



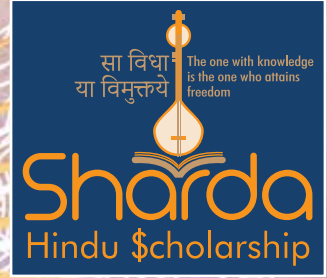
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# HINDU VISHWA

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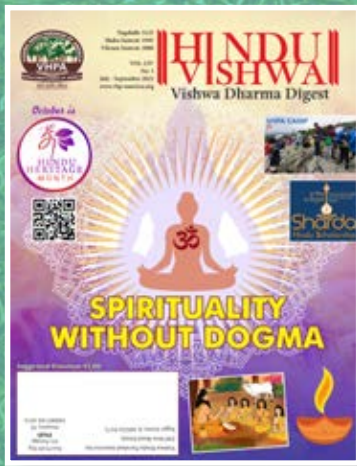
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यथा सर्वगतं सूक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।  
सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥

– श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता, 13.33

Space holds everything within it, but being subtle, does not get contaminated by what it holds. Similarly, though its consciousness pervades the body, the soul is not affected by the attributes of the body.

yathā sarva-gataṁ saukṣhmyād ākāśhaṁ nopalipyate  
sarvatrāvasthito dehe tathātmā nopalipyate

*Bhagvad Gita, 13.33*

## ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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# May The Divine Blessings of **Shiv** and **Shakti** Guide Our Way

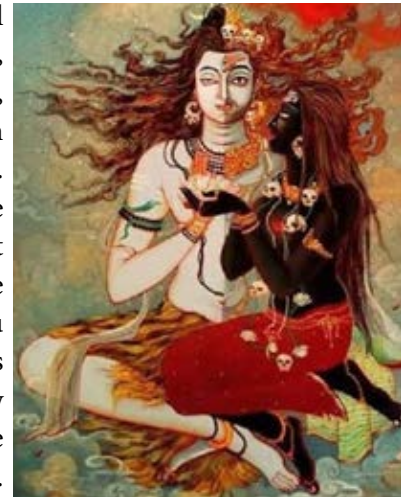
It's that time of year again. Every day, every week and every month is a season of joy in our culture with its unique blessings. However, nothing focuses the mind better than designating a month for the celebration of our heritage. Few understand this as profoundly as Hindus, who have perfected the philosophy of perceiving the world and even God in a multitude of diverse forms including formlessness.

In our heritage, spanning several millennia, every day of the year is likely a birthday of a great luminary, and/or a day worth remembering for an event of great consequence. We celebrate these occasions individually in our own unique and diverse ways. Yet, we also come together for one Diwali, one Holi, and many other days that are grand representing the combination and culmination of many such celebrations.

Hindu Heritage Month in October is one such month, where we dedicate ourselves to celebrating, exhibiting, expressing, and sharing our heritage with the people and communities we coexist in this universe. The recognition of this month is accelerating with each passing year as more people, organizations and communities join in the celebrations. We delved into the meaning of heritage in the last year's issue of Hindu Heritage Month in this magazine. I aim to extend that discussion with the words of one of the great rishis of the last century, Sri Aurobindo. He proclaimed of our heritage, "We are no ordinary people. We are a people as ancient as our hills and rivers and we have behind us a history of manifold greatness, not surpassed by any other people."

Recently, I had to cremate my father at Manikarnika Ghat on the banks of the sacred Ganges River in the holy city of Kashi. As his body turned into ashes, I contemplated not only the enduring nature of hills and rivers but also the eternal flame Agni (a symbol of light and knowledge) that

leads to mukti (spiritual liberation). This flame, lit by Adiyogi Mahadev, has continued to burn since time immemorial. It underscores the continuity of the ancient with the vitality of the present. In the Hindu worldview, death is another name for a new birth, a renewal of the adornment of the Atman.



Is heritage solely about the past? What does it inform us about our future? Sri Aurobindo further elaborates, "All we do or create must be consistent with the abiding spirit of our culture, but framed into a greater harmonized rhythm to the call of a more luminous future. If faith in us and fidelity to the spirit of our culture are the first requisite of a continued and vigorous life, recognition of greater possibilities is a condition not less indispensable. There cannot be a healthy and victorious survival if we make the past a fetish instead of an inspiring impulse."

As the Pragyán rover gracefully explores the enigmatic Shiv Shakti point on the moon, it casts a brilliant light on another facet of Hindu heritage—a beckoning path towards the future. This path weaves together the profound yoga of Shiv and Shakti, the eternal cosmic dance of creation and creative dissolution, the seamless continuity of past and future, the harmonious fusion of science and spirituality, and the unwavering imperative of karma aligned with dharma. In this grand journey, may the divine blessings of Shiv and Shakti guide our way.



# Sanatana Dharma PART II

By Dr. Bharat Patel



**W**hat is that, Truth? The Truth of all three is only one. It is expressed at various locations in the *Upaniṣads*.  
ईशा वास्यं इदं सर्वं, *īśā vāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ*, all this is pervaded by the supreme imperishable Reality. (ईश उपनिषद्, *īśa Upaniṣad* 1).

One Truth is perceived in infinite forms. That is, one Truth manifests in unlimited forms.

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म, *sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahm*, all this, no doubt, is Brahman. (छान्दोग्य उपनिषद्, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1)

The one that provides the vision of that Truth is the *Sanātana Dharma*, the *Sanātana Vaidika Dharma*,

or the *Hindū Dharma*. Whatever is there, whatever exists, whether perceptible or imperceptible, is only the *abhivyakti* (अभिव्यक्ति, expression) - the manifestation of the supreme imperishable Reality. To provide the vision of that Truth, *Veda-Śāstra* has provided a vision of life and a way of life. In that vision of life, the fourfold *Puruṣārtha* (पुरुषार्थ, object of human pursuit): *Dharma* (धर्म), *Artha* (अर्थ),<sup>1</sup> *Kāma* (काम),<sup>2</sup> and *Mokṣa* (मोक्ष)<sup>3</sup> are provided. In the way of life, the *Varṇāśrama* (वर्णाश्रम) System is provided, consisting of the fourfold functional classes: *Brāhmaṇa* (ब्राह्मण, knowers of the Brahman who impart knowledge),<sup>4</sup> *Kṣatriya* (क्षत्रिय, providers of security),<sup>5</sup> *Vaiśya* (वैश्य, engagers in commerce),<sup>6</sup> and *sūdra* (शुद्र, providers

1. *Artha* (अर्थ) means the instruments for the sustenance of life and incorporates wealth, career, activity to make a living, financial security, and economic prosperity. Its typical use is regarding wealth, material, or worldly possessions. It is also used to express purpose or aim.
2. *Kāma* (काम) signifies lust, desire, passion, or pleasure of the senses. It is an internal force that produces an intense desire for something or circumstance while already having a significant amount of the desired object. It can take any form, such as the lust for sexuality, money, or power. It can take such mundane forms as the desire for food as distinct from the need for food or the passion for redolence when one lust for a particular smell that brings back memories.
3. *Mokṣa* (मोक्ष) means liberation, the attainment of eternal (नित्य, *Nitya*) and immovable (अचल, *Acala*) happiness (सुख, *Sukha*) and complete (अत्यन्त, *Atyantā*) removal (निवृत्ति, *Nivṛutti*) of pain and suffering (दुःख, *Duḥkha*) is *Mokṣa*. Alternatively, attainment of the *Brahman* and freedom from the bondage of the *Saṁsāra* (संसार, world) is *Mokṣa*, meaning liberation from the world of transmigrating lives and attainment of the supreme-bliss (परमानन्द, *Paramānanda*).
4. The qualities of a *Brāhmaṇa*, as provided in BG 18.42 *Brahma-Prakṛti* (ब्रह्म-प्रकृति), are: control of the mind, restraint of the senses, austerity, purity, forgiveness, simplicity, faith in preceptors and scriptures, knowledge of the scriptures, and realized knowledge.
5. The qualities of a *Kṣatriya*, as provided in BG 18.43 *Kṣātra-Prakṛti* (क्षत्र-प्रकृति), are valor, splendor, fortitude, skill, charity, leadership attribute, and not fleeing in war.
6. The qualities of a *Vaiśya*, as provided in BG 18.44 *Vaiśya-Prakṛti* (वैश्य-प्रकृति), are agriculture, protection of cows, and commerce.

of labor)<sup>7</sup> and the four stages of life: *Brahmacarya-āśrama* (ब्रह्मचर्य आश्रम, bachelor student stage),<sup>8</sup> *Gr̥hastha-āśrama* (गृहस्थ-आश्रम, householder stage),<sup>9</sup> *Vānaprastha-āśrama* (वानप्रस्थ-आश्रम, retired stage),<sup>10</sup> and *Samnyāsa-āśrama* (सन्यास-आश्रम, renunciation stage).<sup>11</sup> *Bhagavāna Śrī Kṛṣṇa* (भगवान् श्रीकृष्ण) in *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā* (श्रीमद् भगवद्गीता) 4.13 has said-चातुर्वर्ण्यं मसा सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः, *cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭaṃ guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ*, the fourfold functional class system (*Catura-Varṇa*) was created by Me according to the distinctions of the constituents (गुण, *guṇa*) and actions (कर्म, *karma*) of Prakṛti.

In the fourfold *Puruṣārtha*, Dharma is the means (साधन, *sādhana*). *Mokṣa* is the ultimate objective. *Mahākavi Kālidāsa* (महाकवि कालिदास) in his great poem "*Kumārasambhava* (कुमारसम्भव)," 5.33, has said that शरीरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम्, *śarīramādyam khalu dharmasāadhanam*, the body is the means for Dharma. Therefore, every act done through the body, senses, mind, and intellect ought to be done by *Dharma*. They should be done as Śāstra enjoined moral duty (कर्तव्य, *kartavya*). Pursuing Artha (wealth) and Kama (desire) only gives transient happiness, though, in the end, the result is only unhappiness. That is why they



are not beneficial (श्रेय, *śreya*) but are just dear (प्रेय, *preya*). Therefore, both acquisition of wealth (*Artha*) and fulfillment of desires (Kama) ought to be done righteously (धर्ममय, *dharmamaya*) by śāstra enjoined principles.

The system of *Varṇāśrama* naturally evolved to maintain the sustainability of society. It is not an artificial system but refers to natural classifications that appear to various degrees in all humanities. From the Vedantic perspective personality or nature of individuals are varied based on the extent of goodness, purity, virtuosity (सात्विक, *sātvika*), passion (राजसिक, *rājasika*), and sixfold mutations viz. lust, anger,

7. The qualities of a *śūdra*, as provided in BG 18.44 *śādra-Prakṛti* (शूद्र-प्रकृति) is serving through labor.
8. *Brahmacarya-āśrama* means the first bachelor student stage of life from childhood to around 25. This stage focuses on education and includes the practice of celibacy. In Vaidika times, students went and lived in a *Gurukula* (गुरुकुल, house of a preceptor), acquiring knowledge of science, philosophy, scriptures, and logic, practicing self-discipline, working to earn remuneration (दक्षिण, *dakṣiṇā*) to be paid to the preceptor, and learning to live a life of *Dharma* (righteousness, morals, duties).
9. *Gr̥hastha-āśrama* means the second stage of an individual's married life, from the age of 25 to the age of 50, with the duties of maintaining a household, raising a family, educating own children, and leading a family-centered and virtuous social life. The householder stage is considered the most important of all stages in a sociological context. Human beings in this stage not only pursue a moral life, but they also produce food and wealth that sustain people in other stages of life and the continuation of progeny. The stage also represents where the most intense physical, sexual, emotional, occupational, social, and material attachments exist in a human being's life.
10. *Vānaprastha-āśrama* means one who gives up worldly life or literally retires to the forest. In this third stage of life, from the age of 50 to 75, a person hands over household responsibilities to the next generation, takes an advisory role, and gradually withdraws from the world. It is a transition phase from a householder's life with a greater emphasis on wealth, pleasure, and desires to one with a greater focus on spiritual liberation.
11. *Samnyāsa-āśrama* means the last stage of life marked by the renunciation of material desires and prejudices, represented by a state of disinterest and detachment from material life, generally without any meaningful property or home, and focused on liberation, peace, and simple spiritual life. Anyone could enter this stage after completing the *Brahmacarya* stage of life.



greed, delusion, excessive pride, and envy (तामसिक, *tāmasika*) constituents present in their personality, and thus their suitability for distinct professional duties and activities. Individuals have different innate tendencies for work and exhibit a variety of personal attributes. There are also natural phases in life when performing certain activities is easier and more rewarding. Individuals best realize their potential by considering such natural arrangements and that society should be structured and organized accordingly.

It should be remembered that the functional classifications were not intended to represent the superiority of one over the other. The distribution of activities was based on one's nature, on one's intrinsic attributes rather than birth in those functional classifications. The classes were not considered higher or lower among themselves. Each *Varṇa* and *Āśrama* had its own specified function. What may be desirable for one section of society may be degrading for another. For example, absolute non-violence, which includes refraining from animal sacrifice, is essential for the priestly class but considered wholly unworthy of a *Kṣatriya*. Generating wealth and producing children are necessary for householders, but intimate contact with money and women is spiritually suicidal for the renouncer. Underlying all these apparent differences was the common goal of advancing in spiritual life based on *Sanātana-Dharma*. Since the center of society was the supreme imperishable Reality, everyone worked according to their intrinsic attributes to sustain themselves and the community; and make their life a success by progressing towards realizing the supreme imperishable Reality. Thus, in the system, there was unity in diversity. Diversity is inherent in nature and can never be removed. We have various limbs, and they all perform different functions. Expecting all limbs to perform the same functions is futile. Seeing them all as different is not a sign of ignorance but factual knowledge of their utilities.

Similarly, the variety among human beings cannot be ignored. Party leaders formulate ideologies even in communist countries where equality is the foremost principle. The military wields guns and protects the nation; farmers cultivate the land, and industrial workers do mechanical jobs. The four classes of occupations exist there, despite all attempts to equalize. The *Varṇāśrama* system recognized the diversity in human nature and scientifically prescribed duties and occupations matching people's nature. Unfortunately, the *Varṇāśrama* system is maligned today and has lost its original intent. It is viewed as a social class or a caste system, anglicized from Portuguese *Çcasta*, who came to India in the late fifteenth century and propagated an erroneous view of the *Varṇāśrama* system to convert Indians to Christianity. Today, people continue to wrongly assign functional class as caste based on birth when in reality, the original intent was the assignment by *Karma Saṃskāra* (कर्म संस्कार).

Earlier, the ultimate *Puruṣārtha*, the supreme goal described, was *Mokṣa*. So, what is *Mokṣa*? *Mokṣa* means liberation. But liberation from what? In simple terms, liberation means freedom from *Bandhana* (बन्धन, bondage). Bondage of what? That bondage is not physical. It is only this - human beings perceive themselves to be extremely unhappy (दुःखी, *duḥkhī*). Liberation is to be free from unhappiness (दुःख, *duḥkha*). One inflicted with pain and suffering desires freedom (निवृत्ति, *nivrutti*) from that *duḥkha*, that is, the complete (अत्यन्त, *atyanta*) freedom from pain and suffering and the attainment (प्राप्ति, *prāpti*) of eternal (नित्य, *nitya*) and immovable (अचल, *acala*) happiness (सुख, *sukha*). Individuals have a sense of incompleteness, physical incompleteness, and undoubtedly emotional incompleteness. There is an ongoing sense of inadequacy centered on "I," the self. The vision that removes the incompleteness and inadequacy in humans is the *Sanātana Vaidika Dharma*. That vision is provided in the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* and synthesized in the *Śrīmad Bhagavad*



*Gītā*. In the fourth verse of the *Gītā Dhyāna* (गीता ध्यान,) it is said-

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपाल नन्दनः, पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता  
दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत्,

*sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopāla nandanah, pārtho vatsah sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat*, all the *Upaniṣads* are cows. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* is a milker. Arjuna is a calf. Wise and pure men drink the milk, the supreme immortal ambrosia of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

*Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā* provides the means to attain eternal and immovable happiness and the complete removal of pain and suffering (दुःख, *duḥkha*). The quest for perfection and completeness is not something one must go somewhere to get it. Wherever one is, however one is, one is indeed complete. Eternal and immovable happiness is one's true nature (स्वरूप, *svarūpa*). It is a definite tenet of *Vedānta* (वेदान्त)<sup>12</sup> that, though the true nature of a *Jīva* (जीव),<sup>13</sup> is *Asti-Bhāti-Priya* (अस्ति-भाति-प्रिय),<sup>14</sup> and it is always attained (नित्य प्राप्त, *nitya prāpta*) yet due to impurity (मल, *Mala*),<sup>15</sup> vacillations (विक्षेप, *Vikṣepa*)<sup>16</sup> and shrouding (आवरण, *Āvaraṇa*)<sup>17</sup> - the three faults (दोष, *Doṣa*) residing in the conscience, *Jīva* has a perception of non-attainment and separateness. The

issue is only ignorance. Ignorance of not knowing one's true nature, *Ātma ajñāna* (आत्म अज्ञान). The *Mahāvākya* (महावाक्य) of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7, तत् त्वम् असि, *tat tvam asi*, that thou art, enlightens one that "what you are looking for is in yourself." The cause of the perception of non-attainment and separateness is the ignorance of not knowing one's true nature, the nature of one's *Ātmā*. When knowledge is acquired, ignorance naturally vanishes. So, what is the nature of knowledge? The nature of knowledge is twofold. First, knowledge is objective. That is, it is based on the object (वस्तुतन्त्र, *vastutantra*). One gets knowledge of just how the thing is. If an object is black, one will only know it in black form. Second, knowledge will happen only when there is an activity of doubtless irrefutable knowledge (प्रमाण व्यापार, *pramāṇa vyāpāra*).

*Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, as the *Brahma Vidyā* (ब्रह्म विद्या), provides *Upadeśa* (उपदेश, spiritual guidance), knowledge (ज्ञान, *jñāna*) of the true nature of the *Ātmā* (आत्मा). It provides the knowledge that the true nature of the *Ātmā* is *Asti-Bhāti-Priya*. It is the *Jagat Kāraṇa* (जगत् कारण, cause of the universe). It is *abhinna* (अभिन्न, non-distinct) from *Īśvara*, the supreme imperishable Reality, the Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). As stated in *Rgveda*

12. *Vedānta* means "the end of the Vedas," and reflects ideas espoused in the *Upaniṣads* (उपनिषद्), specifically, knowledge and liberation.
13. *Jīva* means the conscious element in the body who is the doer-enjoyer. It is the embodied *Ātmā* (आत्मा), i.e., the delimited *Ātmā*. It is the pure *Ātmā* on whom I-ness sense of the body, senses, mind, and intellect are superimposed due to nescience. It has also been referred to as *Jīvātmā* (जीवात्मा), *Dehī* (देही), *śarīrī* (शरीरी), *Jīva-Sākṣī* (जीव-साक्षी), Soul, or Spirit. Just as there is no distinction between the space enclosed in a pot and the pervasive space, and upon the destruction of the pot is only the pervasive space. Likewise, there is no distinction between a pure *Jīva* and the *Paramātmā* (परमात्मा, the supreme imperishable Reality).
14. *Asti-Bhāti-Priya* means the Existent-Conscious-Bliss. *Asti* means the sense of perpetual existence, the sense of *Astitva* (अस्तित्व, existence, of being), the sense of *Sat* (सत्, real). *Bhāti* means the sense of knowledge, illumination, wisdom, the sense of consciousness (भातित्व, *Bhātītva*). *Priya* means the sense of happiness or *Ānanda* (आनन्द, bliss). *Asti-Bhāti-Priya* is synonymous with *Saccidānanda* (सच्चिदानन्द, Real Conscious Bliss), a compound word from *Sat* (सत्), meaning that which is the real, existent, or true essence, *Cit* (चित्), meaning the conscious element, and *Ānanda* meaning bliss. All three are considered inseparable from the nature of the supreme imperishable Reality or the Brahman.
15. *Mala* (मल) means impurity, dirt.
16. *Vikṣepa* (विक्षेप) means vacillations, the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration of the mind.
17. *Āvaraṇa* (आवरण) means the veil of ignorance.





# Lingua Franca

By Sarika Jaswani

**H**ow do you define homosapiens? ... Memories.... which in turn builds up the algorithm that defines us. If 00001111 defines one person, then a variation of 00010111 defines the other. That fault in the algorithm are the defining moments around which each one of us develops a personality to function, to respond and act to a given command.

If memories are the defining force, pablum is the driving force. World runs on and for vittles and victuals. The variety of grubs and cuisines are the proof.

If you look at it in a strictly technical sense....unless if electricity wouldn't have had been invented, an electronic brain wouldn't have been invented. Our visceral force drives us. Confirm it from our great great great great ....great ancestors.

They braved the volcanos, floods, storms, hurricanes for greener pastures, for better food accessibility. We would have found ourselves living in caves and trending in loincloth if our ancestors weren't chivalrous enough to prefer a nomadic life over stationary subsistence.

Enroute we learnt to make mammoth skin tepees, tools for hunting, fire, utensils, jewelry and so much more. Wherewithal in albatross decided our sustenance.

That's when human learned to save.....hoard. There is a direct connection between playing jeopardy and hoarding points(whoops ....winning points). It's a consanguineous history that peril brought uncertainty;

squirreling accoutrements gave a sense of security. That security in turn gave the promise of more chances of viability.

This ambition for continuance is responsible for contention, conflict and combat since time immemorial. Somewhere between this scuffle language of communication was born.

Coming back to algorithms. Computers, when first built, were made to understand human language, take the commands, and get the job done. Whereas today, we have programmers who are computer linguistics and can talk in its language to tweak its algorithms at will.

HTML represents the skeleton, CSS becomes the skin, JavaScript represents the behaviour of this giant mechanical brain to display & communicate our stock markets, economy and information.

*I cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification, aided by signs and gestures, of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries.— Charles Darwin, 1871.*









# Birthdays

By Jaya Asthana

I will never forget the time when I was in a grocery check-out line one dreary winter day. A young girl in front of me turned to me and said, out of the blue, “It’s my birthday next August.” The joy and anticipation on her face drove away all my winter blues.

Who doesn’t like birthdays? Full of excitement and joy, birthdays conjure up images of cakes, candles, decorations, presents, friends, laughter and happiness all around. Children especially look forward to birthdays, sometimes preparing for the next birthday as soon as the current one is over.

One of the traditions around birthdays is the birthday cake and blowing out the birthday candles. I have asked many people about this custom, but nobody is able to give me an answer. “It’s just something that is done, it’s a tradition,” say most people. So, I decided to ask the Twenty-first-century Guru, Google. Here is what I found.

*“The earliest stories of candles and cakes are linked to the ancient Greeks. Once a month, the Greeks would celebrate the birth of Artemis by making round cakes and lit candles would be placed on the cake. Artemis is the Goddess of the Moon. The round cakes represented the moon, and the candles were to represent the reflected moonlight. It was believed that when the candles were blown out, the smoke would carry wishes and prayers to the sky-dwelling gods.”*

*“Around the Middle Ages, Germans brought about a more birthday-centric celebration closer to what we see today in the U.S. Kinderfeste was a child’s birthday celebration in which candles were placed on a cake and each one represented one year of life. An extra candle was added to the cake to bring hope for another full year of life, placed in the center of the cake as “the light of life.” However, the candles were allowed to burn all day long and basically coat the cake in wax. This was done because Germans believed children were especially susceptible to evil spirits on the day of their birth. At the end of the day, the birthday kid was told to blow out all the candles at once in hopes that their smoke would find its way up to Heaven, similar to the Greeks’ offering to Artemis.”*

Most people follow the tradition of blowing out the candles on the cake without knowing the reasons behind it. However, a 2017 study from the Journal of Food Research found that blowing out birthday candles on a cake increased the bacteria on the icing by 1400%. This is usually the bacteria that comes out of the mouth of the person blowing on the cake.

The Covid era has brought about another concern. Dr. S. Patrick Kachur, professor of population and family health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, cautioned, “Blowing out candles can expel virus particles, just like breathing,



talking, singing, shouting, coughing and sneezing, if the person is infected."

Another birthday tradition is the "sweet sixteen." Many Indian parents celebrate a girl's sixteenth birthday with great enthusiasm, sometimes as grand as a wedding. There is nothing equivalent to this for a boy. Why is that? This celebration is a throwback to the British Victorian era.

During Victorian times, a young girl was sheltered and not allowed to mingle in society. When she turned sixteen, she was considered old enough to mingle with the opposite sex and choose her own partner. A grand ball was arranged by her parents, in which she was "presented" to society, introduced to eligible bachelors, and was given the permission to start dating. That is where the concept of "sweet sixteen" arose, and why there is no such equivalent for boys. It is basically giving the girl permission to date.

### **What does the Hindu tradition say about blowing out candles?**

In the Hindu tradition, Agni Dev, the God of Fire, is represented by the flame. When we light a candle or a diya (an earthen lamp), we invoke Agni Dev to come into our midst to bless us. Since the flame provides light, it also symbolizes knowledge. In olden times, the diya was made from clay or mud. Today it can be made from metal or other substances. In order to light it, there needs to be a wick which is made of cotton, which needs to be immersed in ghee. The top of the wick should be out of the ghee for it to burn, if it is completely immersed, it will not burn.

All auspicious occasions start with the lighting of a lamp. Light symbolizes knowledge and darkness

symbolizes ignorance. Ishwar is "chaitanya", the knowledge principle, the source that enlivens and illuminates us all. Knowledge removes ignorance just as light removes darkness. Knowledge backs all our actions, good or bad. That is why the lamp is lit as a "witness" to our thoughts and actions during any auspicious occasion.

The traditional lamp has a special significance. The oil or ghee in the lamp symbolizes our vaasanas or negative tendencies. The wick symbolizes our ego. When lit by spiritual knowledge, the negative tendencies get exhausted slowly and the ego finally burns away. Like the wick, even when immersed in the negativity of the world around us, we should try to remain above it. Just as the flame of the lamp always burns upwards, we also should strive for higher ideals. A single lamp can light hundreds more, just as a man of knowledge can give it to many others. Knowledge never diminishes when shared with others but increases in clarity and conviction.

That is also the symbolism of the candle. When we extinguish the candle, we create darkness, we invite ignorance into our home. In the process of blowing out the birthday candle, we also unknowingly spit on the fire, which is a symbol of Agni Dev.

So the next time you blow out the candle on a birthday cake, think for a minute. Do you want to bring darkness into your home on the auspicious occasion of your family member's birthday? It may be better to pick up the candle and perform "Aarti" of the birthday person, thus honoring him or her.

### **About the Author**

*Jaya Asthana, based in Boston, is VHPA GC member and a prolific writer.*





# Spirituality Without Dogma

## (Part of the “Contributions of Hindu Thought to the World” series)

Dr. Jai G. Bansal, VP of Education - Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA)

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“In Sanatan Dharma...I discovered the basic truths of all religions in a way that the oneness of God and religion is comprehensively understood” - Radhanath Swami (formerly, Richard Slavin), ISKCON Teacher

*Editor’s Note: This article is based on “Hinduism and America,” a coffee table book that chronicles the 250-year journey of Hindu thought in America.*

Although the Western world has been informally interacting with Hinduism for many centuries, the most recent tryst of America with the Hindu thought system began some 125 years ago with the establishment of Vedanta societies by Swami Vivekananda in New York City, Los Angeles, Boston and other major cities. To a society accustomed to strict conformity in matters of faith, the liberated thinking of the Vedantic ideology would have felt like a breath of fresh air in that it encouraged freedom to choose from multiple paths, beliefs, and practices – all promising to lead to the same “Ultimate Truth”.

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some of the more easily accessible elements of Hinduism such as Yoga and meditation gained currency and captured the imagination of the American society. However, by this time a great many Americans had already internalized the spiritual teachings of Vedanta, integrated them into their lives, applied them to their areas of expertise, and brought forth something new and different but nevertheless imbued with Hindu ideas. Many of these adapters became transmitters, influencing others who in turn influenced still others, and each step of the process added tributaries and

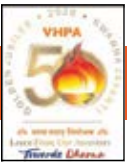
streams to the accelerating flow of Hindu ideas into America’s collective psyche.

In the words of the American historian Will Durant, “*Perhaps in return for conquest, arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, pacifying love for all living things*” - a perfect summation of what the ageless Hindu philosophy had to offer to the West.

### Early Interactions

Introduction of Hindu philosophy to the West can be traced back to early 15<sup>th</sup> century when Christian missionaries accompanying the early European colonizers returned home with large collections of Sanskrit texts - Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas - the very essence of the Hindu scriptures. These texts were studied, translated, researched, and taught as part of the broader curriculum in world religions – with little or no involvement of Hindu scholars.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803-1882), often referred to as the ‘Sage of Concord’, was introduced to Hindu thought system in early 1800s when he was an undergraduate student at Harvard University, and



was one of the first American thinkers to be deeply influenced by it. From transmigration to the divine purpose of human life, he imbibed as much as his voracious reading habits allowed him to, formulating his own theories along the way. Amongst the various texts he read was the Bhagavad Gita which, according to him, was *'the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us'*.

What he learnt from these ancient scriptures made a deep impression on Emerson and his life's work. For instance, in *'The Over-Soul'*, he reiterates the concept of everything around us being an embodiment of the Brahman. In *'Illusions'*, he refers to the concept of maya with a quote from the *Vishnu Purana*. In his 1836 essay *'Nature'*, he declared that the individual soul and the universal spirit were one – in other words, *'Atman is Brahman'*, a uniquely Vedantic concept. In 1836, he began the Transcendental Club, exchanging ideas with other philosophers and delivering lectures that would influence many future generations in the West.

Emerson's student and admirer **Henry David Thoreau** (1817-1862) inherited not only his mentor's immense library but also his passion for Hindu thought. *"Whenever I have read any part of the Vedas, I have felt that some unearthly and unknown light illuminated me. In the great teaching of the Vedas, there is no touch of the sectarianism. It is of all ages, climes, and nationalities, and is the royal road for the attainment of the Great Knowledge,"* was his response after reading extracts from the Vedas.

Another of Emerson's followers was a poet, thinker, philosopher and carpenter, until he discovered the spiritual path. Emerson's essays led **Walt Whitman** (1819-1892) to Hindu philosophy, which in turn introduced him to the Bhagavad Gita. Be it his self-published poems under the title *Leaves of Grass*, or his poem *Passage to India*, Whitman was full of praise for India, a land that, to him, represented meditation and spiritual philosophy. It is believed that he took the

path of Bhakti yoga, the path of devotion to the eternal spirit of Brahman, which is reflected in his poem, *Song of Myself*, part of his *Leaves of Grass* collection.

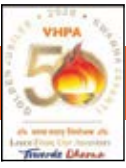
It is said that the book *'The Key to Theosophy'* was an eye opener for Mahatma Gandhi as it 'stimulated in him the desire to read books on Hinduism and helped dispel the notion that *'Hinduism was rife with superstition'*. The book interestingly was not written by an Indian but by **Helena Petrovna Blavatsky** (1831-1891), a philosopher who would go on to establish the Theosophical Society. After Blavatsky's death, the Theosophical Society was taken over by a British socialist and theosophist, **Annie Besant** (1847-1933), who believed that *'Hinduism is the soul of India. Without Hinduism there can be no India'*. Besant was not only a crusader for Indian independence but was also instrumental in promoting Hindu philosophy and literature.

Another young mind, **Ernest Holmes** (1887-1960), began his spiritual journey reading Emerson when he was still in his teens, but soon graduated to reading Indian scriptures, which helped him understand Emerson's thoughts and philosophies better. Holmes' first steps in the direction of *'Science of Mind'* began as a book in 1926, with the same title. It went on to become a best-seller and soon paved the way for Religious Science, part of the New Thought movement. While his philosophy was based on a synthesis of several influences from the East, the impression of Vedanta and the Bhagavad Gita are unmistakable. Holmes spoke of the Absolute and the unified presence of the Brahman in this universe and initiated prayers that were inspired by the Vedanta.

The Vedanta and the Upanishads have also influenced many concepts in modern science, quantum physics in particular. **Erwin Schrödinger** (1887-1961), winner of the 1933 Nobel Prize in physics, was deeply fascinated by the similarity of certain Vedantic concepts and phenomena observed in quantum physics. One of the key philosophies of the Upanishads, *tat tvam asi*,







of Vedanta in the West. He founded the Vedanta Society in the US in 1894 which in time spawned dozens of Vedanta centers across America. As one passes by the famous venue in Chicago, one is sure to recall him – in 1995, the stretch of Michigan Avenue that passes in front of the Chicago Art Institute was conferred the honorary name ‘Swami Vivekananda Way’ in the memory of his famous address.

Until then, the West had mixed opinions about Hinduism and spirituality. He dispelled several myths and taught the West how ancient Hindu philosophy focused on realization as the primary goal, and how the path of Vedanta would take one closer to his goal. In subsequent years, Swami Vivekananda’s speeches, discourses and articles were compiled into books which shaped the minds of leading thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like Will Durant, William James, Pitirim Sorokin, Romain Rolland, Leo Tolstoy and Arnold Toynbee.

In 1920, the West was to receive the ‘first superstar guru of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’, as the Los Angeles Times would describe **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893-1952). America became his home; his Self-Realization Fellowship became his teaching platform and his *Autobiography of a Yogi* became the message that would go on to influence millions since its publication in 1946.

A couple of years later, a 27-year-old ‘Jiddu’ **Krishnamurti** (1895-1986) arrived in California and, before the end of the decade, had become a spiritual star for the leading lights of that era. The list of his followers included celebrities like David Bohm, Joseph Campbell, Charlie Chaplin, Deepak Chopra, Greta Garbo, Aldous Huxley, Robinson Jeffers, Charles Laughton, George Bernard Shaw, biologist Rupert Sheldrake, Alan Watts and Ken Wilber.

The core of Vedanta is clearly evident in Jiddu Krishnamurti’s writings and talks. His teachings have constantly undergone Western revisions and have found their way into several seemingly unrelated

fields, from quantum physics to the corporate world, where they aid team-building sessions.

In the decades that followed, many more dharmic teachers from India came to America and created new lineages and institutions. Among these, **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi** (1918-2008) stood out with his Transcendental Meditation technique, his celebrity followers and the media glare on all his activities. Couched initially as a spiritual exercise, under Maharishi’s guidance TM evolved into evidence-based scientific methodology, thus enhancing its appeal to much larger audience in the western world but in the process distancing it from its spiritual roots. In 1972, he founded the TM Organization to formalize the dissemination of Transcendental Meditation Techniques globally. Over his life-time, Maharishi is credited with teaching his techniques to more than five million people around the world and founding thousands of teaching centers.

Another dharmic teacher who attracted hundreds of thousands of Westerners to Hindu philosophy was a man of many names. He was born Abhay Charan De, and after taking monastic vows in 1959, took on the name A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. But America knows him better as **Swami Prabhupada** (1896-1977), the founder of the popular Hare Krishna movement, formally known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1966, merely a year after he had arrived in the US carrying little besides a precious *mahamantra* that would resound across the country.

Thanks to his charming personality and the simplicity of his message, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* became a chant, a *kirtan*, that would fill a million hearts with joy and bliss across the streets of America. He not just infused spirituality into a simple musical chant, but also brought in the Hindu way of life – living in harmony with one another and with animals, practising ahimsa, being a strict vegetarian and total





abstinence from intoxicating substances. Swami Prabhupada is credited with attracting thousands of followers, not only in America but also in Europe and Asia - including India.

Several gurus subsequently visited the US, some of them establishing Vedantic societies and institutions that would facilitate transmission of their philosophy, and in some cases, propagated their own interpretations of the Vedantic ideas. A partial list would include names like Anandamayi Ma, Swami Vishnudevananda (founder of Sivananda Ashram), Swami Satchidananda (Integral Yoga Institute), Swami Rama (Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy in Chicago), Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Muktananda (Siddha Yoga), Swami Chinmayananda (Chinmaya Mission) and Swami Dayananda Saraswati (Arsha Vidya Gurukulam). Several modern gurus like Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma), Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Art of Living), and Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (Isha) have continued the movement that Swami Vivekananda started more than 125 years ago and have attracted millions of followers seeking enlightenment in the ancient philosophy of India.

In addition to those who travelled with their spiritual messages to the West, there were many like Sri Aurobindo, Satya Sai Baba, Ramana Maharishi and Neem Karoli Baba, who had the power to influence a continent without setting foot in it. Their teachings were carried across the seas through books, students as well as through Western thinkers who were influenced by their teachings.

### Assimilation and Transformation

What was initially regarded as an 'outsider' religion, many in the Western world found, appeared to hold answers to the many questions they had been struggling with for a long time. Attaining a state of enlightenment where one realises one's true nature and transcends desire and materialistic pursuits

became aspirational, especially when acquisition and consumption became top priorities of the Western society.

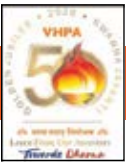
Numbers suggest that the American society has been moving ever closer to a spiritual worldview that resembles the core principles of the Vedic tradition. According to a 2008 Harris poll, 24% of Americans said they believed in reincarnation, and more than a third of Americans are choosing cremation over burial today, up from a mere 6% in 1975. In a 2009 Pew survey, almost half of the respondents stated that they have had *a religious or mystical experience, defined as a 'moment of sudden religious insight or awakening.'* In a Gallup survey, when asked if they thought of spirituality in a personal and individual sense or in terms of organization religion, almost 75% picked the former. When asked about their religious and spiritual attitudes, a great many Americans sound vaguely Vedantic, and when asked where they got those ideas from, they didn't know, or they mentioned a book, a teacher, a friend or family member, a shrink, a health practitioner, a celebrity, or a self-help author.

These seismic shifts in the spiritual and cultural landscape of the American society did not occur overnight, nor did they happen only due to the efforts of the visiting swamis and gurus from India. Indeed, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many a Westerner journeyed to India, spent many long years in ashrams with spiritual gurus there, learning and imbibing, in a true *guru-shishya* tradition, the intricacies of the Hindu thought system, and returned home to disseminate the teachings here. Further, a number of the disciples of the visiting swamis went on to spread the knowledge they had acquired during their years of apprenticeship, sometimes adapting and transforming them into their own formulations and brands.

**Joel Solomon Goldsmith** (1892-1964) founded *The Infinity Way* Movement, which began as a book







establishing a strong parallel between quantum physics and Vedanta.

**Andrew Cohen** (b.1955), a spiritual teacher and the founder of Evolutionary Enlightenment, designed to help each individual change his world 'from the inside out', was influenced by a variation of the Advaita teachings that were closer to those of Ramana Maharishi.

**Jeffrey Long** (b.1969) is another Westerner who converted to Hinduism after he read the Bhagavad Gita. He is the author of *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism*, in which he has shared a vision of Hinduism as the 'eternal' or 'universal' religion that is pluralistic and all-inclusive, with a tradition that is visionary enough to lead the world into a future in which all the religions reflect 'complementary visions of a larger reality'.

The influx of Hindu spiritualism also triggered a number of breakaway religions and communities in the West, like New Thought, which accommodated spiritual aspects of Hinduism like meditation, Agape, a movement that is part of New Thought, founded by Michael Bernard Beckwith, and The California Institute of Asian Studies, which was renamed California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in 1980 and was begun by Haridas Chaudhuri with the objective of capturing the essence of Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana Yogas in its programs.

One of the major developments in the West in the last 60 years has been the emergence of a new school of thought that rejected religion but embraced the spirituality that came along with it. This is the SBNR category, the **Spiritual but Not Religious** mindset that began to attract a lot of followers, especially those who were unclear or ambivalent about their religious beliefs, particularly about the existence of God. As of 2017, over a fourth of the overall American adult population considered itself SBNR, registering an 8%

rise from 19% in 2012. It comes as no surprise that SBNR has been declared the fastest-growing category in American religion. While Vedanta did not precipitate or encourage this movement, it did provide the SBNRs a natural home because here they could have a spiritual life without having to follow the tenets of any religion, be it prayers, rituals, traditions or beliefs.

The SBNR and the New Thought movements have given rise to books like the *Religion of no religion*, by Frederic Spiegelberg, a specialist in Indic studies who also wrote *Spiritual Practices of India*. The influence of Vedanta-Yoga is evident in the various interpretations of and approaches to spirituality, ranging from 'inter-spirituality' to 'integral spirituality'. Vedantic ideas such as Atman, a manifestation of the Divine, are present in all individuals, have now become increasingly popular in the realms of New Age Spirituality.

## Closure

"*We are all Hindus Now*"<sup>1</sup> was the title of an article that appeared in August 2009 issue of Newsweek magazine. Following excerpts from this article should give us a good read on the spiritual heartbeat of today's America:

"America is not a Christian nation. We are, it is true, a nation founded by Christians, and according to a 2008 survey, 76 percent of us continue to identify as Christian... But recent poll data show that conceptually, at least, we are slowly becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other, and eternity.

"The Rig Veda, the most ancient Hindu scripture, says this: 'Truth is One, but the sages speak of it by many names.' A Hindu believes there are many paths to God... all are equal. The most traditional, conservative Christians have not been taught to think like this. They

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1. Lisa Miller, Newsweek (August 15, 2009)







# IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE at Vivekananda Family Camp

By Ajit Desai

**T**he serene shores of Lake Winnepesaukee witnessed a remarkable gathering of over 110 individuals at the Vivekananda Family Camp, which took place from Sunday, August 13th, to Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Nestled within the breathtaking Camp Winaukee, this week-long event proved to be a blend of various activities, cultural celebrations, and memorable experiences.

The Vivekananda Family Camp was an immersive experience that touched upon various aspects of the Camp Theme, which was the Ten Dharma Lakshan (The ten attributes that a person should aspire for). These were Dhritri (Fortitude), Kshama (forgiveness), Damah (self-control), Asteya (non-stealing, honesty), Shaucha (external and internal cleanliness), Indriya Nigraha (sense control), Dhi (intellect), Vidya

(knowledge), Satya (truth), Akrodh (non-anger). Campers and adults learned about all these attributes, which were further enhanced by stories from the Puranas and Itihaasas.

Participants embraced the beauty of yoga, channeling their inner peace through mindful practice. Arts and crafts sessions nurtured creativity and imagination, while discussions fostered intellectual exchange and introspection. On the last day of camp, all the campers were 'tested' on their knowledge of the Camp Theme through a lively scavenger hunt.

The camp's vibrant itinerary included an array of Indian games that ignited friendly competition and camaraderie. A memorable hiking expedition to Baldy Knob allowed attendees to appreciate the splendor of nature. The journey was complemented by savory Subway-style sandwiches lovingly made by













(Shreyas), then it becomes “nishkaam karma” (Karma without attachment).

In Chapter 6, Arjun asks about his mind, which is unstable, wandering all the time. Shri Krishna tells him about “abhyaas” and “vairaagya”. Abhyaas is practice. Vairagya is non-attachment to temporary objects. (Vairagya can be split up as Raag=attachment, Vai=not attaching.) One must practice non-attachment to objects in life, since they are temporary.

At the end of the Geeta, after seeing Krishna’s “viraat roop”, his Divine form, Arjun says “my Moha (attachment) and my Sandeh (doubt) are gone, I can see clearly now.

“Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam”

Detachment to the results is the key to performing one’s actions skillfully.

### Overview and Relevance

Before we begin our studies, we bow down and pay respect to our Gurus (our Teachers).

“Sadashiva Samarambham Shankaracharya  
Madhyamam

Asmad Acharya Paryantam Vande Guru Paramparam”

*Beginning with Sadashiva, through Adi Shankaracharya in between and upto my own Guru, I bow with reverence to the entire tradition of Guru’s*

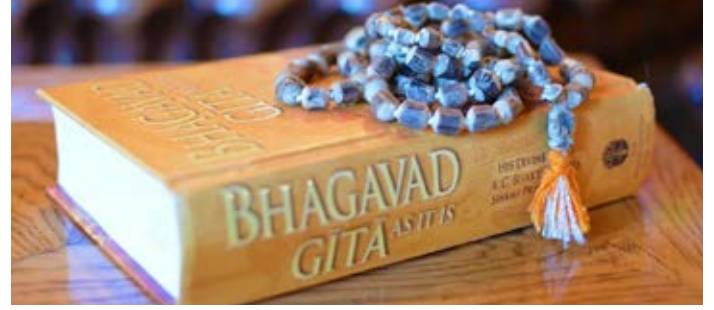
“Vasudēva sutam dēvam Kaṃsa Chāṇūra  
mardanam |

Dēvakī paramānandaṃ Kṛṣṇaṃ vandē  
jagadgurum | | ”

*I worship Bhagwan Krishna, who is the son of Vasudeva,*

*Who killed Kamsa and Chanura, who is the bliss of Devaki.*

For example, before going to Disneyworld, you have an image of the what the place will be like. In the same way, we have an image or idea of what we are going to see or study. We shall see how much that idea that we have in our head aligns with what the Gita says.



There was a teacher called Madhusudan Saraswati ji, who composed one shloka that describes what Bhagvad Gita is.

Advaita-amrita varshineem bhagvateem ashtada  
shaadhyaineem,

Amba tvam anu sandadhaami bhagavad geete bhava  
dveshineem

*Gita is that which was taught to Arjun by Bhagwan Narayan, Shri Krishna himself, which was composed by Rishi Ved Vyas in the middle of Mahabharat. It has 18 chapters. I meditate upon you, Mother Bhagwad Gita, who removes all past karma and destroys of all illusions of Samsara.*

If we have any problems, we go to our Mother. In the same way, Bhagvad Gita is like our mother. We go to it for all solutions.

Arjun has Vishaad Rog, he was scared.

For example, you are walking on dark street, and you see some scary thing, you wonder, is it a ghost? You use your flashlight and see that it is just a pole or a post, there is no ghost, and the fear is gone. This confusion is called Vishaad (mental confusion, depression).

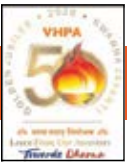
The first chapter is “Arjun Vishaad” (the confusion of Arjun.)

**What action should you take if you are confused?**

When you try to clear a doubt, you ask for someone to help you with it, maybe a teacher. Arjun had a teacher right with him, his teacher was his charioteer, Bhagwan Krishna.

**In Chapter 2, Arjun said, “I am confused, should I go to the battlefield?” He wanted to run away.**

We all do that, running away when we are fearful. Running away from Swadharma, which is our duty at this moment.



**For example:** if you see someone fall down on street, what is your duty? To help the person. For a student, your duty is to study. Arjun's duty was to fight, to protect the people, since he was a prince. But he was running away from his Swadharma.

### In the 7<sup>th</sup> shloka, chapter 2:

*Karpanya dosopahata svabhavah  
prcchami tvam dharma sammudha-cetah  
yac chreyah syan niscitam bruhi tan me  
sisyas te 'ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam*

### Meaning...in short, Arjun says:

I am confused, my mind is puzzled with regard to my duty. I am not sure what my Swadharma is. Please tell me.

### What is the meaning of Shreyas?

**Meaning:** That which is the greater good, which is good for ALL. Not what I like or dislike. I like ice cream, but is it good for me?

Arjun asks, What is good for me?

During Covid, the request from all authorities was to isolate, to wear a mask, so that we don't spread the virus. That was the good of all of us, the greater good, that is "Shreyas".

Arjun asks Bhagwan, what is Shreyas? Shreyas is What is good for all. What is my Swadharma, my duty right now?

Shreyas + swadharma= greatest good. The entire Bhagvad Gita is the answer to that.

Arjun was the student. What is the major quality of a student? To be humble, to listen, to trust your teacher. Use your learning in a good way. Surrender, drop your ego, only then learning takes place.

Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, used to say, "Stay Hungry (in your mind, not body), stay foolish". If you say "I know, I know.." before you hear the teaching, you stop learning. Surrender to the teacher, then you will learn better.

**Chapter 2, Shloka 47 is the summary of what Bhagwan is teaching Arjun:**

*Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana,  
Ma Karmaphala heturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani*

### Meaning...

*Your right is to work only, not to the fruits thereof.  
Do not be the cause of the fruit of the action.*

Karma has three things: action, doer, and result. When doing Karma, we focus on the doer, "I am doing this", and the result – "So I should get the result." When performing Karma, what weakness do we have? We focus on the fruit (result) of Karma, the Karmaphal. Bhagwan says, focus on the action, not the fruit of the action.

Let us chant the Gayatri Mantra. This is a very powerful mantra. Say it slowly, there is no rush. Play the meaning in your mind.

### Chanting Gayatri Mantra...

This is a mantra that is thousands of years old. It has not changed; it is a Perfect design. It has lot of power, which has been retained for thousands of years.

Meaning word by word: Gayatam Triyate iti Gayatri.

### Why is it called Gayatri Mantra?

Gayatri is the meter in which this mantra is composed.

Gayatam = singing. Triyate = protection

Iti Gayatri. The one by chanting of which, I am protected. It protects the mind.

It starts with Om. Om is a sound, it is also the name of Bhagwan.

Definition: Avati iti OM.

Avati=protection. The one which protects is OM or Bhagwan.

Let us close with the closing Prarthana.

*Om Purnnam-Adah Purnnam-Idam Purnnaat  
Purnnam Udacyate|*

*Purnnasya Purnnam-Aadaaya Purnnam Eva vashissyate||  
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih||*

*Om, That (Outer World) is Purna (Full of Divine Consciousness);*

*This (Inner World) is also Purna (Full of Divine Consciousness); From Purna is manifested Purna (From the Fullness of Divine Consciousness the World is manifested),*

*Taking Purna from Purna, Purna indeed remains.*

*Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi,*



# Recipients of **SHARDA HINDU SCHOLARSHIPS** for the year **2023**



## **Sneha Vashistha**

### **Memory of Dr. Mahesh Mehta**

Sneha Vashistha is from Carmel Indiana and will be attending Georgia Tech with a major in Biomedical Engineering on the pre-med track.

Sneha has been attending the Balagokulam Program at the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana for most of her life and has served as an assistant teacher and youth leader in the program. She is also a Sanskrit teacher in the Indianapolis Balakendram and enjoys taking part in interfaith panels and programs.

Sneha is a violinist and studies both Carnatic and Western Classical orchestral performance. She is also an active Girl Scout and Bharatanatyam dancer, preparing to perform her Arangetram in August 2023. She aims to further spread the values of Hinduism as she continues in her higher education and is thankful to her gurus and parents for instilling these values in her life.

## **Vinaya Sivakumar**

### **Memory of Smt. Anjleebahen Pandya**

Vinaya Sivakumar is a social entrepreneur revisioning youth response to societal issues. With her

Hindu values guiding her, she has founded award-winning nonprofits Atharv (preventing the erosion of Indian culture in America) and Heads Up (mobilizing youth against the digital addiction crisis). She was also recognized as a Coca-Cola Scholar and is an active advocate in gender equality and climate change spaces. Vinaya will attend the University of California, Berkeley as a Regents' and Chancellor's Scholar to double major in Computer Science and Economics.



## **Mihir Nitesh Bhatia**

### **Memory of Shri. Ram Suchdev**

Mihir Bhatia, a graduate from Cypress Ranch High School in Cypress, TX, proudly embraces his Hindu roots and Indian heritage. Growing up in an Indian household, he was immersed in the rich spiritual beliefs, traditions, and values passed down through generations. From attending religious institutions like ISKCON temple and Chinmaya Mission Sunday School to practicing puja



[hinduvishwa.org](http://hinduvishwa.org)



and connecting with the divine through prayer, Mihir deeply appreciates the spiritual practices of Hinduism.

Family holds a special place in his heart, as Hinduism emphasizes the importance of strong familial bonds. Mihir values the time spent with loved ones, respecting elders, and cherishing the joyous moments shared during family functions.

Education and learning are cherished in Hindu culture, and Mihir wholeheartedly embraces this passion. He recognizes the significant contributions Hinduism has made to various fields and believes that education is a path to spiritual growth. Guided by his love for learning, Mihir is pursuing a degree in Finance and the Canfield Business Honors Program at The University of Texas at Austin, fueling his long-term aspirations as a social entrepreneur.

Deeply grateful for the values instilled in him by his immigrant parents, family, and community, Mihir holds his Hindu heritage close to his heart. He sees it as a source of pride, spirituality, strong family values, and a passion for education and learning. As he continues his journey, Mihir is determined to share these values with future generations, ensuring the legacy of his Hindu heritage.



**Sanketh Kamath**

**Memory of Shri. Debi Prasad Ji Sodhani**

Sanketh Kamath is very proud of his Hindu Indian heritage. Growing up in a household that has imbued qualities and values of Sanathana Dharma into his identity has made him the person that he is today. Karma teaches him the consequences of his actions. Dharma serves as a guidebook for him to live his life by. Sewa urges him to serve others. Hinduism allows him to improve life for both himself and others and navigate the challenges of life with humility, resilience, and gratitude.

Sanketh has been involved with Hindu organizations such as HSS(Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh) and Sewa International since childhood. Attending shakha weekly has served as a fuel source. Week by week, it has inspired him to continuously explore his heritage and develop himself holistically. Sewa International has allowed him to get personally involved in his community. Four years and more than seven hundred volunteer hours later, Sanketh has had the opportunity to participate in a variety of unique volunteering experiences and work closely with many different communities. Sewa has taught him “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ‘; the idea that the whole world is one family.

This fall, Sanketh will be studying Electrical and Computer Engineering at Princeton University. He is committed to staying rooted in Hinduism and making a positive impact wherever he goes.

**Ria Kothari**

**Memory of Shri Hari Bindal**



Ria Kothari will be attending the University of South Carolina as a Biochemistry and Molecular Biology major on the Pre-Medical track. She is a follower of Shrimad Rajchandra and regularly attends shibirs at the Shree Raj Saubhag ashram in Gujarat. She plans to continue practicing the spiritual values her gurus have imparted and act as an ambassador for her cultural heritage as she progresses to the next chapter of her life.

**Amogh Shetty**

**Asthana Family Award**

Amogh is an incoming freshman at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in the Physician-Scientist Program, a combined BS/MD program with the Albany Medical College. Amogh aspires to become a physician scientist, working both in the clinic and lab





to translate novel ideas in the basic sciences into clinical application. He is honored to have received the Sharada Hindu Scholarship, and he promises to pursue his education with the hopes of bettering the lives of Sanatan Dharma followers around the world.

### Sumedha Sethi

#### Bansal Family Award

Sumedha Sethi has been brought up in Canton, Michigan, where she has developed a strong connection to her religious beliefs, cultural heritage, and the Hindu community around her. She has recently graduated at the top of her class from Plymouth High School. She will be continuing her education at the Honors College at the University of Illinois Chicago where she will be studying psychology and neuroscience on a pre-medical path.



Sumedha has always been an ardent member of the Hindu community in Canton. For more than a decade, she has actively participated in events, traditions, and practices at her local Hindu temple. Dedicated to preserving and promoting her beliefs and traditions, Sumedha has devoted her time to teaching young girls about their religious and cultural backgrounds while encouraging them to embrace and stay firm in their identities.

Sumedha has also utilized her voice and platform through local radio programs. She has led thoughtful discussions with members of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain communities in Michigan

to raise awareness and educate others about their religion.

Sumedha's unwavering commitment to her education, deep involvement in the Hindu community, and passion for service and community education are some things she hopes to take to Chicago as she embarks on this new chapter in her life.

### Anay S Patel

#### The Uttamjan Family Foundation

Anay has been a part of the Hindu religion ever since he was born. He is a part of the Bal Sanskar Kendra in the Swadhyay Kendra of Chattanooga. There, he has heard many stories of Hindu gods and goddesses. He has also learned about having good morals and values. He uses everything he learns in Swadhyay to help others and spread the Hindu Dharma.



Swadhyay and Hinduism have been a part of Anay's life for 18 years, and he does not see life without it. He will continue his study of the Hindu Dharma and Swadhyay in Yuva Kendra at the Georgia Institute of Technology where he is majoring in biomedical engineering. He loves playing tennis and sports in general, spending time with friends and family, and using his creativity to make things. Most importantly, he loves helping people. Anay uses the lessons from Swadhyay to make good decisions and help others. He wouldn't be the person he is today without being a proud Hindu.

<https://scholarship.vhp-america.org/winner-of-scholarship-2023>





# SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS OF 2023



Amogh Shetty



Anay S Patel



Mihir Bhatia



Ria Kothari



Sanketh Kanath



Sneha Vashista



Sumedha Sethi



Vinaya Sivakumar

## WELCOME TO SHARDA HINDU SCHOLARSHIP

While scholarships for graduating high school students are abundant, almost all are sponsored by corporations, foundations, and faith-based community organizations. However, hardly any scholarship is offered by the Hindu community to deserving high school seniors. To fill this gap, the World Hindu Council of America has launched the Sharda Hindu Scholarship at the national level, offered to Hindu students who are graduating from High School and are headed to a college to pursue higher studies.

Saraswati Devi is the giver of knowledge. She embodies the feminine aspect of Reality (Brahman) that inspires us to continuously seek, learn, create, and grow to our full potential. And this growth is trifold: academic, spiritual, and cultural i.e., all forms of creative arts. The scholarship is awarded to students who best exhibit the values that Saraswati Devi represents.



## 7 SCHOLARSHIPS HAVE ALREADY BEEN ESTABLISHED. INTERESTED? THEN READ ON ...

### What is it?

It is a scholarship which grants \$500 per year over a 4 year period to a Hindu student at an accredited college or university in USA.

### How many have been established so far?

As of 2023, seven Sharda scholarships have been established.

### How is it named?

It is named according to the donor's preference. Such as "Bansal Family Sharda Scholarship" for the Bansal family which established it.

### What is Sharda?

Sharda is another name for Devi Saraswati, the Hindu deity for learning. The word is added to associate the scholarship with learning and invoke her blessings. In future other types/denominations of scholarships may be established.

### What is VHPA's role?

VHPA (World Hindu Council of America) is a 501C(3) organization which manages the entire selection, administration, legal and maintenance process. The continuity of a viable selection board is maintained.

### Why should I select VHPA to manage this?

VHPA has been serving the Hindu Community for over 50 years. It is one of the oldest Hindu organizations in USA with 501C(3) status. VHPA manages and over looks several projects both in USA and around the globe for Hindu Dharmic Cause.

### Is there a long term option where a new student is eligible each year?

Yes. A \$50K lump sum donation is the "perpetual" option.

### CONTACT US:

Sharada Hindu Student Scholarship  
200 New Bond Street, Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171  
(732) 744-0851  
hscholar@vhp-america.org  
scholarship.vhp-america.org



Thank You!

We Thank Our Scholarship Donors (till date)

- Award 1. In Memory of Dr. Mahesh Mehta
- Award 2. In Memory of Smt. Anjeebahen Pandya
- Award 3. In Memory of Shri Ram Suchdev
- Award 4. In Memory of Shri Debi Prasad Ji Sodhani
- Award 5. Asthana Family
- Award 6. Bansal Family
- Award 7. Hari Bindal Family
- Award 8. Uttamjan Family Foundation



# Global Hindu Youth Come Together in Bali

## A Precursor to Hindu Heritage Month in October



It was a big occasion alright. A landmark event organized by Warmadewa University's Pasemetonan Mahasisya Hindu Dharma – the local Hindu Students' Organization – brought together Hindu youth leaders from around the world to celebrate Hindu values and mark the announcement of the theme for Hindu Heritage Month to be held in October 2023.

The event adopted a hybrid format, attracting hundreds of attendees, including global virtual participants, Balinese students, academics, and

notably, students from the United States who were in Bali to study Sanskrit through a collaborative program with Samskrita Bharati, a Delhi-based nonprofit.

The program commenced with a profound Rig Vedic invocation by Ida Bhagawan Yogananda, also known as Ratu ji, followed by the playing of Indonesia's national anthem (Indonesia Raya) and Warmadewa University's anthem (Sapta Bayu), symbolizing the unity of Indonesian Hindus with both their Dharma and Matrabhoomi. It was formally

inaugurated after speeches by Nonik Sugita Dewi, Chairman of the Hindu Students' Organization, Dewa Put Widjana, Rector of Warmadewa University, and Gede Oka Wisnumurti, Chairman of Yayasan Korpri Provinsi Bali.

Individuals honored for their contributions to the Hindu community included Nivedita Singh, the Consulate-General of India, I Made Suniastha Amertha, a prominent Balinese priest, and Rutvij Holay, a member of the international Hindu Heritage Month coordination team. The program featured a panel discussion featuring eight speakers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, India, and the United States. The speakers explored Hindu values that have united the global Hindu community across millennia and continents, fostering valuable contributions in diverse fields including spirituality and politics.

A significant aspect of the event was the opportunity for attendees to experience the rich culture of Bali. Balinese students showcased a variety of traditional dances characterized by intricate mudras (poses) and rasas (expressions), akin to classical Indian dances like Kathak and Bharatnatyam. The event included a captivating demonstration of traditional Buddhist martial arts. There was also an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the Hindu concept of "Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti" – stated in Balinese scriptures as "Siwa Buddha Sama." (The ancient Upanishadic saying means one God is worshipped in different names.)

A highlight of the event was the International Shloka Competition, where participants aged 6 to 23 from around the world recited shlokas (verses) from the Bhagavad Gita in both traditional Indic and Balinese styles. A distinguished panel of judges, including Sacchitanand Guruji from Maharashtra, Ida Wayan Arjana from Indonesia, and Chandra Sagar from Malaysia, recognized Gargi Pimpalkar and Dewa Made Bali Sugiharta as winners of the competition.



In the event's concluding moments, Rutvij Holay took the stage to express his gratitude to the speakers, organizers, and attendees and unveiled the theme for this year's Hindu Heritage Month celebrations: "Hindu Values and their Importance in the World." The announcement was met with resounding cheers, marking the finale of the celebrations.

The success of this event owes much to the dedication and tireless efforts of the organizing team, particularly Dwija Suastana, who conceived the idea and worked tirelessly to ensure its realization, even while managing personal commitments. It sets the stage for future editions, promising to establish an annual tradition that showcases the diversity and richness of Hindu heritage.

Commenting on the event, Dr. Jai Bansal, the VP of Education of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America and the global coordinator for Hindu Heritage Month, congratulated all the organizers and the participants for coming together to celebrate their shared heritage. The aim of the Hindu Heritage Month is to showcase the diversity and richness of Hindu civilization, which this event has so beautifully projected on the world stage, Bansal said.

Website: [www.hindumonth.org](http://www.hindumonth.org)

Email: [info@hindumonth.org](mailto:info@hindumonth.org)



# Notable Contributions of HINDU CIVILIZATION

By **Sumukh Paspuleti**

**H**indu civilization has had countless contributions that have impacted the world, presented here are merely the contributions necessary to understand its impressive scope beginning with the creation of the Pallava script and ending with the development of software in the Nepali language. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive;

## **Advancement of Writing**

In the Pallava Empire, the Pallava dynasty created the Pallava script. This script consisted of a collection of letters that were the basis for the writing system used in the Pallava Empire. The Pallava script's origins go back to Tamil-Brahmi and was used by students and priests to communicate. Moreover, this creation helped build a foundation for the languages of Tamil, Thai, Sundanese, and many others used in the modern era ("Pallava script"). Thus, the Pallava script's impact was felt across the Asian continent, as many languages may have been drastically different without the creation of said script. However, this creation is not well known because of the complexity of discussing the history and impact of various scripts ("Why are old languages harder to learn"). In addition, the Pallava script is no longer used in the modern era, so the benefits of learning the script seem slim. Nevertheless, learning the Pallava script has the benefit of being able to read texts written in the Pallava script where

translations may not exist. This ability gives accurate insight into the knowledge of citizens in the Pallava empire which is its own reward ("How to Learn a Dead Language").



*A stone with writing in the Pallava script  
("Pallava script").*

## **Advancement of Astronomy**

In the Gupta Empire, in 520 CE, an astronomer named Aryabhata used the movement of the stars to prove that the Earth rotates. He published his conclusions 1513 years ago, in the text, Aryabhatiya, when knowledge about the solar system and stars was incomplete and often inaccurate ("Aryabhatiya"). His discovery helped expand the field of astronomy and was used by other astronomers to support their research, like Brahmagupta and Varahamihira ("Aryabhata";





be possible without religious tolerance. Nevertheless, these advancements are not widely known as more prominent influences of Hindu temple architecture exist, such as religious texts like Vedas (“Hindu temple”).

### Advancement of Warfare

In the Maratha Empire, the Marathas helped develop the military strategy of guerilla warfare (“Maratha empire”). This form of warfare is unique because it is where individuals or small groups act independently and use methods of ambush and sabotage to fight against a military force (“Guerrilla warfare”). This type of warfare was used in several wars across history, including the Vietnam War and the Second World War. Thus, the Marathas’ effort to develop guerilla warfare helped change the outcomes of wars throughout history, as there were many successful military campaigns based on guerilla warfare (“History of guerrilla warfare”). This influence on the outcome of wars meant the Marathas helped influence whether certain countries would even exist. Likewise, this development is well-known in India because of the Maratha Empire’s use of guerilla warfare to defeat



*A depiction of the Maratha military (Pandey, “Marathas defending Delhi”)*

the Muslim Mughal Empire. In this war, the Mughal Empire was defeated even though it controlled a substantial part of India, representing a victory against the repression of Hinduism (“Maratha empire”).

### Advancement of Technology

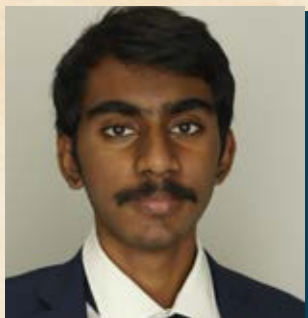
In Nepal, Sakya, a software developer, was the first to code software in Nepali. This advancement was achieved when most Nepalese did not use computers but relied on typewriters (Aryal, “A Very Short History”). This innovation allowed Nepalese worldwide to use software applications even if they did not know English, the language most programs operated in at the time. This software also led to the growth of mobile banking in Nepal as signing electronic checks became viable (“Muni Sakya”). Yet, this innovation is not widely known because the relatively small number of people who read Nepali and the relatively large number of people who can read English made the use of this translated software uncommon (Sakya, “Created Devanagari Computer”). However, the existence of translated software helps give Nepalese people the same experience given to English users. This improvement in quality encourages Nepalese people to participate in online discourse and content creation, leading to the sharing of culture and experiences (“Future of Software is Global”).



*A picture representing software translation (Chew, “Translating & translators”).*

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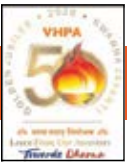


### About the Author

**Sumukh Paspuleti** is an undergraduate student studying at the Georgia Institute of Technology. According to him his belief in his faith helped him achieve many of his accomplishments, and he believes everyone should be able to immerse themselves in Hindu culture.







**Q: My kids don't listen to me. This is keeping me awake at nights, giving me heartburn and increasing my blood pressure. Please help!**

**A:** Rather than getting frustrated, keep the line of communication open with your children. This may not be something you are accustomed to doing, and it may not be easy for you to change, but it would benefit the entire family if you made the effort. Listen to your children patiently rather than yelling at them. Try to understand their point of view. The child may or may not come around, but you have a much better chance if you deal with her calmly and respectfully. Do not say to your child, "I never talked back to my parents," or "If I had spoken like this to my parents, I would have gotten slapped." Work with the here-and-now rather than dwelling on the 'good old days.'

**Q: I have heard in your talks that it is wrong to ask God for gifts of good health, more wealth, a child, protection of loved ones, etc. Why is it wrong to do so?**

**A:** There are many reasons.

1. God is omniscient. He knows better than you what you need and what you do not need. You never need to remind Him.
2. God fulfills all desires of pure devotees such as Draupadi and Gajraj. As long as we don't have an extremely loving relationship with Him, we do not have the right to ask for anything.
3. As you try to practice genuine devotion, asking God for something or the other will prevent you from becoming a true devotee. Instead, you will be encouraged to have a business relationship with Him.
4. If it is not destined to be, God does not just give what we want from Him.

**Q: Is there anything that is good to ask for?**

**A:** Yes! Ask God to engage you in His service. Pray for selfless love.

**Q: What can I do to serve God?**

**A:** Before you can directly serve God, serve the divine Guru and the Guru's mission. Rest assured that serving your Guru is the same as serving God. Both yield the same divine results.

**Q: What is the best way to serve your Guru or your Guru's mission?**

**A:** Scriptures recommend that service to the Guru must be done through physical body, worldly wealth and the material mind. If you are physically unwell, serve financially and mentally. If you have no money whatsoever, serve physically and mentally. If you are not able to serve physically or financially, serve mentally.

**Q: What does it mean to serve God and Guru mentally?**

**A:** It means that you do 'Roopdhyam' by rendering service in your mind to Shri Krishna and/or your Guru from morning till night. Visualize Krishna as a child and serve Him as a mother or father would serve their child. Visualize Him as your beloved and serve Him as you would render service to your family members.

**Q: What kind of service pleases God the most?**

**A:** God is most pleased with the service rendered with gratitude and humility. The servant who does not wish to be recognized and praised becomes the dearest to God and Guru.

**Q: Should I wait to be told to serve?**

**A:** Serve without being asked. You are intelligent enough to know what needs to be done. Go ahead and do it, considering it as your privilege to serve. If your Guru accepts your service, feel immense gratitude. Externally it seems that you are doing something for him whereas you are only helping yourself.

**Q: What if I cannot figure out what needs to be done?**

**A:** In that case, serve happily when you are given the instruction to perform some devotional service. Perform it with a heart full of love.





### VHPA - Executive Board (EB)

Name	Title	
Ajay Shah	President	shahajay@gmail.com
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### VHPA - Extended EB with Special Invitees

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### Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc.

(World Hindu Council of America)

National Office: 200 New Bond Street, Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171 Tax ID#51-0156325

Tel.: 732-744-0851 Email: office@vhp-america.org Website: www.vhp-america.org

### VHPA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

(Fields marked with \* cannot be left blank)

Salutation \_\_\_\_\_ \*First Name \_\_\_\_\_ M.I. \_\_\_\_\_ \*Last Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Spouse's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Street/P.O. Box No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*City \_\_\_\_\_ \*State \_\_\_\_\_ \*Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*Home Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ \*Email Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*Age Group 18-35  36-50  51-65  65  (Minimum age of becoming member is 18 years)

#### Membership Desired: (Select One)

- Associate / Student / General
- Life Membership - \$ 1,000.00
- Primary (10 Year Membership) - \$ 500.00
- Patron Membership - \$ 2,500.00

Please accept my Additional Contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for

- General Use  Seva in USA  Seva in Bharat  Supporting A child
- Youth Development Programs  Publications  Media Outreach and PR
- Liaison with Hindu Mandirs & Hindu Institutions  Hindu Awareness Yaatra

I would like to be a part of the VHPA mission to sustain and strengthen Hindu Dharma and traditions. I believe in, practice, and /or respect the spirituals and religious principles having roots in Bharat. I will not partake in any activities deemed harmful, which may negatively affect VHPA organization or its mission.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature Date

Check No. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check Payable to VHPA) OR Change it to a credit card  
 (Name and adress must match with that credit card, for using the credit card.)

Credit Card Name:  VISA  MASTER CARD  DISCOVER  
  
 Credit Card Month Year Security Code  
 (Expiration Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature Date

Mail to: VHPA, 200 New Bond Street, Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171, Contact Tel.: 732-744-0851

Or

Become member using your credit card on our website: www.vhp-america.org  
Call: 732-744-0851 or email to office@vhp-america.org for application form and more information.

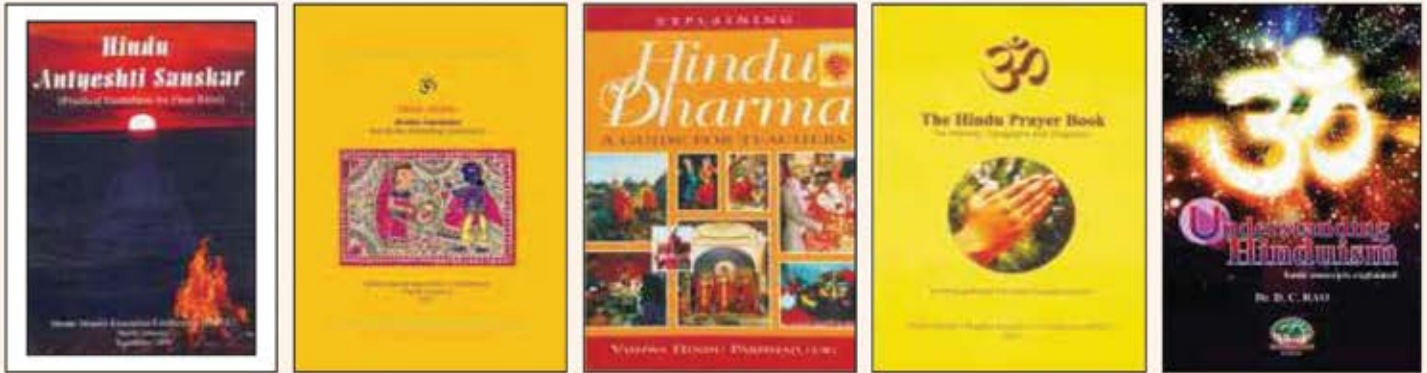
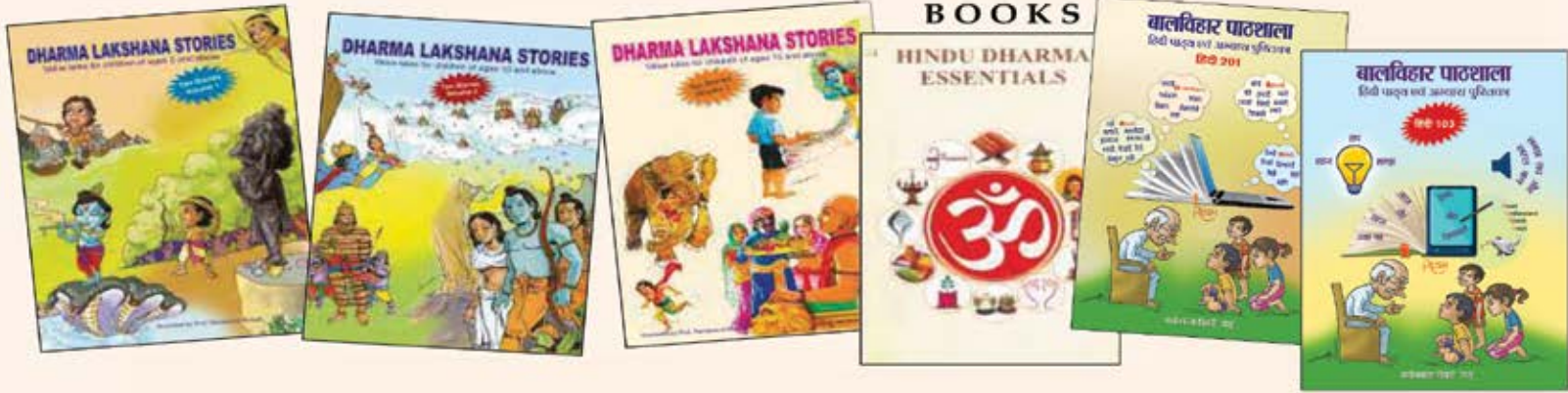


ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्मांसमृतम् गमय ।।

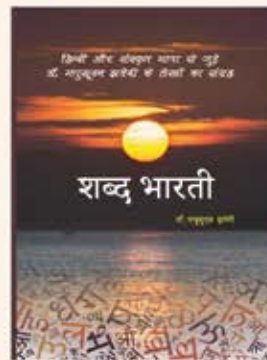
Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

# OUR PUBLICATIONS



Hindu Vishwa - a quarterly magazine



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