā śakti* or the power of desire, teaches that when one selflessly serves others, everything will come to them. Lastly Mother *Durgā*, who can be seen in her other forms as Mother *Pārvatī* and *Kālī Devī* is an embodiment of *kriyā śakti* or the power of action. She teaches that power is necessary to take action against negative forces.

In an overall perspective, the concept of *śakti* can be seen as power which is feminine while a *śaktimān* is a wielder of that *śakti* or power and is masculine but the powerful and his power are ever together! These few points that we discussed in the workshop, greatly helped me understand the big idea or main concept of *devī* and *śakti*. It was a wonderful experience learning about the divine power and the divine mothers, especially with *Navarātri* and other festivals around the corner!

- Hemadarshini Rajendran, Grade 9

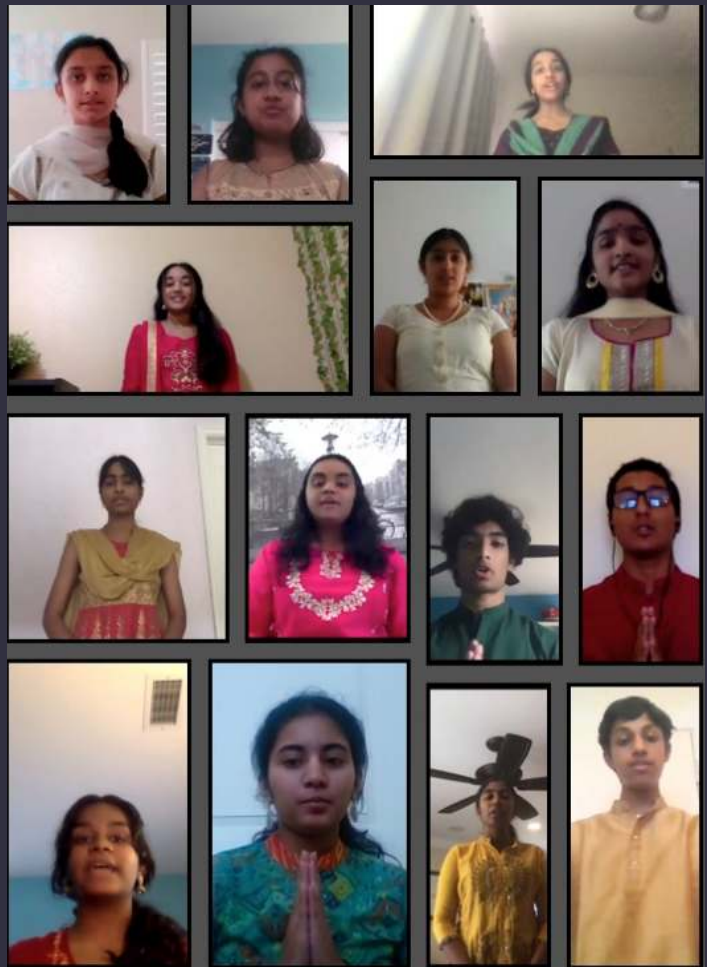
## Reflections on the workshop

The *Śtri Śakti* workshop, “The Power Feminine” presented by Smt. Lakshmi Sukumar in October, 2020, offered a much deeper understanding for me of the three powers or *gunas* personified by the Goddesses *Sarasvatī*, *Lakṣmī* and *Durgā*, or the different manifestations of *Devī*. As I am a relatively new learner to the Hindu scriptures, I found myself taking many notes, and I have reviewed them several times for greater focus and understanding. The information presented was clear, cohesive and meaningful, and the workshop inspired me into further study. I had so many takeaways from the workshop, including “Deep feminine energy understands all souls in empathy” and “*Śakti* is feminine and the very manifestation of power itself.” In concert and in balance with the masculine, the two together make the whole. I am grateful for all I learned and am learning.

-Thushara (Kathe Gogolewski)

## Significance of *Navarātrī* – Presented by Grade 10

This year, on October 25, 2020 we continued our tradition of the tenth grade presentation on the symbolism and significance of *Navarātrī* virtually! Even though we could not celebrate *Navarātrī* in person, we as a community still managed to hold a wonderful celebration. During tough times like these, it is important for us to remain strong together as a community, and the best way to do this is through the meaningful festivals we celebrate in *Sanātana Dharma*, which help us on our spiritual journey. The tenth grade presentation not only captured the fun aspects of *Navarātrī*, but also explained the rich meaning behind why we celebrate *Navarātrī* the way we do. This helped me to better understand and connect with the traditions of our culture. From now on, every year that we celebrate *Navarātrī*, I will be able to participate with a greater meaning!



- Shreya Sapkal, Grade 10



## Sarasvatī Pūjā - October 25, 2020

On October 25, 2020, **Sarasvatī Pūjā** was celebrated by the CMSD family. As it was a Sunday, the celebrations coincided with the Sunday assembly and Bala Vihar session.



As a part of *upacāra*, Chinmaya Dhvani and Chinmaya Swaranjali presented a melodious repertoire as a loving invitation to *Mā Sarasvatī*, followed by bhajans. At the end of the program the Bala Vihar sevaks and sevikas were introduced.

In the evening, a *Bharatnatyam* dance was performed by **Smt. Subashinee Venkatesh** in praise of goddess *Sarasvatī*.

**Sindhu Narasimha**, Grade 10 shares her reflection:

This year, the CMSD family was not able to perform the traditional *Sarasvatī pūjā* as usual. Instead, we watched the *pūjā* elaborately through our TV or computer screens. We chanted the *Sarasvatī Aṣṭottara* while Lakshmi Auntie did the *pūjā*. Even though the experience was not as personal as before, we were able to connect emotionally rather than physically, which makes this year's *pūjā* special in its own way.



## Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Chanting - Oct 17 - 25, 2020

As per the tradition at Chinmaya Mission centers, two chapters of the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* were chanted every night during *Navarātri*. The evenings came alive with *bhajans* by the Chinmaya Dhvani and Svaranjali teams followed by chanting led by a CMSD member and joined by many on Zoom. On the last day, the program concluded with the chanting of the *Gītā Māhātmyam*.



## Ongoing events *Sundara Kāṇḍa Pārāyaṇā*

As a part of the *Navarātri* celebrations, the monthly ***Sundara Kāṇḍa Pārāyaṇā*** was held on October 17, 2020. CMSD Families joined the singing of the *Sundara Kāṇḍa* in various *rāgās* by Pujya Guruji. The November event on November 21, 2020 was sponsored by **Mahesh Viswanathan and family**. The last *Sundara Kāṇḍa Pārāyaṇā* of the quarter was held on December 19, 2020.





## Devī Māhātmyam Pārāyaṇā - Oct 24, 2020

CMSD members chanted the *Devī Māhātmyam*, which is also known as *Śrī Durgā Saptāṣaṭi*, comprising of 700 verses. The narrative of the battle between *devas* and *asuras* has a deeper significance. It is an allegory to the battle between the divine and demoniac forces within the human mind, amid the positive and negative thoughts.



## Vijayadaśamī Celebrations - October 26, 2020

On the auspicious occasion of *Vijayadaśamī*, two children were initiated into *akṣara abhyāsa*. In addition, the team of Vedic chanters, Chinmaya Dhvani and Chinmaya Swaranjali also learned a new chant and song respectively.





## Dīpāvalī Celebrations - Nov 15, 2020



**Dīpāvalī** was celebrated by the CMSD family during the regular *Bala Vihar* session. After the opening prayers, *Devī* was invoked by the rendition of *Mahālakṣmī Jaganmātā* song by CHYK Aditi Puttur. CMSD Swaranjali sevak Sowmian, accompanied by Chinmaya Dhvani members Harini and Sri Jayanth, offered the joyous and uplifting "*Dīpāvalī paṇḍigai koṇḍāḍaḷam*" - an energetic song that describes the diverse ways in which young and old celebrate Dipavali in different parts of India as well as in the United States.

The focus of the zoom session shifted to Chinmaya Nivas as Lakshmi Aunty began the *Śrī Mahālakṣmī ṣoḍaśopacāra pūjā*. All Bala Vihar children participated by performing *Lakṣmī pūjā* at home, accompanied by their parents. *Upacāra* was offered by CMSD Swaranjali sevika Sai Sree.



**Harini Rangarajan (Grade 12)** , **Sri Jayanth Rangarajan ( Grade 11)** share: *Dīpāvalī* celebration was very enjoyable. It was a great opportunity to participate in the *Lakṣmī pūjā* via Zoom from home as we could follow along and perform the steps of the *pūjā*. As part of Chinmaya Dhvani, we were also given the opportunity to sing a very joyous and energetic song that brought us into the festive *Dīpāvalī* mood.

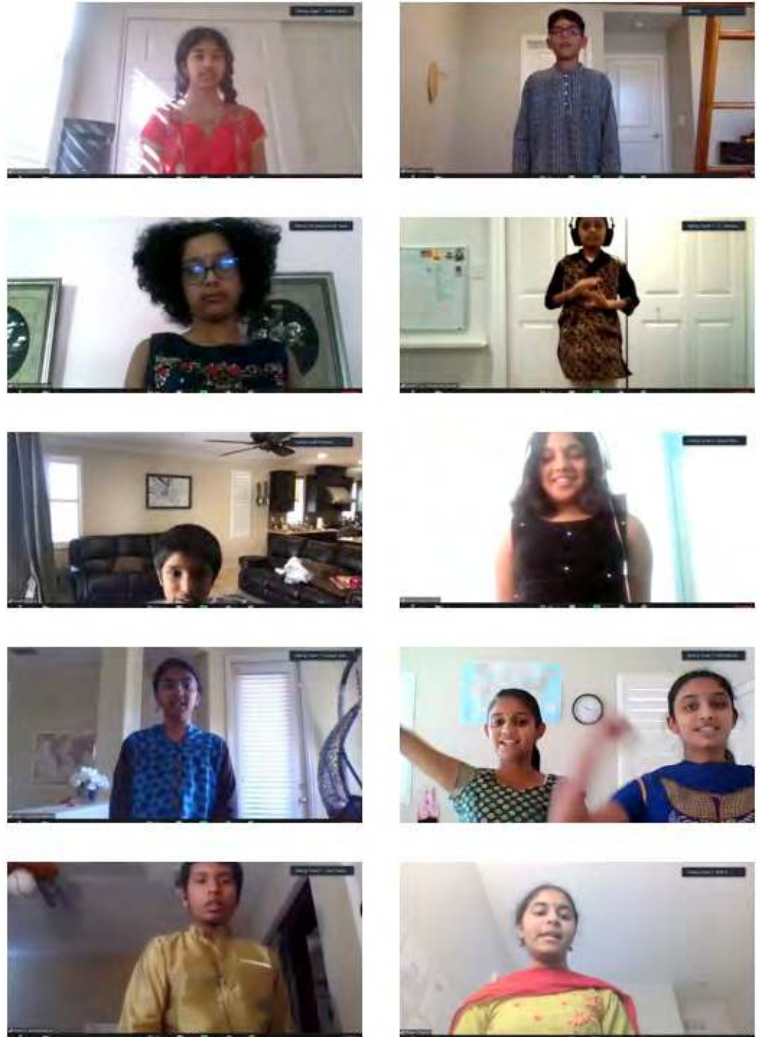


**Srividya Pappu**, a new CMSD member shared her reflections on the celebrations - "*Dīpāvalī* at CMSD was an absolute delight. With the whole world currently topsy-turvy and COVID-19 throwing a gloom on everything, the teachers, students and *sevaks* made sure that the festive fervor reached every household and touched every member of the CMSD family! This being our first year here, we do not have a past reference but seeing all the celebrations integrate seamlessly even virtually, one can imagine the richness of culture and tradition that the members get to experience every year. We are extremely humbled by the opportunity given by the Lord to be part of such a wonderful and warm family."

A special CMSD tradition during *Dīpāvalī* celebrations is the Grade 7 presentation of the legend of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Narakāśura*. The students energetically narrated the story of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* defeating the evil *Narakāśura* and then spoke about the symbolism of *Dīpāvalī*. The victory of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* was celebrated by chants of "*Jai Śrī Kṛṣṇa*" and the offering of the melodious song '*Pāmbanaimel paḷḷi koṇḍai raṅgā raṅgā*.'

The memorable *pūjā* concluded with *Lakṣmī Devī āraṭi*.

- Ashwin Mohan



**Sumathi Vinay** shares- "It was wonderful to see the children and adults sing both individually and in pairs from their homes. The seventh grade Bala Vihar class presentation, vividly drew the symbolism for one's spiritual awakening. In North India, *Dīpāvalī* heralds the return of *Śrī Rāma* to Ayodhya after killing *Rāvaṇa* in battle. This aspect was celebrated by the singing of Pujya Guruji's beautiful composition '*Dekho dekho re āye re bhagavān*' by CMSD Swaranjali member Sujatha Kulkarni. It was also beautiful to hear the beautiful rendering, symbolizing the victory of good over evil and establishing "*Rāma-Rājya*" - the Kingdom of *Śrī Rāma*."

# Workshop on Basic Tenets of *Sanātana Dharma*



On November 22, 2020, CMSD hosted an insightful virtual workshop on Hinduism for the benefit of all members and other interested groups in the community. **Lakshmi Auntie** discussed many principal beliefs and teachings of *Sanātana Dharma* such as the Vedic Scriptures, *Karma*, Reincarnation, Incarnation and the *varna āśrama*. We were given answers to many generic questions as well as answers to questions formed from misconceptions. This workshop provided many attendees with the basic understanding of Hinduism and further expanded their curiosity. Lakshmi Auntie formatted the workshop in an engaging way allowing many of the participants to have an opportunity to have their pending questions regarding Hinduism answered. The workshop allowed me to build on my previous knowledge of *Sanātana dharma* and clear any doubts I still had.

- Neha Mahesh, Grade 10





# CMSD in the Community

## CMSD Participates in Interfaith Thanksgiving Service

CMSD has been a part of Poway Interfaith Team (POINT) since its inception. POINT conducts a special Thanksgiving service every year. This year's event was held on November 18, 2020.

It was really inspiring to hear Thanksgiving prayer from the leaders of diverse faith on the theme of "**Gratitude During Crisis**" and the fact that Love is at the heart of all religions.

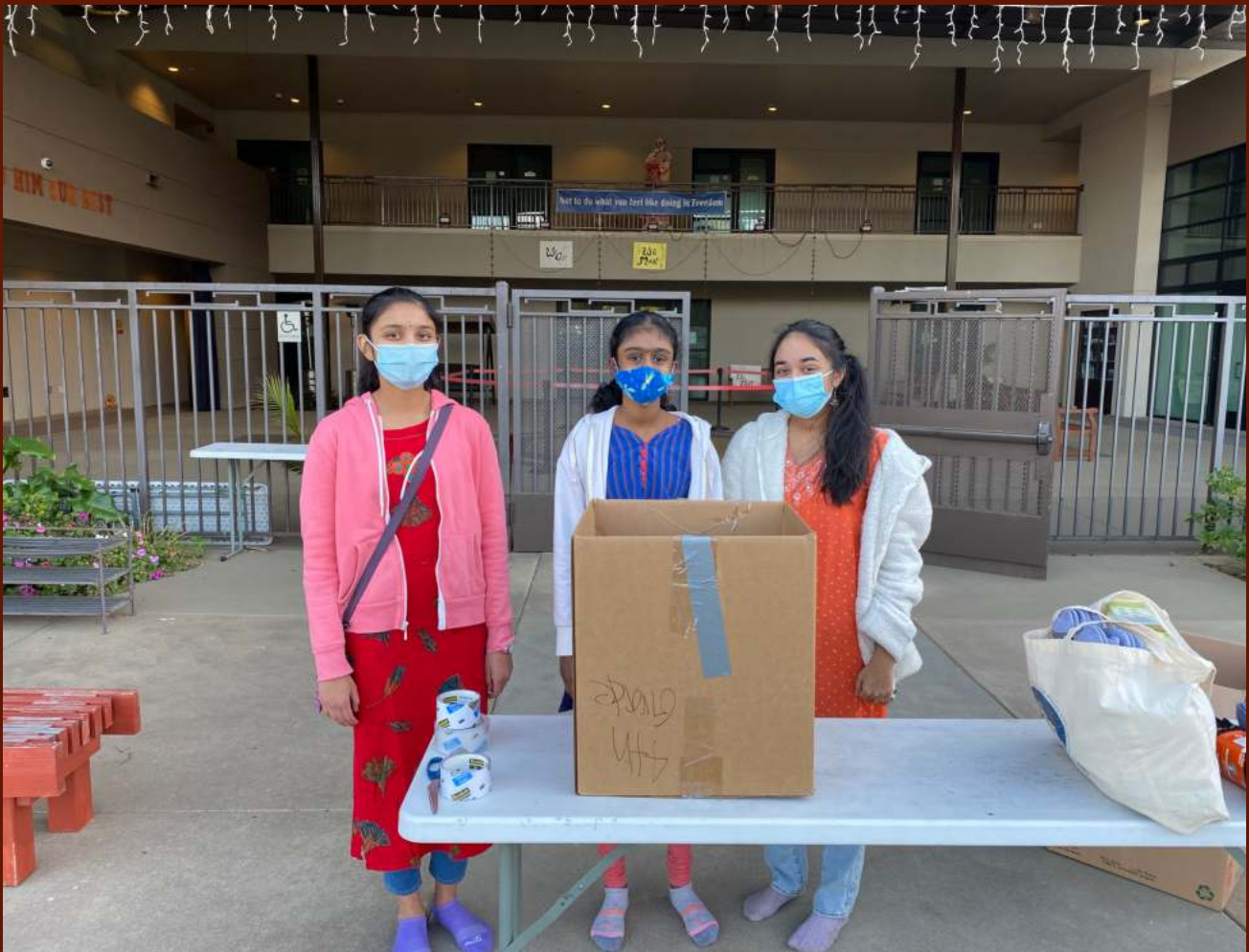
Our own Lakshmi auntie, echoing the teachings of Pujya Gurudev, reminded us that life is a series of experiences and our attitude towards a situation determines the consequence. With an attitude of gratitude when we recognize and acknowledge our blessings, we will see that adversity is an opportunity for our spiritual evolution.



It was a joy to hear our children enthusiastically sing 'Love is God in every heart, expressing as a smile on the face!'

- Deepa Rungta

# Homeless Care Packages Drive



This year's care packages drive for the homeless turned out to be a great success. The donations were given to the Interfaith Community Services (ICS) of Escondido. Many of the high schoolers were able to collaborate virtually with one another and make handmade cards for the holidays. We also wanted to donate some clothing items for this year. Since we were going to donate items during the winter season, we decided on socks, as it would be feasible to collect a substantial quantity of them and donate them safely during pandemic conditions, especially to those that needed warmth. Additionally, we were able to gather and donate other hygiene products, including hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and masks. When we donated the items, we heard that this year was very difficult for many of the people ICS serves due to COVID-19. It was amazing to be able to get together online and organize a successful drive to serve our community. This drive was a valuable opportunity from which we learned much about online coordination between groups with different roles and planning in order to meet deadlines despite seeing each other only on a weekly basis. We definitely hope to do more drives and projects in the future.

- Harini Rangarajan (Grade 12) , Sri Jayanth Rangarajan ( Grade 11)



# Halloween, the Chinmaya way

The popular American festival of **Halloween**, observed on October 31, 2020, is a tradition that is traced to the ancient Celtic festival of "Samhain" during which people wore costumes and lit bonfires to ward off ghosts.

We celebrated Halloween at CMSD this year with both children and adults dressing up as characters from our *Purāṇa*-s. The celebration itself is not new at CMSD - the 3rd and 4th grades have celebrated Halloween dressed as *Rāmāyaṇa* characters in the past 3 years.





The event was held via Zoom online meeting. Each participant hid until it was their turn. On their turn, they gave a clue for others to guess the character they were depicting such as *Durgā Devī*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, *Yaśodā Mātā*, *Lord Rāma*, *Śabarī Mātā*, *Trijaṭā*, *Sītā Devī*, *Gaṅgā Devī*. Reveling in our *Purāṇas*, what a beautiful way to celebrate Halloween!

- Sumathi Vinay



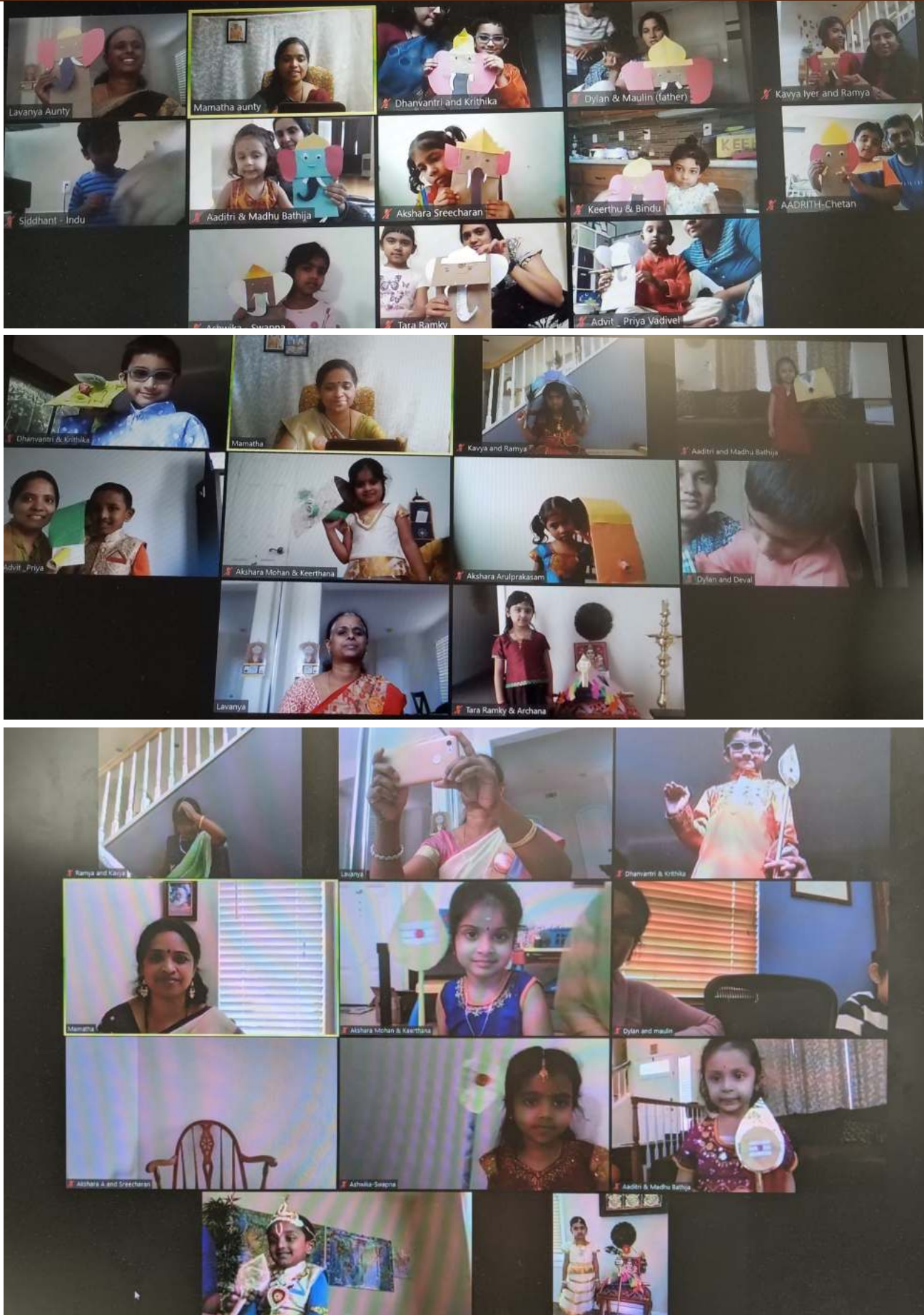
## Workshop on "Sustainability as per Hindu Dharma"

On December 20, 2020, **Lakshmi Auntie** conducted a workshop on **Sustainability as per the principles of *Sanātana Dharma*** for the high school students as a part of CMSD high school mentorship program. **Aathmika Radhachandran** of Grade 9 shares: "The workshop helped me be more aware of how I could implement sustainability in my life and brought light to the differences between needs and wants. Through the workshop, I've been able to implement better practices by being more aware of energy wastage, such as remembering to turn off my computer and lights when leaving the room."

**Ananya Bharathwaj** of Grade 10 adds: "The three steps of awareness, acknowledgment, and action in regards to living with sustainability is one of the several things that I took away from the Sustainability workshop hosted by Lakshmi Aunty. Along with that, this workshop really opened my eyes about how important it is to destroy the greed within myself and instead be grateful for what all I have by exhibiting intelligent restraint. Overall, the fun personal anecdotes shared by Lakshmi Aunty and conversations that were ignited, resulted in an enjoyable workshop, and I look forward to attending more!"



# Shishu Vihar and Bala Vihar Corner



SV- 4 children enjoying Art and Crafts as they learn about Lord Gaṇeśa and Lord Muruga.



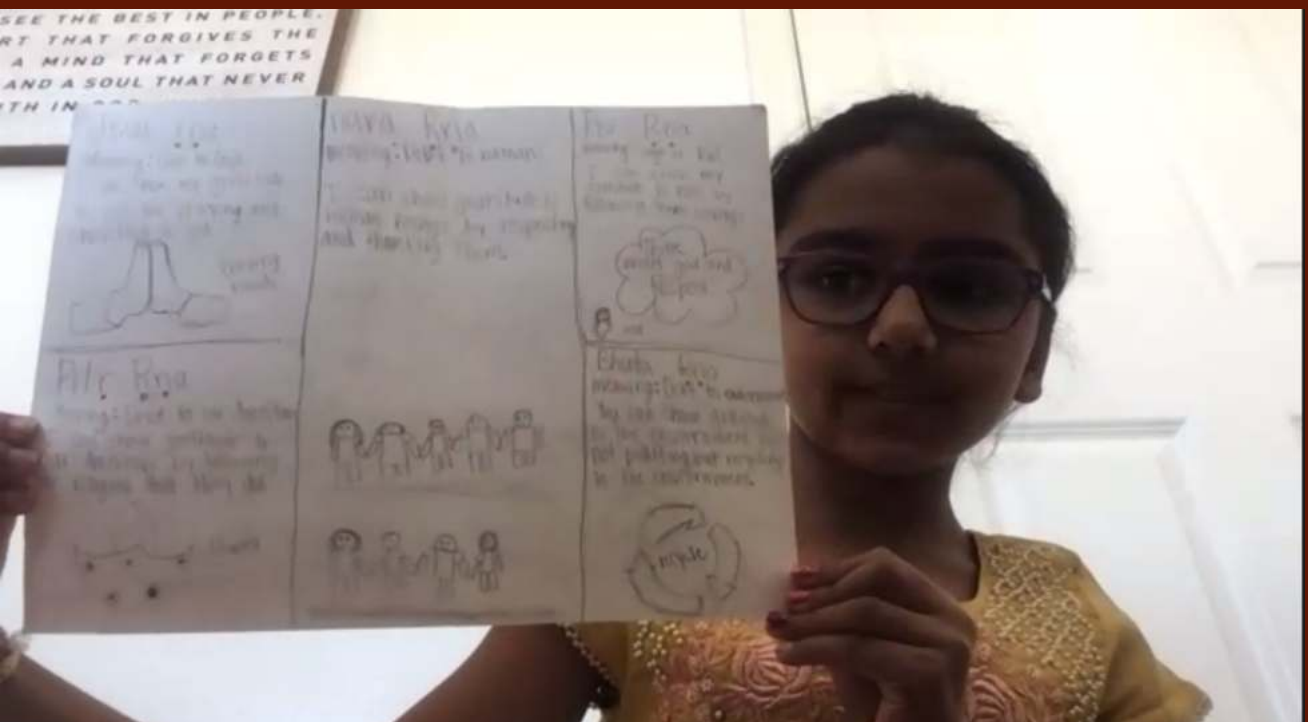
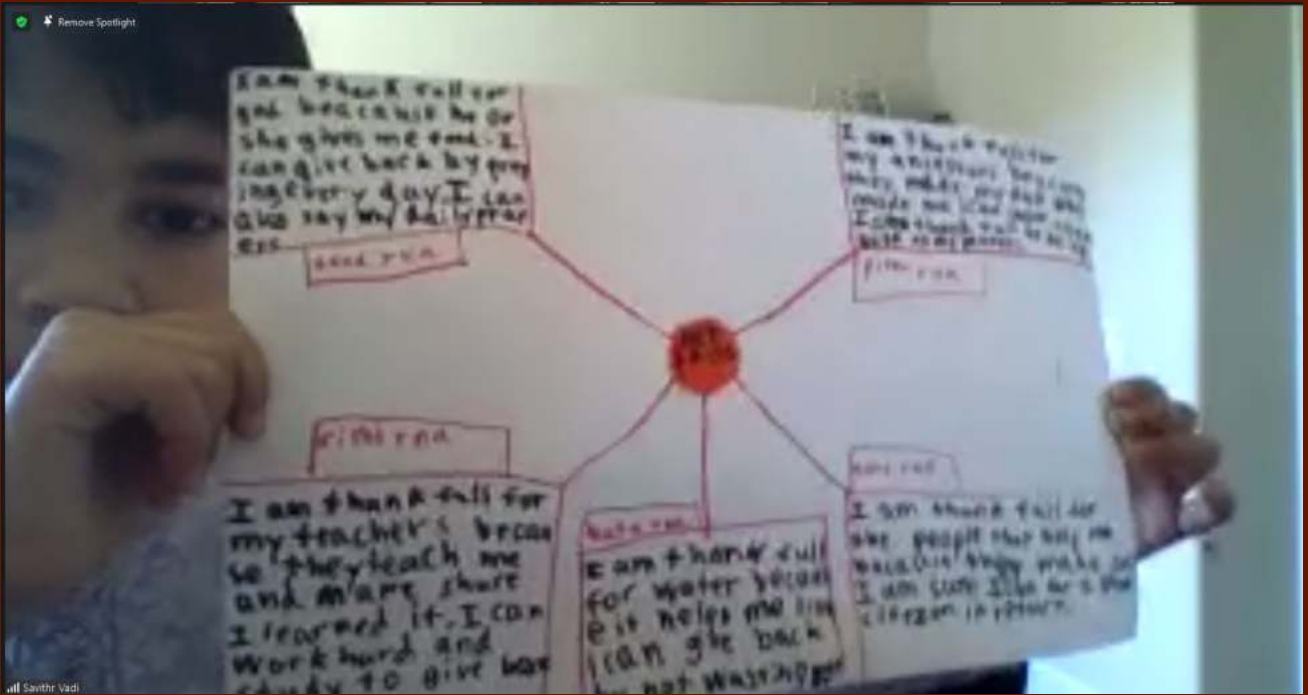
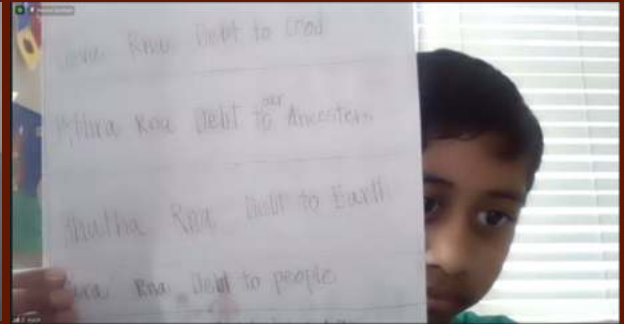


For the Thanksgiving holidays, second grade Bala Vihar students listed several aspects they are thankful for based on *Pañcaṅgā* they learned in the class. Select outstanding homework submission are featured above.



Second grade Bala Vihar students learned *Bhagavān Śiva's* name *ḍamarūdhārī* and made their own *ḍamarus* from recyclable materials available at home.





Third grade students showcasing their posters on *Pañcaṇṇā* and how they can show gratitude.

## Youth Corner

### Inner Transformation through Festivals

In Hindu culture, festivals are celebrated throughout the year. They are fun celebrations filled with prayers, laughter, and joy spent with friends and family. However, besides the enjoyment festivals hold, they have a deeper symbolism and purpose which needs to be understood to celebrate them to the fullest. *Sanātana Dharma* is more than just a belief or faith; it is a way of life guided by the ancient scriptures and *ṛṣṭs*. One's ultimate goal in life is to reach the Lord and break free from the endless cycle of birth and death. Our scriptures contain many different methods and steps to attain the Lord, and celebrating all festivals with great devotion is one way to achieve that goal. These festivals that we celebrate are ways we tune our minds to the Lord, and transform ourselves by removing our negative tendencies and ignorance with the power of the highest knowledge and blessings from the Lord. This quarter, we celebrated both *Navarātrī* and *Dīpāvalī*, recognizing the triumph of good over evil, hope over despair and knowledge over ignorance. *Navarātrī* is the celebration of Goddess *Durgā*'s victory over the demon *Mahiṣāsura*, symbolizing the victory over one's mind. It is a time of worship when we invoke the blessings of three divine mothers so that they can help remove our negative tendencies, instill good values, and receive the highest knowledge so that we can purify our mind, our biggest obstacle in our path towards the Lord. Similarly the festival of *Dīpāvalī* is celebrated to welcome the return of *Lord Rāma* from exile and to celebrate the defeat of *Rāvaṇa* and also for Lord *Kṛṣṇa*'s victory over *Narakāśura*. *Dīpāvalī* is a joyous festival where lights or *Dīpās* are lit all through the house to remove darkness. The lights shine bright and symbolize the highest knowledge which removes the ignorance of one's self. The Hindus celebrate festivals with pomp and fun, but they hold great significance and purpose and result in inner transformation.

- Hemadarshini Rajendran, Grade 9



Drawings by **Sruthi Paduchuri**, Grade 10



# CMSD CHYK and Alumni Study Group



The first session of the study group for CMSD CHYKs (Chinmaya Yuva Kendra) & Alumni was on Tuesday, October 13, 2020. This study group will meet online permanently, which is meant to allow CMSD CHYKs & Alumni wherever in the world to participate whenever. This study group meets on a biweekly basis. Sukumar Uncle is facilitating discussions on *Manah Śodhanam*, a text composed by Pujya Guruji Swami Tejomayananda. We occasionally have watched videos of lectures by Swami Bodhatmananda (formerly Brahmachari Prabodh Chaitanya) on this text in our sessions. Despite being in an online format, we have had robust discussions and all participants have been thoroughly engaged. I am excited for future meetings of this study group in the new year!

- Mihir Pandya

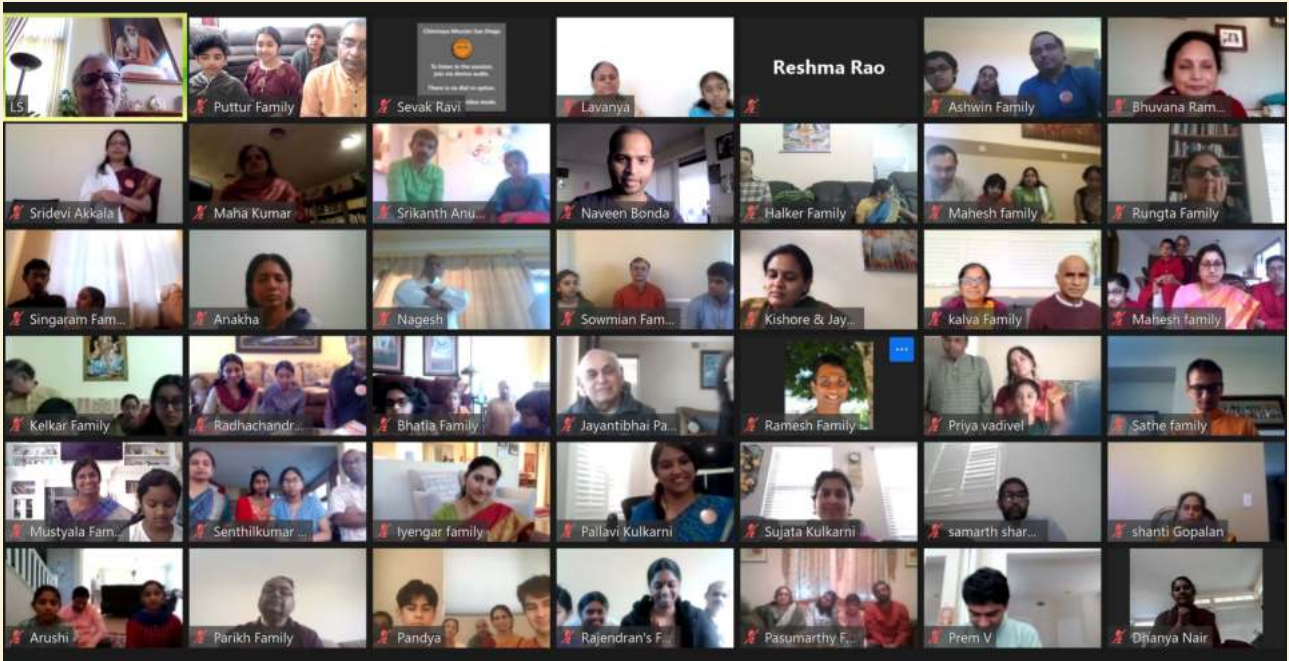
## Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Jayanti and Śrī Tapovana Jayanti



If 2020 was a challenging year paved with thorns, then surely Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Jayanti celebrations, held on December 25, 2020 by CMSD, was a balm to soothe all wounds. One couldn't have asked for a better way to be rejuvenated, uplifted and inspired to face the New Year. The program began with the recitation of the deeply evocative Śrī Tapovana Ṣaṭkam. This was followed by the Śrī Tapovana nāmāvali, and Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā nāmāvali composed by Pujya Guruji. The mind began filling with the significance of Gītā by the sweet rendering of the bhajan 'Jāne kyā jādu bharā hua Bhagavān tumhāri Gītā main'. This was followed by a presentation by eighth graders on the sharp-edged metaphors in verse 6 of the Gītā Dhyānam. Thought-provoking quotes on the Gītā by brilliant people around the world were read out between every chapter. Then, hours flew by like the blink of an eye as we reveled in listening to each of the 700 sacred verses of the Lord's Own Song chanted by many families.







As the *Gītā āratī* and *Tapovana āratī* were sung, the heart filled to bursting with gratitude towards one's Guru, the *Guru śiṣya paramparā* and the Lord's Grace that afforded one the opportunity to be part of something so purifying, so liberating...so Divine.

-Krithika Mahesh

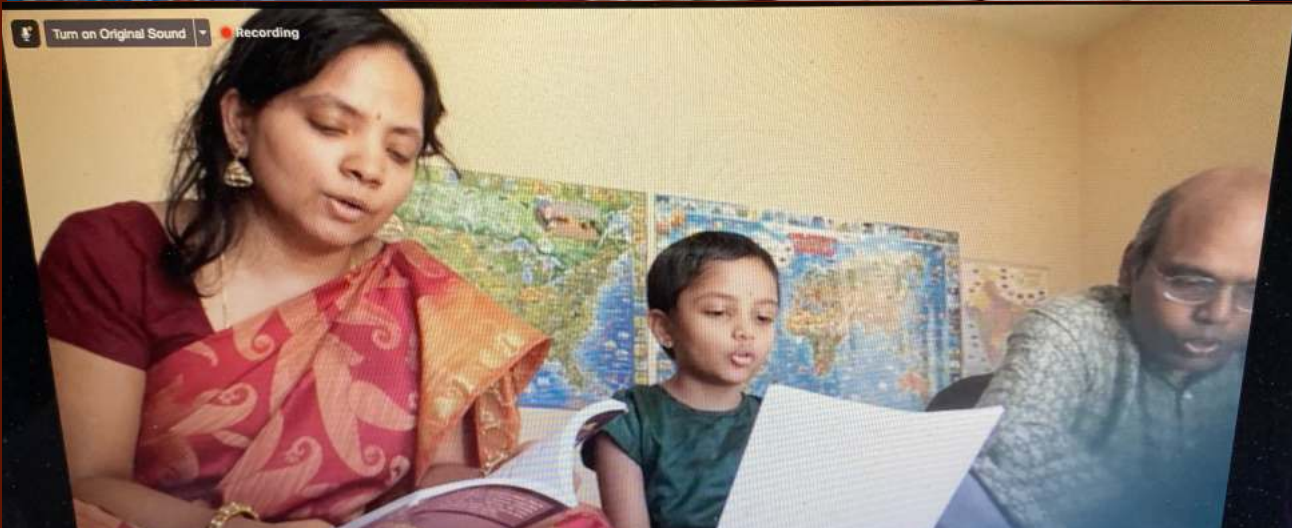
**Mihir Pandya** shares his reflection -

"I absolutely enjoyed attending and participating in the program for *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā Jayantī* which we also celebrated as *Swami Tapovan Maharaj Jayantī*. I had the privilege of not only in participating in the chanting with my family (the beginning of Chapter 14 in addition to part of Chapter 18), but also reading inspirational quotes from inspiring individuals on the greatness of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Lakshmi Auntie had shared these quotes with me a few days prior to the program, and I attempted to correlate each of the quotes before the appropriate chapter. For example, there was a quote from *Swami Vivekānanda* on karma yoga, which I read before chanting the third chapter. This program was a great way to conclude what has been a very challenging year, and celebrate Christmas as well!"





## Pictures of Families chanting the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*







## SWAMI TEJOMAYANANDA

*Spirituality provides one the motive  
to practice goodness  
independent of the reactions, responses and experiences  
of other people.*

