

# DANAM CONFERENCE 2003

## ABSTRACTS

### I. SCIENCE AND VEDANTA

#### **Physical World as an Embodiment of Dharma**

**E.C.G. Sudarshan**

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Austin, Texas

The structure of the Physical Universe is analyzed and the central role of the laws of motion is exhibited. The law of conditioned origination is used to characterize physical theory.

#### **Is There Science in the Vedas**

**Subhash Kak**

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Since the word “Veda” means “knowledge,” it is ironical that the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialist studies of the Vedic texts insisted that they contain nothing beyond nature poetry or meaningless ritual. Slowly, this attitude became mainstream amongst Western scholars and their Indian followers. However, traditional Vedic scholars in India and a minority in the West, have continued to insist that there is *ātmavidyā* in the Vedas together with the usual sciences, such as astronomy logic, mathematics, that has lead to an irreconcilable split in the scholarly world.

### II. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN VAISHNAVISM

#### **Ethical Boundaries and Boundless Love**

#### **Reflections on Dharma and Bhakti<sup>1</sup>**

**Graham M. Schweig**

Christopher Newport University

Newport News, Virginia

Among the numerous stories or *lilās* of the divinity within the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (BhP), the Rāsa Līlā Pañcādhyāya of Krishna with the cowherd maidens, or Gopīs, is considered by later medieval Vaishnava traditions as being the pinnacle of all divine acts or stories. What I intend to speak about today is the way the relationship between the boundless love of *premā bhakti* and the ethical boundaries of dharma is envisioned by the author of the Rāsa Līlā story. In the service of

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this paper is taken from my forthcoming book entitled, *Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna from the Bhāgavata Purāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

brevity, I will not repeat the summary of the story, because I have before me a very enlightened audience. I will suggest here that the author of the Rāsa Līlā story presents the life of the bhakta as paradigmatically embodied in the example of the Gopīs, that of embracing and transcending of dharma at the same time. The Gopīs' example is one of boundless love that crosses social and ethical boundaries, both on the part of the Gopīs and Krishna. And Krishna's identity is that of the divine lover of the cowherd maidens, including his consort Rādhā. This is seen esoterically in the story, for she is not mentioned explicitly there.

### **III. DHARMA IN THE U.S. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

#### **Can Dharma be Taught?**

**S. S. Rama Rao Pappu**

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In the Platonic dialogue, *Meno*, a young boy by name Meno asks Socrates: "Can Virtue be Taught?" This question puzzles Socrates because he himself does not know whether virtue can be taught. In a similar vein, I would like to raise the question: "Can Dharma be taught?" My tentative answer to this question is that it can be taught if certain conditions prevail; but these conditions do not prevail in the contemporary world, therefore, dharma cannot be taught. I will examine in this brief paper four reasons why dharma cannot be taught.

#### **Dharma In Schools**

**Mona Vijaykar**

Network of Indian Parents in Classrooms

When I first arrived in this country, 20 years ago, I was excited to be part of a society, which I believed reflected all world cultures. I have never been more disappointed as when I discovered that generations of immigrants to America seem to have been boxed into this uni-dimensional culture, which is obviously based on western culture. Over time these immigrants have been conditioned into thinking that it was abnormal to speak anything but English, wear anything other than western garb. I do believe this conditioning has robbed Americans of the true meaning of liberty. I am very simply an immigrant, a mother and a citizen of the world...in other words... a Hindu. Perhaps it is because I approach these three roles with intensity and passion that I am perceived as an activist!