

# Globalising the Vedas

■ Kalpana Rangan

"NAMASKARAM, I am Gowri Shankar," he introduces himself in a resonant voice before talking about his travels around the world. Sporting a 'kudumi' (tuft), an 'lyer namam' and 'dhoti-jubba,' Shankar is as much at ease travelling within the country as he is outside. In fact he is very happy playing the part of a religious ambassador and propagating the rich cultural heritage of India to the outside world. Recently he returned from a three-month long sojourn to Central and South Africa. "I believe I am the only Indian pundit to have travelled to Malawi to spread the message of the ancient Vedas," he says proudly. One of the four sons of K V Subramanyam, a retired official of a private firm, Shankar was destined to follow the path of spirituality. As a devout Brahman, his father followed the advice of Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Kanchi and sent the nine-year-old Shankar to Veda Patashala at Salem to study the shastras. "I studied only up to third standard at Saraswati Vidyalaya before departing to South to enroll myself at the Veda Patashala," he informs. Here he stayed till he mastered Krishna Yajurveda. Next, he joined Venkateshwara University to master Sanskrit. From there he



Gowri Shankar

tions has established its reputation. S.K. Somaiya invited him to teach at Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham at Vidyavihar. The committee members of North Bombay Welfare Society's High School also gave him an offer to teach Sanskrit and Natyashastra in their school. As word spread round, important personalities from the world of politics, business and films approached him to guide them in their study of Sanskrit and the shastras.

Shankar feels proud to have associated himself with the likes of C Subramaniam, R

Ranganathan, Shyam Benegal and Hema Malini. "Discovery of India" and "Nupur" is a few serials where he had recited the Vedas and Sanskrit shlokas. Shankar is happy being blessed by godmen like Sankaracharya and Puttapurthi Sai Baba.

With their blessings, he started Aakruti, a trust in 1990 and started giving lessons in Sanskrit, Vedic culture and fine arts to students at home and at institutions. He also performs yagnas for world peace. Year before last, he performed Laksha Modaka Mahaganapati Yagnam, one of the biggest events ever held in Mumbai, at Somaiya grounds. What, however, makes him different from others of his tribe is visiting the different parts of the globe to spread the message of our ancient scriptures and their relevance today. He

has visited universities and religious institutions in UK, USA, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Central and South Africa. "I hold talk shows on a variety of subjects from 'Sanskrit as the language of the gods' to Astrology and the significance of gems," he says.

He has also released CDs and audio albums on Vedas

and Bhagavad Gita. "By god's grace, I have been able to pursue my mission of propagating Hindu culture with the support of generous individuals like Somaiyaji," he says. With dedication and enterprise, Shankar hopes to cross many more territories and establish himself as the religious ambassador of India.

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went over to Chennai to study Astronomy, Astrology and Bharatashastra at University of Madras. And in 1984, he returned to Mumbai to join his parents and start his career as a Vedic preceptor in the metro. "The turning point in my life, however, was when the Paramacharya of Kanchi chose me to accompany his team to participate in the World Hindu Conference at Kathmandu in May 1988," he recalls smilingly.

He got an opportunity to talk on "Bharata Shastra" in front of an erudite audience of 5000 and was noticed by men of religion and education. Also King Birendra gifted him with Rs 10,000 and a 'raja mudra.' Among the guests at the conference was Shantilal K. Somaiya, the visionary under whose guidance the Somaiya group of educational institu-