

CHINMAYA PRADĪPIKĀ

CMSD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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IN THIS ISSUE OF CHINMAYA PRADĪPIKĀ



Śrīmadbhagavadgītā - The divine song of God marked the introduction and culmination of this special quarter, with the *Bhagavadgītā* Chanting held in October 2021 during *Navarātrī*, and *Gītā Jayanti* and *Śrī Tapovana Jayanti* celebrations observed during December 2021. This issue also features tribute to the *Devī Śakti* with grand *Navarātrī* celebrations and *Dīpavalī* festivities. Workshops on “The Journey of Forgiveness” and “An Overview of Indian Knowledge Systems” were unique additions. Special Thanksgiving messages by the Youth from High School Mentorship program on Sustainability certainly piqued interest for all!

THE MASTER SPEAKS

“The *Gītā* is a revelation to humanity by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* through *Arjuna* – a friend and disciple - at a critical moment of his life.

It teaches man the Goal Supreme to be attained, as well as the means of attaining it. It is a universal Scripture containing various strands of teachings suited to different men at their stages of development.”

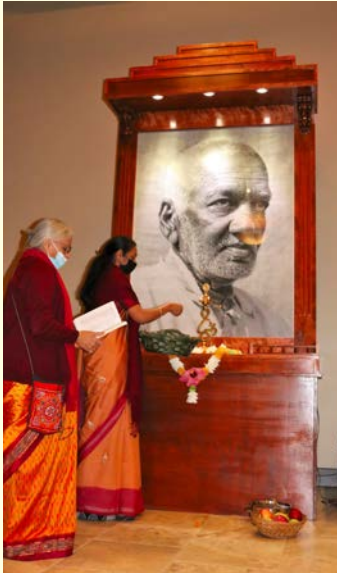
Bhagavadgītā Chanting

It is indeed very powerful and empowering to get an opportunity to chant the *Bhagavadgītā* during the auspicious nine nights of *Navarātrī*. In accordance with CMSD's tradition, two *adhyāyās* of the *Gītā* were chanted on all nine nights, from **October 7 to October 15, 2021**.



Rajasekar Vaidyanathan shares, “There is a popular story of a boy who found his dirty and porous coal basket was washed clean, when strangely, his grandpa repeatedly asked him to fetch water in it. Reciting two chapters a day of the *Gītā* during *Navarātrī*, I was reminded of that story. Dipping my mind in the holy verses of the *Gītā* daily, surely, there is hope for me, just like that coal basket.”

Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Gītā Jayanti Celebrations



On Tuesday, **December 14, 2021**, CMSD celebrated the words spoken by *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* in the land of *Dharma* on the field of the *Kurus*:

- Words that unfold the essence of 108 *Upaniṣat* texts in 18 chapters.
- Words that have been kept honest through *Guru Śiṣya Paramparā* of many lineages.
- Words that our ancestors learnt and that we continue to do so today because of its eternal relevance to human life.

We celebrated by first honoring the *Guru*, Swami Tapovan Maharaj, who was a living presence of the *Upaniṣats* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. We celebrated then by reciting the *Gītā Dhyānam*, a short prayer that honors the grace of the divine through which the *Gītā* was spoken and succinctly describes the setting of the war during which the *Gītā* was spoken. And then we celebrated *Gītā Jayanti* by reading and reciting its words aloud, keeping it alive and prevalent for one more year. Families came together to recite the entire chapter as their offering. With each chapter recited, a flower offering was placed at the feet of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, which was aptly adorned with a blue colored garland. The first verse of the first chapter was read at the end to symbolize that we will continue reading the *Gītā*. *Śrī Tapovana āratī* and *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā āratī* concluded the evening.

Śrī Tapovana Jayanti and Gītā Jayanti Celebrations



Alive and relevant it may be right now, but the onus of it being relevant personally, though, lies within ourselves to explore and reflect in our everyday life.

Prerana Kelkar, one of the CHYKs says, "I was glad to be in town to participate in *Gītā Jayanti* with my family. Being able to come back to the *āśrama* in person and connect with everyone made me feel very blessed by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and Pujya Gurudev".

Devī Mahātmayam

The chanting of *Devī's* glories that happened on **October 8, 2021** was a divine and joyous experience, especially during the *Navarātrī* festivities. The whole atmosphere seemed sanctified and charged with divine vibrations, as though *Devī* manifested HER majestic presence! Listening to the stories of *Devī's* many victories against evil demons infused all with new found energy. With *Devī's* grace and blessings, may all the obstacles we face disappear and may our hearts be filled with positivity.



Discovering the *Devī* Within



Pujya Gurudev’s powerful statement: “It is the ideal behind the idol that is worshiped” brings about the core of *Navarātrī* celebrations. As we celebrate this festive occasion, curiosity is piqued in mind - What is that all-powerful, breathtaking and captivating Goddess form? What are Her qualities and how does one invoke them from within? These were the core topics of the very uplifting ***Strī Śakti*** workshop conducted by **Lakshmi Auntie** on the 6th day of *Navarātrī*, on **October 10, 2021**. Auntie shared her inspiration, drawing from the teachings of Pujya Gurudev, Pujya Guruji, Swami Omkarananda and Swamini Saradapriyananda. Every year this workshop brings forth something new and unique to ponder upon! “*Strī Śakti*” the Power in the universe is expressed as knowledge power (*Jñāna Śakti*), will power (*Ichhā Śakti*), and power of action (*Kriyā Śakti*). They are epitomized by the three Supreme Goddesses *Sarasvatī Devī*, *Lakṣmī Devī* and *Durgā Devī*, respectively. These powers are within each one of us, and a rightful application of innate qualities at the right place and right time is an intelligent action that enables our growth and success.

Pallavi Kulkarni shares, “Once again it was an opportunity to remind myself that I am in essence that divine power - *Śakti*. *Durgā* who is said to be *ati Saumyā* (very benign) to *ati Raudrā* (very fierce), teaches me that by being intellectually alert, I must invoke right kind of virtues and values at the right time to bring out the optimum potential or divine *śakti* lying within me. And this will guide me to a balanced, cheerful and pure mind, and ultimately to realize the highest Truth.”

Priyanka Patel adds: “It was so fascinating to reflect upon how each one of us has masculine and feminine qualities and how we can apply those in our daily lives. The roles of a mother and a wife come with lots of responsibilities, since we are the nucleus of the family, as highlighted by **Lakshmi Auntie** in the workshop. My spiritual journey is to unfold the divine qualities of the three Goddesses, and continue my daily duties with love, passion, honesty and positivity.”

The Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardini*



The nine days of *Navarātrī* commemorate the triumph of good over evil as Goddess *Durgā* defeats demon king *Mahiṣāsura*. As per CMSD tradition, the students of Grade 5 presented “The Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardini*” on Sunday, **October 10, 2021**. The program opened with youngsters of the Chinmaya Dhvani group singing a divine Bengali song “*O māṁ tumī yeso*”.

Amogh Hongal says, "I learned that the meaning of *Navarātrī* is that good always triumphs over evil. Another thing I enjoyed was the play itself- how we dressed up for it, and all the practices we had."



The Legend of *Mahiṣāsūramardini*

CMSD BV *Sevikā* **Hetal Babla** gives us a glimpse of what happened behind the scenes- "Every year there is a lot of excitement among the Grade 5 children about the *Mahiṣāsūramardini* play. The children love to dress up with all the props for different roles in the play (*devās*, *āsuras*, 3 supreme Gods and Mother *Durgā*). Running through the play is such a fun way to learn about the divine birth of Mother *Durgā* and the destruction of *Mahiṣāsura*."

The highlight of the event was when everyone, children and adults alike, got together and chanted and danced to *Mahiṣāsūramardini* stotram around Goddess *Durgā* encompassing the *Āśrama* in devotional bliss.

Amogh continues, "I also liked dancing in a circle in front of Mother *Durgā*. The one thing I loved is how all families came together for the celebration."



Swarna, a member of our CMSD family says, "The *Mahiṣāsūramardini* play performed by 5th graders was beautiful as always. I felt blessed to be able to chant *Mahiṣāsūramardini* stotram in front of Mother *Durgā* and enjoyed watching children dance. Chanting two chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā* everyday at CMSD was the most beautiful experience for three years in a row. I am very thankful to Gurudev for giving me this unexplainable experience."

Symbolism of *Navarātrī*

Students of Grade 10 presented the symbolism behind the three *Devīs*- *Durgā*, *Lakṣmī* and *Sarasvatī*. The deeper symbolism behind *Navarātrī* is to purify our minds and cultivate noble values in order to gain the highest knowledge.

Hemadarshini Rajendran (Grade 10) shares, “One thing I realized from this celebration and applied to my personal life was how I should approach any field of study..... by clearing my mind of negative thoughts, and focusing and preparing my mind.”

Nidhi Babla (Grade 9) adds, “Symbolism behind *Navarātrī* encouraged me to think about how I can purify my mind and achieve victory against my negative tendencies by erasing the bad thoughts and internalizing the right principles as represented by these *Devīs*.”

Dharshini Mageshbabu (Grade 10) shares, "Through the various discussions we had in class, I was able to learn the different ways we celebrate *Navarātrī* as well as the reasons for which each one is celebrated. Furthermore, the presentation we did on the symbolism behind *Navarātrī* and the three Goddesses made me really think about the importance that spiritual knowledge has in our lives."

Śrī Sarasvatī Pūjā

Śrī *Sarasvatī*, the one who gives the essence (*sara*) of our own Self (*sva*), was worshiped on **October 14, 2021**, in a very calm and serene setting of Pranav Nilayam.



Manasi Popat expresses, “Partaking in the auspicious *pūjā*, and chanting Śrī *Sarasvatī Aṣṭottaraśatanāmāvali* was a very uplifting and memorable experience.” The essence and significance of this day was highlighted through a bhajan in praise of Śrī *Śāradā Devī*, offered by **Srividya Brahmakal**.

Vijayadaśamī- Celebrating Victory!

This year *Vijayadaśamī* was celebrated on Friday, **October 15, 2021**. *Vijayadaśamī* also marks the ceremonious beginning of learning-*Vidyārambha*. The celebrations commenced with offerings by Chinmaya *Kalā Jyoti* tabla and *Bharatanāṭyam* students. All the members thereafter joined in the powerful chanting of the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chapters 17 & 18) and the *Gītā Mahātmayam*. The celebrations continued with devotional *bhajans* & songs on *Devī* offered by Chinmaya Dhvani and Chinmaya Swaranjali.



Devī Mahātmayam was brought to life by **Smt. Subashinee Venkatesh**, depicting the multifaceted *Devī* in a captivating way.



Vijayadaśamī- Celebrating Victory!



Smt. Subashinee spontaneously presented yet another graceful dance piece on Mother *Sarasvatī*. The evening continued with beautiful *garbā* dance to the tunes of *Jaya Ambe Jagadambe Māta Bhavani Jaya Ambe* by all the members, with Smt. Subashinee at the center, portraying different poses of the *Devī*. The celebrations concluded with *Devī Ārati* in Hindi and Tamil followed by divine *prasādam*.



Śubha Dīpavalī

India, a land of diverse festivals and cultures, comes together in celebrating one of her biggest festivals- *Dīpavalī*, which was celebrated on **November 4, 2021**. The *āśrama* was cleaned and decorated with traditional *rangoli* with flowers and lamps. This year we returned to in-person after a year of online learning due to COVID.



The festivities commenced with a song honoring the diversity of our motherland. All the children and families gathered, then moved on to worshiping Goddess *Lakṣmī* under the guidance of Lakshmi Aunty. The children excitedly dipped their hands in *Kumkum* and showered it on *Mā Lakṣmī* as they performed the *śoḍaśopacāra pūjā*.



Śubha Dīpavalī

While Chinmaya Swaranjali entertained the audience with their divine singing, the students of Grade 7 enthralled with a play on *Narakāśura*, the demon who is slayed by Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. This was followed by *ārati* and a lively *Rāsa Garbā* by children and adults alike.



Akhil Pasumarth, who took part in the play, shares, “I attended the *Dīpavalī* Festival and played the part of Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. It was great fun and we were able to make the play an experience everyone enjoyed. We got to show why we celebrate *Dīpavalī* and how Lord *Kṛṣṇa* defeated *Narakāśura*. After the play and *pūjā*, everyone ate lots of delicious food. Overall, I was so happy to celebrate this special festival with our CMSD family.”



“It was beautiful to see the CMSD families - new & old, young & young at heart dance the *Rāsa Garbā* around decorated lamps in the courtyard outside Pranava Nilayam. In that sentiment of celebration, a sense of oneness came through. And in that light of oneness, we are all but one big family walking the path led by our loving Gurudev.” says **Akhila Koneri** who joined the celebration through Zoom.

Śubha Dīpavālī



One of our longtime members, **Bhuvana Ramanathan** writes, “In this world of continual change, it is nice to know that the peace, serenity and good cheer of our CMSD *Dīpavālī* celebration is constant. The vibrations of the CMSD family chanting the *Lakṣmī aṣṭakam* were invigorating and inspiring. Chinmaya Swaranjali singing favorite bhajans such as *Mahālakṣmī Jaganmātā*... brings back fond memories of many *Dīpavālīs* celebrated with the CMSD family. The *Narakāśura* play always brings me flashbacks of my own kids in various roles doing the same play. At one time all my girls have been amongst the pre-k and K girls who were wed to *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*!”

As per the tradition of CMSD, new families were welcomed into the Chinmaya *Parivār* with a delicious feast prepared by the returning families. **Jay Parikh**, CMSD CHYK recalls, “The dinner that was prepared reminded me of all the great meals we have had and made me appreciate how far we have come as a center.”



Nita Mehta, a new member of CMSD says, “This year we celebrated *Dīpavālī* with a *pūjā* dedicated to *Lakṣmī*, the goddess of prosperity at the *āśrama*. It was a great experience of spirituality, knowledge, positivity, and purity of the heart.”



Bhuvana continues, “This year the food was especially tasty, as we had to miss it last year! It is very nice to see new additions to our family, but it is also golden to see our old members. Seeing our CHYKs (Devesh and Arvin) now with their spouses and kids was heartwarming, and a reminder that change is constant, and time only moves forward. I remember my father who would have enjoyed the “vibrations” of the *pūjā*. CMSD *Dīpavālī* 2021 did not disappoint in any way. In these challenging times, the constant reminder of who we really are and what this life is all about is priceless.”

The night drew to a close amidst childrens’ laughter and friendly conversations.

Kārtika Dīpam, November 19, 2021



The Journey of Forgiveness- Destination Peace

On **October 16, 2021**, CMSD hosted a very special workshop titled **“The Journey of Forgiveness - Destination Peace”** by **Mr. Azim Khamisa**. The audience had received a preview of how Azimji, through his message of peace and non-violence, turned the tragedy of the loss of his beloved son into a movement of forgiveness that has reached millions of people around the world. The serene setting of the courtyard of the *āśrama* was a perfect setting as the audience was spellbound listening to Mr. Khamisa narrate his life’s mission after his tragic loss. After Azimji’s talk, the audience was split into several discussion groups, which were then led by a moderator to debrief their experience and complete a powerful exercise which involved picking someone to forgive.

Azimji said one of his favorite things is to interact with youngsters. Therefore, the CMSD Bala Vihar students from Grades 7 through 12 had a front row seat to listen and engage with him.



“In the workshop led by Azimji, I was able to learn about how forgiveness is essential for peace and happiness. To practice forgiveness, I need to understand the other person, have empathy for them, and be compassionate towards them. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa* says that values like *Śānti* (accommodation) is considered knowledge. By striving to be like Lord *Rāma* and Mother Earth, who are epitomes of forgiveness, I can learn and practice this great knowledge of forgiveness.”

- **Arushi Bharadwaj, Grade 10**



The Journey of Forgiveness- Destination Peace

“The workshop was an absolutely amazing experience. Although I am young, I believe that by teaching us youth these important life skills, we will be able to apply these skills as we grow up. I really learnt a lot from this workshop starting with why one must forgive and for whom we forgive. One thing that stuck with me was when Azimji said, “I forgave so I don’t remain a victim. A victim doesn’t have any quality of life.” This line intrigued me very much and made me reflect on why one truly forgives, not for others but for their own peace of mind. I really enjoyed this workshop and learnt a lot as well.”

- Hemadarshini Rajendran, Grade 10

Below are some reflections from CMSD adult members:

“The workshop by Azim Khamisa was very helpful as it displayed the practical demonstration and taught instructions to apply one of the values "Forgiveness" (*Kṣamā*) that we have been learning from our own scriptures, along with *Ahimsā*, *Satyam*, *Dayā* and others. More importantly, this session threw light on how other belief systems also have similar concepts of the law of *karma*, higher power beyond intellect, controller of results/judgement, service and other values - illustrating the commonality of spiritual paths.”

- Naveen Bonda

“This workshop was very touching and relevant to all of us, especially to me. The narration of the incident with Azimji’s son and the aftermath left me with tears in my eyes. But the tenacity and inner strength of Azimji that lead to formation of the Foundation and his worldwide mission to spread the message of forgiveness is highly commendable. There was a lot to learn and practice from this workshop.”

- Prabhakar Hariharan

“It was great to see a wonderful forgiveness example like Azimji’s and how he turned his experience into a message of peace in the lives of so many people. In my life I would like to forgive my brother who had forgotten his responsibilities as a son and left home. I pray to *Bhagavān* to shower His blessings on my brother so he can come back and live with the family to fulfill his responsibilities. I would like to thank Sukumar uncle for organizing this workshop and Azimji for conducting it.”

- Priya Vadivel

An Overview of Indian Knowledge Systems - Basis of Indian Culture

On **November 21, 2021**, for the first time CMSD hosted a workshop on the **Indian Knowledge Systems** that is the foundation of Hindu culture and philosophy. It included the fourteen fields of knowledge traditions or *Vidyāsthānams*, and also discussed *pramāṇa* - means of knowledge. One striking point was that in the Indian Knowledge System there is no separation between worldly knowledge and spiritual knowledge- all knowledge must take us to the ultimate Truth.



“This workshop was eye opening for me. It showed me how much depth is there in our culture and how our scriptures include the knowledge for everything, from what we learn at school to spiritual knowledge.”

- **Arushi Bharadwaj, Grade 10**

“The workshop opened my eyes to the vastness of our scriptures and the 14 places of knowledge. In the workshop, I was able to gain a better understanding of how the scriptures are organized. I am very proud to be a part of a culture that has so much relevant knowledge!”

- **Aditi Bharadwaj, Grade 8**

“The workshop made me realize how lucky and privileged I am to be a part of such a rich culture. What I learnt will always stay with me and enable me to live a dharmic life guided by our scriptures.”

- **Isha Popat, Grade 8**

CMSD Ongoing Events

Monthly *Saṁskṛti Pālakas* Meeting

With a vision to guide and groom mothers to be the custodians of Hindu *Saṁskṛti*, CMSD *Saṁskṛti Pālakas*' monthly meet began in **April 2021**. Picking up a topic for discussion on the 2nd Sunday of every month, women get together in the ashram to meet, speak, ponder, and learn from Lakshmi Aunty and each other and create a brighter tomorrow for their own families and the world.

The **October** meet coincided with the *Devī* workshop.

“Sustainability in the Age of Consumerism” was the theme for the monthly meet on **November 14, 2021**, and how to introduce environmentally friendly products and packaging into daily living. Inspiring one family into sustainable living can have a ripple effect in a community setting- which can promote harmony and balance in a society. The discussion covered a myriad of things ranging from how to implement our age-old customs in newer ways to feminine hygiene. There was an exchange of ideas on how to reuse, recycle, and upcycle, and refusing the use of single plastic. Practicing sustainable living is not just service to our country, but service to the entire world!



Kalyani, a CMSD member, shares, “As we discussed, I could relate to how everyone is striving for the same goals of sustainability. We covered many topics such as reducing water consumption, growing leafy vegetables, limiting packaged foods and disposable cutlery, donating clothes, knowing best fabrics, DIY dish soap, reducing wastage of food and saving energy. Thus, contributing individually and spreading the message to make Earth a better place to live.”



The **December 12, 2021** meeting concluded the sustainability discussion with how by embracing a sustainable lifestyle we will not only enrich our lives but also that of future generations! The main takeaway was going back to our age old traditions of **“reduce”** and **“reuse”** and only then **“recycle”**.

CMSD Ongoing Events

Monthly *Sundarakāṇḍa Pārāyaṇā*



October 23, 2021



November 20, 2021



December 18, 2021

CMSD In The Community

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) *Vijayadaśamī Utsava*

Lakshmi Aunty represented CMSD as a Chief Guest at the *Vijayadaśamī Utsav* hosted by the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh on **October 30, 2021**. The celebration also marked the Foundation Day for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), with its inception on the *Vijayadaśamī utsav* day in the year 1925 (in Bharat). The beautiful performances by group members showcased a variety of marching drills and art forms. Aunty's speech very aptly summarized the significance of *Vijayadaśamī* - as a journey into discovering the Divine *Śakti* within and manifesting the divinity in the world outside through purity of mind and immaculate action.



CMSD In The Community

13th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service by Poway Interfaith Team (POINT)

Continuing its tradition, CMSD participated in the 13th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on **November 17, 2021**- “**Gratitude for Those Who Came Before: *The Shoulders We Stand On***”. Lakshmi Aunty expressed gratitude to the *Guru Śiṣya Paramparā*, and the presentation concluded with the Grade 6 choir performing a beautiful song, composed by Pujya Guruji, *viśvameva guruḥ*.



Rev. Dr. Abigail Albert, Executive Director at POINT shares, “The presentation was beautiful, sacred, and inspiring to all who attended. The 6th grade choir was lovely and presented so professionally.”

Shishu Vihar/Bala Vihar Corner

Halloween Celebration on October 31, 2021- the Chinmaya Way!

With upcoming *Dīpavalī* festivities, the children also enjoyed a variety of craft activities.



Shishu Vihar/Bala Vihar Corner



BV Youth Corner

CMSD Youth Speak on Sustainability for ThanksGiving!

I have become more aware of my habits with respect to electricity and water wastage.

**- Aathmika Radhachandran,
Grade 10**

I pledged to be more mindful of the things I buy and actively consider whether or not I really need that item before purchasing it, in order to work towards combating consumerism.

**- Arushi Bharadwaj,
Grade 10**

I have learnt that I need to make changes in my own life before asking others to change!

**- Hemadarshini Rajendran,
Grade 10**

Me and my family now use reusable bags at places like the grocery store to reduce the amount of plastic usage.

**- Dev Babla,
Grade 9**

As a result of our discussions on sustainability, I have become more aware and I try my best to avoid take-out, as well as recycle all plastic appropriately.

**- Sri Jayanth Rangarajan,
Grade 12**

I have become more aware of the resources that I am using and finding better alternatives for the environment.

**- Aniket Chakradeo,
Grade 9**

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SWAMI TEJOMAYANANDA

In the achievement of everything there are two parts.

One part is in our hands and 'we' should do it.

The other part is not in our hands and we should 'allow' it to happen.