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NĀMARŪPA

Categories of Indian Thought



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NĀMARŪPA *Categories of Indian Thought*, established in 2003, honors the many systems of knowledge, practical and theoretical, that have originated in India. Passed down through the ages, these systems have left tracks, paths already traveled that can guide us back to the Self – the source of all names **NĀMA** and forms **RŪPA**. The publishers have created this journal out of a love for the knowledge that it reflects, and desire that its content be clear and inspirational, without any particular agenda or sectarian bias. **NĀMARŪPA** is published in both print-on-demand and digital versions. **NĀMARŪPA** YATRA guides annual pilgrimages to sacred places in India. **NĀMARŪPA** BANDHĀVA has recently been established to adopt a village in the Uttarkashi region of the Himalayas devastated by recent floods.

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NĀMARŪPA uses diacritical marks, as per the chart shown to the right, for the transliteration of all Saṃskṛta words. Many of the articles do contain these marks, but it is not a universal occurrence in the magazine. In those cases where authors have elected not to use diacritics, Saṃskṛta words remain in their simple, romanized form.

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Cover photo: Frieze of Deekshitar priests, Sivakamasundari and Lord Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu, South India. ©Robert Moses. Photo on this page: Three boys ©Michelle Haymoz

YOGA

Talk at Ashtanga Yoga New York Sharath Rangaswamy 4

Beauty, Knowledge & Silence

A Conversation with B.K.S.Iyengar Andy Richter 8

Aṣṭāṅga Yoga Srivatsa Ramaswami 18

'Breath of The Gods'

Notes on the Movie Jan Schmidt-Garre 22

This is India! Bobbie Jo Allen 30

BHAKTI

Maha Kumbha Mela Claudio Notturmi 42

Chidambaram Kate O'Donnell 50

Aghora: Here and There Dr. Jeffrey Hawkins MD 56

The World is as You See It Igor Kufayev 62

JNANA

Trika Rahasya: The Cosmic Triad of Kashmir Saivism Vikram Zutshi 66

Release from Karma Jaidev Dasgupta 70

Questions & Answers

Interviews with Atmananda and Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani Alexander Medin 74

Numinosity Danielle Winter 88

अ a	आ ā	इ i ए e	ई ī ऐ ai ऋ ṛ ऌ ḷ	उ u ओ o अं am	ऊ ū औ au अः aḥ
क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa	
च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña	
ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa	
त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na	
प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma	
य ya	र ra	ल la	व va		
श śa	ष ṣa	स sa	ह ha		
क्ष kṣa	त्र tra	ज्ञ jña			





MAHA KUMBHA MELA 2013

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAUDIO NOTTURNI

I ARRIVED BY BUS IN ALLAHABAD FROM Faizabad on the morning of Saturday, January 26th, the day before *Paush Purnima* (the full moon of the month of Paush, one of the seven most sacred dates on which to bathe). Leafing through the *Indian Times*, I saw that the previous night in a tent camp, a fire broke out in which nineteen people were injured and five died, but, thanks to the prompt intervention of a team of firefighters, the blaze was immediately curbed and did not spread to the entire camp. I carried on reading – the Maha Kumbha Mela takes place over an area over of 40 sq km. I cannot clearly define the space; I find it extremely difficult to imagine a rectangle of 7 x 6 km full of people. So I decided to immediately go to see for myself. The rickshaw left me





three km from the “ground,” the area adjacent to the two rivers where the event takes place. It could not go any further because the street was full of people, a river of people marching in the direction of the *Sangam* (the sacred bathing place). Most were rural villagers who had traveled for days, weeks or even months by all possible means of transport in order to be here on these specific days. They marched on, loaded down with blankets, food, canvas to make tents, all wrapped up and carried on their heads. They were not prepared for the low temperatures. Normally, at this time of year, temperatures can fall to almost 0°C, but this year the temperatures were 6 to 8°C below average. They would have to sleep on the ground and cook their food (conditions



that for most of us Westerners would not be acceptable at all). This was all to seize the opportunity for a miraculous plunge into the icy waters of the Ganges on this sacred occasion.

As soon as I had passed the hill next to the temple dedicated to Hanuman, I realized what awaited me: All I could see were heads, fields full of tents and, in the distance, the shimmering waters of the Ganges. I dived too, not into the waters but into the middle of this raucous and colorful multitude. For four days I “sailed” by sight from one bank to the other on the pontoons connecting the shores or on boats that took me to where the Ganges and the Yamuna meet. The line that marks the union of the two rivers is clear and it is particularly sacred to bathe at this place.





Here also, many people fill up whole tanks with water to take home.

The Indians were friendly and they always wanted to be photographed. If you have a digital camera where you can see the photo on the screen, a crowd of people immediately forms which is difficult to break up. Even the sadhus, who are usually reluctant to be photographed, greet and smile at you as if they want you to take a photo of them. I was particularly impressed by the Naga Babas, completely naked and covered only in ash, who give advice and blessings to the many faithful who turn to them, and the Standing Babas, also completely naked, who have vowed to stand up for the rest of their lives and sleep leaning on a sort of swing. I had read about them in



Shantaram by G. D. Roberts but seeing them in person took my breath away...

THE MAHA KUMBHA MELA IS A Hindu pilgrimage, regardless of all the barriers of caste, which is performed to celebrate the symbolic triumph of the Gods over the demons in a battle for the nectar of eternal life. During the battle, four drops of nectar fell to earth: one drop fell in Haridwar, one in Nashik, one in Ujjain and one in Allahabad, and it is in these four places that the Maha Kumbha Mela is celebrated on a rotating basis. According to Hindus, bathing oneself in the waters of sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery and Brahmaputra during the full moon in Paush is very auspicious. They also believe that this action erases all the sins committed during their lives. If one does this in Allahabad, the place where the three most sacred rivers of India meet: the Ganges, the emerald





green Yamuna and the Saraswati (the latter you will not find on any map however; it is invisible to the human eye!) it takes on a very special meaning: One becomes eligible for liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Twelve years ago, more than seventy million saints, sinners, sadhus, healers, preachers, charlatans, gurus and devotees from all over India gathered in Allahabad. For this year's event (from January 27th to February 25th) it is believed that there were over eighty million visitors. It is the most colossal gathering of humanity since time immemorial. ❖

Claudio Notturmi was born in 1953 in Ravenna (Italy) where he lives and works as a graphic designer. Keen on travelling, he regularly collaborates with the *Lonely Planet Guide*.



