

A the **ISTADEVATA** in home puja. In some ways they could be described as secondary incarnations of the Deity so saintly is their reputation as well as the unique way some died while in a state of samadhi, deep meditation, knowing the precise time of their *shuffling off this mortal coil*—an intriguing **HINGLISH** phrase for death. Their messages soar in poetic imagery, sung in far-flung places, now translated beyond Indian shores into the universal.

■ **ANAND**

Joy, bliss, a sense of beatitude. It is *not* the outward show from ritual worship, etc, that counts in the soul's development during the progression towards release but the inner **heart**, that individual care for integrity which brings contentment and release... the **Indian psychology of bliss = anand**.

■ **ARATI** (n. *Sanskrit*) pr. *arati*

The actual ritual worship at home and temple in the clockwise circling of flame in the lamps before the shrine and the Deity.

Indians are aware that '**lighting the lamp**' at prayer holds an inner meaning—'**illumination of the mind**'. As the equivalent of the human eye on the external world so the flame represents 'the inner eye' leading the ignorant, bound by short-sighted ego constraints, towards the liberating **marg** or way.

In many a home as dusk falls, in those fleeting moments between hazy daylight and velvet-smooth dusk, flickering oil lamps, *deepas*, are still carried in the hand through the darkening rooms to light the oiled wick in the niche where the Deity presides... **Istadevata**, that particular representation of the **ONE** preferred by a householder or individual. The flames replace the effulgence recalled every morning in the one real mantra to be chanted, **GAYATRI**, acknowledging the life-giving rays of Savitar—the Sun. A gentle cadence, a flowing song is sung, or temple nadaswarams crack the air, and gentle flutes bid goodnight to the Deity. From the flame blessing is taken by those present, hands as prayerful as Dürer's famous etching; a quick gesture wipes the flame over head and face, taking the evil off the head of those who worship, giving thanks for planetary blessings, gift from the galaxy where the sun centres our universe with its flaming creative energy.

■ **ARDHANARISWARA** (n. *Sanskrit*)
ardha = half
nar = man *nari* = woman
iswara = divinity

A truly remarkable artistic imagery in the Hindu acceptance of biological truth in conceiving the supreme energy, essence (or whatever the Absolute may be called) as half male, half female depicted as such in many visual forms of Indian art, folk as well as urban temple sculpture and bronze carvings. Conceptualisation also includes the



Shiva/Shakti union or the upright phallic lingam set in the flat womb yoni with birth canal. In temple rituals such a shrine will be bathed daily with holy water, milk or ghee and marigold flowers with little thought for sexual implications which seriously disturbed Victorian missionaries on encountering such rituals, the liquid running along the canal slope graphically to be taken in the right palm onto the head as blessing.

■ **ARRANGED MARRIAGES and OTHER MATRIMONIAL MATTERS**

Take any leading English-language newspaper on a Sunday and spend an informative but frustrating hour (not because you won't find a spouse but because you won't understand the adverts!) in reading the matrimonial columns page after page. They need decoding, such is the variation in regional clues, **CASTE**, gotra, sapinda, acronym, salary and profession.

Although there are few statistics, it is generally accepted that most of India's population still arranges its marriages—alliances of families first and foremost rather than individual romances, and this is one way of effectively doing so.

Even though the English-language newspapers reflect only middle-class India, a vast proportion of the population who neither read nor write and therefore do not turn even to the regional language press, nevertheless if immediate family and trusted friends or the traditional matchmaker—a paid professional (a very bossy woman appears in Indian TV sitcoms as well as in a Western documentary) doing a search—are not successful in finding the right person for daughter or son, increasingly these people are using video and the internet. Someone will read for them! Even that traditional matchmaker has gone frighteningly professional. Seen on Mumbai TV this epitome of the large bag-lady with the wobbly-head and cheshire-cat smile available in emporiums for tourists where classic caricatures of Indian 'types' are replacing the Bharata Natyam dancers who enticingly wobble their jointed sections, this formidable personage has gone public rather than working quietly behind the scenes at the behest of the family sending messages to other families via the other traditional go-between, the village barber. But now TV is bypassing them all. As community TV firmly establishes a receiving dish in each village wonderfully scripted 'sitcom' serials take over accompanied by the hilarious laughter of Indians laughing at themselves.

Now professionalised, the arbiter sits on a dais presiding over the throng, men and women lined up either side of a bleak hall, seeking partners, sadly only able to choose in front of a voyeuristic crowd.

◆ Modern technology is even more sophisticated in catching up with finding that elusive soulmate. Women's magazines both in English and regional languages, directed mainly to the upper-middle class professional woman appear to encourage her to branch out into very carefully monitored **computer matchmakers**.

One such agency, under the management of a retired mariner captain (to give it respectability) sifts through personal

looks, character, family background, short video clips; people are given phone numbers once the computer permeates through all the indices of compatibility. Here is territory beyond the boundaries of family alliances—the new dispensation—Western style individuality for 1% of the population... very little different from a new phenomenon in Western community newspapers and internet adverts seeking 'soulmates', unable ironically to find the appropriate 'match' in their nowadays mobile and rootless urban neighbourhoods.

◆ Increasingly, speciality magazines are supplying a service, advertising the fact that they are published in numerous editions, reaching lakhs (100,000 = 1 lakh), people who are out there searching for that perfect soulmate every bit as eager as the Mills and Boon readership yearn to replicate in their real lives what they read in the **billions** of pages of Barbara Cartland's novels.

New mobility and economic forces change the search conditions

◆ Even for nonliterate villagers life and work is becoming so mobile and change is so rapid, family confabulations are not working.

The drift to the city throws up all kinds of influences, family fractures, and chance meetings challenging the tightly-bound networks of old. In Kerala, for instance, it is not only professional brahmin upper and middle-class who are mobile and to be found increasingly in pockets of Australia, Canada and the USA, but also building construction labourers once of the lowest caste—now extremely wealthy—as well as technicians and other 'hands on' labourers who have moved in very large numbers to Gulf Arab countries. They have done the dangerous labouring jobs of creating the modern high-rise buildings in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates; some have come back wealthy, disoriented, building extraordinary painted concrete blocks for homes amid the aesthetically pleasing traditional stone and brick homes embedded in the sun-flecked palm groves of Kerala. The traditional lines of inquiry which fanned out at caste level to settle a marriage arrangement are now in disarray.

◆ In addition such is the diaspora of Indians overseas (the **NRIs**) who may not have efficient networks or large enough communities in the USA, the UK, Europe, Australia or Canada in which to find that elusive partner that advertising is a useful arm in the search:

Decent marriage but no dowry bride. Should be beautiful, fair/charming/convented because she will find it easier to adjust in Germany, age between 26–27 years and very good family.

because as that Box Number family states:

We are very old established Brahmin family in Lucknow. Son very fair 1961/183/ Medicine working in UK. Soliciting urgent replies with full details and photo which will be treated with utmost discretion. Early ceremony wished...

◆ And there begins the momentary pause, the query. Why? Does the reading of his janampatra horoscope, the scrolls that can unroll to the length of the room with the life-map in intricate

zodiacal sections and coded signs, indicate that something had better be done soon? Or what other factors come in to play when he was born in 1961 and is now 183 centimetres tall?

Natural human curiosity makes the visitor wish for a code to unravel all the clues! It is intriguing to discover that even Indians cannot explain the indicators beyond their own community columns. Regional caste, religious customs differ so widely that even if certain main criteria apply across the board, others are very particular to a certain group. Reference to a '**pooradam-star**' in a Tamil advert of a brahmin family is still a mystery until I meet the right category of brahmin, there being many criteria to measure birth influences by—not only the 12 zodiacal signs—but according to Hindu reckoning 27 specific stars per lunar month moving into dominant 'pulls' on the specific zodiacal position (explained in detail in **Dr S R N Murthy's** scientifically researched **Vedic View of the Earth**, Reconstructing Indian History and Culture Series, No. 14, D K Printworld, New Delhi, 1997). A diagram of the four lunar mansions and 27 influential stars may decode some adverts—but it raises more questions than it answers! (Turn to **ASTROLOGY** for illustration.)

◆ On one page alone in which approximately 150 families were engaged in this vital search, columns were sub-divided not only into all the major regional/linguistic communities but also under headings such as Finance/Banking; Government/Defence; Hotel/Shipping/Airline; MBAs, IAS–ICWAS; Doctors; NRI–Green Card (a very important consideration for being able to work in the USA and bring in a double-income as a future spouse). That issue boasted 2,497 entries!

There are also the major religious columns of Hindu, Christian, Muslim families, subdivided down into Andhraite, Kannadiga, Marwaris, Khatri/Aroras, Mangalik, Kulalar Telugu, Velanadu Vaidiki, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe and occasionally, a sign of the times, Cosmopolitan:

European, 42 (looks 32), successful, good-looking, international aid professional seeks well educated, dark beauty, 20s/30s, who shares interest in nature, environment, travel, fashion, books. Must be French speaker or quick learner, and prepared to live between India or Mauritius and France. Direct correspondence only please.

Times are indeed 'a changin'!

In the 50s such an entry in the columns would have been inconceivable, as also those words incorporated into the paragraph, now even designated to a specific section, **Caste no bar**.

In my lifetime those three words map the changing attitudes of India. On the last visit, of approximately 150 matrimonials on a page, two-thirds carried that message. Other phrases also have crept in as indicators of social change and quite dramatic ones over what is now half a century of the new freedom **to be Indian**.

◆ caste/religion no hindrance
 ◆ divorcee (without children)
 ◆ issueless widow

Buddhism is laying the foundations of a new diplomatic relationship after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A vacuum therefore needed filling after this special rapport with the USSR. In an imaginative diplomatic move the Indian Government appointed the head Buddhist lama of Ladakh to Ulan Bator as ambassador where other ancestry leading down the centuries into India from Genghis Khan and the Mongol blood of Babur can also now be recalled in brotherly diplomacy.

Clearly a balancing act is necessary as the crescent of Islam spreads even further, flowing eastward over India's northernmost Himalayan ranges through the newly independent erstwhile Russian republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan into the Chinese province of Sinkiang. They too are flexing their independent muscles. Buddhist societies in Tibet, Burma, and South Asia may well have to be a buffer. And so the ancient chess games of central Asia re-form on the board where once British imperialists and Tsarist Russians, Afghans and Chinese moved their jumping knights. The Buddha left a message for all this engagement of power play:

For one who clings, motion exists;

But for one who clings not, there is no motion.

Where no motion is, there is stillness.

Where stillness is there is no craving.

Where no craving is, there is neither coming or going.

Where no coming or going is, there is neither arising or passing away

Where neither arising nor passing away is, there is neither this world nor a world beyond, nor a stage between.

This, verily, is the end of suffering

from a sacred scripture of Buddhist teaching: **udāna** = utterances, in the Pali canon: **Inspired Utterances of the Buddha** edited by **John Ireland**, (Buddhist Publications Society, Sri Lanka, 1990). This volume contains 80 utterances attributed to the Buddha or his chief disciples on their self-realisation, a sublime state of bliss.

Where to find current Indian Buddhism in all its cultural/artistic glory is **Ladakh**—part of Jammu-Kashmir state, thus balancing out the strong emphasis Kashmir claims on world political consciousness as being entirely Islamic.

La = pass, **Dakh** = land (of high passes). Leh, its capital has only become part of global tourism in the past 20 years. The flight from Srinagar is one of the most psychologically challenging over its forbidding blue-grey crusted moonscape peaks of the inner Himalayas.

An annual festival now takes place celebrating the Indus river, foundation stone of India's name and identity. This is the **Sindhu-Darshan Mela** (refer to **DARSHAN**).

■ BUREAUCRACY

The **babu** (now regarded as an officious clerk) gave India a bad name, an image of a nation smothered in a tangle of red tape. But let us face it—all nations suffer from obdurate government officials who regard you, as an enquiring citizen—an intolerable nuisance. But **babu** also had connotations of respect. Placed as an honorific after a name such as the first President of India, Rajendra Prasad, a truly homespun honourable Hindu in his khadi jacket and dhoti known as **Rajendra Babu**. A family elder might be referred to as **Babuji**.

And there is the obsequious (fearful) approach of an uneducated villager addressing a clerk of the court for instance as 'babu sahib'. There are niceties of detail at the bureaucratic babu level that only India with all its penchant for lists and categorisations can attain—and the following is one of them... and not a government department either...

Every occupant is presented with a detailed inventory when settling into nightly accommodation at the august Ooty Club in the Nilgiri Hills. This is just in case you feel inclined to walk off with a famous print on the walls without telling Management or the Colonel-in-Charge. And also if you feel inclined to pack up hangings, brass lamps, the most ancient of 19th century wardrobes—and clearly listed also... **one chimney!**

■ CALCUTTA now KOLKATA

founded 1690

is still alive! A phantasmagoria of 10 million volatile, talented, revolutionary as well as saintly Bengalis, radical demonstrators who specialised in turning over double-decker buses and trams in fighting the British for independence, Kolkata has been written off innumerable times as the city that should die—indeed several decades ago the Ford Foundation in a study concluded it was beyond redemption as a functioning city. Yet in 1990 it celebrated the 300th anniversary of its founding with aplomb! At night the population increases by 8 million!

It is quite impossible to describe coherently a city the size of some small nations. To do justice to her one would need to be as multi-armed as Kolkata's presiding benign deity **Durga** worshipped in colourful exuberance at the **puja celebrations** in September–October after the devastations of monsoonal rains.

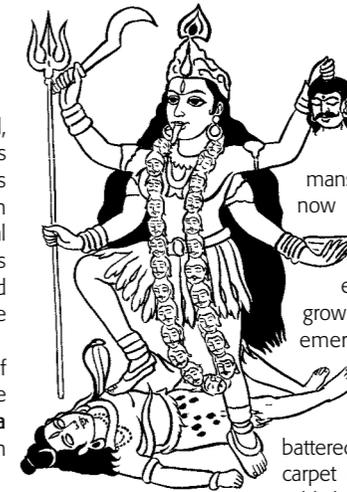
◆ Kolkata provides a kaleidoscope of fitful impressions, a swirling universe of people, yet cursed by thousands of visitors and inhabitants during its 300-year growth from three undistinguished riverine villages now swallowed up in chaotic suburbs... cursed for its uninhabitable climate built as it is on swamp, in the proximity of salt lakes and fetid airs, beside a river Ganga that silts up with lethal sandbars down the Hooghly—its shipping pilots as a result the best in the world.

◆ Deluged nearly every year by volatile monsoons—you can almost catch a glimpse of the dark Kali—an alter ego of Durga—dancing with a similar demonic energy as the miasmatic spread of city groans under wave after wave of refugees first in the savage amputation which was Partition and, in this new century, as well over a million illegal immigrants from an even more disrupted Bangladesh, especially after a series of devastating cyclones and floods, from topsoil brought down from the mountains from massive deforestation. Consequently, neighbouring Bangladeshis are dislodging settled societies in Assam, Uttar Pradesh and even distant Maharashtra. It also suffers from having as capital to service India's most densely packed state (nearly 800 people per square kilometre).

◆ Flying over the area once in a small impoverished Burmese plane, the great delta of the Brahmaputra and Ganga spread out below in an amazingly even design, a gigantic symmetrical mud fan, a crescent shape with brown silt leaking into the Bay of Bengal in a muddied flow clearly demarcated from an uncertain ocean.

◆ And yet its inhabitants still survive in a glory of the inner heart, treasuring the arts—despite the impoverishment in material possessions—probably more so than many an affluent nation. Bengalis are in the higher echelons of literacy attainment which is over 70% of its more than 80 million citizens.

◆ A 'surfeited muckheap' is Kipling's damning comment. From the charmingly civilised and homely Kenilworth Hotel—with its stairs and hall religiously washed down daily in the unmistakable disinfectant of British India—I watched the nature of the beast in the physicality of Kolkata's lethal climate, and the Kipling comment at work.



◆ Looking out from a bedroom window onto the vertical wall of one of Calcutta's last decrepit mansions, which undoubtedly will now have fallen to the bulldozers' implacable advance on behalf of the new rulers—the real estate barons, I watched a tree grow a foot in length in five days, emerging like a brawny elbow between two great blocks of stone masonry. The mildewed stonework and monsoon-battered stucco was home to a veritable carpet of vertical vegetation. So soon would the two pieces of wall be prised

apart, then open to ravages of driven water invading the crevices, rapidly to crumble. And in the middle of the compound, ragpicker children, matted hair, faced with huge hessian bags, sorted out an unlimited detritus of other peoples' undoubtedly unhygienic refuse—the **KABARIWALLAHS**.

◆ Yet some of India's most gifted musicians, poets, cinema directors, actors, intellectual writers, politicians, saints, philosophers, business tycoons, innovators and powerful women have created a quite unique amalgam—Kolkata! And in a Marxist democratic state led by **Jyoti Basu, chief minister** since 1977 seeing the millennium in at 86! (He has since retired, but remained elder statesman with occasional prime ministerial ambitions).

An unusual history

Legend goes, when an Englishman employed as an Agent of the East India Company sat under an equally legendary tree (**peepul** or **tamarind** in two distinct places according to tradition) what became Kolkata, was born. The intruder smoked a pipe while considering how to resurrect the trading fortunes of the East India Company, then established firmly after nearly 100 years over in the west at Surat (1612), Bombay (now Mumbai, gifted in 1665 by the British government to the EIC) and down south in Madras (Chennai), 1640. He settled on an emporium in **Kalikata**. A riverine hamlet of fisherfolk and, according to British historians, the amalgamation of two other swamp-ridden villages—**Sutanati** and **Gobindpur**; thus was laid the foundations of an EIC trading post which even official Bengal appears to have accepted as the foundations of the city in 1690. Irreverent Bengalis prone to satire and healthy scepticism, assert this is typical of colonial European historians romanticising their own heroes in this case **Job Charnock**, when Bengalis were already trading along the river banks in the famous textile silks and muslins as well as **pith** (used in making Durga decorations at Puja time) and shellac referred to in a famous episode in the Mahabharata. Whatever the inconsistencies, anomalies, contrariness and paradoxes, the spirit of Kolkata flourished from that time onwards.

■ LAKSHMI

Churned up from the cosmic ocean of **amrit** as Vishnu reincarnates himself over and over again to preside over the tug-of-war between deities and asuras, she emerges, like Aphrodite did much later in Greek legend from the scattered spray.

Mild and seemingly gentle in her radiant beauty, as **Sri**, Vishnu's balancing half, her feminine energy redeploys itself with similar forceful preservative influences as she progresses through the Dasavataram, ever at Vishnu's side as consort, but under different names (see **PANTHEON**). Strangely no temples are dedicated to her but she is the focus of universal worship all over India at the major all-continental festival of Diwali... and she shifted a long-sustained cultural stance!

Personal note: It is on this stepping stone that I have to admit to a radical change of attitude, a virtual turn-around in response to an impassioned comment by an Indian friend whom I deeply respect. We have been in dialogue for some time on philosophic issues concerning English language usage in India (and by Indian writers in English as well as by outsiders such as myself) when dealing with translations of profound Indian terms that are not just matters of specific language but are 'halo-ed' in fundamental cultural dimensions.

Such is **Sri** and such is **the Lord**, Lord Shiva, Vishnu *et al.*

I have remained obstinately attached to the respectful use of 'the Lord Vishnu, etc' as following the convention used by gurus and pandits themselves when addressing overseas audiences. But my editor wrote this:

There are titles we are expected to understand. 'Monsieur', 'the Rt Hon.' Or 'H M the Queen'. You would be doing a sterling service if you introduced in reverse Sri (Shri) to Western perceptions!

It is such a beautiful word, with such a gentle, gracious meaning, a happy meaning and it is gender neutral!—Shri Vishnu, and Shri, his consort... A Sanskrit scholar will explain the nuances—Shri Rama, Shridevi, Shrimati. (see introductory note to the Reader)

The way this devotional approach to a term is so lyrically expressed has convinced me of its legitimacy as yet another Sanskrit word which should pass seamlessly into my native language alongside all the less dense terms—raga, guru, yoga, mantra, asana, ayurveda, swami have done!

And while on genderless issues it is worth taking note of **Ram Swarup's** book **Meditations: Yogas, Gods, Religions** (Voice of India, New Delhi, 2000). He points out in relation to Western religious traditions that 'the very word 'God' was neuter in its original Teutonic home. But when this word was adopted by Christianity after the Teutons became Christians, the word became masculine. The word 'Allah' has a similar history.



The **lota**, present at puja ceremonies, often on a bellmetal tray and decorated with a floret of ashoka or mango leaves on which is cosily bedded a coconut, is the harbinger of all that Lakshmi stands for, the 'electricity' of her auspicious 'presence' and plenitude.

Lakshmi is to be honoured, most especially as the goddess seated on a LOTUS. In this protective role she is the channel for benign influences—not just the gold shekels she appears in the imagery (most especially in Thailand's Hindu shrines) to be releasing upon the head of the devotee from the palm of her downward-pointing right hand. Yes, at the lustrous Festival of **DIWALI** when every home should be lit up to welcome her she brings good fortune as the goddess of wealth. But in the cosmic order of things her force is to protect her devotees with well-being and fortune of a less material kind. Merchants, however, as they open their account books for the New Year (incidentally, celebrated at different times in the calendar by Bengalis, Kashmiris, Tamils and others, constellations of worlds within worlds) do keep an eye out for that extended palm and a possible golden shower! For **Sri** is indeed auspiciousness incarnate.

■ LANGUAGE and ATTITUDES of MIND

In all cultures we often do not say directly what we mean, clothing our words in ambiguities—hence the length of time it takes to iron out political treaties that are binding, industrial agreements that sometimes take all-night sittings to find the right written formulae for accord, legalistic jargon that takes a page to express one simple thought.

There are additional dimensions for not reading the right signs when dealing with different cultural indicators—and radically different ones at that, such as the Indian view of life, creation and our place as humans in this framework. For one thing, time is at the cosmic level. For another, the concept of **samsara**, transmigration of the atman-soul through many rebirths runs counter to the sense of urgency in European civilisation with its biblical sense of one life—a linear progression with not much time left to get things done... or to reach 'perfection' if that is what you wish to do.

Over 60 per cent of Indians are now designated bilingual (one other language other than the mother tongue) or even trilingual, many having taken the English language and made it their own, another overlay in the **PALIMPSEST**. This should not lead to the assumption that they will be meaning the same thing, however. Grammatical structure, for instance, interacts with **CORE CONCEPTS** thereby shifting the emphasis of a sentence. Perhaps this is what Noam Chomsky is on about and why he is so popular in India and far more widely known among the generality of the population than in a country like Australia.

1 Many a business seminar taking on board how best (and efficiently) to cope with the challenges of doing business with India, considers 'attitudes of mind' a major stumbling block. All is not what it may appear to be on the surface. How to read the signs? Indian love of manipulating two languages at once, quite unconsciously and without having to pause for grammatical

thought about order or construction adjectively or adverbally, indicates a subtlety that is not face-to-face 'businessspeak'!

Aligned with nodding the head between the two distinct polarities of **yes** and **no**, Indians allow themselves the option of not hurting anybody's feelings by this adjustment. Harsher European clarity, a direct and well-defined-if-blunt NO—or YES—is not the Indian way!

2 Two languages blended together fluently, flowingly, all in one go... this is a remarkable capacity of Indians when talking to each other in a regional language. If they also speak English they incorporate it into the flow of conversation. Such an example in Bengali of this flexible handling of language is this mother's statement:

Jishnu roj shokāle uthe music practice kore, breakfast kheyē, dānt brush kore, uniform aur sneaker pore, suncream lagiye, schoolbag niye schoole jaye...

Jishnu gets up every morning, practices music, eats breakfast, brushes his teeth, wears uniform and sneakers, puts on suncream and goes to school with his schoolbag.

The ebullient over-the-top Sikh popstar **Daler Mehndi** en route to perform in a 1999 concert in Delhi had this advert placed in the English-language media (plus translation for the Australian tour):

Mastiyan Chha Gayin... Romantic joy is spread around

1. **Coca Cola Tour Daler Da Aagaya...**: Daler's Coca Cola Tour has come
2. **Your city Nu Rock te Refresh Karanvaste...**: To rock and refresh your city

◆ Even simpler—a question put to me. '**Aap lunch key liyeh free hain?**' Are you free for lunch?

◆ And an exclamation by a winner on the TV show **Kaun Banega Crorepati** = Who Wants to be a Millionaire ... '**Is se to meri life hi change hogayeeji** = My life has changed because of this'.

3. There are further open-ended possibilities in phraseology to do with 'coming' and 'going'.

Rather than using the inverted question mark: '**You will come to my home tonight for the party, won't you?** Expecting the answers—yes, or no, the order of the Indian sentence is:

◆ **Tonight/to my home/you will be coming/isn't it?/no?**

There are distinct possibilities then that you might, or you might not, depending on immediate circumstances, there being many if you happen to exist within the multiple exigencies of a joint/extended family with so many calls upon your time and energies. Once back in the homestead even for a modern Indian working in an office, to turn around and go out again to see a friend at the end of the day, go to a committee meeting, frequent a cafe is all too much. Best to stay in the airconditioning if you are lucky enough to have one, or collapse by a fan. And besides, Indian hospitality is so compulsive (good dharma) as well as innately warm-hearted (that **a-tithi** principle!) that it doesn't matter anyway if you come late, and unexpectedly. There are usually in traditional households enough unemployed members

of a family or retainers (if but one humble servant) to jump to, to put together another helping of food... none of that Western rudeness in showing annoyance that you weren't given any forewarning and 'look at the time' attitude. Besides, Indian khanaa stretches further, a pilau is flexible!

In fact the Indian answer to 'Aren't you coming this evening?' would be: '**Hanji**' (yes, acknowledging the question is being asked), '**I am not coming**', rather than a downright rude, '**No! I am not coming**'.

4. The miracle is that despite the Spike Milligan/Peter Sellers attitude of English people trying to imitate 'Hinglish'—as nothing to the embarrassment of our own miserable efforts at Hindi—Indian writers have built up a consummate and articulate English literature of their own. **Nirad Chaudhuri's** impeccable classic English referred to by some literary critics as a 'mixture of the Elizabethan Bible, Gilbert Murray classics and the evening news on radio'; **Rabindranath Tagore's** lyrical poetry (Nobel Prize for Literature); the racy ease of **Khushwant Singh's** novels to the Tolstoyan command of **Vikram Seth's** masterpiece... and a thousand others, editors in their dozens, too many to mention, all indicate this mastery.

A Madhavan, poet manqué who became a distinguished diplomat and Director of the **India International Centre** has a fascination for the proclivities of the English language as used by his Indian colleagues. Over the years his occasional articles have with wry humour appeared in the English-language press. I had many hours privilege at the Farnham Centre of International Briefing sharing ideas on this matter with him.

5. '... Indian writers have a sense of humour' he points out, 'well able to laugh at their own foibles, with that most Indian of phrases: **You do one thing...** suggestive rather than directive **Please do this**, is too peremptory. One of his articles tackles Indian English.... '**He has gone for taking meals**,' shadows the Indian construction, a great favourite which will not easily be dislodged. Nor will '**You came today, isn't it?**' he pointed out in one of his wry essays. As if one didn't know! ...and with the rising Welsh inflexion echoing in the inner ear.

And there are the wonderful phrases he notes in 'officialese'—coming right out of the British Raj days of administrative instruction in **Tottenham's District Office Manual**, directed towards that loyal band of Indian clerks hidden behind rising mounds of pink-taped-files, with their elastic garters strung taut across the paper bulges threatening to slide out.

6. Madhavan notes the Indian preference for the passive voice: '**You are requested to present yourself..!** And another example: '**I am to say that**'... well, go ahead and say it!

7. '**Do the needful**,' is a beloved classic which is perhaps indispensable. But the limit for Madhavan is: '**This may kindly be got done**...'—a whole essay, he rightly comments, could be written on the official subjunctive, '**may**'.

8. Because of India's characteristic absorptive gift, Victorian officialese must have surely influenced other areas of the gifted ability to harness English to her own purposes. Latinised polysyllabic words survive, fossil reminders of Miltonic solidity for