

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, December 2023

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar— December Spirit

The Hindu gods we see in Indian restaurants are all very vivid, exaggerated, and gorgeously decorated. And these posters of gods and statues of deities are not just interior decor. The people who worship these gods want them to be that way.

Last month, I visited a special exhibition, “Divine Affection: Enchanting Images of Hindu Deities”, at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. The items on display show how Hindu gods are firmly rooted in Indian people's everyday lives. Since my sister has been working on this exhibition as a researcher, she showed her family around. For the exhibition publicity, the museum adopted an infant Krishna figure she'd purchased in Delhi last year. The figure is decorated with a pretty colorful dress and looks like a toy doll. Actually, Hindus believe there is divine power in it, and followers worship such figures. My sister told us that these deities appear as a variety of media: sculptures, paintings, and even practical things such as calendars, matchboxes and postage stamps.

Hindus demonstrate their love and devotion by decorating these statues and paintings with dresses, jewelry and flower petals. As part of their daily worship, they actually bathe God's statue, dress it, feed it and sing it songs. They listen to whatever wishes the deity may have. If he is hungry or thirsty or sleepy. They treat these objects as if they were children. The worshippers feel responsible for taking care of them.

During Krishna's birthday festival, Hindu families, rich or poor, set up an elaborate swing and place a statue of young Krishna on it in order to amuse the deity. Believers use LED lights to decorate various sacred items, too. They use social media to share pictures of God and, in this way, try to keep God close to them.

My sister kept talking about why Hindus would love God more than they expected to be loved by God. They believe that there is God within them and they desire to be one with God. In order to realize this, they try to reduce their ego by single-mindedly taking care of statues of the deity. In this way, they believe that they can eventually be free from the cycle of reincarnation.

I think this devotional belief, "Bhakti", is something that Japanese people don't possess. Instead, we pray that we can benefit from the power of God or Buddha during our current lives.

I was amazed at the variety of exhibits, and I think I understand now why Hindu gods have such a strong impact in Indian people's lives. This exhibition will be held until December 5, and some of the exhibits will be transferred to the permanent exhibition. (Miwa N.)

At 88 years of age, my physical capabilities have been reduced to those of a toddler.

Awareness of my days being numbered prompts me to live treasuring every minute of my remaining time. This notion makes my mind even more sensitive to the transition of the four seasons as well as to what's going on in the world and where our world is heading.

In my later years, among other subjects, seasonal phases are one of my major fields of interest.

Let me remark on some of them.

Wordsworth wrote, “My heart leaps up when I behold.” To this phrase I would append flowering fields brimming over with abundant sunshine. A brook lilting merry tunes of spring, butterflies dancing in accompaniment on the vernal breeze. In summer, a refreshing breeze blowing from over the bright blue ocean. Cicadas' scorching chorus. A glass of draft beer with “*kaba-yaki*”—grilled eel

with a special sweet sauce, which stimulates our stomachs spoiled by summer lethargy.

When autumn rolls around, the atmosphere becomes clearer, colonies of colorful cosmos flowers wave in a brisk breeze. As the season goes on, foliage turns yellow or scarlet. Soon, winter takes over, and we can fully enjoy slurping steaming hot ramen noodles, while in due course, another year draws to a close. I hope these changes of seasons will not be further truncated by global warming.

Lovingly appreciating the impressive cycle of seasons. At the same time, cautiously watching diverse phases of social turmoil, taking care not to get caught up in the chaos. At this stage, an old codger maintains an attitude as an onlooker or perhaps a fence-sitter as the case may be. What I mean by fence-sitting is not necessarily taking sides with the majority. Sometimes, I am apt to join up with the minority if I think their cause is justified. This sort of *modus vivendi* is a reserved privilege of old age.

Life is brief. I'm soon to experience death. But as I grow older, I'm becoming conscious of my fear of death gradually dwindling. That might partly be due to the growing frailty of my body. Being dead would be, so to speak, an ever-lasting slumber without so much as dreaming, a world of nonentity. Some people contend the spirit leaves the body after death and continues to exist. Mind and body are inseparably integrated with each other, so I believe.

People who hold with the former theory might be more complacent as they maintain emotional stability by believing in eternal existence. As for myself, I could hardly put up with the sheer boredom of my spirit afloat in boundless cosmic space for good and all. (H. Tarumi)

“I was 13 years old...” Over coffee, while waiting for his flight, Uncle John, a Japanese/Canadian Nisei, gradually opened up to me. He is not my uncle, but my close friend's relative. She'd also been my client at one time,

John's son and granddaughter had left Matsuyama on their first journey across Japan. Allen, his son, texted me asking me to pick up John at his hotel in Dogo, take him to the airport, see that he and his luggage were checked-in and that he boarded his flight to Narita to meet up with Allen. That was my job last June.

One week before, I joined their family reunion welcome lunch and dinner in Matsuyama. They needed an interpreter. From their conversation, I learned John was in an internment camp for Japanese-Canadians from 1942-1945. “What? Why in Canada?” I'd only heard about Manzanar internment camp in California!

Back home, I opened my PC and briefly read about Japanese-Canadian history. Three months following Japan's December 7, 1941 surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, over 22,000 Japanese-Canadians were forced into internment camps in British Columbia. The federal government seized and sold all their agricultural property and other personal possessions besides.

At the airport, I casually asked John what he remembered about the camp where he was interned 81 years before. He replied that he never forgot that awful smell in the barns where they were treated like cattle, how he became seriously ill and was sent to another camp.

I was intrigued to learn that John spent several years in Matsuyama as an interpreter for GHQ. Amazingly, he'd retained his sense of direction and could trace the exact route he took on his long ago commute to his office on Ichibancho.

A week later, Allen texted me that John was thinking about returning to Matsuyama soon, and that he would let me know if and when that would happen!

Isn't that nice?

(Kay Kajiwara)