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No. 2
April-June 2010

HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest

Marching With The Brick Layers

**Resurgent India-Upcoming Leader in
the International Arena**

**Hinduism and VHPA: A Personal
Overview**

Reminiscences-My Journey With VHPA

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VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD (World Hindu Council) OF AMERICA, INC.

National Headquarter:
P. O. Box 441505,
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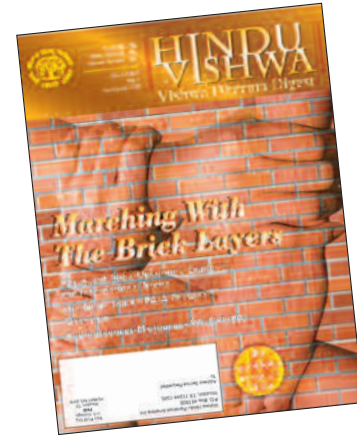
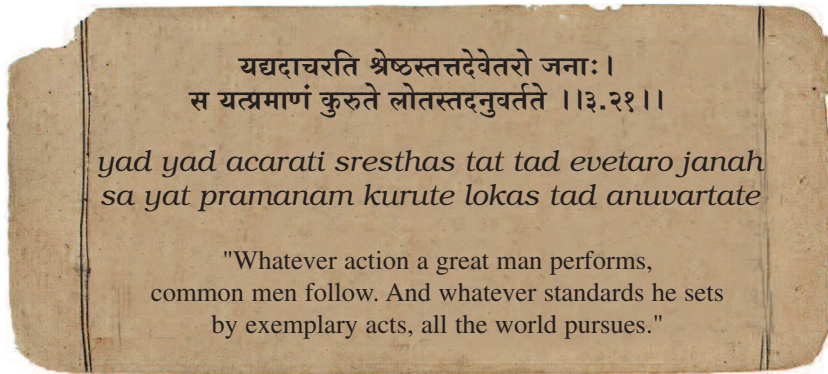
www.vhp-america.org

Tel.: (281)496-5676
Fax: (281)752-8185
office@vhp-america.org

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| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|
| President | Shree Jyotish Parekh | 860-521-2173 | president@vhp-america.org |
| Executive Vice President | Shree Gaurang Vaishnav | 732-744-0851 | evp@vhp-america.org |
| General secretary | Dr. Abhaya Asthana | 508-875-0432 | gensecy@vhp-america.org |
| Treasurer | Shree Jayesh Mehta | 856-751-2132 | treasurer@vhp-america.org |
| V. P., Seva | Shree Girish Gandhi | 561-244-5813 | vp_seva@vhp-america.org |
| V. P., Publications | Shree Shyam Tiwari | 770-962-2669 | vp_pb@vhp-america.org |
| Jt. General secretary | Shree Sanjay Mehta | 412-276-2670 | jt_gensecy2@vhp-america.org |
| Organizing Secretaries: | | | |
| Youth Development Programs | Smt. Nayana Modh | 516-935-0002 | orgsecy1@vhp-america.org |
| Great Lakes Region | Smt. Renu Gupta | 513-860-1151 | orgsecy4@vhp-america.org |
| Southeast region | Smt. Sneha Mehta | 770-394-1353 | orgsecy2@vhp-america.org |
| Membership & HAY | Shree Sanjay Kaul | 781-893-4982 | sanjaykaul@hotmail.com |

Editorial Team

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Managing Editor: | Shyam Tiwari | vp_pb@vhp-america.org |
| Editor: | Dr. Ashok Sinha | aksinha1722@yahoo.com , aksinha@sbcglobal.net |
| Copy Editor: | Sabitha Venugopal | raguv1@gmail.com |
| Assitant Editor: | Rachna Gupta | rgupta242@yahoo.com |
| Advisors: | Dr. Abhay Asthana | abhayaji@gmail.com , |
| | Dr. Shardananda | prayagraj@erols.com |

About the HINDU VISHWA

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For Advertising inquiries please contact:
Shyam Tiwari at 770.962.2669
or Email - srtiwari@hotmail.com

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H+

"The symbol H+ is the code sign used by some futurists to denote an enhanced version of humanity. The plus version of the human race would deploy a mix of advanced technologies, including stem cells, robotics, cognition-enhancing drugs, and the like, to overcome basic mental and physical limitations...."

--- Gary Stix, Scientific American, October 2009, p. 46.

From the earliest phase of man's ascent on this earth, the vision of a higher form of humanity must have been a dream. Now such a dream - the vision of a superman, not as children's cartoon or a fictional character of a popular movie, but as a scientific and attainable feasibility, as a part of continuing biological evolution over the cosmic time-scale -- can be simply taken as a natural corollary of Darwin's conventional theory of Evolution. In contrast, the Christian theosophy probably altogether neglected such an obvious extrapolation under its doctrine of Creationism, which tacitly regards God's plan of creation already complete and over. In the Bhagavad Geeta, as is well known, the Supreme Reality (personified as Lord Krishna) is unambiguously declared to be the ultimate source of all Existence. The concept of an evolutionary cycle of birth-and-death for the progressive purification of the soul finally leading man to godhood automatically implies generation of a god-like man - 'Maha-Manav', as a stage of Evolution, on way of attainment of salvation as well as of powers and capabilities 'to overcome basic mental and physical limitations.' But the Hindu vision of Maha-Manav far transcends that hinted by Darwinian Evolution, because it focuses not so much on physical or mental aspects of man's being, but on the aspect overlooked - rather forgotten - by the Western science and theosophy alike.

A vision of the Greater Man based on 'stem cells, robotics, cognition-enhancing drugs, and the like,' is far from complete if not accompanied with a concordant enhancement of the basic virtues of humanity, enshrined in various degrees in most religions, but best stressed as centrally as part of the Hindu spirituality and traditions. In fact, in the Vedic period of India, many of the seers and sages who left their imprints on time and, gave us the Vedas, the Upanishads and the like, were living proofs of the Maha-Manav genre. We have ample evidence of their existence in history and mythology. They possessed extra-ordinary powers that overcame basic mental and physical limitations - from today's standard spectacularly and beyond belief, in fact. Such feats as being ready to create a parallel universe, making someone reduced to ashes at a glance, causing in another person the occurrence of a desired type of dream, making someone lose memory of a past event selectively, appearing at or disappearing from any place in the universe instantly at will, and myriad of 'superhuman' or godly capabilities that Vishwamitra, Durvasa, Narad, among untold number of well-known sages and seers of ancient Bharat, were infinitely more than a result of stem cell, robotics, cognition-enhancing drugs, and the like. Such godly capabilities were realized from a especial virtue latent in humanity: 'tapasya' or austerity and self-discipline taken to its limit. Whether 'tapasya' was a deep research carried out in solitude or simply extreme devotional meditation is a matter worthy of our contemplation and study. But attainment of especial 'superhuman' powers devoid of common human qualities made good springboard of demonic characters - 'asur.' To take a modern example, the people who caused the present economic crisis out of sheer selfishness and greed are no different than 'asurs', they cause collapse of banks and the Wall Street-based economy, almost killing millions of people's peace. Directly killing hundreds of innocent people in an act of terrorism, or of millions in a war-zone for a show of might or purely out of personal vengeance, is not much different, either. Any vision of the Greater Man ('Maha-Manav') must be based on inclusion of basic human virtues, of which Hinduism - and only Hinduism -- is a proponent at par. The formula H+ represents the proton, basic to the matter and the universe. The formula for H+ is quite simple: The BhagavadGeeta. 

Intellect, Knowledge, Freedom (From Attachments), Forgiveness, Truth, Self-Control, Joy, Misery, Origination, Annihilation, Fear, Fearlessness, Nonviolence, Equanimity, Contentment, Austerity, Charity, Fame, Defamation, Etc., Are Various Mentalities Of All The Creatures That Originate But From Me.

The Bhagvadgeeta 10: 4, 5.

"Indeed, I am the Progenitor of the Seven Great Sages (the Saptarshi'), the Earlier Four Ones, and of Manu."

The BhagvadGeeta 10: 6.[Man ('Manav') is the progeny of Manu.]



Over 35 Years' Journey with **VHPA**

By Jyotish Parekh



*The Dharma Ganga in America has started from **Gangotri**. It has traveled some distance. However it has to travel long distance before it becomes **Ganga Mahasagar**.*

Formation of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America

Many of the first generation Hindus immigrated to the US in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Their first priority was to settle in this new adopted land and get their immediate family to the US.

Even though some had to struggle for a short period of time, most did not have difficulty landing jobs because of their exceptional educational qualifications. However, once they started settling down they started feeling a void in their social life. They started missing the social environment they had back home in Bharat.

Recognizing this social need and thinking about the needs of the future generation Hindus, forward thinking leaders started worrying about the future of the great Hindu tradition, culture, and Hindu Dharma in the US. People were worried about preserving and passing along these things to future generations of Hindus. This country is a melting pot and has assimilated many cultures nicely. However, in order to preserve Hindu culture and values, Hindus had to work for it.

Keeping this in mind, a few individuals, who had the training in Bharat to run such an organization, founded Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA). The founding members were Dr. Mahesh Mehta, Shri Subhash Mehta, Shri Arvind Sant, M.P. Srinivasan, and Shri Pranjivan Patel. Many other likeminded Hindus joined and thus VHPA started its work in the early 1970s.

Keeping in mind the needs of Hindus in the US and taking inspiration from great Hindu leaders Like Swami Chinmayanandji,



Muni Shushil Kumarji, Shri Guruji (M.S. Golwarkar) the vision of VHPA was kept as, "a dynamic vibrant Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and lofty ideals of vasudhaiva kutumbkam, meaning the entire creation is one family."

What Attracted Me to VHPA

During my childhood I had heard a story that left a deep impression in my mind. Many of you might have heard it or read it. It was about a very old man who was watering, fertilizing and meticulously nurturing a tender, budding mango tree. A young man had been watching him for some time with curiosity. We all know that after planting a mango tree, it takes 10-15 years or longer before it starts bearing mangoes. The curious young man could not resist and so he asked the old man why he was caring and nurturing the budding plant so much when he knew that he might not be around to enjoy the fruits. The old man smiled and replied, "See that huge mango tree about 500 feet from here? It gives tons of mangoes every year. I, along with many others, have enjoyed the fruits of that mango tree for many years. I was told during my childhood years that the person who planted and nurtured the tree did not live to enjoy its fruits. However, we all benefited from his benevolent and far sighted action."

The story, which left a deep impression in my mind, revealed to me that the seeds for the sevabhav were there. They were seeking a proper environment to germinate.

Why VHP of America

In Bharat as well in the US, I have seen many organizations where people were working with a purpose to promote themselves. Their primary motivations were getting a stage, having their name appear in the media, and being recognized in the community.

I saw that VHP of America was focused on a noble cause. Programs and projects were aimed at an existing cause. When the meditation is on the cause, the egocentric temptation for name and fame becomes secondary. It is true that it does not get completely eliminated, but it is downplayed. That higher motive was what appealed to me which led me to work for such an organization.

Working for a cause in a selfless manner was and is the culture of VHP of America. This true karma yoga was the inspiration not only for me but hundreds of other swayamsevakas of VHP of America.

During the course of 35 years, VHP of America has seen good times and bad times. The dedication of the

swayamsevakas was tested time and again. Their commitment got even stronger in hard times, and that was possible because they were rooted and established for a higher cause; not just for name and fame.

Inspiration from Swami Tilak

In the mid seventies, Swami Tilak came to USA and met a large number of VHPA karyakartas. His ascetic life style, clear understanding of Dharma, and high spiritual status inspired many and strengthened their commitment to VHPA. Crystal clear understanding of the cause, which is based on dharma, is very essential for unparalleled commitment and motivation. Swami Tilak was able to bring great clarity for the divine cause. He instilled the sevabhav and spirit of great dedication amongst VHPA workers.

One of his statements still reverberates in the minds of many who met him. While addressing the members of governing council meeting he said; "You all think that you have come to America for earning dollars. But the divine may have a different plan for bringing you to USA. Remember in spring the trees get new buds, leaves and flowers. Shortly thereafter, pollens come out. The wind carries the pollens to near and far away places. Then pollen is settled in the new land and in due course trees and forests emerge. Similarly, Hindus (pollen) coming and settling in America might have a divine purpose." He further added, "Be the instrument (nimitta) of the divine."

Many other Swamis and divine souls have helped the cause in their own way. The founding member of VHPA, Dr. Mahesh Mehta, has inspired hundreds with his untiring zeal. Working in this selfless spirit and with the guidance of many divine souls VHP of America has made a journey for over 35 years in USA. Many of the karyakartas in VHP of America today have been with the organization for over 35 years. Only divine inspiration can sustain such stamina for selfless work for so long. VHP of America has faced many challenges over the years, however through thick and thin the organization has kept on progressing due to the dedication of its countless noble souls.

I feel myself privileged to be part of this group of dedicated karmayogis. It must be the punyas of the past that brought me together with these divine souls to work for the divine cause.

The Dharma Ganga in America has started from Gangotri. It has traveled some distance. However it has to travel long distance before it becomes Ganga Mahasagar.



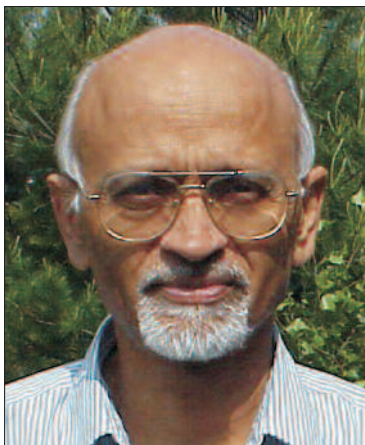
Shri Jyotish Parekh, President VHP of America



A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him. - *Swami Chinmayanand*

Marching With the Brick Layers

By Dr. Abhaya Asthana



What distinguishes those who prevail when the world goes out of control? What sets apart those who not just survive but turn every adverse moment into a defining point in history? These are great human questions. The answer lies in the value system that governs the actions of such individuals or an organization as a whole. These are my impressions living and working with the people of VHP of America for the past 25 years. Plain clothed Sadhus who single mindedly work for the sustenance and strengthening of the Hindu community. They sweat and toil to prepare the ground, dig the trenches and lay the foundation one brick at a time; a foundation to secure the future of their children and to leave a legacy behind that they can be proud of.

1983-84

1983-84 were eventful years. In June 1984 Indira Gandhi had ordered the "Blue Star" operation to rid the Golden temple of unwanted militants. The bold measure achieved its end but its aftermath shook the entire country. A tragic outcome of the ensuing repercussion was the assassination of Indira Gandhi herself in Oct of 1984 by her Sikh bodyguards. Another round of violence erupted that caused the country to bleed for months and the scars from those wounds pain the nation till



this day. Another notable event with momentous consequences was the 1984 Dharma Sansad in which the Sadhus decided to launch a movement led by VHP to liberate the Ramjanma bhoomi (birthplace of Ram). By September 1984 the VHP conducted a march, beginning in Sitarmahi (Bihar) to liberate the Ayodhya temple.

Vision of Unity: Ekatmata Yagna

Those years were significant and memorable in our family's life as well. Since 1975 we had been dreaming of going back to Bharat to settle down, and 1983 was the year when we made it happen. I joined IIT Kanpur as a faculty member in the computer science department. Our children were only six years and younger. It was a dream that had come true.

Life unfolds itself in mysterious ways. While we



meticulously plan our lives and labor to make it work, Ishwara has his own plans for us. More than anything else, it is the turn of events that shape our lives. I was plunged into one such event as soon as we landed in Bharat in Dec of 1983. That remarkable event was the Ekatma Yagna organized by VHP. Three caravans carrying Ganga water traversed the length and breadth of Bharat connecting Kathmandu and Rameshwaram, Gangasagar and Somnath, and Haridwar and Kanyakumari. These were joined by sixty-nine other caravans which distributed water from the Ganga and provided everyone with sacred water from local temples or from other sacred rivers encountered on the way. We lived through this remarkable event that left us awe-struck. For me and my family, life was never the same again!

What struck me was the concept of the Ekatmata Yagna itself. The waters from rivers, wells, ponds, lakes in every village in the remotest corners of Bharat was collected, brought to a place, mingled into a larger pot, that pot was carried to the district, to the state and eventually to the metro cities. Waters from all over were mingled with Ganga water. The symbolism of unity behind this was riveting. But the power of action behind it was even more captivating. It reminded me of the salt march by Gandhi. The event gave me a first hand glimpse of what holds the nation together. One simple act can capture the imagination of an entire nation and move them into action with a fervor that I had never seen before. That is what changed me. No lecture, no book, no great vision, just one simple act of gathering and distributing water. That was my introduction to VHP and RSS.

My father had joined VHP of Bharat as full time karyakarta after retiring from government service in 1978. While I was in Bharat 1983-84, I got to hear from him first hand about the people that he worked with, their dedication, their devotion to the country and their selfless nature. In the context of Ekatmata Yagna I met many Sadhus, Swamiji and workers of the parivar who would visit and stay at our home. Simple people, but inspired people, driven by passion and love for the traditions of their land. My entire being was being altered molecule at a time. I was being reconstituted, transmuted by the touch of these people. I could sense the undercurrents of a great upheaval. Those were the seeds of a great transformation to

come.

No work is small

It was in 1989 that my father came to visit us on his way to the Virat Hindu Conference in UK. He took us to the VHP family Camp in Inawendiwin, NJ. It was Rakshabandhan day. The keynote speaker, a Swami, explained the social significance of Rakshabandhan, the thread serving as a medium to connect the entire society into one organic entity. No one had explained the concept in such terms before. I was fascinated and moved. At the same camp, I saw Yogesh Naik washing large pots and pans in the kitchen and Praveen Modi sweeping the bathroom floor. "People actually do that outside of their homes, for others?" I thought to myself. I introduced myself to them. "Here we do everything ourselves, no work is small," said Praveen Bhai. They unknowingly taught me one of the greatest lessons in my life: Do something for others. With that thought germinating in our minds, suddenly our lives had a meaning. That obscure visit to the VHPA camp was a turning point in the life of our family. There was no turning back.

Every Child is Your Child



We have met countless wonderful people since then in this extended family of VHPA. People the likes of which we had never met before. And each of them has been a teacher and inspirer. With them we learned how to run camps. "In the VHPA camp we do not worry about our children, we take care of other's children. All the children are our children." Those words from Sharad Gandhi taught me another great lesson. And that one thought has been our beacon ever since.

After being surrounded by self centered people who could not think beyond Bollywood and Wall Street, we finally met people who thought about and went out of their way to help others. They thought about the Hindu community as a whole. For us this was a brand new



way of thinking. There was more to life than weekend parties, TV and movies? It gave a direction to our lives - disha. Life had a purpose and became more meaningful.

It is not that I did not have feelings for Bharat and for my Hindu traditions before this. I did. Since my childhood I had that latent feeling. But I did not know how to give it an expression. It only manifested itself as heated arguments in the defense of India at parties, and verbal fist fights with others. With this fortunate encounter, we found what we were looking for. Our long suppressed desires to be useful found an expression.

Repaying the Debt of Your Ancestors

Working with VHPA workers and experimenting with various ideas, we developed materials for Bal Vihars, that being the urgent need we faced with young children at that time. Running a Bal Vihar clearly helped create an environment for the wholesome development of our children since they got involved in every aspect of it. But it also helped other families who soon became a part of a larger extended family. We heard of others who were doing the same thing and were inspired by folks such as Sheela Kene who has been running a Bal Vihars in the Los Angeles area for the past 20 years. "We need to ensure that our children know their heritage and history," she says, "that is how we pay the debt we owe to our ancestors." There are many devoted people like Sheela Ji in every chapter of VHPA who have spent their lives developing programs and material to teach the children just that.

Work Silently

I met him 20 years ago in the New Jersey camp, walking around the campsite with a mop and a bucket cleaning all the toilets and bathrooms. Twenty years later we can still see Kiran Parikh doing the same thing at the camp in Tolland, MA. His child has long graduated from the camp and is married. But this rare "seva murti" is still there year after year at every camp silently cleaning the camp facilities. And no one knows. VHPA camps are a great laboratory to observe human behavior, to study great team work and to



figure out the dynamics of a lasting relationship. The camps are also a place to discover classical Hindu values such as doing seva in

silence. How else would one explain why Devendra Patel spends a week at the camp sleeping only 4 hours a night, keeping guard to make the camp secure for the children.

Work Selflessly

The quality of rajas creates selfishness and attachment. A selfish man does not have a large heart. He has no ideal. He is petty-minded. His mind is full of greed. That was the common image of an Indian I carried with me: of a person who is always calculating, is actuated by the hope of reward and is greedy of gain - someone who has got into a narrow, circumscribed circle and dwells within this small grove. His love extends to his own body, his wife and children. That is all. Generosity is unknown to him. But how could I have known any different until I met Shivaram Sitaram.

When discrimination dawns, and the mind is filled with purity, then its nature changes slowly. The spirit of selflessness slowly creeps in. That is what I experienced after meeting Sushim Mukerjee and Ramesh Patel, plain clothed sadhus. They work tirelessly for the community with no personal agenda. Sushim Ji single handedly started a project to support needy children in Bharat and brought it to a national level project that today supports more than 800 children. Passionate householders cannot dream of doing any work without expecting some gain for themselves

and their families. And yet Ramesh bhai years ago sacrificed the comfort of his weekends only to serve the community by performing



poojas wherever needed, donating whatever dakshnia he receives to VHPA.

Work as a Team

VHPA is a living laboratory for learning people skills. When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence then excellence becomes a reality. Over the years we have worked on so many projects, youth conferences, Hindu Heritage Day celebrations. Our team in VHPA Boston was a fertile ground for many experiments in team work. In the company of wonderful people, we learned how to



work with no expectations or rewards. We learned the art of getting things done in a non-profit organization, where there is no position power, only personal power. And we learned great secrets such as how to lead from behind. That is what creates a team and motivates people. What makes a team work is individual commitment to a group effort; that is what makes a company work, a society work, a civilization work. "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." In words of Henry Ford, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

Prayerful Meetings

VHPA meetings, big or small, are unique lesson in group interaction. They are organized more as prayer events. Every meeting starts and ends with a prayer. All the participants sit on the floor in a circle (mandala). Everyone offers their ideas and inputs and every one has the opportunity to contribute. These meetings have taught us how to communicate with others, politely and sweetly. It has taught us the importance of mixing humor with work. It has taught us the value of mutual respect, that accomplishing shared objectives is more important even in the presence of disagreements on specific issues. It has taught us great lessons in acceptance and working with a smile.

An Organization with No Mandir, No Swami

I took me a long time to discover what is so unique about VHP of America. It is its unifying vision that spans the entire Hindu diaspora. This is one organization that does not recognize any boundaries within the Hindu community. There are no sampradayas, no Gujratis, Marathis, Telgus, Tamils, Biharis or Punjabis. Only Hindus, One Billion Hindus.



Very often we are asked if we have a Swami we follow or a Mandir that we go to. VHP of America has no mandir of its own, and it has no Swami associated with it for a very simple reason. All the mandirs are our mandirs and all the Swamis are our Swamis. Every Jain Muni, Sikh Guru and Baudhha Bhikshu or Lama is ours. I personally witnessed this concept transformed into reality for the first time at the Dharma Sansad in Arhsa Vidya Gurukulum in 1998. There



were 30 Swami of various sampradayas sitting and deliberating on the same platform. What a sight that was to behold! Following up on that initiative, today the Parishad is working on HMEC, a project to bring all the mandirs into one network so they can share ideas and best practices, pool their resources and jointly solve each others problems.

Nurturing the Fabric of the Society

When the thought of doing good becomes part and parcel of a person's very being she will not entertain any motive at all. She takes immense delight in serving others and in being good to others. Such a person gets spiritual strength and power by performing motiveless and selfless actions. What is our job, people ask. Connecting one human being to another human being, that is our job. Communicating with people, to make them aware of their history and heritage is our job. It is this connectivity that forms the fabric of the society. We all know that in theory. But to reduce that to practice, endlessly, is not a trivial matter. That lesson can only be learned from someone like Anjlee Pandya, who year after year sends a "Rakhi" to hundreds of families across the globe simply as a reminder of this bond that holds us all together as ONE.

Balancing Work, Community and Family

Perhaps a great lesson that we have learned being in VHP of America is how to strike the right balance between work, community involvement and



family. The secret that we learnt is that all three are equally important. And the key to doing that is in the Bhagwat Geeta - the science of Karma Yoga. Working with such people we learn the art of cultivating a contemplative mind with twin qualities of Arpana buddhi and Prasad buddhi. Excelling at work is important for personal growth, serving the community is important for your spiritual growth as well as for the growth of the entire family. But ensuring that your family responsibilities are not neglected is the key to the harmony and happiness of all. I have learned much in this area from Ramprakash Agrawal and Yash Lakra, who have displayed tremendous composure, dedication and humor regardless of what they faced in life.

Living as a Hindu

VHPA has taught me that while we are workers, we are the ambassadors of our community as well. All too often we focus on being great workers and forget that our role is also to highlight and promote the work we do; that is part of the package, that is part of educating others, and that is part of the whole Hindu

Awareness campaign.

One common principle in America is: Say what you will do, do it, and then talk about what you did - Say-do-talk. There is a lot of merit in this principle. That is the culture that we promote in our organization.

In times of great duress, tumult, and uncertainty, we have to have our moorings. Great movements and



organization have always had an incredible fabric of values, of underlying ideals or principles that explained why it was important that they existed. VHP of America has found after 40 years of devoted and tireless service that what really matters is that it has core values - not what they are. The more challenged we get, the more we have to have our values. We need to preserve them consistently over time. As VHP of America we have known this as our mission - to keep the flame of the Hindu heritage alive and strong in this land.

We do this, first and foremost, by living our Hindu values. By helping our children live as Hindus. By generating goodwill through community service for the needy in the Hindu as well as in the larger American society. As we continue to enhance our foundation of accomplishments, we earn the "adhikara" to talk about it. Without a base of accomplishments all talk is vacuous and empty.

Having a few core values and living them day in day out is more important than citing excerpts from sacred texts. We know that the Hindu civilization is ancient and its value system is precious. In fact many solutions to the world's problems are to be found in the simple, sublime, creative, pragmatic, harmonious and sustainable life style demonstrated by our sages. The challenge is to bring it into our lives and enrich the world with it at a practical level.

Our children have an Indian ancestry and the roots of Sanatan Dharma are in Bharat. All those who we deeply respect and regard are there. It is an integral and essential part of our identity and the identity of our children. What we share with people there are the core principles of Hindu Dharma that have guided us throughout our history. We must never be apologetic of this value-based bond that we share with all the Hindus across the world, especially with our kin in Bharat.

Shiv Bhagwan's Baraat

Another important thing we learnt was that every member of the community is valuable. When we recognize the value and contribution of every member, then we make a great team. In VHP of America everyone is welcome just as in Bhagwan Shiv Ji's baraat. We accept all.

We realize that volunteers are not always selfless! Volunteers are not always donating unpaid service to be nice, to help the world, or to make a difference for a greater good. Often, volunteers donate unpaid service: to gain certain kinds of experience, for a sense



of adventure, to gain skills and contacts for paid employment, for fun, to meet people in the hopes of making friends, because they are angry and want to see first hand what's going on at an organization or within a cause, or to contribute to a cause they feel passionate about, or to feel important. All these are true.

A great organization like VHP of America is cognizant of this human reality and deftly works with it. There is a place for everyone and there is a role for everyone.

What is true at the individual level is also applicable at the organizational level. Not every organization should or can do everything. VHP of America realizes this as well. We do a few things and we do them well. The rest will be shouldered by other Hindu organizations that are passionate, equipped and trained for other special functions. VHP of America never has or will work at cross purposes with any Hindu organization that is working for the well being of the Hindu community. We always seek to bridge and align with other Hindu organizations to achieve greater synergies and effectiveness of operation.

Creative Activists

Throughout VHPA's history, we have had to make crucial choices: be politically correct or stand up for what we are. The choices may have been tough but the sequence of choices we made ended up defining us and the future of our children. Rev Martin Luther King: "The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be... The nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists." It is this creative assertiveness that is the hallmark of VHP of America.



VHP of America has inspired many to understand that assertiveness is the ability to express your emotions and needs without violating other's rights and at the same time without being aggressive. Hindus in the past have always been accommodative. They have been seen as people who are not assertive and would do their best to please others violating their own rights; as people who just step on themselves in order to make others feel happy or in order to avoid being rejected.

VHP of America teaches that assertiveness is not shouting at people nor trying to show them that you are mad, it's something in between being aggressive and being passive, it's demanding what you want in a confident way that harms no one but at the same time preserves your rights. It teaches you how to be pro-Hindu and anti-none.

Social change groups have always carried out their actions for change based on some degree of strategic planning. The advent of the Internet brought hundreds of non-profit organizations online, each wondering how best they might use the new medium. The pioneering work of Ajay Shah and Srinivas enabled us to harness technology to reach out to Hindus across the world and create awareness on sensitive, socio-cultural issues on an unprecedented scale. With AHAD he demonstrated a new brand of Hindu activism as intentional action to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change.

An Incubator for Leaders and Organizations

VHP of America continues to be a great incubator for creating leaders and organizations that serve the Hindu community. It is a leadership incubator that creates an environment where social and spiritual leaders and ideas are born, nurtured, and developed by example and sincere dialogue. It provides sustainable, peer-group-based, mission-driven, leadership and personal development programs: accept, learn and lead. Many well known organizations were seeded, incubated and then spun off from within VHP of America, such as Ekal Vidyalaya, The Hindu University of America, Hindunet and Hindu Student Council.

The field of action for these leaders is America. And their mission is to sustain,



strengthen and lead the Hindu-American community and in doing so leave a memorable and lasting legacy behind for our children and this country; and they must do this by example.


The leadership also understands that our work is basic and foundational in nature. That we work to sustain the fundamental social and cultural elements of our civilization: our families, our children, our elders, our mandirs & acharyas, our community and our environment. Which one of these is not important? Conversely, if we can do this much, what else is there to be done? We work mostly at the ground level work to strengthen, sustain and lead our community from within.

The Brick Layers

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Rev Martin Luther King.

When we look at our history we have had many difficult times. One of the big lessons the Hindus have learned is that turbulence is our friend. And it is in times of turmoil that we have understood the caliber of our people. As they say, if there is a storm on the mountain, more important than the plan are the people you have with you. If we go back in history, institutions have used difficult times to bolster their legions of talent. VHP of America has always been fortunate in having a continuous stream of talented, passionate and dedicated members. Its vision, long term thinking and selfless service to the Hindu

community attract those great people. Being a great institution it manages for the quarter century.

As people of VHPA we know who we are and the work we do. We seek to help all in need and harm none. We are open and transparent in our operation. We must never harbor a doubt in our mind about our vision and mission lest we become weak in our resolve. Everyday our characters are being forged in a burning, searing crucible. 

1) *The right people don't think they have a job: They have responsibilities. The right people do what they say they will do. In difficult times our results are our responsibilities. People who take credit in good times and blame external forces in bad times do not deserve to lead. End of story.*

2) *The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists who are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood - Martin Luther King.*

3) *The greatness in an ideology is not, in fact, in the ideology; but it is in the subject which lives that ideology - Swami Chinmayananda.*

4) *Regardless of where we come from: Trinidad, Africa, Guyana, Surinam, Fiji, Australia, Europe, UK, Bali, Malaysia, Indonesia, Canada, or USA.*

5) *"Ekam Sat Viprah bahudha Vadanti" in Sanskrit, and alternatively also as "God is One paths to attain It are many." Hence, there are hundreds of different belief systems, images of God and methods of praying, what we in the west would call religions that coexist harmoniously and with mutual respect, within the big fold of Hinduism.*

"Ishavasya Idam Sarvam, Yatkinch Jagatyam Jagat," in Sanskrit. The entire creation is nothing but different manifestations of the same Spirit. Thus, only God exists, and the diversity that the human beings experience is based on the limitations of individual minds and intellects, the logic being that the same world provides different experiences to different individuals.

"Udar Charitanam Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," in Sanskrit. This also demonstrates the all-inclusiveness cherished by Hinduism as contrasted with the exclusivity practiced by other faiths and traditions based on following one book or one prophet.

"Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah, Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu, Ma Kaschit Dukh Bhagbhavet," in Sanskrit. This is the prayer a Hindu recites daily.

6) *In contrast with work done by advocacy groups, bloggers on the Internet, or mere activism. All these functions are valuable as well, but this is not our primary focus.*

Dr. Abhaya Asthana, General Secretary, VHP of America



Support-A-Child: Strongest Link to Bond with Mother Bharat

By Sheela Kene

Support a Child (SAC) is one of such well run sewa projects adopted by VHP of America for past several years. Through SAC program families living outside India can educate a worthy child and also support his lodging and boarding during his/her school years.

These children come from various parts of India who cannot afford secondary/high school education due to abject poverty at home. Such deserving students are given opportunity to become high school graduate with the help of a donor.

Children are selected after a test exam and admitted into a boarding school.

While living in supervised, disciplined yet caring environment in a chhatralaya or boarding school, the children learn many skills. Besides education, they are kept occupied from 6am to 10 pm with various activities such as yoga-meditation, gardening, athletic games, art and crafts. They are taught self-discipline through daily chores of washing their own clothes, their dishes, helping each other and serving food at lunch time.

I had an opportunity to visit the model school at Seva Dham, Mandoli (Near New Delhi) and several other boarding schools and witnessed this project closely. It was an humbling experience to meet a child who we have been supporting. He had become an energetic talented youth and was ready to face the outside world. The children are very polite and hard working. They are provided basic amenities and simple food. Nothing fancy yet I saw joy

on their faces and spark in their eyes. Where would these children be without education? They would either become victims of juvenile crime or drug addict. Or more likely would be victim of religious conversion due to pressure of poverty. With the education they have a choice to work or go for higher education on scholarship. Some of the students have become teachers or IAS officers and engineers after graduation.

After visiting these schools, I strongly felt that every Indian family must make it as part of their duty to support these children by donating \$250 per year. Without actually raising them, we can become instrumental in giving future to these worthy children.

Serving man is like serving God and education is the highest charity as stated in our scriptures.

On birthday of our own child we can send this life-changing gift to one or more children under SAC project. When we receive their annual progress report and read their hand-written letters we feel rewarded and our hearts feel blessed.

Many children from Vivekananda Balvihar of VHPA, Irvine save their allowance to help this project. This has brought them face to face with

the reality of life. I am proud to say that Vivekananda balvihar has consistently adopted children since 1994. In the past, few parents pooled together to support one child, currently we are adopting total 5 children. Thus, the support a child has become the strongest link to connect with Mother Bharat - the source of our inspiration.

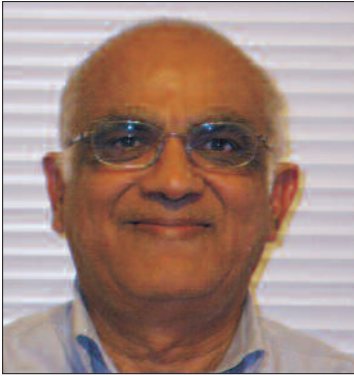


प्रसन्नार्थ साधक संग्रह
किशोर कल्याण कक्ष





VHPA Reminiscences: My Journey with VHPA



By Gaurang G. Vaishnav

When I was asked to share my experiences for this special issue of Hindu Vishwa, I felt reasonably comfortable of wrapping it up in no time. But lo and behold! To think of VHPA's journey of almost 40 years is to walk down the memory lane and as we all have experienced, memory lane is never straight; there are by lanes, nooks and detours. So let me begin with the time when I was introduced to VHPA.

Flashback to early 1972- a chance meeting at a common friend's home in Hartford, CT with Dr. Mahesh Mehta, the founder of VHPA and a chance to ride back to New Jersey with him was my first unofficial introduction to VHPA. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a life long journey, now in its 39th year. As I jokingly say, I got on a ride, from which I have not gotten off, yet!

In those days, VHPA was a small and fairly localized organization. To introduce new contacts to VHPA and to the philosophy behind selfless social service as well as to strengthen the resolve of other volunteers, a series of workshops were held in weekends in New Jersey and New York. Many a new comers like me were astounded by the depth of knowledge of the instructors and also the family atmosphere created by the hosts. Today, with the growth of VHPA and new demands of present times, though we have most modern communication tools, that intensity and verve witnessed in early 70's is lacking.

I remember the first picnic that I attended in Bear Mountains in upstate New York. I had never imagined that a picnic could be structured, disciplined and informative, yet full of fun. I learnt some important lessons which have helped me in working with chapters, first



in Connecticut and now in New Jersey.

In 1973, four volunteers had just started a new chapter in Hartford, CT. Even before they could find their bearings, printing and mailing of Hindu Vishwa as well as office work of VHPA was transferred to the Hartford chapter. I distinctly remember that VHPA had less than 300 names on its mailing list, Hindu Vishwa was an eight to 12 page affair, set to type on a very complex and cumbersome machine by Anjleebahen Pandya and prepared on a cyclostyle kind of machine. It used to be stapled on the side at three places.



Subscription was three dollars. Mailing was an interesting exercise. We used to keep the membership list updated manually as there were no computers. A few of us (our current president, Jyotishbhai Parekh being one of them) used to get together every month (at that

time Hindu Vishwa was a monthly) for dinner and then sit down to the task of checking membership roster, printing labels, affixing them to Hindu Vishwa, sorting them by the postal requirement for bulk mailing, bagging them in special sacks and then one of us carrying the sacks to the post office.

A Costly Lesson

I remember an interesting incident. In our zeal to save postage on mailing membership reminders, we decided to stamp the expiration notice on the last cover of Hindu Vishwa itself. We had a rubber stamp made and Shree Rameshbhai Patel (former Joint General Secretary, Vice President, Seva) and I stamped each magazine and filled in the expiration date by pen. When Rameshbhai took the sacks to the post office, our mailing was rejected because we did not know the basic rule of bulk mailing: each piece had to be identical and there could be no "unprinted" matter. It was a costly lesson.

1975 was a turning point for VHPA. Mrs. Gandhi imposed "emergency" in Bharat to save her chair and banned several organizations, including VHP (Bharat). Those of us who dared to speak out against this murder of democracy from out side of Bharat were

put under a scanner by Bharatiya Missions abroad. Naturally, VHPA and many of its volunteers were in the cross-eye of these Missions. The 18 month struggle to thwart Mrs. Gandhi's designs brought together people who were ideologically opposed to each other. Thus, the communists, socialists and others joined hands with Hindutva forces under one banner named Indians For Democracy (IFD). Once the emergency was lifted, the groups went their own way, but strong friendships were built transcending the ideological divide and VHPA gained new workers and friends.

In 1976, I was asked to take up the role of Editor of Hindu Vishwa. I had thought of this as a temporary, stop gap assignment, once again not knowing that this was to alter course of my life in more ways than one. My assignment lasted till 1993, a full 17 years and gave me immense pleasure. I learnt techniques of editing, understood the need of vast reading on varied subjects, developing skills of appreciating opposing viewpoints on emotional issues, working with writers and contributors- those who were highly established and those who were starting out and eager to have their name in print. I found new interest in working with children and encouraging them to write for Hindu Vishwa- a poem, a joke, a small story, a puzzle, anything to catch their imagination. I am happy to see



Swami Tilak: The Inspiration and Guiding Force of VHPA



Dharma Prasaar Yatra 1999, New Jersey



Dr. Mahesh Mehta, Dr. Sukhdev Soni with Shree Dada Saheb Apte, founder, secretary general, VHP - 1975

that all of these contributors are today successful professionals or entrepreneurs and well rounded parents. In one of the issues, in children's page, one question was "who was sitting on top of Arjuna's chariot?" From multiple answers, one young boy selected blue jay!

We brought out a number of special issues, including souvenirs commemorating several conferences, but four issues deserve special mention. These were: Kashmir Issue, Ram Janmabhoomi Issue, Youth Camp Issue and Hindu Unity Year (1989) issue which had a full pictorial life story of Param Pujaneeya Dr. Hedgewar.

Hindu Vishwa also gave me an opportunity to meet with religious, spiritual and nationalistic leaders to seek their blessings and views. I had the good fortune of visiting Shree Ram Janmabhoomi after the 1990 massacre of karsevaks but before the Babri structure was pulled down. I interviewed a number of men on the street to understand their feelings and also interviewed Acharya Giriraj Kishoreji and Ma. Ashok Singhalji, two senior most leaders of VHP.

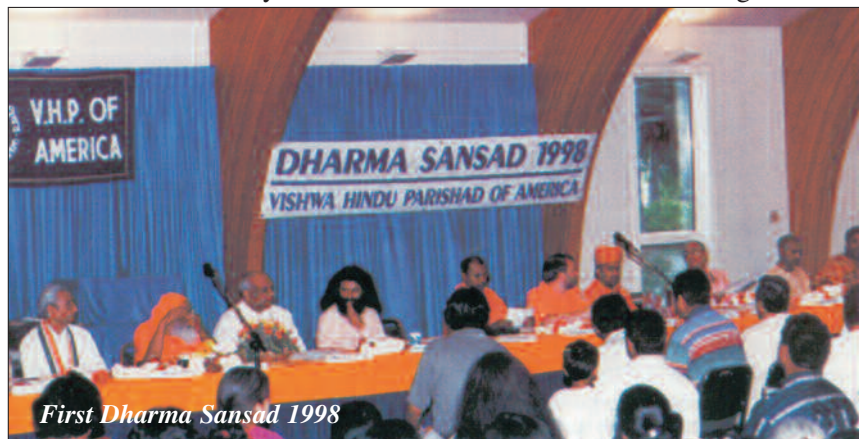
I remember advice given by Shree Atal Behari Vajpayee. As a prominent opposition leader, he used to come to the United Nations every year. On one such trip, during late seventies, he was visiting Hartford. There was a meeting and dinner at someone's home; after the dinner, Vajpayeeji and some of us were strolling in the backyard- during a conversation, knowing that I was editing Hindu Vishwa, he told me- "Vaishnavji, you have a powerful tool in your hands, use it effectively." I hope, I have put in practice his advice.

Earlier I mentioned that becoming

editor of Hindu Vishwa was going to alter the course of my life. On one hand, becoming editor of Hindu Vishwa opened a new horizon in my thought process and interactions. On the other and on a rather personal note, I ended up buying the printing facility where I used to go to have Hindu Vishwa printed.

1977- National Conference at Newington (Hartford, CT): I had attended one conference in Chicago but being new to VHPA and having travelled by bus to Chicago with other delegates from northeastern states, I was quite tired and have only hazy recollection of it. But in 1977, we were the hosts, so we got to know ins and outs of planning a national conference. It was sheer hard work of a highly motivated team and when almost 250 delegated came to the conference from several states, we were elated; in those days, that was a big number. We had not imagined that 16 years from then, VHPA's conference would attract 30 times more delegates in Washington, DC! The experience of Hartford conference was valuable and a permanent team came into being and managed several successive conferences- at Baton Rouge, Los Angeles, Orlando, Charlotte, New York, Boston, etc.

1979- VHPA started first Youth camp in Rhode Island. After two successful camps there, need was felt for a larger and more central camp site. Thus came in picture Tolland, Massachusetts camp site in the Berkshire mountains. What stated in 1981 at that site is still continuing today after 29 years. Many of the past campers now come there as volunteers with their own children. Many organizations that run good camps today had sent their volunteers to VHPA's camps to learn the technique of running successful camps. Now of course, VHPA runs camps at several locations- New Jersey, Maryland, Georgia, Houston, Detroit, etc. and thousands of children and parents have benefited over the years. Here I am reminded of an amusing incident.





1987 Vajpayee ji at New England Hindu Conference

In the early years of camps, once a reporter from India Abroad came to visit the camp site and write a story about it. We were delighted because we had not made any effort to seek media publicity. After talking with the managing team the reporter got hold of a nine year old girl and asked: "So are you a Hindu?" Pat, came the answer: "No, I am a Gujarati."

1984- It was a watershed year for VHPA. This was the first time when we decided to change the format of VHPA conference to an International Hindu Conference. Two years planning preceded the conference. These were the days of advent of personal computers- bulky and with very limited memory. I remember 1982 Governing Council meeting in Southington, CT where we debated whether we should invest in a computer- it was an expensive affair then and we were not sure if it was worth it! Leading contenders for our choice are no longer in business- Radio Shack's computer line, Victor and Osborne. We settled for Osborne and they were used to manage the 1984 conference. One of the hallmarks of VHPA has been dreaming high. Though we did not have a bank balance worth speaking about, we decided to go for the best and the prestigious Madison Square Gardens in midtown Manhattan, New York was selected. A couple of key volunteers used their own credit cards to put down a deposit on the venue, such was their confidence in what they believed in. Three months before the conference, a tragedy struck. Pujya Swami Tilak, a monk who would remind us of how Swami Vivekanand would have been, was a mentor to VHPA. He did not belong to any organization and yet he belonged to all. We had special relationship with him

and he was invited to be a keynote speaker at the conference. During a planning meeting on May 12, 1984 in Connecticut, we received a telephone call informing of Swamiji's passing away in a car accident on way to airport (to come to USA) in Spain. While this threw a pall of gloom on all of us as we all were very close to Swamiji, we redoubled our efforts to make the conference a great success as a tribute to Swami Tilak. I am reminded of a weekend retreat that we had arranged for our workers at the Tolland camp site with Swami Tilak. Over two days, he gave very illuminating and lucid talks and shed light on various aspects of Hindu living. A couple of things I recollect: He said that if mothers considered their careers more important than child rearing and left the child with a baby sitter then, that child will not become matru-bhakta but a baby sitter-bhakta. In the same vain he mentioned hesitation of some mothers to breast feed in order to maintain their beauty and quipped, if you raise a child on a bottle (of milk), he will become bottle-bhakta.

We used to have meetings every Saturday and Sunday for moths on end to do planning as well as for canvassing for the conference small and large groups in New York and New Jersey. We from Connecticut and Massachusetts used to drive together and those Friday evening to Sunday night togetherness cemented further ideological bonding amongst all of us.

We had commissioned an interesting exhibition titled Bharat's Contribution to the World especially for this conference. Late Dr. Vishnu Hari Wakankar, an eminent archeologist, artist and patriot, decorated with Padmashree award, was the moving force behind this



*VHPA and Gujarat Keshavnagar-Lodai village Lokarpan Samaroh.
18 October 2002*



exhibition. He engaged 200 artisans in Bharat to put together this exhibition. I remember the days when in the Staten Island, NY garage of one of the founding members of VHPA, Arvindbhai Sant, Wakankarji would sit like a king surveying his kingdom and lovingly give final touches to hundreds of paintings



1993 Global Vision 2000, Native Indian Chief and The Dalai Lama's representative

and sketches. Though he was such an eminent person, Wakankarji was down to earth and he regaled us with numerous anecdotes while working. He would be sitting in our meetings and effortlessly sketch us. Wherever he went, he would sketch the house and give it as a gift to the host. Even today, I fondly look at the sketch he made of our house in Glastonbury, CT.

The conference was a great success by all standards. There were 4500 delegates representing 20+ countries. Luminaries like Maharana Bhagwat Singh of Mewar, the president of VHP (Bharat), Swami Chinmayanandji (Founder president of VHP), Sant Morari Bapu, Swami Ishwaranand Giri, Dr. Karan Singh, H. V. Sheshadriji, Dr. Gopal Singh and many others graced the conference.

The keynote address in the closing session of the three day conference was delivered by Swami Ishwaranand Giri of Mt. Abu. His prophetic words ring in my ears even after twenty five years. He said two things: Alluding to the divisions among Hindus, he told a story of a visit to an asylum for the insane and ended with "those who are in an institution for insane do not unite and therefore, no one fears them." Swamiji further said, "We are not new to sammelans (conferences), but we have not had a Hindu sammelan

in Madison Square Gardens, in the heart of the most commercial city in the world. Perhaps, we want the world to know that we mean business!" This conference decided to fulfill Swami Tilak's dream of establishing a Hindu University in USA. Today, that dream is a reality, albeit on a smaller scale in Orlando, Florida.

1985 saw visit by Swami Vishnu Puri from Kolkata who talked about his small scale project of supporting a few destitute children in his ashram. This inspired one of the governing council members, Sushim Mukerji of Delaware so much that he proposed to the governing council setting up a project to support such children from donations from USA and took upon himself to single-handedly nurture the program. Thus was born Support A Child project. Today, this project supports 800 children in 17 states of Bharat.

1989 was the birth centenary of P. P. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, founder of RSS. VHPA decided to celebrate the year as Hindu Unity Year. Throughout the year, programs small and big were organized across the country, celebrating Unity in Diversity. In all there were programs at 104 locations between September 1988 and December 1989. Through these programs, VHPA reached out to close to 10,000 people. A Charter emphasizing eternal truths espoused by the Rishis such as Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti was created and 60+ organizations signed it. The grand finale was held in Newington, CT (same town as 1977 conference!). This two day event featured a Hindu Unity Yagna performed by several hundred participants. While such yagnas have become common occurrence now, in those days it was a unique program. Keynote speaker was Ma. K. Sudershanji, former Sar Sanghchalak of RSS who was at that time Baudhik Pramukh of RSS. One important feature of this program was sheela puja for Shree Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. All participants performed puja of Ramsheela, brick or a tile which were later sent to Bharat for the construction of shree Ram Mandir at Ayodhya.

By late eighties, we realized that there was no organized Hindu presence on college campuses. So VHPA started Hindu Students Council (HSC). It was inaugurated at Camp Inawendiwin, NJ in Memorial Day weekend in 1990. Led by young, dynamic volunteers, it spread rapidly and established its presence in more than 70 campuses. By 2003, HSC had become an independent organization.



1991 showed an organizational change. I was asked to shoulder responsibility as the General Secretary of VHPA. I had to give up my favorite job of editing Hindu Vishwa, which was ably taken over by Dr. Ajay Shah.

In the Governing Council meeting in 1989, Dr. Mahesh Mehta presented the concept of celebrating on a grand scale centenary of Swami Vivekanand's epoch making visit to USA and his address at Chicago to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. By end of 1991, we started working on that idea. The national team of VHPA was consumed with planning of a major International Hindu conference. It was also decided to have year long programs centered on Swami Vivekanand's teachings. HSC started study centers at many of the campuses. Several chapters of VHPA took upon themselves task of conducting regular classes to study Vivekanandji's works. Perhaps, this was one of the best experiments in mass awakening and mass contact. For the conference, out of three possible candidate cities, Washington, DC was chosen. Capital Center, an indoor sports arena in Landover, MD, a suburb of Washington, DC was selected to hold the three day extravaganza. We ran into significant challenges with this conference. While the preparations were in full swing, news came of Babri demolition on December 6, 1992. There were serious ramifications for all Hindutva organizations as the



*Durban Hindu Conference 1995 attended by four VHPA executives-
Dr. Mahesh Mehta of VHPA addresses the conference.*

central government of Bharat went on a war path with Hindu organizations. We had to decide whether to continue with the conference or postpone it. An emergency meeting of the managing committee was held in Boston and after a long session, we decided not to backtrack. We faced a barrage of negative reporting in the ethnic media and the usual suspects, pseudo-secular lobby and leftist groups enjoying hospitality of a capitalist country, and other anti-Hindu organizations publically vowed to make it difficult to hold the conference. Further surprise was in store. We had named the conference World Vision 2000. A well established Christian group named World Vision filed a law suit to stop us from using World Vision as part of

the conference name. The ruling went against us and we had to change the name to Global Vision 2000. This caused major expense as we had to reprint all the published material and recall everything that had World Vision 2000 in it.

The Global Vision 2000 Conference had five themes. (1) Religion and Spirituality are Unifying Forces (2) The Cosmos is One Family (3) Excellence is the Goal of Life (4) Systems are Conducive to the Unfoldment of Divinity



Shri Gaurang Vaishnav and Shri Vasav Mehta



We had planned a parallel youth conference, led by HSC at a nearby hotel. Our expectations both for the main conference and Youth

conference were far exceeded. We had anticipated 500 students for the youth conference and 2500-3000 delegates for the main conference but we ended up with close to 2000 youth delegates and 4000 or so conference delegates. This posed serious challenge of space management, crowd control, hotel arrangements for the delegates and food supply. While many delegates had to suffer long lines and less than satisfactory arrangements, it was heartening to see that "every available hand on deck" plunged in to bring a semblance of order to the whole affair. I personally know of dozens of volunteers, seasoned and new, young and old who were on their feet for hours on end without taking a break for a drink of water, what to talk about food. I cannot forget one 25 year old volunteer lady who used her own American Express card to make a deposit of more than \$20000 with the hotel for the last minute reservation of additional rooms without batting an eye lid. It is this spirit of dedication and Seva that has kept VHPA going strong in even most adverse situations.

The much hyped protest of the conference turned out to be a damp squib. Barely two dozen people demonstrated outside the hotel and they were outnumbered by thousands of enthusiastic delegates.

The conference, while a great success in terms of what it offered to the delegates, incurred sizeable deficit due to unexpected expenses and circumstances beyond our control. In a voluntary organization unfortunately such deficits from an event leads to mutual accusations, acrimony, finger pointing, forced resignations and even law suits. It is to the credit of VHPA's strong sense of self-sacrifice, ethics and feeling of one family, that none of these happened.

Star studded cast of the artists included Anuradha Paudwal, Anup Jalota, Hariprasad Chaurasia, Shekhar Sen, famous danseuse Sonal Mansingh, Kala Viduru, a dance troupe from Karnataka, Viji Prakash and Anjani Ambegaonkar, dancers from California and others.



1994 to 1997 was the time for us to recoup the losses and pay all the pending bills. As an emergency measure, with the approval of the Governing Council, restricted funds were used to pay off the bills and then successful efforts were made to replenish the restricted funds. By end of 1997, VHPA was back on sound footing and during all this time, all activities continued at usual pace.

Hindus of South Africa were planning a first ever Hindu conference in 1995 after the fall of apartheid regime. The executive board of VHPA felt that there should be a representation from VHPA at this historic event. So, Dr. Mahesh Mehta (ex President and General Secretary), Anjlee Pandya (International Liaison Coordinator), Kanchan Banerjee (HSC Coordinator) and myself (General Secretary) were asked to attend the conference. Lest one should carry an impression that VHPA funds are used indiscriminately for foreign junkets of its office bearers, I should clarify that it has remained an unwritten policy of VHPA for the past 40 years that its office bearers travel at their own expense as much as possible. We have made some exceptions but by and large those who travel anywhere, within or outside USA, reimburse VHPA for the funds spent by VHPA. Thus the delegates traveled to South Africa at their own expense.

This conference in Durban drew as many as 30,000 people for the public rally which was inaugurated by Shree Nelson Mandela. Conference itself drew thousands of delegates from all corners of the world. VHPA was able to make and renew a number of international connections. HSC excited many young delegates to start similar efforts in their own countries. I believe that VHPA should continue to take part in such international events because VHPA has the strength and wherewithal to provide leadership to Hindu organizations around the world.

We had several experiences of live, warm and vibrant Hindu culture and ethos in South Africa but one is etched in my memory. We were visiting a small town near Johannesburg and happened to stop by at a tailor shop. The lady at the shop found out that I had met one of her cousin brothers in USA a while back. She had

not met him in long time so she told me that she considered me her brother and since there was no "rakhi" available, she took a thread from a spool on the sewing machine and tied it around my wrist! We both were overwhelmed by that experience- all I could do was to bow to her and empty the South African currency in my pocket as a gift to her.

In 1997, Sony music came out with a CD that had a distorted picture of Bhagwan Krishna on its cover. This was not the first time that Hindu icons, Hindu Gods and Hindu traditions were being insulted or made fun of; however, this incident served as the spark in the tinder box and result was the birth of American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) to fight such ignominies. Late Dr. Kuldip Gupta had planted seeds of such an organization way back in 1990. Now it had become a reality under the leadership of Dr. Ajay Shah. Sony withdrew the offending cover and tendered an apology. Since then, AHAD, as a VHPA project has scored a number of victories in such cases.



Hindu Students Council at New Jersey Camp, 1991

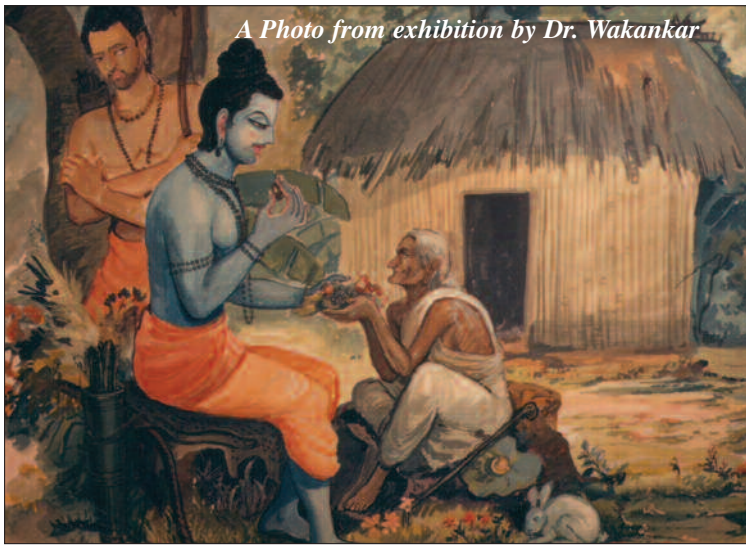
Some enterprising volunteers of VHPA had designed a web site for VHPA under HinduNet in 1995. A time came when they thought it was appropriate to make HinduNet a commercial venture. Thus was born a commercial portal called GHEN- Global Hindu Electronic Network. Today it operates as www.dharmauniverse.com

In 1998, VHPA held first Dharma Samsad, an assembly of learned saints. Concept was to have an apex body of Dharma Gurus that would guide VHPA in establishing /evolving Hindu traditions in America for sustaining our community and to develop relationships with Mandirs and Ashrams. This program was held at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, PA with



blessings and guidance of Puja Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

I remember the year 1999, when VHPA embarked upon a unique project- the Dharma Prasaar Yaatra. In Bharat, Yaatra is done continuously, so here the plan was to have religious leaders and artists travel across the country and have a program every day for nine days. Puja Dayanand Saraswati, Puja Rameshbhai Oza, Swami Chidananda Saraswati, Jain Muni Rupchandji, Anuradha Paudwal, Kavita Paudwal and others traveled by a chartered plane, courtesy of Dr.



Bhupendra Kumar Modi, continuously and covered nine cities in nine days. Starting from Los Angeles, they covered San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Boston, Houston, Philadelphia and ended with a grand finale in Whippany, NJ where 2000 people came to listen to religious discourse of Hindu unity and melodious bhajans of Anuradha and Kavita Paudwal. Even on weekdays, there were large crowds at each venue and Dharma Prasaar Yaatra made a significant contribution in revitalizing VHPA chapters.

Dharma Prasaar Yaatra was also a vehicle to launch a major Seva project named Ekal Vidyalaya. Today, readers of Hindu Vishwa know Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA quite well because of its tremendous success in getting thousands of informal schools in the tribal areas of Bharat sponsored on dollar a day theme. We all feel very happy that seeds planted by VHPA in 1999 have grown into an independent foundation of formidable size.

That year VHPA held second Dharma Samsad, at Barsana Dham in Austin, Texas. Swami Prakashananda guided the assembly.

The United Nations decided to hold a Millennium Peace Summit of religious and spiritual heads in year 2000 to find solution to the problems of world poverty and wars. VHP Bharat and Swami Dayanand Saraswati were entrusted with the selection of Hindu delegation. 108 religious and spiritual heads representing various sampradays along with their entourage descended upon New York city. VHP of America was given the responsibility of making all the arrangements for hosting and looking after all the comforts of these revered gurus. It was a mind boggling task. It was to the credit of the volunteers of New York and New Jersey chapters and some from other states that all the delegates had nothing but praise for the arrangements. I remember the time when we had to go out and buy dozens of steel plates, bowls and cutlery since most of the Dharma Gurus would not eat in china plates. We had to negotiate with local Bharatiya restaurants to bring food to two hotels where the delegation was staying and get the permission of the hotels to serve the food there; our lady volunteers served the food with motherly love and won the hearts of the Dharma Gurus. It was emotionally overwhelming to be with the stalwarts of the Hindu Dharma along with leaders like Ashok Singhalji and Dr. B. K. Modi who had poured all their energy to give proper representation to the Hindu delegation at the United Nations. Many in the community gave generously to help fund this effort. Most of the volunteers worked around the clock and though they could have, they did not go to attend any session at the United Nations but preferred to stay back at the hotel to make sure that all the needs of the guests were taken care of. The volunteers set a great example of dedication, hard and sincere work, tireless efforts, humility, working under very trying conditions, picked up every challenge and came through with flying colors. It proved once again that when there is commitment to higher cause and selfless service, one can take up any challenge.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who led the Hindu delegation, in his address to the General Assembly of the religious leaders, clarified Hindu position on religious conversions. He said, "Article 18 of UNO was not acceptable to Indian delegates. Freedom of Religion does not give right to convert." This was a challenge to all the proselytizing religions. The result of the presentation was coming together of the leaders



of non-proselytizing religions like Boudha, Native Americans, Native Africans, Bahais, Parsees, Jains and others. The discussions on religious conversions forced Vatican to come out with a statement proclaiming that only Catholic Church had right to Heaven!

We took advantage of the presence of more than 100 Dharma Gurus and arranged a Dharma Prasaar Yaatra (DPY) at several locations. This was a Bhagirath task; getting several Mandirs to come on board to host the Yaatra, deciding program dates, travel of the saints, their living arrangements, and all in a short time when exact plans of each one were unknown, was nothing short of a miracle. 60 Dharma Gurus participated in the DPY which took place at New Jersey, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, PA, Miami, Orlando, Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, Boston, Hartford and New York.

We also arranged a public function in Staten Island, New York to honor the Dharma Gurus and the then Prime Minister, Shree Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Year 2001 started ominously. I had just returned from Gujarat, Bharat on January 21; On January 26 came the news of devastating earthquake in several parts of Gujarat. VHPA's Seva team swung into action. Jyotishbhai Parekh had barely taken over as the President of VHPA in November 2000 and he was faced with the task of coordinating efforts of all our chapters to come together to raise funds for the victims. He and our Seva Vice President, Girishbhai Gandhi set an example by action. They worked round the clock-literarily- along with their full time jobs; they established channels of communication with VHP-Gujarat, several Mandirs and Hindu organizations in the USA, with the ethnic media and the chapters and created an efficient infrastructure to channel the funds so that they reached the needy. Several Mandirs and organizations deemed it fit to give their collection to VHPA for processing as they had full trust in VHPA's transparency and honesty. We were able to raise more than \$600,000 which was used to rebuild a brand new village, Lodai in Kutch. Jyotishbhai, Girishbhai, Maheshbhai, Smt. Anjeebahen, etc, were present when the rebuilt town was dedicated to its inhabitants. One of the Governing Council members, Dr. Mihir Meghani (who later founded Hindu American Foundation- HAF) who specializes in Emergency Medicine, went personally right after the earthquake to render help to the injured.



1979, Kabbadi at VHPA camp - As popular today as was in 1979

Later that year, the infamous 9/11 happened. We were shell shocked. We in NJ-NY area started collecting information about willing blood donors and their blood group and we received tremendous response even from people hitherto unknown. We were willing to send volunteers to help at Ground Zero, but city declined the offer. It was very difficult to get the true picture of how many people of Bharatiya origin had perished. There was lot of confusion. We got numbers as high as 700 and as low as under 100. We were able to establish contact with five families that had lost a spouse. We met them, young wife/husband who were totally devastated by their loss in such a tragic way. We distributed to them the funds that were collected and gave moral support. One of our Governing Council members, Arvindbhai Patel worked in one of the WTC towers. He was fortunate because as he was coming out of one elevator to take an express elevator, he heard the loud bang; at first he thought that to be a blown out transformer (since he had worked on design of those buildings) but when he saw people running out, he also followed them, he ran down 44 stories and out in the street. God had willed for him to work for VHPA longer. Today, Arvindbhai is a regional director for HMEC in New Jersey.

In August 2005, hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. As usual, VHPA made an appeal and collected funds to help out. But more importantly, we had a new first for VHPA. A team of four volunteers decided to go on site and volunteer. Harilal Patel and Hitesh Mehta from Pittsburgh, Vasav Mehta (current Asst. Treasurer) from Atlanta and I took a van and drove down to Waveland, MS. Wherever we stayed overnight, we got heart warming welcome and donations. The experience is hard to put in words. We



VHPA's helping hand to Tsunami affected people.

Shri Jyotish Parekh with volunteers.

met with the executives of Hindu Mandir in Brandon, MS and were connected to several business persons and community activists. We met with executives of several Mandirs in Jackson area and support was overwhelming. One organization gave us hotel size pots and pans, owner of local Patel Brothers asked us to pick up any groceries we needed at no charge, he and his wife insisted that we stay with them overnight, rather than going to a motel where rooms were donated to us by another generous person. We spent a day shopping for all the groceries, loading a U-Haul truck, planning all the details and serving meals at a local church shelter. We ended up staying a few nights at an ISKCON Mandir in Carriere, MS, which was about 40 miles from our center of activities, Waveland.

Waveland and surrounding area were like a war zone with utter devastation everywhere. With no electricity, no running water, rudimentary sanitation, wiped out

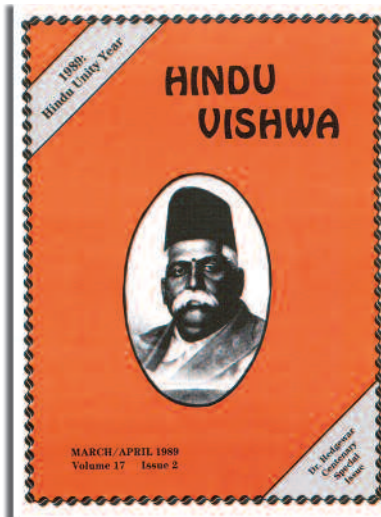
neighborhoods and damaged roads, only human grit and a will to live helped people to survive while a will to help and strong sense of sacrifice and duty enabled rescue workers to carry on the relief work. We pitched our tent in front of a damaged store building, cooked and served vegetarian meals. The four day experience was humbling but we were proud to represent an only Hindu organization on the front lines of relief work.

We also found out that without certified training from an organization like Red Cross, it is very difficult to work in disaster area. I strongly recommend each chapter of VHPA to

have a few people take such training. In fact, our Mandirs should facilitate such training so that a Hindu volunteer corps could be available at a moment's notice.

Some time in 2004, one more time we started thinking about Swami Dayanand Saraswatiji's suggestion to network the Mandirs for preservation of our religion and culture. Some of our volunteers started the process of visiting several Mandirs and presenting the idea of such a network. VHPA decided to hold a conference of Mandirs in 2006. The first Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) was held in June 2006 in Atlanta. We were charting untested waters and had very modest expectations. We were pleasantly surprised that 120 representatives from 58 Mandirs and Hindu organizations came for the conference. I must note that the small but efficient





team of volunteers from Atlanta did a wonderful job. The transportation team had difficult task because a rain storm delayed many flights and delegates ended up arriving well past midnight but they worked diligently and that left very good impression on the delegates.

HMEC has steadily progressed through successive conferences in Edison, NJ, Detroit, MI and Baltimore, MD. Its scope has been expanded to include Hindu institutions and organizations and now more than 100 Mandirs are represented from more than 25 states in these conferences. HMEC has generated a lot of ideas and some concrete results. A book on Antyeshti Samskars has been published keeping in mind the users in USA. Strong network has been established with quarterly newsletters, an email group and periodic conference calls. We are in process of redesigning HMEC web site which would be highly interactive. Tripod of HMEC rests on Faith (Shraddha), Legacy (Heritage) and Network. 2010 HMEC in Houston promises to be even better than last four conferences. HMEC has truly brought together the Mandirs on a common platform to think collectively about the future of the Mandirs themselves but more importantly cultural, religious and spiritual well being of our future generations. One measure of HMEC's impact is that inspired by it, a similar effort has started in Tamilnadu, Bharat to bring together Mandirs district by district.

At the end of 2008, VHPA took an important decision to elect Dr. Abhaya Asthana as the General Secretary. I have had a long innings of 17 years as the General Secretary and it was in the interest of the organization that the change be made. In a short period of only one year, Abhayabhai has made significant changes and improvements in the way VHPA thinks and operates and he has won trust and respect of his colleagues. As I look back at 40 years journey of VHP of America, I feel pleased and satisfied. The beauty of VHPA is that it is not based on personalities. There is no jockeying for power or position and though areas of operation are

demarcated for ease of operation each one of its volunteer is always ready to jump in and help out where needed. Our meetings are more in the nature of a family gathering than corporate meetings. Some times new comers or visitors feel awkward about it and wonder how this organization keeps going; some times we take more than required time to come to agreement but our solidarity is forged by consensus and not voting. I believe VHPA has been successful in balancing needs of the modern times and tools with its unique approach of creating family feeling amongst its workers; It has adopted strong points of corporate culture without bringing it the negatives of the same.

As I bring to an end my sentimental journey down the memory lane and look forward to exciting future of VHPA, I remember and pay homage to many of dear colleagues who have contributed significantly to VHPA as its Governing Council members and have left this world. These are Ramesh Gandhi, Dr. Kuldip Gupta, Harish Pandya, Pranjivanbhai Patel (founding member), Dr. Bhagwandas Raheja, Mahesh Shukla, Satyanarayan (Satu) Somani, Mandyam Srinivasan (founding member), Dr. Shiva Subramanya, Dr. Jitendra Sukhadia and Dr. Mulesh Swami. May their souls rest in peace knowing that their hard work and dedication have blossomed into a beautiful vat-vriksha (banyan tree) of today's VHPA.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America has touched thousands of lives in USA and helped shape young minds and public opinion on issues important to the Hindu society; it has created networks of several interest groups and provided leadership without aspiring to be in lime light. More importantly it has given the society a band of several dedicated, selfless workers who have set an example of integrity not by preaching but by practice.

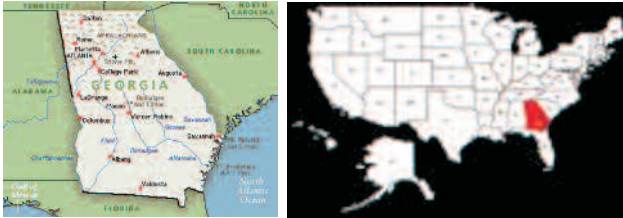
I hope that someone else will take a trip down the memory lane after another 40 years in 2050 and write about the continuity of VHPA's work. Writers, Publishers and Readers will have changed but the message will be the same- VHPA works to preserve, nurture, promote and propagate Hindu Dharma and Hindu View of Life and for the volunteers of VHPA, it is always, Main Nahi, Tu hi, Tu hi, i.e., Not me, You and only you.



**Gaurang G. Vaishnav, Executive Vice President,
VHP of America, Edison, NJ 732-754-1727,
vicharak@gmail.com**



Aashraya: A united effort by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America



VHPA Atlanta Chapter's efforts to help our Hindu Bhutanese brothers and sisters in various areas yielded results when we saw pictures of Deities, religious books on Dharma and children surfing the internet in our latest visit to their households. Along with other agencies like the Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh and local Indian groups, VHPA was persistent in its effort to help the Bhutanese realize that a worldwide Hindu organization stands with them in America and is ready to assist them morally and financially. Unlike other organizations which donate and forget, VHPA lays emphasis on preserving their Hindu culture, religion and traditions whenever the Karyakartas interface with Hindu Bhutanese. It's because of the efforts of VHPA and HSS that in the Clarkston and Doraville areas of Atlanta, where there are large concentrations of Bhutanese Hindus, women wearing bindis and traditional Bhutanese attire can be seen.

The VHPA Atlanta Chapter team, led by Smt. Sneha Mehtaji, has distributed hundreds of new clothes, electronics items (TV, DVD, Radio, Laptops), new cars and a van for transportation (with the help of HSS). The team, led by Ragu Veeraraghavanji has also helped tutor the Bhutanese children in science and math and helped the students with the integration process into the American school system. VHPA encouraged the Bhutanese Hindus to celebrate and represent their rich Bhutanese culture at Hindu Unity Day which was celebrated at the world renowned Centennial Olympic Park, Atlanta. The team makes numerous visits to help those who are ill and to comfort those going through difficult times. More and more Hindu Bhutanese are becoming members of VHPA and soon VHPA Atlanta Chapter hopes to integrate some of their leaders into the VHPA Atlanta committee.

By Rahul Sharma

Hindu Bhutanese brothers singing Sangh Shakti Vijetreeyam at a winter clothing distribution event in Clarkston.



VHPA karyakartas and Hindu Bhutanese in June 2009



Rahul Sharma, Milap Patel, Omji (local Bhutanese leader) and other senior members of community.



Sweets, new clothes, electronics, blankets for community in DEC 2009

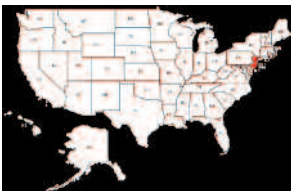


Sneha Ji (VHPA Southern U.S) along with Bhutnese Hindu Bhutanese Brothers as Diwali gift from VHPA.



OHIO

NEW JERSEY



A Warehouse of Hope and SEVA

Arun Ji, a VHPA Asharaya project director, along with the volunteers and members of the New Jersey VHPA Chapter organized the massive stockpile of donated clothes, electronics and other items of daily necessity for the Hindu Bhutanese staying in NY-NJ areas. Below pictures depict the herculean efforts of the NJ VHPA team to consolidate all collected items at one central warehouse. After Haiti earthquake it was decided that these items must first be dispatched to the needy in Haiti.



In 2008 ten families of Bhutnese refugees, comprising a total of about 60 people, came to Cincinnati. Subsequently,



more people have come. Local church volunteers contacted Mrs. Renu Gupta and the Cincinnati VHPA Chapter sprung into action. VHPA volunteers started gathering necessities including food, clothing and household goods such as beds, furniture and even computers. Our large Hindu community also got involved and helped teach English, computer skills and driving. Families were brought to the temple many times so they could practice their own Hindu faith and mix with the large community of devotees. It was very exciting listening to Bhutanese devotional bhajans. Bhutanese children also performed a dance during local Hindu Awareness Day celebrations. Since that time many family members have become employed and the community is becoming independent.

Shri Rahul Sharma, currently based in Atlanta, is a Co-Editor of VHPA Newsletter & a member of VHPA Governing Council.

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Letter from Namita

By Namita Pallod

Jai Shri Krishna everybody!! Well, here it is, the annual Pallod Khandan Diwali letter, written by me, Namita Pallod. The year of '06-'07 has been filled with wonderful news, and I just can't wait to tell you all of it! One of the best things that happened this year was that my kakiji in India, had a baby boy named Kunj! I'm pretty jealous of Radhika, I always wanted a baby brother to boss around myself. Didi and bhaiya seem to have way too much fun doing it.

Also, as most of you probably know, Rishi Bhaiya is engaged, and is going to be married in

February! We're all really excited about meeting our bhabhi and finally having someone to complain to about Rishi Bhaiya! But he isn't the only one who got engaged this year, my Sarita didi also got engaged a couple weeks ago! For me, the best part of the year was Papaji earning a community service award from the IACGH (Indian American Chamber of Commerce), which was presented to him by congressmen Nick Lampson. It is really nice to finally see him being recognized, and we're all extremely proud of him.



The highlight of our summer was definitely Naniji coming to visit us and our cousins in Chicago all the way from India. We had a lot of fun answering her silly

questions about the way things work in the USA, and taking funny pictures at NASA space station. Also, this year, for Janmashtmi, Nitish Bhardwaj (the actor who played Krishna in B.R. Chopra's serial) stayed at our house when he came to Houston for the Janmashtmi festival. Me and my good friend also got to help him assemble his Apple laptop. It was a real honor, and it was hard to believe he really stayed with us.

I am currently 12 years old, and in the 7th grade at the Village school. This is my second year at the village school, and I am really loving it!!! Bhaiya is currently 17 and senior at Taylor High school, and is planning on going to UT next year for Austin. I will have the house all to myself! But the perks of having the bathroom all to me might not be as fun if I don't have anyone to annoy! Didi is currently at UT too, longhorn pride runs in the family! She is a sophomore right now, and is a HSC (Hindu Student Council) officer, following in Papaji's footsteps. Mummy is busy teaching her free yoga classes, and is busy changing the house around. She is also busy with the Maheshwari Mahasbha cruise that is this January. She can handle the logistics, I'm just itching to finally go to the Bahamas!

The coming year also brings more relatives! Aside from all the new bhabhi's and jijaji's we're getting, I'm also going to become a masi for the first time! My Kiran Didi is expecting her first child this February. Kajal Kakiji is also expecting her third child this January.

As you can see, we really have a lot to be thankful for this Diwali. I hope that everyone's year was just as great as ours! Happy Diwali and I hope everyone has a great new year!!

Namita Pallod, currently in Kempner high school in Sugar Land, Texas, regularly attends Bal Gokulam at Madhav Shakha and has not missed any VHPA youth camp.



शंख सीपियाँ

डॉ. मधु झवेरी

कुछ लोग तो किनारे पे ढूँढते है शंख सीपियाँ।
रेत के गढ़ बना लेते हैं, कोई और तीसमारखाँ॥१॥
कुछ और साहसी, जो खेत हैं नाव पानी मे
पर वह भी किनारे किनारे डरते हैं डूब न जाएँ कहीं और गये गहरे?॥२॥
बिना लाँघे समुन्दर को पढ़ी-सुनी फिलसुफी सुनाते है,
आसन पर बैठकर सुरक्षित, तालियों के मध्य मे॥३॥
इह लोक ही चाहिये, परलोक तो पराया है।
किसने देखा? जगाते हैं अलख! किन्तु, चाहिये शंख सीपियाँ॥४॥
भोली गोपियों ने बेचा था, श्याम को; समझ पाता हूँ
यह चतुरजन बेचते हैं, तुमको कैसे बमभोले भोलेनाथ?
क्या तुम इतने भोले हो?॥५॥
श्रद्धा की कच्ची डोर है, पर आसक्ति का लगर है पक्का।
रत्नाकर सागर है, सामने पर भाते हैं हमें
ये रंग बिरंगे कंकड, और ये शंख सीपियाँ॥६॥

Dr. Madhu Jhaveri, is an accomplished poet, prolific writer and eloquent speaker. Madhubhai is a structural engineer by profession and is currently based in Boston. He has served VHPA in various other capacities besides being president of VHPA.



Once, Swami Ram Tirth (a Social Reformer) gave an advertisement in the news paper looking for volunteers. The advertisement stated, "Volunteers needed: high compensation will be paid to those who want to change themselves." Volunteering is an act taken up to bring about a positive change in the society. It requires many qualities such as dedication, hard work and a willingness to sacrifice. But the most desirable quality of a volunteer is the aspiration to change him/her self. The Scriptures (Vedanta / Spiritual beliefs) place an emphasis on changing oneself before going out to change others.

Let us see what we can learn from the life stories of three of the greatest volunteers of modern time; Mahatma Gandhi, Benjamin Franklin, Shri MS Golwalkar.

Mahatma Gandhi was born in a well do family, studied law in London and was making a good living as a lawyer. We all know the stories about how he became a leader of masses and a great freedom fighter. If we look closely into his life work, we will find that the key ingredient of his strength was 'Volunteerism'. He gave up his status and all of his comforts to become a volunteer and serve the masses for majority of his life. One of his strongest messages for volunteers which he also practiced himself was; 'Be the change

you want to see in the world'. Inspired by Gandhiji's work, a Swami (Monk) came to him and showed willingness to work with him in his social reform work. Mahatma Gandhi said, 'You cannot do that because your status is of a Swami (Monk), people respect your status, your dress, your outlook. Only if you are ready to sacrifice all that, you can serve the people in need. You have to be like the people in order to serve the people.' And the story goes that the Swami (Monk) gave up his status and joined the team of Gandhi's volunteers.

The list of Benjamin Franklin's volunteer work is also very long. Two of his pioneering efforts that became milestones in American history are; the Public library and the Firefighting department. He thought that if people in the community could volunteer their time for these two activities then society would be better served and the country would be better governed. These two activities are still among the most popular volunteer services in America. His sense of duty was the strength behind all his volunteer work. We all are aware that in performing services many firefighters lose their lives. One TV program interviewed a young son of a deceased fire fighter. The interviewer asked the son about his aspirations. "A fire fighter," the son replied. "But, your father died in firefighting," the astonished interviewer said. The



son proudly replied, "Even my Grandfather was a firefighter, I will pursue the same service and honor as them." Such is the spirit and sense of duty that Benjamin Franklin envisioned for the community of volunteers.

Shri Madhav S Golwalkar was raised by modest and cultured parents. After finishing his masters in Bio Science he associated himself with a spiritual master in order to fulfill his spiritual quest. By the grace of his guru, young Madhav attained the state of a Yogi. Soon, he realized that service to people is service to God. To serve the people, the society and the mother land he gave up the call from sacred Himalayas and remained with people for the rest of his life. He was the only son of his parents. His mother kept pursuing him to marry. After repeated refusal from the son, one day the mother said that if you do not marry our lineage (vansh) will be discontinued. Young Madhav humbly said, "If discontinuation of many lineages like mine will benefit the society then I am not worried." This young man later known as Guruji has inspired millions of volunteers over past seven decades. His message to the volunteers is, "An individual should dissolve him/herself in the nation as a grain of salt completely dissolves in water."

The following are some of the benefits of volunteer work:

- ◆ It is an uplifting process for the volunteer.
- ◆ It creates Social Capital by forming human bonds between volunteer and the one who is being served.
- ◆ It helps society and government during an economic downturn. Volunteers can help people in need with their skills, time, and some discretionary funds.
- ◆ It is an integral part of the spiritual practices for some people and serves as a process of uplifting the self.
- ◆ It helps people understand the multicultural dimension of the society.
- ◆ It enables volunteers to learn and acquire new skills.
- ◆ It generates everyone who volunteers a sense of community cohesion and leadership.
- ◆ Above all, it gives self fulfillment if it done with altruistic temperament.

Many a times we think of volunteering our time and material, but when it comes to reality we end up with excuses. There was a politician who used to talk a lot about volunteerism, giving, and sharing. Once, a press reporter interviewed him:

Reporter: If you have two million dollars, would you give one million to those in need.

Politician: Yes, I will.

Reporter: If you have two Lexus, would you give one to someone in need.

Politician: Yes, of course.

Reporter: If you have two bikes, would you give one to someone in need.

Politician: No, I cannot.

Reporter: You are willing to give up expensive things but not an inexpensive bike. Why so?

Politician: Because, I do not have two million dollars and do not have two Lexus but I do have two bikes in reality. If I say yes then I will really lose one of my bikes. (You see, how difficult it is to give away even a bike!).


Volunteering requires the courage of giving up something personal to us (including our time), the spirit of enjoying someone else's happiness, and the consciousness for 'greater and global goodness'.

Great volunteers like Mahatma Gandhi, Benjamin Franklin, and MS Golwalkar have proved through their lives that 'Greed is Good' is not the mantra to be followed, rather 'Giving is Good' is the mantra for 'Social harmony and happiness'.

Look around in your community to identify some opportunities to volunteer. Some choices that readily come to mind are

- ◆ Work for a non-profit group.
- ◆ Help raise awareness and funds for social causes.
- ◆ Help in community improvement projects.
- ◆ Give time to spiritual (temple), social and professional groups which are working towards betterment of the community.
- ◆ Mentor and tutor those who are less knowledgeable in any subject matter; physical or spiritual.
- ◆ Help seniors / elders in reading and writing.
- ◆ Small acts like clean up in office kitchen, temple rooms and your own community centers, offering your seat in a public transport to elderly, child or someone who needs it more than you, Or even something as simple as once in a while writing a nice note/email to family and friends.

As Ben Franklin said "There are three categories of people - first are those who are immovable, second are those who are movable, and third are those who move - move others."

So, let us be in the third category and become volunteers who move themselves (be the change) and help others move. In short, "Give and Gain". 

*Shri Sanjay Mehta, Joint General Secretary,
VHP of America*



support their sponsored-schools for a minimum period of 5 years, if possible. Donors can visit any Ekal school to see their money in action.

Besides USA, where EVF is a duly registered as a tax-exempt charitable organization it also has chapters in several other countries namely India, Canada, South Africa, U.K., Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand, with support groups in Muscat & Dubai. EVF is the largest literacy movement undertaken by Indians and NRIs, which was first born out of Dr Rakesh & Rama Popli's literacy efforts in Jharkhand in 1986 and later jump-started


Most of us came to USA with a degree and a dream; a dream to excel in life. We not only succeeded beyond our dreams but also created a blissful life for our entire family. We all know that this was made possible by the substantially subsidized education that we had received in India. In other words, faces unknown to us made it all possible. Unfortunately, not everyone has this opportunity. As of now, there are over 100,000 small pockets of humanity in tribal & remote areas all over India where not even basic education has been rendered due to their isolation. Forget about schools, some of these areas don't even have basic amenities like approachable paved roads, water and electricity that the rest of us take for granted. Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF), not only takes the education to their doorstep but also gives us, the donors, a golden opportunity to give something back to our Motherland for what we brought here as our greatest asset - our education.

With just a dollar a day or \$365 per year, Ekal provides basic literacy skills and health care training to a group of 25-35 young children year-round, in what is conceptually called an Ekal School. This non-formal schooling in the village is generally imparted by an EVF-trained teacher from the same village or vicinity and may take place under some shed, tree or in someone's backyard. One can sponsor as many Ekal Schools as one wishes \$365 per school. For their monetary support, the donors are given detailed information about the schools they have sponsored as well as an annual progress report. As it generally takes 5 years for an Ekal School to become independent of any assistance, the donors are generally encouraged to

Ekal Vidyalaya: India's Largest Literacy Movement

By Prakash Waghmare

by Shri Madan Lalji Agarwal around the Dhanbad area in 1988. In USA, Ekal Vidyalaya initially found patronage as a 'One Teacher School' program under Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, until it became an autonomous entity as EVF. Ekal is also a recipient of the prestigious 'Best NGO Organization' award in 2008/9. Currently, there are approximately 27,000 Ekal Schools in operation all over India; a splendid testament of its transparency of operations and impeccable administration. According to Shri Ramesh Shah, Chairman of EVF-USA, over 8,000 Ekal Schools are sponsored by the people in USA every year through annual fund-raising efforts in major metropolitan cities.

For sponsoring Ekal Schools or for further information about this noble cause that eradicates illiteracy in India please check www.ekalvidya.org or call (281)668-5982. I humbly appeal everyone to sponsor at least couple of Ekal Schools every year. 

Shri Prakash Waghmare is the Media Coordinator for NJ-Chapter of VHP of America.



In my recently completed visits of eighteen Indian universities during August to October, 2009, covering nine states, New Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, I had an opportunity to interact with research students, professors, lecturers and intellectuals covering the academic arena including economics, political science, agriculture, veterinary science, pharmaceuticals, environment, business, law and commerce.

research scholars and teaching faculty, compared to the earlier decades.

The university students are driven by the dreams of success and rewarding careers. In my talks with the academic community, I posed a challenge to them if they can envision India becoming the leader nation in this century and be among the top five nations of the world. By this I meant many nations around the world would like to emulate Indian life, Indian knowledge base, Indian values, and Indian paradigm of life. I also inquired if they were aware of the global challenges



Impressions of my visits to Indian Universities:

By Dr. Mahesh Mehta



Dr. Mahesh Mehta

Indian universities have competitive brain power to provide leadership to meet with global challenges in all of the above mentioned fields. Indian universities are in much better financial position compared to the last few decades. The compensations for the academicians have been significantly accelerated to attract and keep the best

faced by humanity and the changing scenario of the world leadership.

The general impression I gathered was the lack of enthusiasm for not only the world leadership but even the local one. Their feelings of frustrations were rooted in the corrupt political leadership at every level from the nation to the state to the village Gram Panchayatas. The students would prefer more to strive for personal careers and recognition than for any nation building responsibilities.

I left India with an impression that the university youths are looking for leaders with integrity,



The current global scenario is ripe for an alternative world view to deal with the challenges presented to us today. India is in a position to provide a leadership role by presenting the solutions rooted in the eastern paradigm based on the integral view of life.

dynamism and vision to be their role models in every sphere of national life. The time line to unfold the full potential of youths is very short for India to provide leadership to the world in this century.

It would be appropriate to summarize here the important pieces of my talks with the academic community.

Current Global Scenario:

Only a couple of decades back people did not have to worry much about global issues. Today the world is pretty much drawn into our living rooms, thanks to the power of advanced communications technology. This transition has caused us all to shift our attention from local to global issues. Today we are facing five major challenges in the world, namely (i) global warming (ii) global terrorism (iii) nuclear proliferation and threats of the nuclear sites falling in the hands of terrorist groups (iv) the increasing gap between the poor and the rich in the current global economy (v) the demographic changes caused by the aging population in the west and growing number of young people in Asia. The demographic changes also caused by the migration of the people with unfriendly

attitude to the multicultural life of the host nations.

The Leadership of the World:

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 has changed the world scenario from being bipolar to multi polar and not mono-polar as anticipated by many in the West. The indomitable power of USA was challenged by the 911 acts of terrorism. The terrorist forces like the Al Qaeda, Taliban, Lashkar-e-taiba and others have shaken up the dreams of the advocates of democracy, human rights and global peace. The economic crisis caused by the failures of the giant financial institutions in USA, the bail out of troubled assets by the US government using the tax payer money, the unemployment rate of over 10% in USA, the weak dollar and the US economy burdened by trillions of dollars debt, are all big monsters facing the US Government at home.

The rising power of China with good GDP, becoming the manufacturing arm of USA, strong currency, and big assets base in USA, keep USA complacent in dealing with human rights violations in China.

The US involvement in the conflicts of middle eastern countries, the antagonism of Arabs against Israel, the continued war against Taliban in Afghanistan and with Al Qaeda on the western front of Pakistan, the continued gestures of nuclear development in Iran are some of the issues consuming the financial resources and American lives when the internal issues of American people demand focus to resolve the crisis at home front.

From the review of the above conditions that USA is facing, it feels like it is losing its global leadership and some other nations are looking to get an important position in world affairs.

The New World Order:

The western world view rooted in the philosophy of individualism and mechanistic model of the creation; has promoted econo-centric and also homocentric approaches in dealing with all aspects of human life. The result has been the search of happiness for a fraction of humanity at the cost of the rest. Being homocentric it has exploited nature causing severe stress on the ecology of planet earth. The current global meet at Copenhagen to deal with the issue of global warming, attracting a large number of



developed and developing nations to come to some acceptable standards of emissions points out how much damage is already done to our environment that may likely result in rising levels of ocean waters, the disappearing of forests in Amazon, the pollution of river Ganga caused by interruption of the continuous flow of water from Gangotri caused by dams, the changing migratory patterns of birds, the dying flora and fauna and many others.

In promoting the western world view, the advocates have covered all possible strategic moves to control the destiny of humanity. Among those strategic tools, west has promoted International Organizations with very well calculated moves to achieve the best standards of living for a fraction of humanity. Among these institutions are the United nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and others all having on the face of it the ideals of global peace, world without war, no poverty, better education and health for all the nations.

With the help of these agencies many resolutions are passed and many agreements have been signed for the good of all. These are General Agreements on Tariff and Trades (GATT), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) etc.

The second very powerful tool promoted by the west is the International Currency. At the base of the corporations is the need for authority over issuance of money. In any national economy central currency gives controls in the hands of the government and that in turn is influenced by corporations. The corporations have thus gained more power over the economy, the government and the culture. It may not be easy for a common man to link the power of International currency in influencing their lives, manipulated by those who are working for a new world order. The west established dollar as the standard for international exchange of currency. The dollar used to be exchangeable with gold or silver. Since 1971 the gold standard was discarded in favor of paper-dollar. In the words of John Exter, Citi-banker, the dollar bill's promise, "I owe you." means "I owe you nothing."

The third strategic tool in the hands of the advocates of the western paradigm is

the birth and growth of multinational corporations (MNC). According to the western paradigm, the world is a market place and the human beings are consumers. This view has systematically replaced the values of human life and human relations to be controlled, directed and ruled by the power of corporations.

The fourth powerful strategic tool deployed is the news media and the entertainment industry to promote the western paradigm of life. One of the keys to the success of the mass media technology is the power of programming the subconscious of all human beings whether educated or illiterate. The subliminal message of "free to make your own choices" using the mass media, has generated a sense of trust between the brand names and people. The mass media has promoted disconnection among the local and more real world of human beings and established connection with brand names and the virtual world. The consumer pays more attention to self-interest at the cost of the community interests. The value is created by centralized currency meaning the brands in the products and the leaders supported by multinational corporations.

India has the brain power to establish new paradigm of life





Need a New Paradigm of Life:

Humanity has come to a cross-road of making choices for themselves, their children and grand children. Indian scholars, researchers, academicians, intellectuals and all leaders have to grasp the major issues faced by people everywhere. Even if one does not have the inclination or acumen to go in deeper analysis of the causes of the current catastrophes, one can at least see where humanity has arrived after a couple of centuries of experiments with the western world view of life. It is not implied here that all that has been developed has made only negative impact on human life. The advances in knowledge achieved by the application of these principles have given a much better understanding of the natural forces, the laws governing the universe and the ability to deploy this knowledge for enhancement of the quality of life. However there are serious side effects caused by following the path of only the objective understanding of life.

The current global scenario is ripe for an alternative world view to deal with the challenges presented to us today. India is in a position to provide a leadership role by presenting the solutions rooted in the eastern paradigm based on the integral view of life. The integral view is rooted in the philosophy of wholeness of creation and oneness of life. The view is not exclusive but all inclusive in search of happiness, not homocentric but holistic. This new world view is really a gift of the ancient scientists and philosophers of India. The western thought that is rooted in the famous proclamation of Rene Desecrates, "Cogito ergo sum" meaning, "I think therefore I am." This view established the idea that man could know the world around him through his five senses. The reality is perception and hence can be analyzed through reduction. Thus the development of science and technology did not give any recognition to the subjective view, the view of reaching the mysteries of creation through the inner experiences of mystics or spiritual seekers. The net result is the current stage of human development. Fortunately later developments in science have opened an understanding of subjective reality as expressed in the quantum theory and theories of physics beyond Einstein. The scientists are facing the basic question if cosmic intelligence is the cause and material reality is an effect or vice versa.

The eastern or Bharatiya world view as revealed by the seers and sages of India, goes beyond, human body, mind and intellect and hence beyond thought. In

contrast to Desartes theory, the ancient wisdom says, "I am therefore I think." The Upanishad's describe it as, "Ekoham bahu syam." I am one and I multiply in many. In Yajurveda (4016) it is expressed as:

"Yasya sarvani bhutani aatmanev anupashyati

Sarva bhuteshu cha aatmanam , tato na vijigupste."

"One who sees himself in every being (not just human being) and one who sees the same aatman in every being and hence cannot hate anyone."

The acceptance of Aatman, that is the holographic image of cosmic consciousness, is the source of the integral view of life. The highest goal of human life, according to this view, is to experience the Self in the creation. Hence all the developments for the benefit of human being are centered in the well being of all including animals, plants, environment and the planets.

The challenge before the academicians, scholars, intellectuals and leaders of India, is to open new windows for growth and development. In the new world order that India can promote the principles of excellence, cooperation, all inclusiveness, holistic health, character building, self-reliance, growth, family and social harmony for all to take the center stage instead of the current ones like cut-throat competition, exclusivity, self serving education, dependence on developed nations, pollution of air, water and land, violence and hatred among people.

The leadership role of India is not an empty dream but has a very high probability based on today's realities. India with one billion population that has 75% people below the age of 35, is a young nation. India has the brain power to establish new paradigm of life. India is a nation with independent and most loyal military force. India is a nation with nuclear power and a democratic political system. India has one of the most panoramic societies with diversity of expressions and underlying current of spiritual culture.

India has the track record of more than ten thousand years of continuity and sustainable cultural life. India has been a knowledge based society since the time of Vedas, guided by the principles of Dharma, the cosmic laws that sustain the creation. The real challenge is to give an alternative model of life not borrowed from the materialistic philosophies either of communism or capitalism but inspired by the Integral view of well being of all. I see the arrival of resurgent India as a leader of the international community in the twenty first century.



Dr. Mahesh Mehta, Vice President, VHP, Global Coordination

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- Mahatma Gandhi

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Being a man of science - or at least thinking of myself as such - I had relatively less affinity to the thought of a formal association with a religious group, even with the one whose basic principles and conduct were the natural and inseparable part of my upbringing and youth. So when one of my friends and colleagues casually introduced me to the idea of joining VHPA during one of our occasional luncheon together in a Chinese restaurant next to our place of work, INTELSAT (International Telecommunications Satellite Organization) in Washington, DC, I replied, equally casually, "Well, it never occurred to me that I need to be a member of any such organization...."

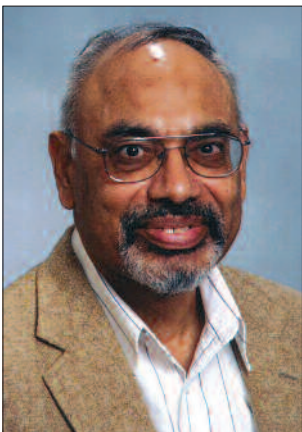
Besides, I have never been a member of the RSS before."

"That means you never really got to know about RSS," coolly concluded my good friend, somewhat relieved. "If you did, you would have most likely joined!"

"Can't say," I confessed. "But I doubt."

"How come?"

"Well...well," I tried to convey my age-old skepticism upfront, but without making an issue out of it, personally. "I had heard about Nathuram Godse, who shot Mahatma Gandhi, belonged to the RSS."



Ashok Sinha

"But both of these assumptions - that Nathuram was really the one who killed Gandhiji, and that he belonged to the RSS - are disputed by many people. Besides....."

This was a revelation to me. I leaned forward to hear more intently, while busying myself more intensely to fiddle with the hot-and-sour soup in my tray, still too hot to sip.

"....Besides....," continued my friend, unraveling the wrap from his fortune cookie, "there is no requirement that you be a past or present member of the RSS in order to join the VHP... or, rather, VHPA. This is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, you know."

Yes, I knew, just then. Earlier, the idea of being a Hindu and being in America seemed to me two totally unrelated elements of life - but suddenly, then and there, an intimate interrelation between these surfaced in my eyes. The net outcome of our casual, 'time-pass' conversation over a Chinese meal was that I told myself that it was quite ok -- for an open-minded intellectual and an aspiring physicist and a young-man-come-to-a-foreign-land purely in a spirit

of a quest of the novel and the adventure of world-travel -- to be a part of a 'religious organization' of the ancient order from his native land, which aspires to be and do good to people of all ages and backgrounds. Lots of good, indeed: initiating and supporting the establishment of the 'Ekal Vidyalay' - a one-teacher school in remote regions of India to impart basic literacy to the unprivileged children of the 'Adivasi' segments of the rural-tribal population who, just as the so-called American Indians of the USA, have remained secluded from the mainstream, bent upon following their own traditions and way of life. This program is all the more vital for countering the encroachment by the zealous Christian missionaries trying all sorts of ways to penetrate deep in India looking for victims to proselytize, sort of trap and steal the souls of the poor unsuspecting simple folks; and who take pride in their booty and 'harvest' in the name of their Church and 'humanitarian mission' -- driven and financed by their masters, ministers and top authorities, including the Pope in the Vatican and the President in Washington, DC. Then there are 'Adopt-A-Child' program to support and educate orphaned children, the 'Bal-Vihar' program to offer the Sunday school to the children of Indian origin for acquainting them with the culture and spiritual teachings of their illustrious forefathers, the program of

Hindu Dharma and VHPA: A Personal Overview

By Ashok Sinha




helping the native American homeless, of extending a helping hand when a natural disaster strikes anywhere, and so on. Always a great admirer and lover of my Indian culture and the Hindu spirituality, and now with an eye to the value of proper education as even more critical in a society with too many damaging distractions to the young, I persuaded my intellectual self to participate in some of the creative activities of the VHPA. As a plain humanist, I didn't see any conflict in joining the religious organization of which the prime mission is open service and not blind sectarianism.

During the time of my early days, I used to see Adivasi women folks trekking huge distances, such as from their obscure villages to ours, with a bundle of dry wood for household fuel for cooking, picked up from the forest, precariously perched over their half-covered heads. They sold their cargo in our village, hawking from door to door, then happily traveled to the small bazaar in Hazaribagh, my hometown about 3 miles from my village, to buy their daily bread and other necessities from the precious few coins they earned from us. In Ranchi, a nearby town, I had seen at more than one occasion groups of Adivasi women and children begging from door to door for a morsel of rice.

The picture changed when I joined St. Xavier's College in Ranchi, where a few of the young Adivasi young men and girls could be seen as students, and more particularly as skilled football players and accomplished participants in athletics. Majority of the students of the college were from the so-called Upper class. But, except for a few reputed Bengali professors, the faculty was primarily composed of Belgians. They did an excellent job as professors of physics, mathematics, English, etc., and doubtlessly even a better job as missionary evangelists, behind the scene. During a recent visit to India, I dropped in the St. Xavier's, Ranchi, campus to find, to my great surprise, that practically one-hundred percent of the students as well as faculty body comprised of Adivasis -- Christian converts, no doubt. I could spot not a single Belgian face - those still living from among the old faculty members must have moved to new locations in search of additional crops to harvest.

My decision to join the VHPA was consciously motivated by a desire to do my part to contribute in the process of educating the American-born Hindu children on the Hindu culture and spirituality, as well as of trying to raise a voice against the trend of proselytizing poor Adivasi children in India - be it through helping in the 'Ekal Vidyalay' movement, through a social change, or any other legitimate channel. I feel that efforts in these

directions are vitally important for the preservation of the Hindu community in the remotest corner of the world, since Hinduism continues to be targeted by diverse group-interests and religious zealots, at local all the way up to even the global levels. This has been the case starting as far back historically as the Tenth century, the time when invasions and attacks, terror and subversion, subjugation and colonization, by the Islamist and subsequently the British forces were unleashed. Now it is the turn of the Pope and his dedicated disciples as well as the American and European evangelical Church on the one hand, and Pakistan's relentlessly ill-minded proactive ISI on the other.

It must be said that a key to preserving and strengthening the spirit of Hinduism is unity among the Hindus of the Diaspora. Here this is not an offensive but purely defensive mechanism; but many among the Hindus seem to lack this common virtue rather pathetically. It is probably the result of great oppression and subjugation by external forces century after century that Hindus abhor authority even within, and the result is lack of cohesive administrative structure, even mutual cooperation, that is the soul of organization. Outsiders have exploited this inherent 'disunity' to the hilt. History is replete with examples of collapse of one segment of Hindu royalty resisting invasion, simply because another segment remained indifferent or even hostile, aiding the invader. Even in the administration of the VHPA activities and associated functions, a degree of disjointedness is manifest. This is damaging divergence in unity, despite every VHPA member supposedly being an admirer of the concept of unity-in-diversity. I have witnessed this paradoxical phenomenon in many instances, including in the momentous celebration in Washington DC, in 1993, of the Centenary of Swami Vivekanand's Participation in the World Conference of Religions in Chicago in 1893. But more on this at another occasion, for now, it is my fond hope and prayers to God that VHPA will take all necessary precautions and appropriate peaceful steps to keep the spirit of Hinduism alive and well in the hearts and minds of the Third generation of Hindus in America, so to say, and no less in the culture of the Adivasis in every corner of India. If I am able to make even a very small contribution in this preservation for the posterity, I would consider myself fortunate. 

Ashok Sinha, Editor, Hindu Vishwa



2009 counselors starting from top left: Atit Patel, Bharat Pallod, Saagar Grover, Mukesh Pillai, Gaurav Ved, Api Mysore, Om Shahi, Parul Kapur, Eesha Gulati, Ronak Shah, Anup Parikh, Apurva Patel, Vinay Sarda, Anuj Mittal, Neha Chaudhry, Adi Sundararajan, Avi Jain, Kavita Pallod, Sapna Malani, Ruchita Naik, Anjali Baxi, Krishna Desai, Dharti Patel, Anjali Dhingra, Sujata Amin, Nikita Malani, Geetanjali Gubba, Meera Chaudhry, and Saniya Shah.

Team Work & Dedication

Helps VHPA Camp Grow Over 25 Years

By Sharad Amin



Houston: In 1960's to the late 1970's, the first generation Hindus coming from Bharat to USA were busy studying, getting permanent residence, and settling down in the United States. In the process they stabilized their lives and accepted the increased responsibility of spouse and children. Once they were in 40's, when they started realizing that their growing children were losing grip of Hindu culture, maintaining it became an urgent and significant issue.

In 1984, after a Hindu Dharma conference was held in New York's Madison Square Garden, some attendees from Houston seriously began talking about starting youth activities in the Houston area. Soon afterward, the first outdoor, summer day camp took place in Houston's Bayland Park in 1985. VHP of America (VHPA) and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) families meticulously planned the six-hour camp.

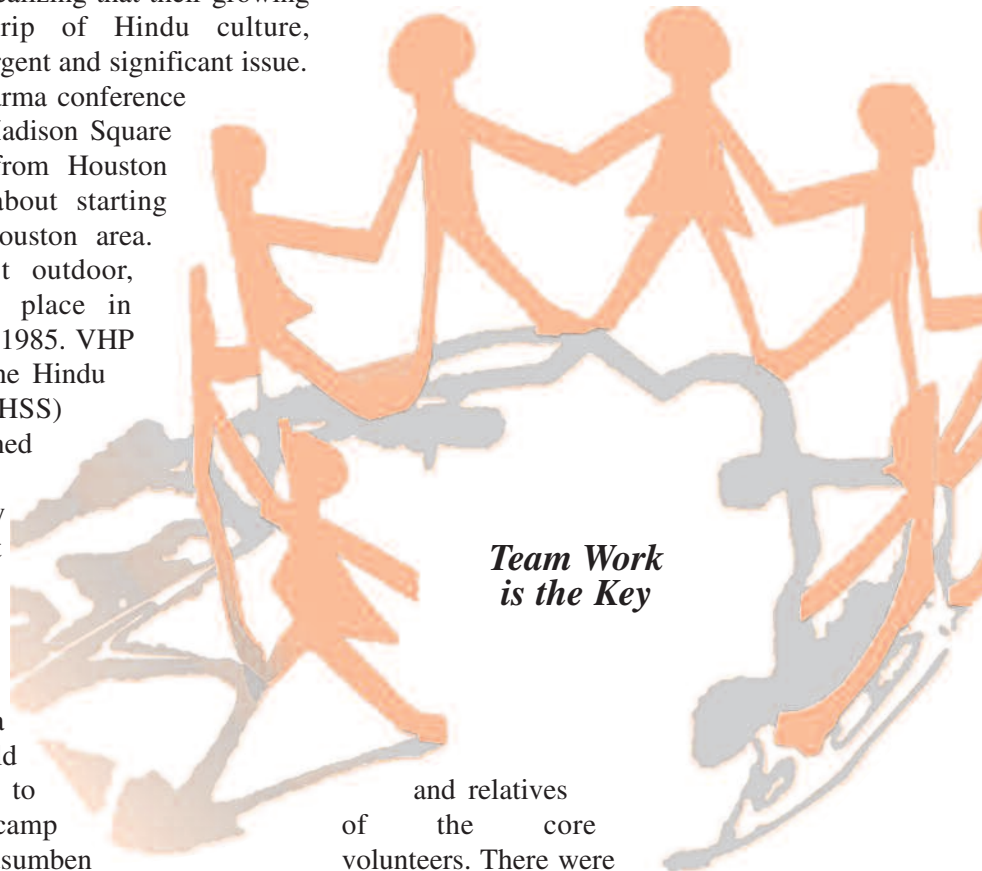
After the success of the day camp, the first overnight residential camp was held in 1986 at the Jewish Community Center's Ida Gordon Campsite in Richmond, TX. This was a monumental event that would make its mark for years to come. Planning for the camp started at Dilipbhai and Kusumben

Mehta's house. Anjaleeben Pandya, a VHPA volunteer experienced in running the camp on the East Coast, traveled from Boston to guide a team in Houston. Houston team members Suresh V. Patel, Dinesh Shah and Sharad Amin worked closely with Anjaleeji from day one to plan and execute the camp which became a popular tradition in Houston. One member of the team Suresh Patel brought his extensive experience as a professional physical educator to the table, as well as his experience with running camps. He had worked as a yoga instructor at JCC for some time and made it possible for the camp to take place at the venue.

As VHPA volunteers and HSS families including Dr. Chandraahans and Ushji Misra, Rameshji and Kiranben Bhutada, Subhashji and Sarojben Gupta, Malikarjun Shintri, Dr. G. S. Gopalkrishna, Dr. Haku Israni and Ramesh Shah came together to plan this first overnight camp. They approached and received

support from other Hindu organizations such as Hindu Worship Society, Chinmaya Mission, Sri Meenakshi Temple, Jain Society, BAPS, and some local businesspersons such as Ramesh Parikh of Sara International.

Volunteers for the first camp included many friends



and relatives of the core volunteers. There were about forty campers in attendance, and home-cooked meals were prepared at the campsite with a tremendous amount of teamwork. Suresh Patel was first camp director.

M.B. Shintriji started the day with yoga. Then came the Indian and American games followed by education classes and breakfast. Arts and crafts were afternoon creative entertainment, while recreation such as swimming and canoeing were big attractions for kids. In 1987 and onwards, more adult volunteers joined the camp planning and execution. Jugalbhai took care of camp security. Rakesh Bhalla helped in Vyvastha. Vijay kumar Pallod took charge of publicity and media work. With limited facility to provide home cooked food at the camp was a challenge but Amita Amin, Kiranben Bhutada, Kokilaben Shah, Daksha Shah and so many part time volunteers made this possible and set up the standard menu which children loved and



Suresh Patel, Rishi Bhutada, Ronak Shah and Nutan Mehta; Rear, Sushma Pallod left, Girish Naik, Pravin Vyas and Manish Mehra. (Camp directors from Manish to Nutan)

looked forward to at every camp. After couple of years a new team got developed under Sushmaji Pallod's leadership. Youth volunteers started taking more interests and counselors like Amit Misra, Hamsa Subramaniam, Padma, Nagesari, Manisha Gandhi (Mehta), Kumar, Rakesh Patel and many more joined the Hindu Heritage camp team.

By 1990, youngsters that were campers were groomed to run the camp. Directors and counselors like Rakhi Israni, Amit Misra, Maneesh Mehra, Nutan Mehta, Mohan Drakshram, Rishi Master, Rishi Bhutada, Ronak Shah, Alok Kanojia, Nimit Patel, Seema Shah, Samit Shah, Sweta Gupta, Kruti Parekh, Priyanka Parekh, Sumit Desai, Sapana Desai and many more have made a big difference in making the camp what it is today. Even after these individuals have

moved on to pursue other endeavors in their lives, they continue to advise, help, and stay involved with the camp in whatever way they can. Doctors who keep coming back every year are Dr. Uma Knojia, Dr. Meena Parekh. Dr. Gopalkrishna, Dr. Neeta Shukla, Dr. Kavita Chandwani and recently Dr. Heenaben Pandya who came from China with her daughters for the camp. Looking back to early years of camps, every time when camp ended, there was relief on the part of volunteers, and sadness from children saying goodbye to new friends.



Maneesh Mehra was the first youth director of the Hindu Heritage Camp. He met his future wife, Niharika first time at the camp. "The Hindu Heritage Camp is a fantastic opportunity for kids to learn and grow together. The camp clearly achieves this goal. One of the Directors this year, Nikki Malani, used be an elementary group camper when I was a counselor!" says Niharika. Above, Maneesh and Niharika Mehra with son Rohit.



Barbara Karkabi, seated, center, of Houston Chronicle talks to camp organizers during the 2006 Hindu Heritage Camp.

After 25 years the camp has not changed a lot except for the duration; the once 3-day camp is now 5 days long. The first camp had 40 campers. Today it is has

grown to 150 and some children are waitlisted. The significance of this camp is that it was founded and initially run by first generation immigrants, but it has continued to flourish through the team work between them and the following generations of Hindus. The original little kids who were crawling and tumbling on the same floor are today counselors and directors making decisions and working hard to keep Hindu Heritage going for generations to come. The second generation members who were counselors are now on the steering committee. This is the place where no matter how old one is, whatever background one hails from, or what profession one is in, all work together toward a common purpose: to foster Hinduism and to do this in a joyous environment. 



Former camper and camp director, Rakhi, now with daughter Siya.

Sharad Amin is one of the founders of VHPA camp. At present, he is Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh national public relations officer. His daughter Sujata is camp co-director

Do you believe in life after death? We do.

Well, not exactly as it is preached in the Bhagvad Gita, but not too unlike it either. Death comes to an individual but life goes on for the individual's family. Coping with the feeling of loss is hard enough. But surviving in the material world is harder, especially if the dear departed individual was the sole breadwinner. Like the good book expounds, death may be in destiny's hands, but duty rests with you. Duty towards your dependents. To provide for them and ensure provision in case of your sudden departure to the other world. Life Insurance can be sensible, practical and above all, the right thing to do.

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Hindu Awareness Yatra presents

Swami Mukundananda's Lecture Tour

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, in association with the Jagadguru Kripalu Yog, has organized Swami Mukundananda's lecture tour through "Hindu Awareness Yatra". Along with enlightening lectures, the program offers Yoga and Meditation sessions to provide a holistic treat for body, mind, and soul.

Swami Mukundananda is a world-renowned teacher of spirituality, yoga and meditation. Swamiji is the founder of Jagadguru Kripalu Yog which is a unique system of yoga, with a holistic approach for nourishing the mind, body and soul. He received his degrees in engineering and management from two world famous institutes in India, IIT and IIM. However, the call of God was so strong that a short while after landing a top corporate job, he renounced his professional career in the quest for God-realization. Swamiji is a senior



| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Silver Spring, MD | May 2nd to 8th | Schaumburg, IL | Jul 11 to 17th |
| Flushing, New York | May 9th to 14th | Tampa, FL | Jul 18th to 23rd |
| Edison, NJ | May 16th to 21st | Plano, TX | Jul 25th to 30th |
| Ashland, MA | May 22nd to 27th | Smyrna, GA | Aug 1st to 7th |
| Sunnyvale, CA | June 6th to 12th | Norcross, GA | Aug 8th to 13th |
| Fremont, CA | June 13th to 19th | Houston, TX | Aug 15th to 28th |
| Cerritos, CA | June 20th to 26th | Monroeville, PA | Sept 11th to 17th |
| North Ridge, CA | Jun 26th to Jul 1st | Maple Valley, WA | Sept 19th to 25th |

disciple of Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj.

The Hindu Awareness Yatra starts at East Coast from the first week of May and will continue through October, covering most of the major cities across USA.

Swamiji was part of Hindu Awareness Yatra program in 2009, as part of his four-month tour across the U.S.

The program was very successful and the response was overwhelming!

Swami Mukundananda's lectures are simply marvelous and very appealing to the youth! -Abhaya Asthana, Boston



For details: www.jkyog.org or 972-527-6195



My Tryst with Satya or Truth

By Niyati Behl

Truth, is it a helpful thing? Ask yourself that. Now ask yourself is lying a helpful thing or is telling the truth? Please think of that as I share my memory with you. In my life I have been told so many stories, like fables and morals, and other cultural things. Today, I would like to share real life experiences of some students in my class. When they were not in a group, they weren't bad kids at all. It is really important you know that. These kids stole, lied, and basically never told the truth. They would steal our things, and all the kids in the class knew who had done it, but they would never tell the teachers. They felt that they were doing the perpetrators a favor. If the bad kids were ever questioned, they would lie and say they that they were not responsible for any wrongdoing.

"Why don't you tell me, were they doing good by lying and not telling the truth? "

Day by day, the problem got worse. They teased the teachers behind their backs and refused to tell the teachers the truth. They started lying about everything from their homework to all kinds of other things. Soon they started losing friends because they would lie so much. The teachers didn't like them much any more, and also blamed them for every thing lost and stolen. In my opinion they were losing a part of their essence, their soul. It may have started out as a joke or a prank, but it soon became hurtful and was no longer funny. I actually started feeling bad for those kids. Their untruthfulness lost

all the trust their friends and teachers had on them. Nobody liked them anymore, but nobody came out and told them why. I hope one day they learn from their own experiences. I have learned most importantly that when you have trust, don't lose it by telling lies, no matter how painful it might be to tell the truth, it always helps in the long run and makes people appreciate you in the end for who you are.

For me, truth is not an option, it is the only thing. It cleanses me when I admit to my mistakes, I feel lighter knowing I did the right thing and I never fake my feelings or my speech. The message I am carrying to you today is simple. Tell the truth and people will learn to accept you for who you are. It will create a solid foundation for your relationships. Also, I know deep inside that is the right thing to do, I urge you to consider and pray that you come to the only rightful conclusion that there can be in this matter.

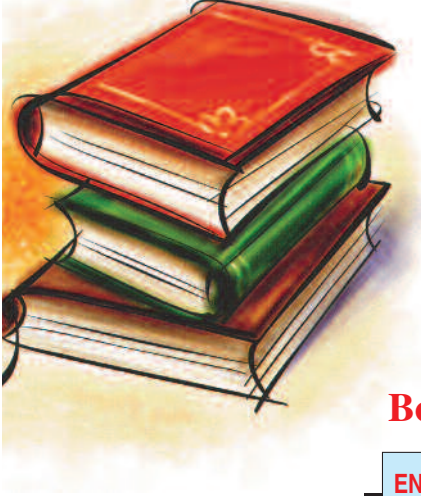
Truth is pure, like the rays of the sun, like the air we breathe, like the water we drink and the mothers love when we most need it. Our life and our worlds thrive on truth, truth will live on forever, it is the only thing that will remain. Isn't this what our Vedas have taught us, "SATYAMEV JAYATE", Long live SATYA, thank you and God Bless You all with the strength to say the Truth Always!!

Niyati Behl, an 8th grader, read the above essay to the class at the camp in Erie.

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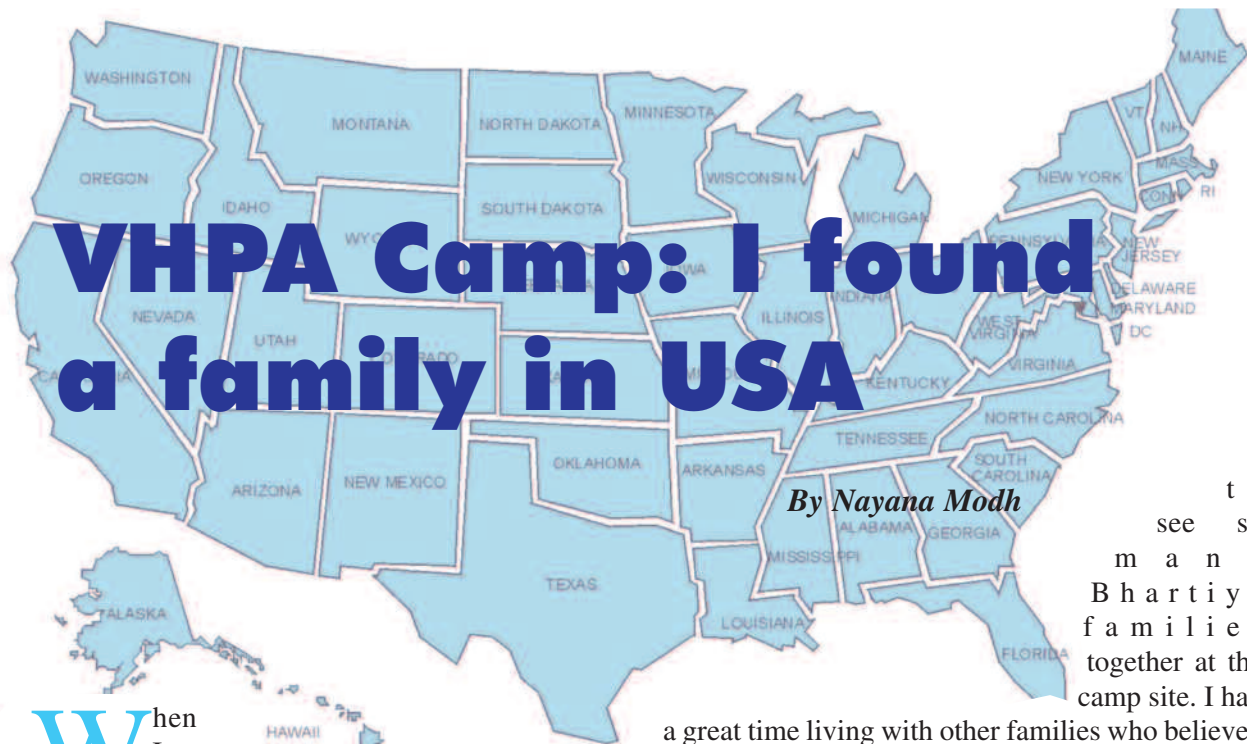
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When I was a little girl I always went to Mama's home during the school vacations or Mama and Mausi's children came to our home. I was born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. My Mama's home was in Halvad (Saurashtra dist.) I had 34 cousins including my 3 brothers and 1 sister. We had so much fun getting together and living together at one place. It was very difficult time for my Mami and Mausi to take good care of us all together but they did it. This was like a tradition we followed in Bharat. By living together we learned family values, respect, taking care of each other, shared knowledge, self confidence, fearlessness, learn cooking, cleaning and many other disciplines. School knowledge was one thing but what we got and learned from living together during the vacation time was much more valuable to me.

November, 1984 I landed at JFK airport in New York, USA. Newly wed with Dinesh Modh. I didn't know anyone besides Dinesh's family, Mother-Subhadraaben, Father-Ramanbhai and his two younger sisters Bhavna & Zarna. He registered for VHPA family camp in Massachusetts. That time I was 5 months pregnant. His family didn't want me to attend a week long camp for various reasons but Dinesh wanted me to attend the camp. He had felt that I was missing my family during the pregnancy time. So he didn't listen and took me to the camp. I was very happy

to see so many Bhartiya families together at the camp site. I had a great time living with other families who believed in same as I was. Camp atmosphere was so much Bhartiya living it felt like I was in Halvad my Mam's home. I made so many new friends. Camp participants were so nice just like me who came from Bharat and living in USA with their extended family. I can't express enough in words my feelings toward the other participants and the way they ran the camp. Last day of the camp they got together and gave me a surprise "Baby Shower" very traditionally. I was in shock with tears in my eyes. That was the best gift of my life. I found Mama, Mausi, Nani, Dadaji, Bade Bhaiya, Mom, sister, friends all of them at the camp." I found a family"

Now we have two beautiful children Priya, 23 years old and Ankit 21 years old. We all attend VHPA camps.

VHPA camp activity started in 1979, first camp happened in Rhode Island. In late 70's Hindu families came from Bharat missed tradition of spending vacation time together. They felt the value of living together in USA and started camp activity. Since then many camps are running in various parts of USA. We have now regular camp activity going on in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington DC, Florida, Atlanta, Indianapolis, Texas and California.

Camp is the one of the best project of VHPA we enjoy the most. We thank you all who started VHPA camps.



Founders of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America (VHPA)



Late Shri. Mandayam
Paramakanthi Srinivasan



Dr. Mahesh Mehta



Shri. Arvind Sant



Shri. Subhash Mehta



Late Shri. Pranjivandas B. Patel

FAQ

on Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America (VHPA)

Who were the founders of VHPA?

VHPA was founded on October 19th 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York on May 16, 1974 by Dr. Mahesh Mehta, Shri Pranjivan Patel, Shri Subhash Mehta, Shri Arvind Sant and Shri M P Srinivasan.

What is the nature of the organization?

VHPA is an independent, nonprofit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in US.

Why was VHPA founded?

VHPA was founded to address social, educational, cultural, intellectual and spiritual needs of the Hindu society in the US and to network with other Hindu organizations with humanitarian causes worldwide.

Who is a Hindu according to VHPA?

According to VHPA Hindus are those who believe in, practice, or respect the spiritual and religious principles having origins in Bharat (India), which includes Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and people of various religious sects within the Hindu ethos.

What is the vision of VHPA?

VHPA was founded with a grand vision of building a dynamic Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam meaning the entire creation is one family.

Why is the name of the organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America similar to Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bharat?

Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharat was founded in 1964 and it was the only Hindu organization of its kind at the time founded by prominent personalities from Vedikas, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, whereas VHP of America was independently founded in 1970, six years later in the US. Keeping the vision of Hindu unity in mind the organization in the US was named similarly.

Is VHPA a branch of any other organization?

No. VHPA is an independent organization in the US governed by the laws of the US with its own constitution.