

अनादि | *Anādi*

THE REBIRTH OF HINDU TRADITION



Sushil Kalia in Conversation with David Goa

A MEMOIR

PROLOGUE

In 2018 Sushil Kalia and I sat down to plumb the well of the past. We talked together about how his life had unfolded from his birth on January 1, 1940 in Ludhiana, Punjab, India, to his student days and early work in India, to his immigration to Southampton, England, and on to Edmonton in 1976, where he made his home with his wife Kamla and their children, Rajnish and Alka.

Our focus, as befits a memoir, is to hear in Sushil's own words the poignant stories, and the joys and sorrows that shaped his life and work. Perhaps most importantly, we glimpse the divine unfolding in his treasured relationships and in his life of unfailing service to the Hindu community and to the cultural and religious life of Alberta and beyond.

Stories speak to how life's meaning takes root and matures and makes one's soul; stories open up landscapes of relationship through which we may hear how a particular life is knit together with the divine mysteries that gather and shape the world's integrities.

I suggested we title Sushil's memoir *Anādi* अनादि, *a Rebirth of Hindu Tradition* for two reasons.

First, as you will hear in his telling, the soft Hindu formation of his childhood and early years was nurtured through his marriage to Kamla Devi and her family. The sparks of the divine were ignited by her spiritual disciplines and, as curious as history is, rose to full flame in his vocation as the founding priest of the Hindu Society of Alberta. This story speaks to a rebirth, an *anādi* अनादि.

Second, the theme of rebirth surfaces again as Sushil recounts how he discerned and envisioned the shape and purpose of the Hindu Temple in Edmonton to serve as a home for all the distinct pieties present in the diverse Hindu community, for the various manifestation of the divine, as well as for elements of other religious genius India has bequeathed to civilization.

This is the memoir of a humble and clear-eyed man, of a life of unflinching service to the Hindu and Indian community in the diaspora and to a number of our public institutions. It is a story of one who has given his life for others out of his deep sense that, as he says, "God addresses us, invites us; the divine reveals and we are called."

CONTENT

1 : 14 – Childhood formation; encounters with Sikh tradition, with Arya Samaj and with *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*; studies in Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, English and Punjabi; the Bhogpur monastery and Kamla's chant style; initiation by his Grandfather; Feroz Pur, Chak Saboo, Ludhiana, Phagwara; Ramgarhia Engineering school; meeting Kamla's family, destiny and arranged marriages; birth of Rajnish.

2 : 14 – marriage a family affair; “I am looking for a match for my daughter”; learning from Kamla's religious discipline; opening to Mother Durga; “I follow whatever my mother wishes me to do”; a humble home in Delhi and getting to know each other; weekends visiting local temples; the “spark of devotion”



Kamla Devi passport photo



Kalia family at the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, London, 1974

becomes a flame; moving to Southampton; the birth of Alka; heart-break and crisis at the loss of a little one who flourished for so short a time; Ramakrishna temple in Holland Park, London and Swami Bhavya Nanda; lectures at Brighton Palace.

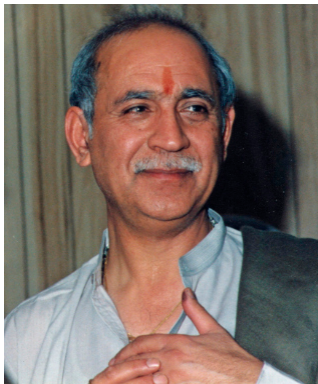
3 : 14 – encomium to parents and ancestors; inter-generational support through family and for family; the cultural life of Delhi; hair cutting sacrament at the shrine of Jwali Ji Himachal in Pradesh; doctrine of *karma*; the leave-taking of India; settling in the United Kingdom and initial work; the culture of the Conder company and profit sharing; British civility.

4 : 14 – Sanatanist and Arya Samaj forms of devotion, Vaishnavite and Saivit traditions, the Shakti; immigration to Canada and work at Great West Steel;



Sushil with Rajnish and Alka, Shakespeare Avenue, Southhampton, c.1970's

early gatherings and the beginning of the Hindu Society of Alberta; sod turning for construction in Lougheed Park; understanding Hindu society political leadership; building a cultural centre or a temple; the “formless concept of Hindu worship; visiting the Ganesha Temple in Queens, New York; the unique concept of a temple devoted to five deities; accommodating the various pieties in the Hindu community; the influence of Adi Shankaracharya; “where is god?”; shaping the temple with Lord Ganesha, Siva lingam, Lord Vishnu and Mother Durga, Lord Siva and Surya Narayan.



Sushil Kalia, c.1990's

5 : 14 – building dialogue of the Hindu Society of Alberta; research trips to New York and Pittsburgh; professors and grass roots Hindu community; fund raising and inauguration of Cultural Centre and temple; founding priest of the temple; development of south sanctum area and *pranaprasthita*; serving

the community in home pujas, temple ritual, initiation rituals; Kamla's musical gift to the community; conducting ritual after learning and embracing it in personal devotion; search for a priest in India; drawing a lot to choose who to invite as priest; priestly service and pastoral attentiveness to community needs; value of Sanskrit as sacred language; "to me the building is organic, a living presence"; mechanistic ritual verses ritual served out of deep presence; Kamla's ecstasy and the worship of Lord Krishna; the influence of Dandi Swami and Pundit Jagdish Komal's chant style; a dream of Kamla chanting a new style.

6 : 14 – the meaning of sacramental work, the theology of



Sushil and Kamla at the Hindu Temple, 2017

sound; “it is the duty of a Brahman to conduct the ritual when requested”; sacraments for marriage, sacred thread, hair-cutting, death; home havan’s and Agni as purifier of cosmos; “service to human beings is service to God”; interfaith dialogue on sacraments; interfaith marriages, “love between two people is divine”;

Swami Vivekananda on the soul;

pastoral issues involving families; other images in the temple, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist; issue of images honoured by traditions thought to be atheist.

7:14 – Jain images, *murtis*, various saints, *yantras* in the temple; the bronze *OM* mandala made by Roy Leadbeater; passions and the state of *apatheia*; public work with various museums and art galleries; creating the Vivekananda Gallery in the temple; the Gandhi Foundation and the public placement of a bronze bust

of Gandhi on the Molson Plaza; Hindu Society of Alberta and the Council of India Societies; Gandhi related programming; two spheres of authority: political and those who are knowledge bearers; being told to not come to the temple.

8 : 14 – Interfaith Centre for Education and Action; seeking harmony: in a faith community, between faiths, within traditions and nations; Interfaith Committee on Human Rights; “my mother is my god, my father is my god, my neighbour is my god, the stranger is my god”; interfaith chapel at the Royal Alexandra Hospital; various interfaith dialogues at the temple; interfaith exhibitions at Edmonton City Hall; teaching about Hindu tradition in schools and universities; public work motivated by British colonial period and the communal struggles with partition; father’s relationship to the 14th Punjab regiment and hosting Muslims; witness to communal struggles; assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

9 : 14 – intimate relationship of Kamla, Rajnish and Alka to the priestly work in temple and homes; adopting the chant style of Pandit Jagdish Komal; Kamla leading women in bhajans; home shrine and



daily *abhishekam*; the challenges of being children of the priest, expectations and presumptions.

10 : 14 – other public work include Royal Alberta Museum documentation and collections on Hindu tradition; the damaged *murti*; relationship to university students teaching Hindu ritual and spiritual disciplines; “teaching as karmic seed you planted in students”; various university classes, Victoria Composite High School, Sherwood Park High School, Saint Joseph’s Catholic School; Saint Stephen’s College; Catholic school interest in interfaith education.

11 : 14 – contemplation of the divine in worship; contemplation as pathway to knowledge; Swami Vivekananda’s teaching that the spiritual life starts with external worship and moves to internal worship; *japa* mantra, *gayatri* mantra, Ramakrishna Paramahansa said it is enough if you “only do the *gayatri* mantra”; the love of ritual and serving the deities; the five monasteries of Adi Shankaracharya; Ganesha’s big belly; the Eternal Absolute, the Shakti, “in this life only once to see her”, and the worship through images; feeding Alka as an infant, a revelation; ritual: purification, illumination and deification; becoming one with

(Left) Sushil in praise of the Divine, playing the naal, Southampton

the divine; a Sufi story, a Jewish story; the longing to come to the place of presence; personal cycle of worship; changing the sacred thread.

12 : 14 – grandsons visit and discussion; meaning of personal worship of the Shakti; student of Swami Vivekananda and initiation at Sri Ramakrishna Centre in London by Swami Ghanananda; given the Ramakrishna mantra; Swami Omkarananda in Switzerland; living out of the rituals; the development of views on marriage including interfaith marriages; the influence of key teachers including Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Adi Shankaracharya; meeting Swami ji Ghanananda “when my thirst had arisen and he spoke to this thirst”; dream of Kalka ji in Delhi with “my guru Swami Ghanananda”; Ramakrishna bequeathed the worship of the Divine Mother, respect for other faiths as divine pathways; Hindu nationalism and fundamentalism; visiting the home of M who recorded what is written in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

13:14 – Adi Shankaracharya and the worship of the five deities, his non-duality philosophy; five deities related to the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, space; “we don’t chose a deity to worship; the deity chooses us”;



each religion is an ocean of meaning, each has a particular charism; five deity worship and the need to accommodate the various pieties of the local Hindu community; influence of Swami Vivekananda and his journey in America and the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago; Aurobindo as reformer; use of Sanskrit and learning from translations into Hindi and English; absorbing the ritual through daily practice; mastering the language of ritual; invitation to gather for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Edmonton; the Pope's visit to India; consultative committee for *Spiritual Life – Sacred Ritual* gallery and for *Anno Domini* exhibitions working across faith traditions; “we go to the temple for *darsan*, to be seen by the deity”.

14 : 14 – encomium to those near-by; meeting Mathoor Krishnamoorthy and doing cultural programs for diaspora Indian community in the United Kingdom; the worship of Lord Vishnu with a thousand flowers; the cosmic dimension of worship; worship of Hanuman with a thousand bananas; influence of Swami Bhavya Nanda; the richness of worship, a plethora; searching for unity amidst difference; “honorary priest” or “founding priest”; patronage to

schools in India; bringing Kamla's ashes to various places in India, to the Ganges, Lundhiana, Apra and to the Devi Chintapurni Shrine she was associated with; making a place in Edmonton on the North Saskatchewan river where Hindu, Sikh, Jain communities may place the ashes of loved ones; all rivers flow to the same place.

AFTERWORD

Enduring friendship is a lovely gift, a grace. Following our first meeting in 1976 Sushil and I worked together on various educational and interfaith initiatives, periodically sharing meals in his home or at one or another of the local Indian restaurants in Edmonton. Our conversation moved easily around the gifts of spiritual discipline, Hindu and Christian, and touched on the curious way the institutions and communities we loved and sought to nurture seemed to move inexorably from summers of flowering through diminishing autumn and, often enough, into a winter of seeming exile. Taking the measure of life as revealed in Sushil's memoir and facing the entrance into the Eternal with a clear eye, the struggles of life all take on the colour of what is normal for the short season from

birth through living unto that moment when as we are anchored by as much integrity as is given we close our eyes. Such struggles do not dim the deep movement of the soul animated by gratitude, gratitude for the seeds planted in childhood by parents and grandparents and friends, gratitude for what has unfolded through the love that animates each day and, at the end (or is it *anādi*?), what is and what unfolds beyond our earthly span. Such is the movement of divine grace, a movement vividly present in *Anādi* (अनादि), *the Rebirth of Hindu Tradition*, Sushil Kalia's memoir.

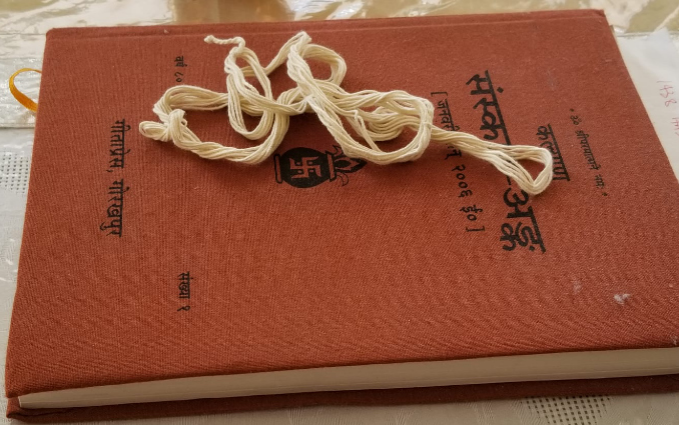
MEMOIR CHANT

The portions of chant have been drawn from a VHS of the *Pranapratistha* ritual recorded at the Hindu Society of Alberta temple in 1983.

“Hail to the Mother” bhajan Kamla Kalia playing the *dholak* and leading the praise along with Sarla Sarhadi.

A bhajan in praise to Lord Krishna with the voices of Sushil and Kamla Kalia leading the congregation accompanied by their son Rajnish playing the *naal*.

A bhajan in praise to Krishna and Radha. *Chimta*, cymbals, *naal* and *dholak* join with Sushil, Kamla and the congregation.



गीताप्रेस, गोरखपुर

वर्ष २००६

संख्या १



[जब्त १, २००६ ई०]

संस्कृत-अङ्ग

कलामा

३३ शिवपुरी सं.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO

Radhe & Krishna Gupta for the generous support that has made the publication of *Anādi* (अनादी), *the Rebirth of Hindu Tradition*, Sushil Kalia's memoir possible.

अनादि | *Anādi*

THE REBIRTH OF HINDU TRADITION