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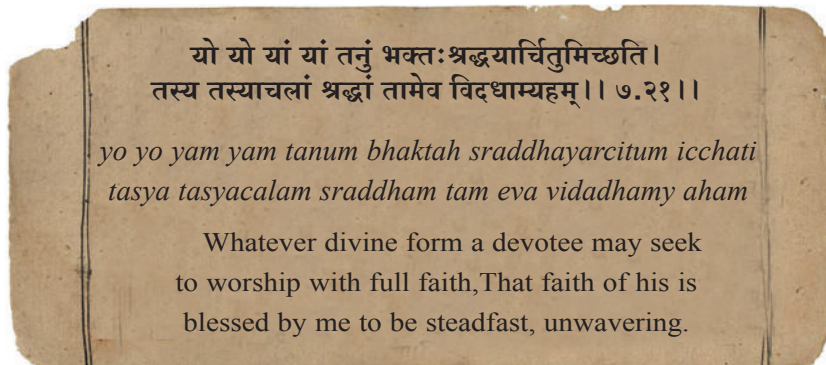
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Volume XXXX

No. 4

October - December 2011



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The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) publishes the Hindu Vishwa issue quarterly except when combined with special publications. For subscription, please fill out the membership form on the last page.

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*Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America (VHPA), founded in 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York in 1974, is an independent, nonprofit, tax- exempt and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in USA. It aims to build a dynamic and vibrant Hindu society rooted in the eternal values of Dharma and inspired by the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. the entire creation is one family.*

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# Tying The Knot

**T**his Editorial relates to an article in the last issue of this magazine by Rakesh Bhatnagar, “Become a Hindu to Marry a Hindu: Supreme Court,” (The Hindu Vishwa, July-Sept. 2011, p.11.) Also see: [http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report\\_become-a-hindu-to-marry-a-hindu-Supreme-Court\\_1542622](http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_become-a-hindu-to-marry-a-hindu-Supreme-Court_1542622). According to the mentioned article, the Supreme Court of India has issued the edict that “If a Muslim woman plans to tie the knot with a Hindu man she should convert before marriage otherwise the alliance could be declared illegal in the eye of the Hindu Marriage Act (HMA).” In view of a large number of cases of Indian-American men and women tying the knot with a non-Hindu partners, it is of interest to expound upon the HMA in a wide context, at least morally if not legally.

There are several dimensions of the said edict, although, of course, the Supreme Court is essentially concerned with the legal aspect only. In the wider context, one is compelled to contemplate the plight of the individuals involved from the view-points of conversion, moral responsibility particularly for the children and descendents, harmony in the home and in the society, statistical imbalance in the proportion of population-growth (playing havoc under the vote-bank politics of India), Islamic stricture on polygamy, decline in the health of family values and of the Hindu Diaspora, identity crisis, alienation, divorce-rate, and so on.

First, let us briefly consider conversion. More often than not, the Sanaatan Dharma (Hinduism), with its benevolent attitude of “Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam” and its pluralistic outlook, commonly does not demand conversion of a non-Hindu into Hinduism in such matters, leaving it purely to the individual’s choice. To the contrary, Islam and Christianity invariably insist that a Hindu marriage-partner convert to that religion. Thus a Sharmila Tagore converts to Islam to marry Nawab Pataudi. Their four children are, of course, Muslims. What is the big significance of such a happening? Well, a ratio of one-to-one of Hindu-to-Muslim population turns into a zero-to-six. The long-term statistical significance for the nation is

anybody’s imagination.

Also, often such marriages suffer from severe culture-shocks. Even religious persecution of the Hindu partner is likely. This leaves a scar on the offspring as well. A burning example of such an unfortunate marriage is vividly described in the website <http://www.interfaithshaadi.org/blog/?p=298>. Such a situation subverts harmony in the home and the society, proportion of population-growth, socio-religious norms, inheritance of cultural heredity, poisoning the destiny of the descendents. Just reflect upon what India would have been if a large number of Hindus – ancestors of most of the present-day Muslims in India -- were not converted forcibly by the Islamist invaders. In any case, the exclusivity of Islam and Christianity presents a huge threat to Hinduism, as it has throughout the history. The net outcome is an irreversible loss to Hinduism, the most pristine creed of universality and spirituality at par, free from dogmas, encouraging free thinking.

And, then, usually, a Hindu marriage entails tying the knot, literally, as the wedding ceremony highlights the couple undertaking the ‘Saptapadi’ -- going around the sacramental Fire 7 times to complete the marriage-vows, promising to uphold the same ‘for seven janmas (rebirths).’ No such ‘knot’ is imbibed in any other community or faith.

The above arguments and pictures bear one simple message to the Hindu youth: To think twice before deciding to tie the knot with a non-Hindu partner. Going one step further, one can generalize the edict of the Supreme Court, morally if not legally, to apply to all non-Hindu partners, within India and without, especially in the USA. Marriage is personal matter, as should be religion. The true basis of marriage is true love, or should be; and the true basis of religion is pursuit of true spirituality, or should be. An inter-religious marriage presents a host of challenges and potential social, religious and cultural conflicts, and, at the same time, an opportunity for greater understanding between religions. Legal aspects apart, anyone, within India or USA or anywhere else, considering such a marriage owes it to oneself to examine one’s own heart, as well as to learn well enough about both the religions involved, before making a final decision. One owes it one’s future generations, too. The inherent invaluable benefits are bound to accrue for generations to come. Let the Supreme Being resident in your soul and conscience be your Guide. Perhaps the cited edict of the Supreme Court is just a first right step in this direction. ■



# Hindu American VAnaprasthi Network Conference

(HAVAN)



Transforming from  
Family Orientation to Community Orientation



*Illustration from Human Excellence, July 2009*

*Vanaprasthi's Lifestyle demands us to be like a banyan tree, under which thousands can find shelter and solace. It is not how 'long' we live that matters, but 'how' we live, for self-sacrifice is the key to spiritual sublimation.*

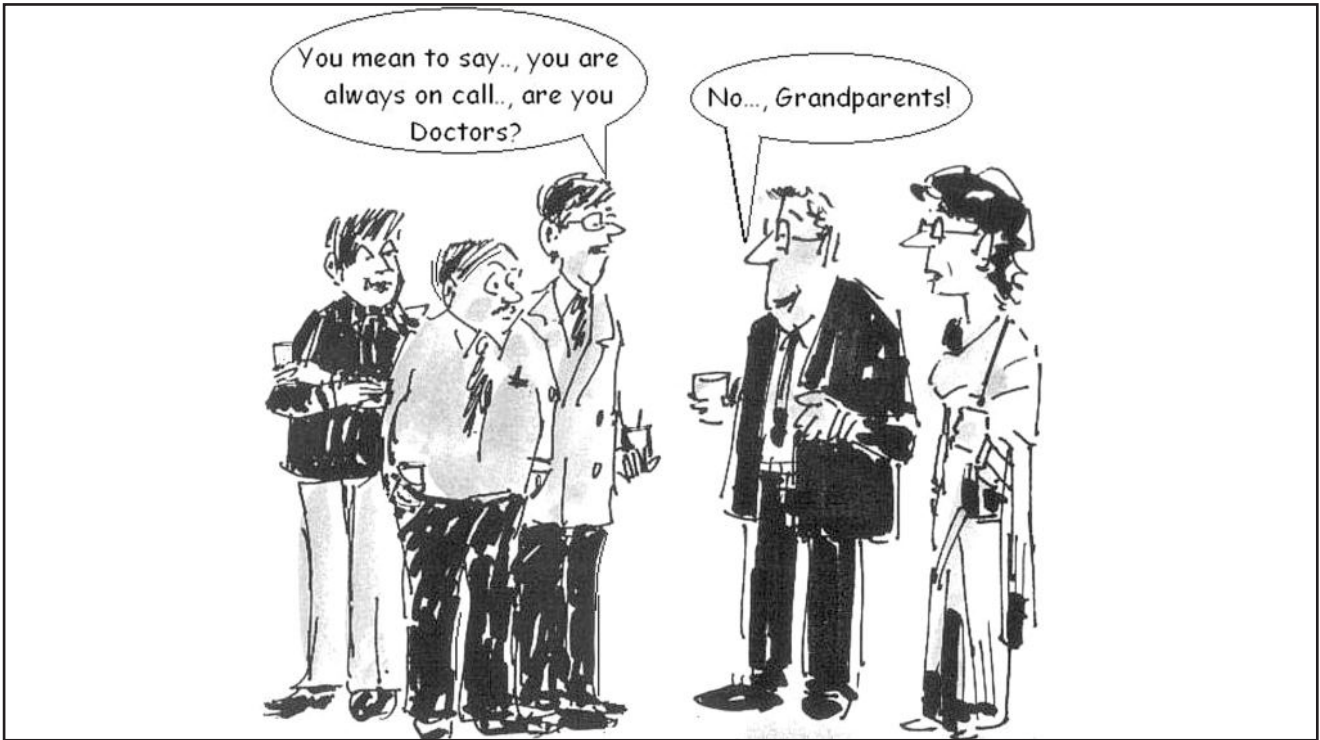
# Engaging Vanaprasthis in meaningful Activities



- Lifestyle for seniors
- Health, Seva, Networking and Estate planning discussions
- Light entertainment
- Social mingling

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*Stay Connected*  
*Growing Old can be An ART*



## About Vanaprasthis:

- Age 50 & above: more than 100,000 Hindu Americans will retire in next few decades.
- Professionals, businessmen, home-makers.
- Involved in religious, community and professional organizations.
- Have ample time, experience and wisdom at disposal.
- Geographically dispersed.

## Mission

The Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network (HAVAN) was launched to serve the self development and identification of service fields need for retired and to be retired members of Hindu community living in America. The acronym HAVAN is chosen to reflect the transformative lifestyle stage of Vanaprasthi. The implied transformation contained in the term Vanaprasthi is a journey from often conflicted lifestyle of householder dominated with family needs and interests to conflict-free lifestyle of community service and self development reflecting the purpose and goals of Hindu way of living and leading to Self-realization. The goal is to engage them locally in meaningful community service activities, develop network, and opportunities to use their skills, specialties, and wisdom for the benefit of the society. The Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network (HAVAN) is an initiative of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).

## Conferences Overview

The very first HAVAN conference was held on May 21, 2011 at Hindu Temple of Central Indiana, May 21, 2011. The fruits of their efforts are being realized in the formation of HAVAN in the inaugural conference.

The second conference was held at the Hindu Temple of Toledo OH, November 12th, 2011.

The conferences were designed to stimulate discussion by looking thoughtfully through the lens of Vedic vision of Vanaprasthi/older adult's lifestyle-focusing on:

- Importance of perception of aging reflecting on transitional bio-psycho-socio dynamics of aging as envisioned by our Vedic rishis with their profound understanding of human life and its interconnectedness with creation
- Importance of purpose of life and living in relation with creation
- Importance of impact of place of living on our quality of life
- Importance of how we prepare as individuals and communities for our upcoming generations and aging seniors---Importance of instituting preventive health care, advance health and financial directives, etc.
- Importance of engaging temples in the development of a working community living model that enhance interactive activities between youths, adults and Vanaprasthis or older adults

### Expectation

In short, these conferences were aimed at coming up with suggestions for a dynamic working model that helps shift the focus of our groups/temples/spiritual institutions from just decisions of creating ritualistic edifices to creating - 'institutions of learning' for the future of our younger generation growing up in this country and the planet as a whole within Hindu cultural context. We would like to engage untapped energies of our Vanaprasthis/older adults with our youths and adults in reaching those decisions. The most critical contribution we can make is to become advocates for the future as to what kind of world will our grandchildren live in?

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## Summary of the second conference

**T**he second HAVAN conference was held at the Hindu Temple of Toledo on Nov 12, 2011. Forty members (mostly older adults - Vanaprasthi) of the Hindu community from OH, MI, PA area participated in the conference. The conference began with an invocation prayer by Madhav Karche, the priest of Toledo Hindu Temple. Sudershan Pasupuleti, the President of the Toledo temple, in his opening remarks reiterated conference objectives: "Engage Vanaprasthis in meaningful community service activities, develop network, and find opportunities to use their skills, specialties, and wisdom for the benefit of the society." The conference was divided into six sessions covering areas such as the Vedic vision of Vanaprasthi lifestyle, medical and behavioral issues of older adults, how Vanaprasthis can be engaged in Seva to the community and help each other with personal and emotional needs. Subba Reddy of SV Temple in Pittsburgh discussed the Vedic concept of Vanaprasthi life style emphasizing the practice of Bhakti Yoga. Dr. Vipin Kalia of Indianapolis talked about the idea of cyber Vanaprasthi e-tool where

seniors can log into a web site and seek the help and company of other seniors and younger ones too. Dr. Inder Saini of Michigan shared his 20 years of experience working with the senior group and fulfillment of their needs. He mentioned that Bhartiya Temple in Troy, MI is the focal point of their activities. Dr. Siva Yachoor of Toledo talked about the mental health aspect in which he discussed three dimensions of life: Physical, Emotional and Spiritual. He summarized that the key to peace is achieving contentment through Hindu spiritual practices. Manju Rastogi of Akron, OH shared her experiences of Seva for senior women of Bhutanese Hindu community. Gautham Madhira, a student from UMich, talked about his grandfather's influence on him and his family in moral precedent and interpretation of religious principles. At the end, conferees deliberated to start a communication newsletter to connect Vanaprasthis across the nation. Most participants endorsed the idea of organizing HAVAN conferences at the Temples across the country. ■



## Synopsis of few Presentations at the conference

# Vedantic View of Vanaprasthi

By Subba K. Reddy, Pittsburgh PA

**L**iberation from the repeated cycles of birth followed by death referred to as God-realization or Self-realization is the ultimate goal in life for all Hindus. Our ancient sages developed a wonderful system in which life is divided into four parts, Student(brahmacharya), householder(grihastha), forest dweller(vanaprastha) and finally sanyasa. If one follows the dharma assigned to each stage, one can attain liberation in one life time or it may take several births depending on the inner growth of the individual. Vanaprastha plays a very important role in realizing the ultimate goal in life. The concepts of the divine law of karma and reincarnation will be introduced followed by a brief discussion on Vedanta, the end portion of Vedas - the Upanishads. Vedanta deals with the jnana yoga and this yoga is the most difficult to practice in real life. The two yogas that are easier to practice are the

karma yoga and bhakti yoga. Hindus are currently leading their life as householders with no time for reflection on the ultimate reality. They should gradually transition from an active life to direct their energies to help the society by undertaking charitable activities to help the poor, needy and the distressed. At the same time, they must allot some time for prayer and meditation everyday to slowly eliminate the attachments to the external world. This will open the path for God-realization or Self-realization. As they reach their final years, the best option for Vanaprasthis is to offer their talents and services as seva to the society. ■

*Subba K. Reddy, a Ph.D. in Chemistry in USA, is Chairman, Trust Fund Committee of Sri Venkateswara Temple, Pittsburgh. He also established a family foundation, Govinda Mission and funded it to establish a school in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh.*

## Active Networking

By Dr. Inderjit Saini, Troy MI

**A**ctive Vanaprasthis will be ready to extend help to other seniors and will be able to receive help from others in time of need. This is only possible by active networking with each other and creating an environment for active Vanaprasthis to come forward and take a lead in specific projects. The projects like meeting on a weekly basis in local areas with the help of local temples will create bonding with each other and foster caring attitude by learning about issues of other seniors. Frequent meetings are very important for fostering such feelings.

### Projects can be:

- Volunteering for your local temple's needs as a group. Visiting sick seniors at their homes or in hospital. Taking them for doctor appointment.
- Organizing collection projects for winter clothes, blood drive, meals for the home bound seniors.

- Raising funds and providing vegetarian meals to the local soup kitchen for poor people of your community.
- Teaching our younger generations about our culture, Hindu religion and family values. ■

*Dr. Inderjit Saini, a practicing pediatrician in Troy, Michigan for the last 35 Years, founded Bharatiya Seniors under Bharatiya Temple, Troy in 1991.*





# Vedic Vision of Vanaprasthi Lifestyle

By Sree Aswath, Columbus

**T**he Vedic wisdom classifies the span of human life into four parts, the third of which is Vanaprastha. Kalidasa summarized "a Vanaprasthi is one who adopts the lifestyle of a sage, that of a muni."

"Outward movement - evolution, the path of pursuit - the pravritti maarga - is characterized by self-assertion. Inward movement - involution - the path of return - the Nivritti marga - is characterized by increasing Self-realization". In Vanaprastha stage nivritti, the characteristic of a muni, gains priority over pravritti. The success of such a lifestyle, the Veda declares, is when a man has gone beyond all fear, he is not distressed by the things he did or did not. His inner freedom permeates to his outward conduct. He has conquered anger, is truthful, non-hurting, free from envy and prejudice. He has perfected the art of ennobling all relationships. A Vanaprasthi is a role model to those in society groping in the darkness of confusion. He now, when sought after, guides others to learn the skills whereby they can resolve chaos and confusion, become less isolated, and achieve harmony all around. The practice, saadhana, of the Vanaprasthi lies in his

ability to withstand the impending shocks and sorrows of the life of an elder. Increasingly, one finds his near and dear ones passing on, the most difficult of which is loss of the spouse. In this ashrama, not only he must develop the strength to face such situations, but also must become skillful in consoling and comforting others who may also confront such calamities. In short, his lifestyle now will be signified by overcoming binding activities (rajas), dedication to contemplative life (tapas), and doing everything to see that he is the least burden on family and society. In this pursuit, before too late, he takes complete personal responsibility for his minimum material needs, dynamically serves his fellow beings, maintains healthy relationships, and his own physical and mental well being. ■

*Sree Aswath, based in Columbus, OH, learned Sanskrit and the Vedas at the Sanskrit College, Bangalore, India. He earned the title "Samskruta Sree" and has been Teaching Veda and Vedanta since 1975 and at Columbus since 1990 and has served the Bharatiya Hindu Temple at Columbus as a trustee. He works in IT management at the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, in Columbus, OH. He may be contacted via [sree.aswath@gmail.com](mailto:sree.aswath@gmail.com).*

## Vanaprasthis Exploring Media Opportunities

By Shrinarayan Chandak, Bloomington, IL

**H**indu community has the inherited qualities of serving others. To better communicate this message to our community and outside world Vanaprasthis need to explore new channels of communication.

There are many opportunities in the world of media to serve our community in USA as well as in India. Vanaprasthis have a special advantage of their lifetime experience of issues concerning the society. They have acquired a great deal of practical knowledge of socio-political issues, spiritual aspects, the eastern and western world and their outlook, living and raising a family in USA, finance and healthcare. By using the writing skills and finding ways to channelize such knowledge back to the society can be a great service to society by Vanaprasthis. It will give a satisfaction of self-



expression and of serving society.

To start with, we can write and publish well researched articles in all types of local, national and international media. The well researched articles will be useful in taking important issues to

the community and the world. Secondly, apart from print media we also need to keep up with the current digital age. Thus, we can promote blogs and websites through intra and inter network communication and with the help of social networking tools. The articles won't suffice the need as motion picture is more attractive than print media. Option like Youtube.com can prove highly effective

if we create attractive videos and maintain our Youtube channel effectively. There always is a need to preserve our culture amongst our community in the USA. Thus, we can publish books on teaching dharma and wisdom to our children in USA. In addition, we can create documentaries explaining the important rituals and traditions like pooja, symbols, mantras, wedding, and sanskars.

It's not always about writing well researched articles but the challenge that stands for us is getting them published in mainstream media. We can start reaching out local American media and also networking with Indian media journalists in USA. This will open new communication channels for us in the future. In addition, the Indian media should not be left unexplored. We should specifically stress on pertinent issues of interest to either India or USA. In order to reach Indian media, we will have to explore friendly avenues and find like minded ones to build upon. This initiative won't be effective unless we create a strong network. The network should include our American friends (including VASA) from widespread background as well as people from India. Moreover, to grow our network we can employ innovative ideas of creating speaking (like Toastmasters club) and writing forums. The forums will provide the members

benefit of collective knowledge and resources. We can collectively mobilize the information and use them for taking speaking assignments in USA and India, giving seminars on variety of subjects including communication skill development, religion, sewa, culture, politics, management, energy, environment, conflict resolution, counseling, and social services. There are endless opportunities depending on the interests of the individuals and the group they are associated with. Some examples are: reaching out other communities through interfaith dialogue, teaching in local community yoga, meditation, diet, stress-management and teamwork and productivity. Once many of us do these things, this in itself will look like a media empire. ■

*Shrinarayan Chandak, a resident of Illinois for over 40, has retired from a career in technology. He is a past official of VHP America and the Toastmasters Club. He is a regional vice President of Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh (HSS), Midwest USA and advisory board member of Sewa International - USA and Ekal USA. He is a trustee of the Hindu Temple of Bloomington. He may be contacted by email chandak101@yahoo.com*

## Vanaprasthi Village and Seva

By Dr. Vipin Kalia, MD

**I**ndianapolis  
We are just the latest participants in the "Ram Leela" of life that has been going on for thousands of years. Once you are born there are only few Guarantees. Old age and Death is the only Guarantee. Sometimes this journey is sprinkled by many hardships brought on by various diseases and the cost associated with them. People much wiser and who were here long before me have noticed this



guaranteed phenomenon and given us some Vedic Guidance on how to make this Vanprasthi stage a more fruitful, productive, and enjoyable and Serene State. Since I have medical background, my hope is to add practical steps from Medical background and point of view to make Vanprasthi a more enjoyable, productive, engaging, serene in the context of Vedic appearance. ■

*Dr. Vipin Kalia is a Professor of Medicine - Indiana University, General Internist - VA Hospital & Coordinator of Night Hospitalist Responsibilities - Johnson Memorial Hospital. He is involved in community Seva projects and may be reached via email kalia\_vipin@hotmail.com Assistant.*

# Building bridges between Generations

*By Bhakti Mehta, Pittsburgh and Preya Dave, Indianapolis*

**W**e hope that seniors can guide us as we connect Hindu youth with the Sanatan Hindu philosophy. Together, we can ensure our dharma continues to shed light in the life of millions of Hindu Americans in the years to come. Together, we can not only sustain, perpetuate and grow the spiritual, cultural and social wealth created by Vanaprasthis but also to spread it to a new generation of Hindus.



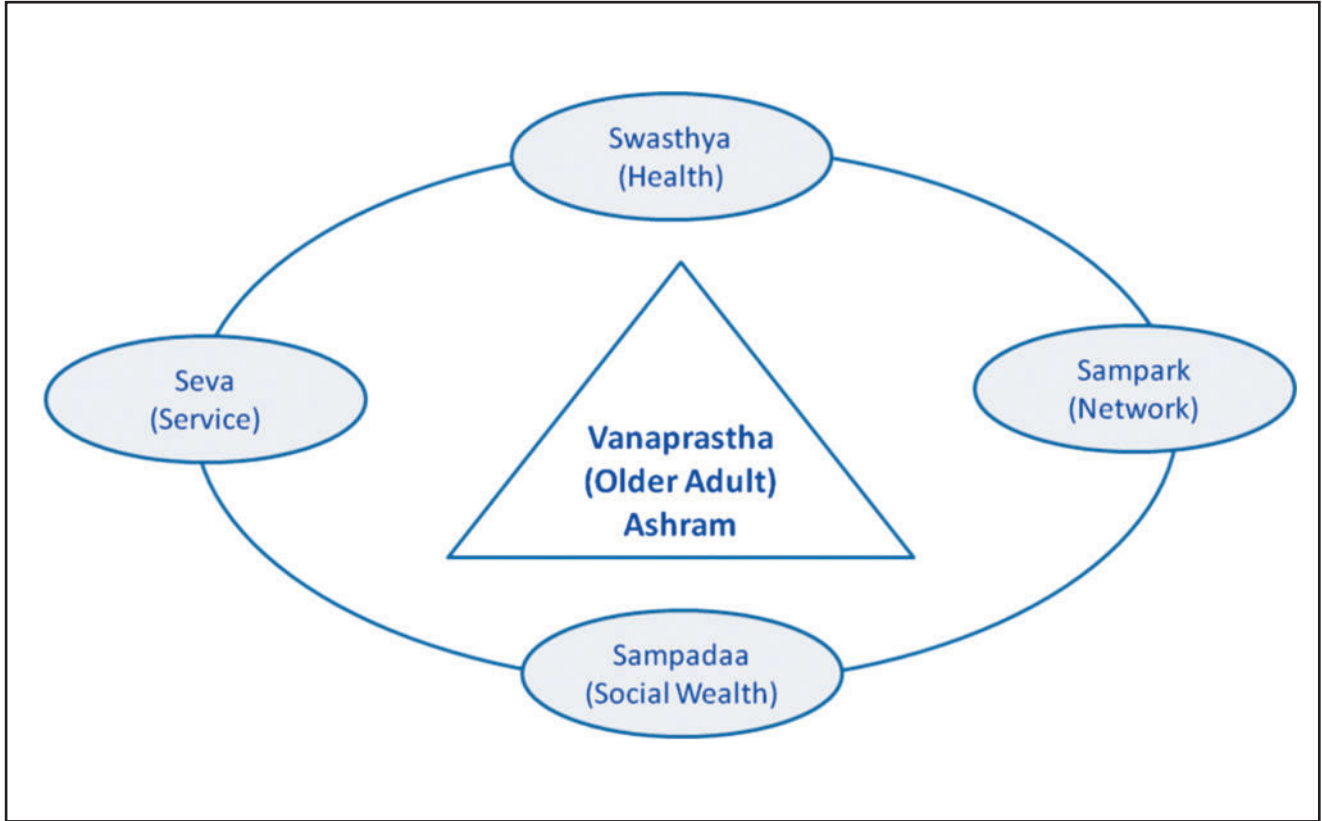
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***"Please take part to satisfy each other's needs!"***

# Plight of Hindus in West Bengal India

## An Interview with Tapan Kumar Ghosh



Sri Tapan Kumar Ghosh, President of Hindu Samhati and a well known champion of human rights in the north eastern part of India was on a tour in the US. He was in Atlanta and spoke on the crisis in West Bengal. Below is an interview with him on the Hindu human rights issue in West Bengal, India.

### ■ Please tell us about yourself.

I have been a thoroughbred and lifelong dedicated Swayamsevak in the truest sense of the word. I was initiated to the movement in my childhood and had the great opportunity to get inspiration and guidance

from the great patriots like Sri Guruji Golwalkar, Sri Eknath Ranade, Sri Rajju Bhaia, Sri Bhaurao Deoras, Sri D.B. Thengadiji and Sri Ashok Singhalji among others. Soon after completing graduation in Physics from Calcutta University, I became a full time Sangh Pracharak during the Emergency period in 1976. I held various responsibilities given to me by Sangh and VHP in many parts of Bharat for 31 years and then started Hindu Samhati in 2008.

### ■ What brings you to the US?

After founding Hindu Samhati, I was appalled at the lack of awareness regarding the plight and persecution of the Bengali Hindus among their compatriots in the rest of the world. The unfortunate events of 9/11 brought India and US closer like never before and it was for the first time that NRIs as well as many Americans started realizing that the evil of Islamic terror has put the rest of civilization in the same boat and no one can remain isolated from this singular threat to peace and prosperity. My prime vision is to travel the length and breadth of the United States (and other developed countries) and inform the public, both Hindus and non-Hindus, on the existential crisis that the Hindus of West Bengal and Assam are facing. I hope to raise a concerted effort to thwart this evil.

### ■ What are the issues ailing present day Hindus in West Bengal?

The issues ailing the present day Hindus in W. Bengal, Assam as well their counterparts in an increasingly Islamic Bangladesh can be best described with two words "existential crisis". The population of Hindus in Bangladesh has steadily dropped from 29% to under 9% by the end of the last decade while a steady decline of Hindu population continues in West Bengal. In three districts of W. Bengal and 7 districts of Assam the Hindus have become a minority. In almost all border areas the Hindus have been facing severe

stress and persecution to live on their land, pursue their livelihood and are forced to migrate to Kolkata or other parts of India. Rape and kidnapping of the women, trafficking, forceful marriage and conversion to Islam of the minor Hindus is common story in rural Bengal bordering Bangladesh. Cow slaughter is a common and effectively practiced means to scare the Hindus in addition to the desecration of deities and temples, destruction of shops, homes and other means of economic survival. The unfortunate events of the month of September 2010 in Deganga (barely 25 miles from Kolkata) should serve as a stern warning of the grim event awaiting the Hindu Bengalis; over 300 homes and shops, all belonging to the local minority Hindus were destroyed by neighboring (majority) Muslims during the month of Ramzan while the police watched in silence under strict order from the state government not to take action on the rampaging Muslims! The victim Hindus decided to abandon the traditional practice of Durga Puja in the following month in an attempt to raise awareness to the situation. They even staged a protest campaign right in front of major media houses. Yet the entire Bengali media, without exception, decided to censor the plight of the victims. I exhort the reader to compare this one-sided attack and media blackout to the media coverage provided to the Gujarat riots.

■ **What is the nature of the impending crisis that can affect Hindus elsewhere if it is not addressed adequately and promptly in West Bengal?**

If the fall of Gandhar/Sindh to Islamic hordes practically sealed the fate of Hindus in the entire northern frontier areas of historic Bharat then it will be absolutely no exaggeration to say that the fall of West Bengal will ensure an implosion of the eastern flank of India. The formation of a "Mughalistan Pathway" connecting the Islamic states of Pakistan with Bangladesh is not only on the agenda of terrorist elements in both countries but has been conceived and propagated elsewhere as discussed in the recent book "Breaking India" by Shri Rajiv Malhotra. To that extent, total and permanent ethnic cleansing of Hindus from W. Bengal, followed by all of

eastern India, is a critical goal in the scheme of things. If these developments are not addressed properly these will surely affect the integrity of India. Additionally, Bengal is already serving as a prime gateway, hideout as well as an escape route to a large number of terrorists implicated in major terrorist attacks in the rest of India.

■ **What do you suggest that should be done to deal with this issue in West Bengal?**

First and foremost, a persistent and systematic awareness campaign on the ensuing as well as impending crisis in W. Bengal has to be organized across the developed world. Second, the goal should also be to develop an efficient information network to effectively bypass the current censorship of media in Bengal (and to a large extent, across India) to communal events afflicting the Hindus. Third, most Hindu organizations, specifically those in Bengal, suffer from severe lack of funds to develop an organization that could act as a deterrent to Islamic Jihad. Funds are immediately required to counter the situation. But, I would repeat that once awareness grows I firmly believe the rest will follow.

■ **How can Hindus in US help?**

In this hour of need, I must say that both the Hindus as well as the non-Hindus facing the brunt of Islamic terror must come closer to organize a united effort against Islamization of the secular democracies, without which I'm convinced that civilization will fall to barbarism. There are numerous ways Hindus can help their co-coreligionists in W. Bengal, Assam as well in Bangladesh. They can raise awareness in the developed world, specifically by petitioning their respective government at the state and national level, thereby drawing their attention to the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Bengali Hindus. I wholeheartedly appreciate the recent mention of one Republican Congressman in the US House of Representatives on 49 million Hindus "disappearing" from Bangladesh over last 60 years. A similar type of silent cleansing of Hindus in rural areas of West Bengal and Assam is ensuing nowadays. Hindus must unite, politically and socially and rally support for other Hindu victims and I am here primarily to help organize this. ■



# Foreigners flock to Haridwar for love of Hinduism



**T**hey come here from Russia, Malaysia, Belarus, South Korea and the US lured by Hinduism which they say answers questions that have plagued them for years. The eclectic nature of the Hindu religion - one of the world's oldest - has attracted foreigners from time

Hinduism in such large numbers. "Today the Orthodox Church in Russia is like the old Communist rulers," the tour operator said. "They don't allow questions. They don't reply to questions. You have to obey them. This repels many. "A fan of Indian religious philosophy,



immemorial. However, those enticed by it now are no more the dope-smoking hippy variety of the 1970s. Foreigners flocking to Haridwar, one of the holiest Hindu holy spots, are mostly the educated, both men and women, from all parts of the globe, and have a spiritual commitment that amazes many Indians. Moscow resident Victor Shevtsov, who at 56 looks at least a decade younger, explained why Russians like him have taken to

Shevtsov said in fluent English: "Many Russians are coming here because they don't have answers (to their questions) in Orthodox Christianity. "Here, in India and in the East, religious leaders talk to you, they answer questions. "Fellow Russian Prokhor Bashkatov, a 37-year-old real estate agent, also blamed the Russian Church for his decision to embrace Hinduism. "The Church is too rigid," said the Russian who can't



understand or speak English. "It is not keeping pace with the time. I feel that my coming here is going to improve relations between Russia and India. "Both Victor and Prokhor have close links with Gayatri Parivar, a grassroots group that is organizing a mammoth event here Nov 6-10 with a view to propagating the sacred 'Gayatri Mantra'. Dmitri Kozhemyakin, in his 20s and from Belarus, has another view. He feels that the Church traditions are similar to the Vedic teachings. "And we are part of the Aryan culture too," he added. Like so many foreigners, Dasom Her, a 22-year-old South Korean who studies here, was floored after reading "Autobiography of a Yogi", a gem in spiritual literature that Paramhansa Yogananda authored in 1946 and which still sells. India, Hindu ethos and yoga had always attracted her parents, who met at a yoga class in South Korea and fell in love. When her father died, her mother decided to move to India with Dasom. After spending time in Kolkata and Santiniketan, where she mastered Bengali, the daughter and mother moved to Haridwar where both study at the Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyala. "My mother decided that India is where I will learn the values of life," said Dasom, her hands decorated with henna. Pranav Pandya, who heads the Gayatri Parivar, says there is more than one reason why foreigners take to Hinduism. "Meditation has done wonders," Pandya said. "It has provided many foreigners quiet and tranquil lives. Many have



accepted 'Gayatri Mantra' too, as their own. "The foremost mantra in Hinduism, its chanting is said to remove obstacles and increase spiritual growth. Its syllables are said to positively affect all the chakras, or energy centers, in the human body. Do the families of foreigners accept their gravitation to the Hindu religion? Some families are very supportive, others not so. Said Russia's Bashkatov: "Slowly and slowly my family is accepting my interest in Hinduism." ■

*articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-11-02/faith-and-ritual/30349472\_1\_foreigners-flock-hinduism-hindu-religion*



# First Hindu American Bal Vihar Network Conference Held in NJ

*By Tejas N. Dave*

**BERLIN, NJ—July 31, 2011**

On an otherwise sleepy summer Sunday in Southern New Jersey, about thirty teachers and administrators from various Hindu heritage schools from around the nation met at the India Temple Associate in Berlin, NJ at a conference organized by the Coalition of

(Barsana Dham) in Austin, Texas, after which Ms. Rina Patel, President of the India Temple Association, welcomed all the participants on behalf of the host temple. This was followed by a round of introductions which illustrated the diverse nature of various Bal Vihar programs and highlighted the need for a Bal Vihar Network.

“It was inspiring to see a group of dedicated



Hindu Youth (CHY). The purpose of the conference was to develop the Bal Vihar Network, a tool by which to share curricula, experiences, techniques and advice between organizations that impart knowledge to Hindu youth all over the country, and later all over the globe. The conference was held at the India Temple Association in Berlin, New Jersey on Sunday, July 31. While the main focus was to develop the Northeastern part of the Bal Vihar Network, participants from as far as El Paso, Texas were present at the conference. The conference kicked off on an auspicious note with an address by Swami Nikhilananda from the JKP Radha Madhav Dham

educators and students from different Bal Vihar programs working collectively to achieve the same goal, sustaining our Hindu Dharma. While learning about how other programs work, everyone ultimately realized there is no right or wrong answer to the learning process, it's about steady growth and being able to adapt to the needs of the youth and society today” noted Vivek Tandon, of the Southwest Hindu Temple Society in El Paso, Texas. Similar sentiments were echoed by all the attendees. Sitara Mohan, a teacher in Long Island, captured that sentiment, saying, “I realized that the Balvihar network is a stepping stone in accomplishing a more united sense of our functionalities as such diverse groups. The





Swami Nikhilananda

conference was the next step to bringing these divisions together, face to face, to share, vents, contributes and bounces ideas off of each other.” Delegates to the conference participated in four sessions, three main sessions and one breakout workshop session. The first session of the conference was centered on the curriculum that is being taught at the various Bal Vihars. The discussion started off with each participant presenting what their organization teaches and transitioned into what is not being taught by the Bal Vihars and what potentially should be added to curricula. For instance, the delegates contemplated teaching Indian history, culture, and current events, to name a few. The second session, on the strengths and weaknesses of Bal Vihars discussed aspects ranging from fees to structure but seemed to gravitate towards the issues of the lack of student interest, attendance and parental support. Many solutions also came out of the discussions. Aesha Mehta, a young Bal Vihar teacher in the Allentown, PA temple, summed up the session

well in saying, “We were able to identify key issues facing many programs and establish strategies to eliminate the problems.”

Perhaps one of the most engaging and lively sessions focused on using technology to enhance the Bal Vihar programs. The session presenter, Bhakti Mehta, a young teacher from Hindu Jain temple in Pittsburgh, PA, articulated the potential of resources such as YouTube and social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook on the future Bal Vihars. The participants further discussed how their organizations were using different forms of technology in their programs as well as some of the drawbacks of each method.

After a short chai break, the participants were divided into three groups: technology, publicity and operations. Each group was led by a member of CHY and consisted of those participants most interested in the specific topics. The different groups discussed how their particular component would factor into the development of the Bal Vihar Network. At the end of the workshop, a member from each group presented the

conclusions of their respective groups. The conference ended with the concluding remarks and a vote of thanks by Samir Asthana. All the Conference delegates left enthused, refreshed, and hopeful for the future. This spirit and energy was captured beautifully by Prerana Katti, who remarked how refreshing it was “to be in an environment surrounded by similar like minded people all with a single goal in mind—to educate the Hindu youth, our future leaders.”

The Bal Vihar Network is planning more such events in various regions all over the country, with the eventual goal being a unified community of teachers, students, parents, and administrators, all working towards sustaining the same dharma, and preserving our common rich heritage.

*To learn more, or to become an active participant, contact The Coalition of Hindu Youth at [info@chynetwork.org](mailto:info@chynetwork.org). Or you can find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/chynetwork](http://www.facebook.com/chynetwork). ■*

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प्रकृते : क्रियमाणानि गुणै : कर्माणि सर्वशः ।  
अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥२७॥

*All works are being done by the Gunas of Nature,  
but due to delusion of ego,  
people assume themselves to be the doer. (Bhagwad Gita 3:27)*

# Ego

**By Dr Mona Khaitan**

**E**go exists in all men.<sup>i</sup> It would be impossible to have a physical body without ego. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a divine incarnation, would leave the slightest hint of ego in himself otherwise the Self or Atman would separate from the physical body. The Paramhansa would lapse into the Nirvikalpa State of Samadhi routinely, sometimes a couple of times in a single day and then would return to the phenomenal plane, an impossibility for any man except for a divine incarnation. For a normal yogi attaining the same Nirvikalpa State of Samadhi, there is no return to the phenomenal existence akin to a river once it has merged into the ocean. Sri Ramakrishna says of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, “As a piece of lead thrown into a basin of mercury soon dissolves in it, so the individual soul melts away, losing its limitations, when it falls into the ocean of Brahman.”<sup>1</sup>

Ego arises in man from ignorance or Avidya of one’s divinity. Ahamev parabrahma: I am verily the Boundless Divinity is one of the four absolute truths (mahavakyas) stated in the Upanisads. “Each soul is potentially divine,” proclaims Swami Vivekananda.<sup>ii</sup> Avidya is individual ignorance or becoming forgetful of one’s divine identity and becoming entangled in universal ignorance and illusion called Maya. Patanjali’s Yogasutras (II.5) succinctly defines Avidya: “Avidya is taking the non-eternal impure, evil and non-Atman to be eternal, pure, good, and Atman respectively.”<sup>iii</sup> Why this happens is an age old question with no answer. Avidya is the result of a divine



spark of consciousness (Atman) becoming involved in matter. “Progressive involution in matter deprives it of this Self-knowledge in increasing degree and it is the privation of this knowledge, which is called Avidya.”<sup>iv</sup> It happens as our own existence proves it; we all have a physical body and at the same time we all have consciousness of Atman. Adi Sankaracarya clarifies, “Atman is verily one and without parts, whereas the body consists of many parts; and yet the people see these two as one! What else can be called ignorance but this?”<sup>v</sup>

Ignorance of one’s divine identity, Avidya leads to ego or Asmita. Asmi in Sanskrit language means “I am,” and Asmita is “I am this.” The consciousness becomes increasingly involved in the five body sheaths, from subtle to gross, namely bliss sheath

(*anandamaya kosha*), intellectual sheath (*jnanamaya kosha*), mental sheath (*manomaya kosha*), vital energy sheath (*pranamaya kosha*), and physical body (*annamaya kosha*). The infinite consciousness eventually limits itself to become “I am this body” bound by time and space. Compiled in Patanjali’s Yogasutras (II.3), this progressive entanglement in the five body sheaths leads to the duality of likes and dislikes and a great fear of death noticed in all beings, as follows:

**Ignorance ♦♦ Ego ♦♦ Likes ♦♦ Dislikes ♦♦**

**Fear of Death**

Observe a 2 year old child not yet fully identified with the physical body. If the child has been given the name Sapna, she is likely to say “Sapna is playing,” to the amused smiles of the parents. Sadly, it is the parents who are deluded and mistaken in their identity while Sapna is correctly distinguishing herself (Atman I) from the body. It is the body of Sapna playing while the “I” of Sapna is a mere onlooker. Gradually, the consciousness in Sapna becomes fully involved in the five body vehicles to the extent that Sapna now, to the approval of parents, begins to claim that “I am playing.” This ignorance of Self begins to extend to ‘my toys,’ ‘my house,’ and ‘my mother.’ The ignorance of Self or the non-dual Consciousness is so complete that the person identifies with not only his own body but with external things, places, and people. The instant Sapna’s real nature is forgotten, the limited ego assumes control. The ego is a pseudo “I” that derives its light from the Atman. The thief, ego arrogates all work to itself and starts dictating the life of an individual. Ego is a reservoir of past experiences and memories replete with innumerable desires collected from past births and present life. Likes (*raga*) and dislikes (*dvesha*) are natural offshoots of ego. When the intellect receives a stimulus to act, then it seeks approval from the ego before acting. If the action is liked, ego consents readily. If disliked by ego, then the action is normally rejected. It is an automatic subconscious process. On a spectrum of the extremely egoistic to the least ego bound individuals, the more the ego the more the likes and dislikes prevail. In a man of lesser ego, there may be a conflict between the intellect and ego for the right course of action. This duel is won by the intellect if the individual has some control over his ego. Swami Chinmayananda defines culture thus: “Man’s

control of nature external is called civilization. His control of nature internal is called culture.”<sup>vi</sup> The nature or ego with its likes and dislikes is more controlled in a cultured man than a brute. A secular education replete with social refinements fails to guarantee that a person is cultured. A cultured man is one who has conscious control of his ego and allows the intellect to choose the right course of action overcoming personal preferences. On the other hand, an uncultured man is held hostage by egoistic desires and preferences in any decision making process. While Avidya is individual ignorance, Maya is universal ignorance that veils Reality and projects this phenomenal world. Adi Sankaracarya describes Maya thus, “she has three Gunas known as *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*, named after their respective functions.”<sup>vii</sup> An



individual is under the influence of all three Gunas at all times. The relative proportion of each Guna determines the overall tendency of an individual. Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita in a much earlier time describes to Arjuna the behavior of a person under the influence of *tamas*:

“Ignorance, inactivity, carelessness, and delusion arise when *Tamas* is predominant, O Arjuna.” (B.G. 14:13)<sup>viii</sup>

A man of predominantly *tamsic* nature functions at the basest level of ego. All his responses to external stimuli are based on likes and preferences dictated by the ego. He is led by inner desires emanating from ego. There is no thinking involved. It is a life lived at a level below that of an animal. Animals lack intellectual discrimination and use instinct to survive; while a *tamsic* man possesses intellectual capacity to reason but fails to use it entirely. On a higher scale, a predominantly *rajasic* man also has strong preferences, likes, and desires dictated by the ego.