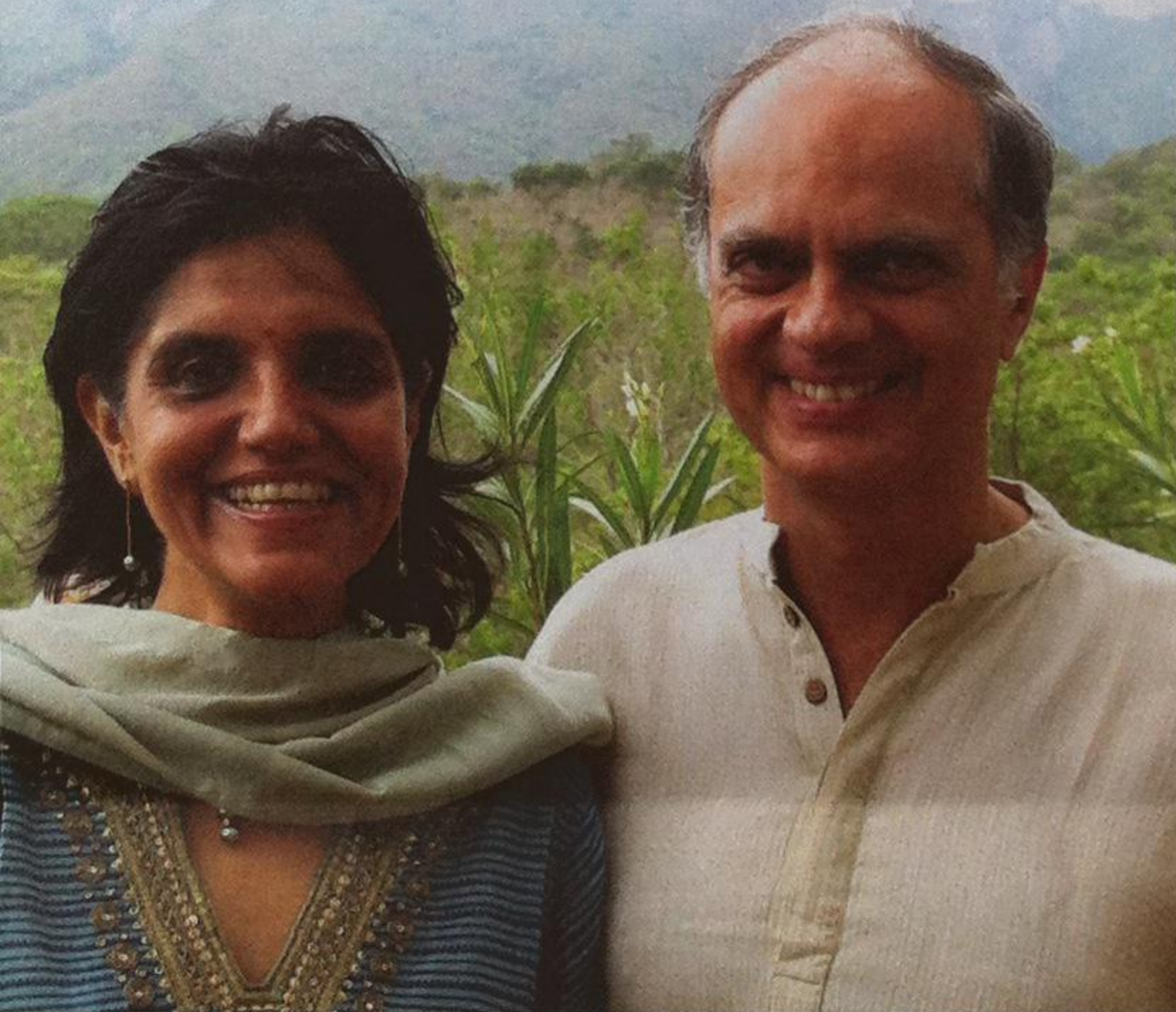


A Path to Fulfilment

Vedanta brought Surya Tahora and Neema Majmudar together in 1995. Since then, this teaching duo has travelled the world bringing this philosophy to others. *By Mrigaa Sethi*



Neema Majmudar had been working for the United Nations and Surya Tahora with French multinational companies when they each independently arrived at an interest in Vedanta, taking workshops and going on retreats whenever possible. In 1995, Neema made a commitment to Vedanta by signing up for a three-year course near Coimbatore. It was here that Neema and Surya's paths finally crossed. In 2001, they got married and since 2012 have left their jobs to devote themselves full-time to teaching Vedanta around the world. They were in Bangkok in late November, conducting a two-day workshop at Indus restaurant. Here, we speak to them over email about what it's like working as a husband-wife team, who can benefit from Vedanta, and why it's for people of all religions.

What does Vedanta mean to you?

Vedanta is a body of knowledge which throws light on certain realities of existence. It not only answers questions such as what is our real nature, the nature of the universe, and the cause of the universe, but also has a very practical framework to bring about transformation in our daily life. The realities unfolded by Vedanta are highly pertinent for people to live their life meaningfully and with greater purpose.

The workshops you teach are open to all religions, but Vedanta, as far as I've heard, is a Hindu tradition. What makes it so inclusive?

The framework for human growth expounded by Vedanta is universal as it includes analysis of criteria that we need to consider to make decisions. It shows some facts that enable us to respond to different situations with objectivity and equilibrium. It reveals how to manage desires effectively, conduct interpersonal relationships with compassion, and take care of our subjectivities. In addition, it shows some practices, such as meditations, necessary to be well-grounded and a centred person. All the above topics are highly relevant for any human being who wants to grow and be a better person.

How do the techniques of your workshop differ from other forms of meditation, such as mindfulness or vipassana?

Our workshop is multidimensional. The sessions invite people to think through different areas of their personal growth by engaging them in group discussions, examining case studies, doing personal reflections, and role-plays.

Why do you recommend the practices of Vedanta? Who is it good for?

Vedanta is good for any person who wants to be objective and alive to realities. It enables a person to take off unwarranted loads, such as feelings of failure, being a victim, and feelings of "why me". When these burdens are taken off through understanding a larger perspective, we can live much more proactively, dynamically, with enthusiasm, and showing compassion towards others.

I heard you both worked jobs in the private sector before you turned to teaching Vedanta full-time. Can you tell us about that journey?

In spite of having high positions, very lucrative jobs, and a comfortable life with lots of travels abroad, something seemed to be lacking. We felt something was missing in life, which led us to search for something more fundamental that would give lasting fulfilment. We came across our teacher Swami Dayananda Saraswati who taught us Vedanta. We studied Vedanta full-time for three and a half years. After in-depth study from 1995–1998, [Neema] went back to work with the United Nations. The knowledge gained during the Vedanta studies enabled her to make decisions in different aspects of life with a lot of clarity. We started sharing the vision of Vedanta and got very positive feedback from the participants about how it helped them to become better human beings. In 2012, we decided to leave our professions and become full-time teachers of Vedanta.

What's it like working as a husband-wife team? Why did you decide to work together?

We were not working together in our professional life, but for Vedanta, we

work together as a team. It is very productive as we have complementary skills [Neema] teaches in English and [Surya] teaches in French as well as in English. [Neema]'s forte is creating course content and [Surya]'s strength lies in developing the website, the Facebook page, blogs, and coming up with new programmes. We launched an interactive workshop on self growth in Matheran (near Mumbai) in January 2012, which was attended by many corporate leaders. This workshop imparts the teaching of the Vedanta in an interactive format. The workshop in Bangkok [was] along the same lines. We have also authored a book called *Living the Vision of Oneness* and produced a DVD, *Insights into the Timeless Teaching of the Gita*. Working together as a team, we have been able to accomplish a lot more than what we could have done alone. Our ultimate goal is to make this wisdom available to professionals, corporate leaders, and intellectuals in society. If leaders and intellectuals change, their learning percolates down fast and creates more responsible and holistic societies.

What kinds of things can corporate leaders take away from a Vedanta workshop?

Practical ways to incorporate ethical considerations in business, knowing the benefits of having a wider perspective in business decision-making, the ability to better deal with uncertain situations in a complex world, enhancing objectivity of staff and senior executives in decision-making, and improving interpersonal relations among bosses and colleagues.

What specifically does Vedanta say about these things?

There are no black and white answers. It is all about understanding and applying this profound teaching in our lives. What is more important is to learn the process of decision-making that is different from our usual ways of thinking.

Upcoming Workshops

January 11–12: two-day workshop at Sri Vijaya Bhavan, Altamount Road, Mumbai

January 17–21: residential retreat at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Coimbatore

February 15–16: two-day workshop in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

For information, write to discovervedanta@gmail.com