

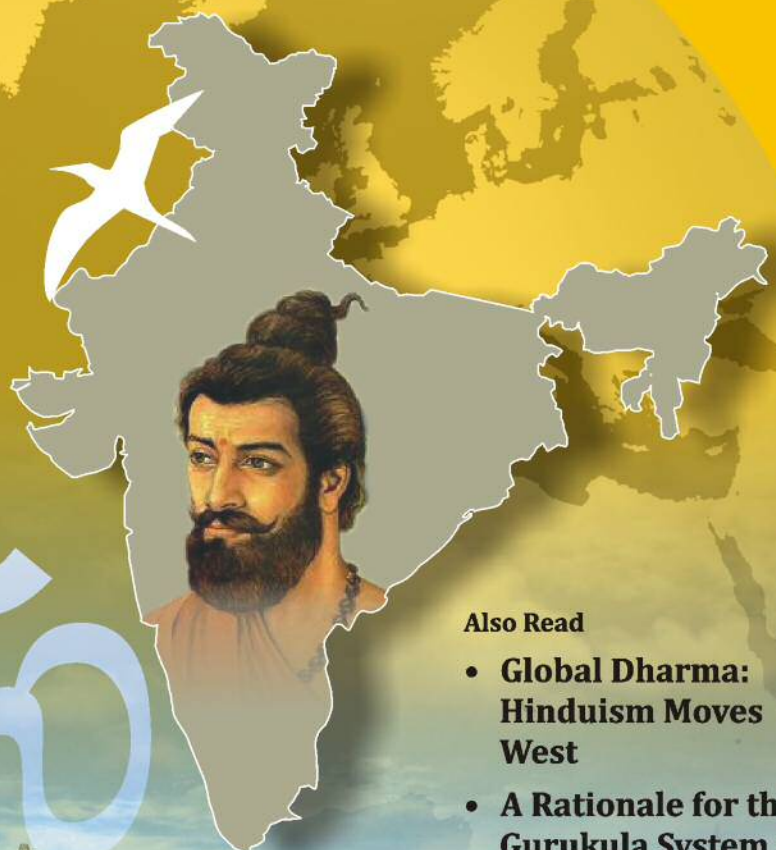


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Jan - Mar 2011

HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest



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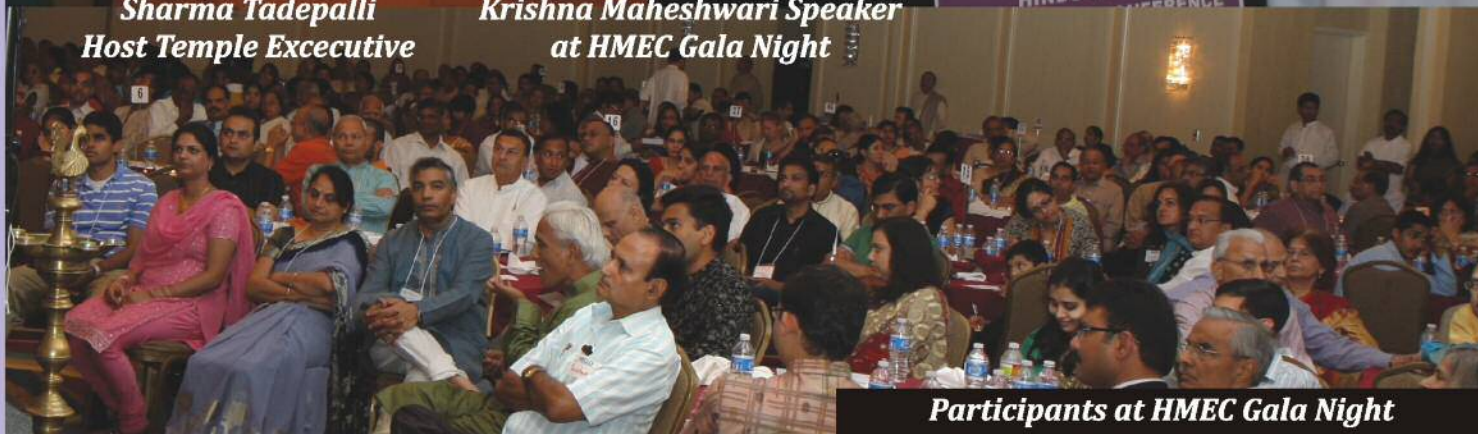
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BAPS Youth Performance at HMEC



HMEC Youth Participants



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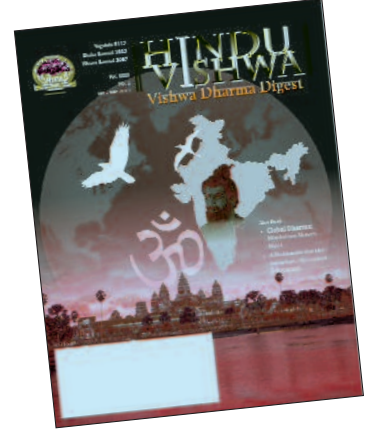
January - March 2011

यथा धेनुसहस्रेषु वत्सो विन्दति मातरम् ।
तथा पूर्वकृतं कर्म कर्तारम् अनुगच्छति ।।

Yatha Dhenusahasreshu Vatso Vindati Mataram
Tatha Poorvakrutam Karma Kartaram Anugachhati

As a calf finds its mother among a thousand cows, so
does the deed previously done follows after the doer.

(Mahabharata, Shantiparva 15.56)



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The views expressed in the articles presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization, officials, editorial staff or the donors.

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- President of VHP (International) Shri Ashok Singhal

EDITORIAL



"Ram-Ram," is what village-folks say all across India when greeting one another, "Ram-Ram."

JAI SHRI RAM

Ram resides on the tongue, in the blood and soul of every corner of Bharat, from the Himalayas in the north to Kanya Kumari in the south and from Puri in the east to Dwarka in the west. And Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram and the center of His life as described in the Sanskrit epic Ramayan by sage-poet Valmiki who was contemporary of Shri Ram, and subsequently in many other regional versions of the saga including the Tulasi-Ramayan in Awadhi, a dialect of the national language, Hindi, is no less than the very heart of the spirit of Bharat from the Treta-Yug up till this day, and even beyond; for Ayodhya bears a unique significance second to none for the entire lineage of kings of the Raghu-dynasty from Sat-Yug. Then comes Babar, the Mongol invader, in 1526 CE, whose General, Mir Baqi, demolishes the splendid Mandir at the birth-place of Shri Ram ('Ram-Janma-Bhoomi'-RJB) in Ayodhya to erect a victory-structure thereupon, brazenly even using the stones and rubbles of the demolished RJB Mandir. Later, Muslims - descendants of Babar and his clan as well as those of Hindus forcibly converted to Islam under the Mogul sword and cannon - fashionably called this infamous structure a mosque, in complete inconsistency with the injunctions of their own faith, since their sacred text, Koran, prohibits building a mosque upon the ruins of another construct. In observance to this conflict, this structure was never really used to render 'Ajan' or 'Namaz.' Naturally a conflict, often taking the form of bloody riots,

ensued between the Hindus and the Muslims that perpetuated over centuries, up till this very day, climaxing on December 6, 1992 when a group of Hindu 'Kar-sevaks' (devoted volunteers) found it appropriate to demolish the Babari structure, a symbol of Hindu servitude in their own land. At one point the ruling (Congress) party declared officially that Ram was simply a figment of imagination, a fictitious character, primarily to mitigate protests against a plan of building a channel by breaking a bridge-like underwater structure ("Ram-Setu") connecting the Southern tip of India with Lanka (currently called Sri Lanka.) This structure was revealed by space-based satellite photography, and is believed by Hindus to be the remains of the bridge Shri Ram and his army built to cross the waters to attack and kill Ravan, the 'demon-king' of Lanka who wickedly kidnapped Sita, Ram's beloved consort. This victory of the Truth and the Good over the Untruth and Evil is celebrated by Hindus as 'Vijaya-Dashami' and 'Deepavali,' joyous annual festivals of Shakti-worship and light all over India and the world even today.

The controversy and legal battle that followed the demolition of the Babari structure on December 6, 1992, culminated recently (September 30, 2010) in the verdict by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court that the ground at the RJB be divided into three parts - with two subdivisions 'awarded' to Hindus for constructing a new Ram Mandir, and one subdivision to Muslims to build a mosque, as they please.

Since the archeological excavation and survey of the site had revealed the entire land to be graced with Ram Mandir, with 64 pillars of unparalleled beauty and myriad of other historic artifacts, this decision by the Allahabad High Court, in the name of fairness, was but a reflection of the commonly pursued minority-appeasement policy right from the carving out of Pakistan from out of the undivided Bharat. This policy, needless to say, turned a self-evidently simple matter of letting the entire landscape to be justifiably returned to Hindus into an unnecessarily complex problem.

Despite the favor shown to Muslims by the High Court, however, instead of thankfully accepting its gracious verdict, certain factions of Indian Muslims - notably the Imam of the Jama Masjid in Delhi - prepared to contest this verdict. Recently, in response of this blatant and arrogant effort to breed disharmony in the Hindu-Muslim communities, Hindu Dharmacharyas including the Shankaracharyas have

contemplated to advance the claim for a legal contest in their own right before the Supreme Court, protesting any division at all of the 67 acres of land around the RJB. One can only hope that this should serve as a lesson to the Jama Masjid camp.

The principle of secularity in its unadulterated form implies an equitable treatment of all citizens of the democratic

country, and not a plethora of unfair privileges to the Muslim minority at dire expense of the overwhelmingly large Hindu majority in an originally Hindu land. Undoubtedly, biased treatment of the minority by short-sighted and self-centered politicians motivated by the vote-bank politics flies in the face of the fundamental principle of democracy and secularity. ■

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Sanatan Dharma and Science 3rd Annual Essay Competition

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**Topic: The Science is a Verifiable Truth
and so is the Sanatana Dharma**

FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:

**Topic: Hindu Mandir and Deity Worship -
The Manifestation of Divinity**

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To explore the scientific basis behind Sanatan Dharma concepts,
and Vedic Philosophy of the given topics

Eligibility:

High School and College Students

Essay Submission

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- 2) Essay must be typed in Times New Roman 12 point font size.
- 3) For ease of Reading, essay must be formatted to one and a half space
- 4) Mail essay as MS Word file to: omcenter@gmail.com
- 5) All essay submissions must be sent before

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PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

FIFTH HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE

Enhancing Hindu Community Through Mandirs

Oct 22-24, 2010 Houston, TX

FRIDAY 10/22/2010			
Session	Time	Topic	Chair & Speakers
Session 1	7:30 PM	Inaugural Session	Moderator - Ram Belagaje
SATURDAY PRE-LUNCH PROGRAM 10/23/2010			
Session 2	7:50 AM	Welcome Session	Moderator - Dharmendra Dargan
		Opening Remarks	Shri Jyotish Parekh
		Keynote Address: Enhancing Hindu Community Through Mandirs	Swami Tavttavidananda Saraswati
Session 3	8:35 AM	HMEC Update and Report on Selected Projects	Moderator - Umesh Shukla
Session 4	10:00 AM	Sharing Hindu Community Presence Through Festivals & Seva	Nainan Desai
Session 5	11:00 AM	It's All About Collaboration	Moderator - Arjun Pradeep
SATURDAY POST-LUNCH PROGRAM 10/23/2010			
Session 6A	1:00 PM	Coordinating Hindu Seva Activities	Moderator - Animesh Sinha
Session 6B	1:00 PM	Education and Integration	Moderator - Rishi Bhutada
Session 6C-7C	1:00-3:00	Expanding the Youth Portfolio: Creating opportunities for youth participation in temples	Moderators - Keya Bhatt & Samir Asthana
Session 7A	2:00 PM	Making the Mandirs & Priests More Effective	Moderator - Ganesh Ramachandran
Session 7B	2:00 PM	Expanding Mandir Services	Moderator - Surendra Pandey
Session 7D	2:00 PM	Hot Topics	Moderator - Suparna Salil
Workshop Breakout Sessions			
Session 8A	4:00 PM	Hindu Public Policy	Moderators - Krishna Kirti Das Divya L. Selvakumar
Session 8B	4:00 PM	Spirituality Women bring to Temple Programs & Management	Moderator - Mythili Bacchu
Session 8C	4:00 PM	Effectively Integrating Youth and Young Adults into Mandirs	Moderator - Smeeta Patel
Session 8D	4:00 PM	Assimilating Non-Hindus Into the Hindu Tradition	Moderator - Vinaya Vardhana
Evening Program	7:30 PM	Cultural Program & Invited Speakers - 'Nivedana'	Emcee - Priya Ramachandra
SUNDAY 10/24/2010			
Session 9	7:50 AM	Summary of the Workshop Sessions	Moderator - Manju Shrivastava
Session 10	8:30 AM	Management & Administration of Mandirs	Moderator - Hymavati Mikkilineni
Session 11	9:30 AM	Community Involvement Through Mandirs	Moderator - Sant Gupta
Session 12	10:30 AM	Closure	Moderator - Preya Dave
		Parting Thoughts - Blessings	Swami Parmeshanand Ji
		Resolutions & Next Steps	Sanjay Mehta
		2011 HMEC Host's Acceptance	
		Vote of Thanks	Subhash Mehta
		Prarthana	Youth
For details visit: http://hmec.vhp-america.org/			

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

A Message



My prayers and best wishes for the success of the 5th annual conference of the Hindu-Mandir-Executives. The responsibility of upholding the basic principles of Hindu dharma lies with every Hindu. To make this happen, no Hindu should be denied of the opportunity to imbibe those principles in terms of both form and spirit. The executives have an onerous job in hand. I am with you all. May Bhagvan's grace be with all of us.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

September 19, 2010

**Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya***An Establishment for Cultural Renaissance of the Globe.**Founder-patron**Vedmoorti Taponistha Pt. Sriram Acharya &
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Director & Head	All World Gayatri Pariwar, Shantikunj
Director	Brahmavarchas Research Institute
Editor	Akhand Jyoti, Yugshakti Gayatri
President	Swami Vivekanand Yoga Anusandhan, Sansthan (Bangalore)

MESSAGE TO HMEC-2010

I am truly delighted to see that this great initiative has started making impact both at community level and political level in USA and Canada by bringing executives of a large number of temples and Hindu organizations from across USA, Canada, and Trinidad together. It has been the vision of our Gurudev Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya that 'Temples become centers of mass awakening' and 'harmony is established among various Sects' and HMEC is making a significant effort in accomplishing this vision.

Temples provide a very powerful medium for reaching out to community. They are not only the place of worship but they are also the light-houses of Divine Culture. Temples have major responsibilities of sustaining the universal values of our Vedic traditions and to impart them in the next generation.

I would like to emphasize, however, that temples can fulfill their role in totality only if temple executives expand their vision and realize that we all are connected and what is good for all is good for self. The young generation in North America is craving to get connected to their roots and a large number of westerners are also being attracted to the doctrines of Sanatan Dharma. All that is needed is to shift our focus and develop our capability to serve them in the way they can relate to it. I hope that this year's conference will create a new level of energy and enthusiasm in the participants to reach out to the youth and the westerners.

All World Gayatri Pariwar has been working relentlessly for past 70 years with the goal of bringing Divine era of truth and righteousness back on earth and believes that it will be accomplished by adoption of great values by each & every person. The world is getting ready for major changes and it is a duty of all awakened souls like you to take leading role in these special moments of change.

Gayatri Pariwar has more than 4000 Shaktipeeths within India and four Gayatri Consciousness Centres across USA and Canada. Gayatri Pariwar has also started Dev Sanskriti University in 2002 which has now grown to have over 100 students doing Ph. D. research in Vedic sciences. A large Research Center (Rupees 1,300 million project) to revive the Vedic science is taking shape in the university. We are always willing to share our experience and expertise to any temple/organization that need it.

In November of 2011, we are celebrating the 'Birth Centenary Year' of our Gurudev in Haridwar in a grand way. Please accept our invitation and plan to come to Haridwar next year for this memorial event.

My best wishes and blessing to the success of the HMEC 2010 conference and may this conference inspire all temples across North America to become 'Light-houses' for the Vedic knowledge to all.

With Blessings,

Dr. Pranav Pandya

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Office of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar



Message from HH Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

It is vital that different Hindu mandirs in North America come together and devise programs especially for the youth so that they maintain their ties with Indian culture and spirituality. I am glad that the Hindu Mandir Executive Committee is so active.

Love and Blessings

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar



// Sanskruti Foundation //

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September 17th, 2010

Shri Arvindbhai Patel

Sanskriti Parivar Centers - USA
HMEC-2010
156 Anderson Parkway
Cedar Grove, New Jersey 07009



Dear Arvindbhai,

Jai Shri Krishna to you and all of the devotees!

I am delighted to learn that the 5th Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) will be taking place in Houston, Texas from October 22nd through October 24th, 2010. The Mandir is truly the foundation of our lives and communities; it serves as a sanctuary where devotees can attain peace, tranquility, inner harmony and divine bliss by being in the presence of the Lord. Within the various communities, and Mandir also serves as a center for unique religious and cultural activities, which are beneficial and import our rich culture to all of the participants.

It is indeed exceptional that temples from various communities throughout the world are endeavoring to meet together at this 5th Annual Conference. By meeting regularly and constantly increasing the participation to include new communities and Mandirs, there is a palpable strengthening of the linkages among the devotees and the various places of worship, and this will generate extremely positive vibrations for all of those who participate.

May everyone involved receive Lord's blessings and continue on their spiritual path to be in Lord's Seva. Unfortunately, my ongoing commitments within India will preclude me from attending this marvelous Conference. However, I am conveying my heartfelt warmest wishes and prayers for a successful, blissful and enlightening event

With Blessings,

Rameshbhai V. Oza
("Bhai Shri")

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Message from the Host Temples

Welcome Aboard

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It is our great honor to welcome you - the delegates representing temples in America, Canada and abroad - to the 5th Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference 2010 - a historic event organized by following six temples in Texas with participation and co-operation of other area temples in the Lone Star State of Texas.

We will be together over the weekend of October 22-24, 2010. During our stay in the One Hindu Family Environment at Sheraton, IAH airport in Houston, we will discuss, deliberate and find solutions to the problems that our temples are facing so that our mission of HMEC may be fulfilled.

Briefly, the mission of HMEC is to develop a network among the executives of all Hindu Mandirs of North America leading to the goal of ensuring the sustenance of Hindu Dharma and the role of the temples in achieving this goal; and exploring the ways of anchoring the spiritual values in the hearts and minds of our future generation. The other objectives of HMEC include networking, better interaction and collaboration among mandirs.

It is our hope that each one of us will learn from each others' experience and take new ideas from this conference and implement them in advancing the growth of their respective temples.

We have tried our best to make this 2010 conference an incredible experience for all. Please do not hesitate to call on any of our volunteers to make your stay more comfortable. We hope to enjoy great weather, friendly and healthy environment and a memorable time in the Lone Star State of Texas, and in Houston. Welcome aboard!

Sincerely,

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It is with great pleasure, I welcome you to the 5th Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC). With this 5th HMEC we have crossed a milestone. Your overwhelming response over last five years signifies a great need for such a forum where the mandir executives can come together, deliberate and strategize upon the needs of American Hindu community.

For nourishing the tree of Hindu Dharma in this adopted land (karma bhumi), we have collectively felt a need to focus strong-ly on the needs of 2nd generation Hindus and the greater US so-ciety. Mandirs are Hindu institutions in US that can address the-se very important needs in a tangible way. Mandirs need to be vibrant centers of activities that meet a variety of needs of the community. At the same time I must com-mend those visionary leaders of mandirs who have successfully expanded the role of their mandirs to take up greater responsibilities beyond being the places of worship.

During last five years we have come to know each other and have developed working relationships. Working together for a divine cause has gradually instilled a confidence to find solutions for some of our problems. Now we need to go to the next phase - come out with bigger programs that can help the community and institutions in more concrete ways. We will need whole-hearted participation from many Mandir executives to accomplish this. Your proven leadership, rich experience with the community, and devotion for selfless service - with the synergy of many of us working together - will accomplish this mammoth task with ease.

This year Texas has shown us a real team spirit. HMEC 2010 is graciously sponsored by six Mandirs - Sri Meenaxi Temple Pearland, TX, Barsana Dham, Austin, TX, D/FW Hindu Temple, Irving, TX, Hin-du Temple of The Woodlands, The Woodlands, TX, Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir, Houston, TX, and Val-labh Priti Seva Samaj, Houston, TX. We sincerely thank all of them for being wonderful hosts and demonstrating a way to unite for a divine cause.

Jyotish Parekh, President
VHP of America.



HINDU VISHWA



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Dated: October 05, 2010

Office of Ashok Singhal, President, Vishva Hindu Parishad (Int'L)

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MESSAGE

We are glad to know that the 5th annual HMEC-2010 (Hindu Mandir Executives Conference) is going to be held in Houston, TX, on October 22-24, 2010 and that this time round, with broadened representation from all over the United States, Canada and other areas you hope to reach your goal of 130 temples participating in the conference.

We are sure that Hindu Dharma, culture and civilization will remain safe and continue to grow in the hearts and minds of our present and future generations in the matrix of the Western hemisphere as long as the HMEC movement plays its role with vision, commitment and dedication! This key role as a protector, preserver and promoter of the Hindu cause brings all the more responsibility on the HMEC movement and we know the movement leaders quite appreciate it and are ready to meet the challenges of the times and climes.

We send hereby our heartiest greetings to the participants, organizers and all the supporters of the HMEC-2010! We pray to Parampita Paramaatmaa to shower His Blessings so that the noble objectives of the HMEC-2010 are accomplished and all those involved go back with fresh ideas and energy to promote the cause of the movement!

We again wish all success for the HMEC-2010 and its follow-up activities! We also wish all success to the HMEC-2010 souvenir that would prove to be a preservable one!

In the service of Dharma,

(Ashok Singhal)

President

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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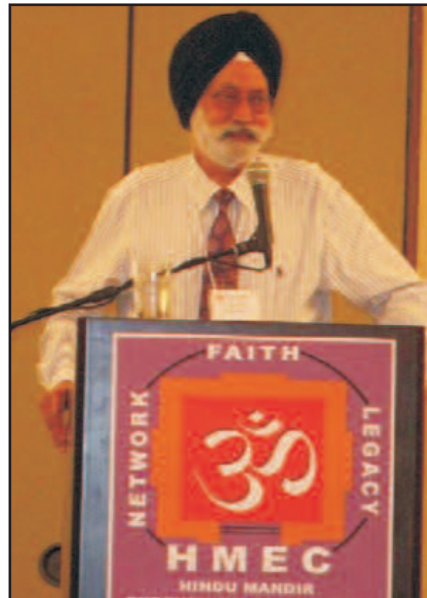
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5th Annual

Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) Draws Huge Participation

2 50 delegates from nearly 100 temples and Hindu organizations from various parts of the US and Canada participated in the fifth annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) from October 22-24, 2010 in Houston, Texas. The temples and Hindu organizations represented included those from as far away as Hawaii and Canada to those from California, Massachusetts, and Florida. Delegates ranged in age from teenagers to those in their eighties and came from a variety of ethnic and career backgrounds. As conference host, Dr. Sharma Tadepalli extended on behalf of the six host temples and 19 other participating mandirs a "Texas-size" welcome. Sri Meenakshi Temple which hosted this year's conference was joined by VPSS-Houston, Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir, Hindu Temple of The Woodlands, Dallas/Fort Worth Temple, and Barsana Dham. One of the aims of the HMEC is to assist in the development of networks and relationships between Mandir executives so that a cohesive and focused Hindu-American community is created with Mandirs as its nucleus. The participants were focused on developing programs to provide leadership to nourish, protect and sustain Hindu Dharma in North America. There was also an emphasis on service to the broader community through blood drives, health fairs, school supply donations and tutoring projects. Addressing the conference by video, Swami Dayananda Saraswati of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam (AVG), emphasized that the Hindu Mandirs need to work together to stand up to external forces trying to interfere with their activities and goals. Other prominent speakers included Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswati of

AVG, and Swami Nikhilanand of Barsana Dham, who appreciated the HMEC's efforts in fostering a spirit of fellowship and cooperation amongst the Hindu religious leadership in America. Paramacharya Palaniswami of Hinduism Today spoke about using festivals to inform others about Hindu traditions. A special gift to all



Shri Harnek Singh
from Austin Gurudwara

attendees was a CD of ready-to-publish layouts for various festivals throughout the year. Vishal Agarwal, a scholar from Minnesota and Jignesh Patel of BAPS-Houston both were inspiring as they spoke of ways to involve the younger generation in Mandirs, including establishment of Youth Clubs for teenagers for whom traditional classes no longer appeal. Dr. Umesh Shukla, the convener of the conference, remarked that we had reached a milestone with the 5th HMEC in establishing co-operation among the Hindu Mandirs and Hindu organizations to nourish and sustain Hindu Dharma in North America.

Topics discussed included potentially controversial subjects like the proper definition of a Hindu and the portrayal of Hinduism in schools and the public media as well as the contribution to better inter-group understanding throughout the US by the inclusion of main-stream Americans in celebrations of festivals. Organizations presented examples of how they promoted community involvement in their celebrations. There were displays from several suppliers of books including the VHPA and temple software management systems.

Delegates discussed avenues of collaboration like establishing a common supply ordering system through which temples can combine their orders for various



L-R Krishna Maheshwari, Prem Dixit, Keya Bhatt, Samir Asthana, Preya Dave, Hirsh Shukla, Tejas Dave, Priya Ramachandra, Bhakti Mehta

common items that they need as well as insurance programs providing medical coverage for priests and staff of various temples.

This would make it more convenient for large and small temples while keeping costs down.

A special feature of this year's program was the inclusion of more young people and more women and topics of special interest to those groups. Reaction from the youth participants was very positive and enthusiastic. Participants like Hirsh Shukla, Abhinav Suraiya and Samir Asthana welcomed the opportunity to

connect with fellow Hindu youth and establish communication channels with their peers. They along with leaders like Preya Dave felt inspired and empowered by the speakers at the various sessions to get involved in Hindu activities and to be the agent of change in the Hindu community.

For the first time the local Hindu community were invited to a Gala night. This included a delicious meal and talks by Krishna Maheshwari, a second-generation Hindu; and Gaurangbhai Nanavaty, the respected Acharya of the local Chinmaya Mission-Houston, who

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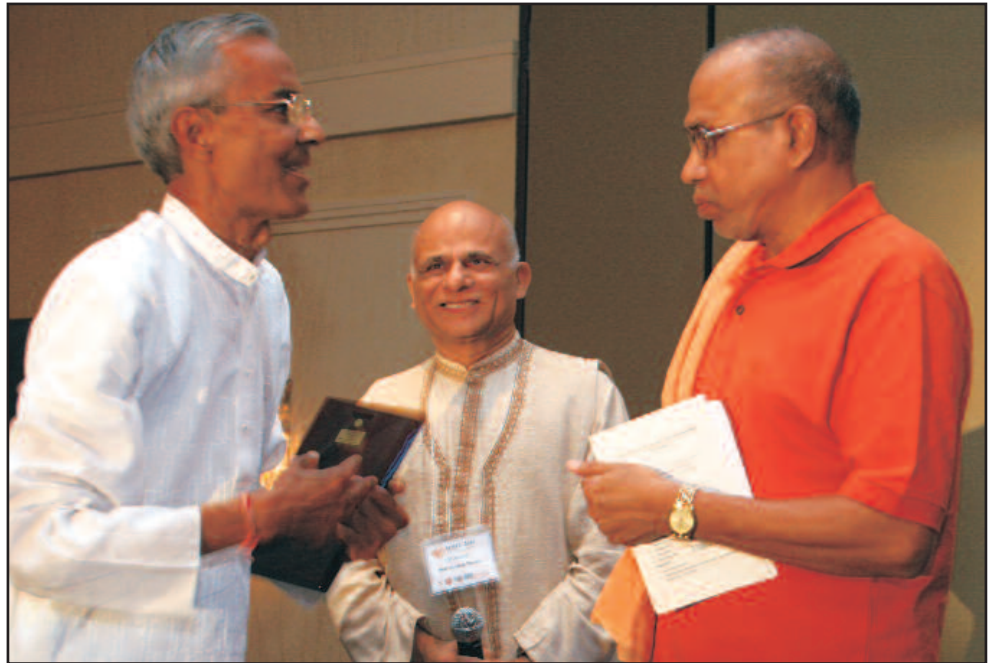
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provided some very practical guidance. A special award was given to Ramesh Bhutada, a businessman who devotes much of his time and resources to community work, including donations to NGOs involved in health, education and youth activities. There were extraordinary dances by Rathna Kumar's Anjali Center of Dance and a very colorful and energetic folk dance by the young men of BAPS and the audience joyfully joined with Jiv Jago group from ISKON-Houston as they presented their bhajans and devotional dances.

The national and local volunteers from VHPA and host Mandirs had worked shoulder to shoulder for over nine months to organize the conference. The attendees were appreciative of the many local volunteers, both youth and adults, who worked hard behind the scenes, helping with food, airport transportation and more. Nirav Patel, a young volunteer, said afterward "Not only did I have fun volunteering in different departments, but I also learned more about Hinduism and the importance of time management." The conference concluded with participants setting a cooperative agenda going forward. Action items include

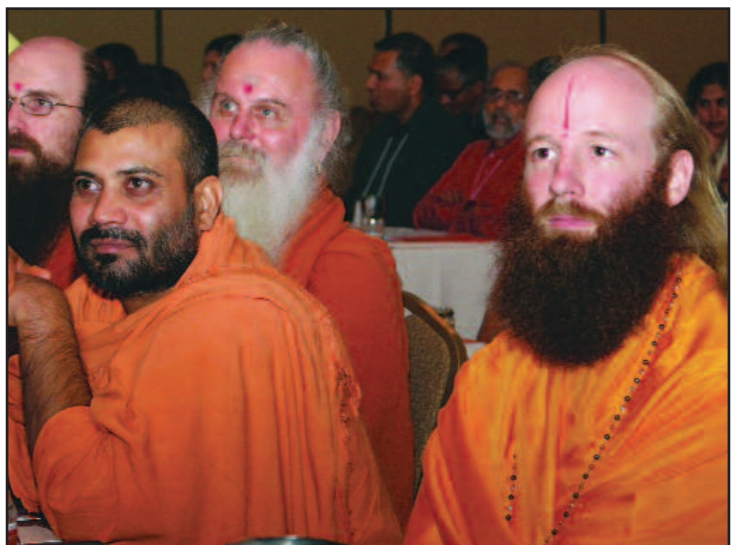
- Develop a formal application process to facilitate, invest and train future leaders.
- Publish an HMEC book which includes history of Hindu Mandirs in North America with profiles of spiritual guides and other key volunteers.
- Provide help in the areas of operation and leadership from established and well-performing Mandirs through a common resource pool to assist new and struggling Mandirs.
- Encourage the networking of Hindu youth through the recently established Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY).
- Provide informational resources for Hindu individuals and organizations through newsletters and books currently in progress, including a prayer



Ramesh Bhutada receiving award from Jyotish Parikh, VHPA President and Swami Tattvavidanand

book for hospitals, and supplementary educational materials for schools.

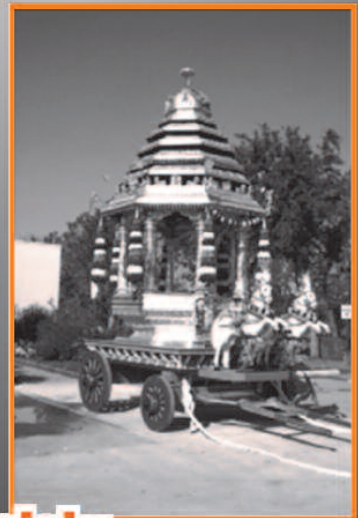
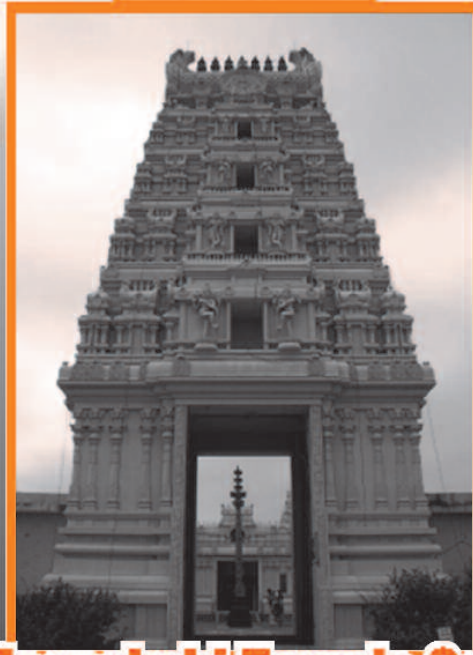
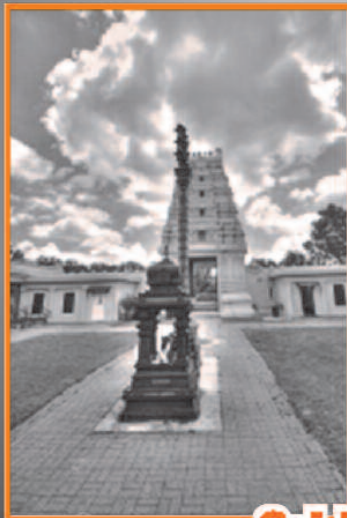
- Join together to promote the distribution of copies of the Bhagvad Gita in motels
 - Continue to give scholarships based on essays written by students on a topic concerning Sanatana Dharma
- Delegates are already looking forward to next year's conference in the Ohio area which will be hosted by several temples from the upper mid-west region. ■



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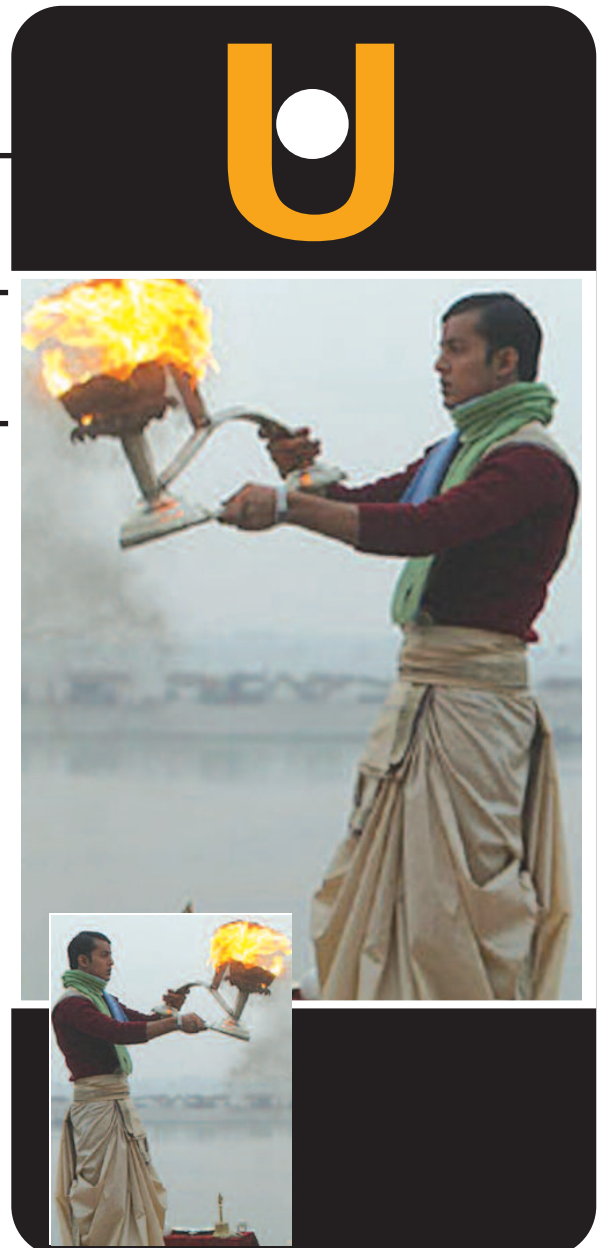
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The New Role of Pracharak in US Mandirs

By Fred Stella

Imagine a civic ceremony in your hometown that might be convened by a progressive mayor who wished to have as many representatives of the city's various religions as possible. We can assume that there would be a number of ministers and priests of various Christian stripes, one or two Rabbi(s), and perhaps an Imam if there is a local mosque. But who would represent the Sanatana Dharma? Well, there might be several possibilities. If the community had an Ashram nearby, perhaps we'd see a Swami on the dais. Another option would be someone from the Board of Directors of the local Mandir. However, it is very doubtful that we'd see the pundit of that temple. In most cases, the priests of local temples do not have a public face. Their duties are almost exclusively at the temple and, often coupled with a lack of proficiency in English, do not allow the kind of exposure to the general community that other clergies have. Many temple board members and other volunteers do a wonderful job representing their spiritual family in the context of the general community. However, it is the opinion of the West Michigan Hindu Temple that we need to establish greater visibility and serve the cities and towns where we have a presence on a more formal level.

About two years ago, a small group of devotees from the West Michigan Hindu Temple met to discuss a proposal that would create a position similar to what would be called a "Lay Minister" in Christian terms, or "Para-Rabbi" by Jews. These are trained individuals who assist their church or synagogue in a variety of ways. What differentiates them from others in their faith families is that they are ordained to perform certain sacramental



functions. We decided to investigate the possibility of creating a volunteer position at par with what the clergy of other religions do: an Outreach Minister.

We agreed that congregations (from all religions) made up chiefly of the first generation immigrants tend to be somewhat insular. We wished to avoid this pitfall. So it was decided that a person in this post would be the "face" of the temple. It would be his or her job to operate media relations, connect with other clergies in inter-faith settings, be the point-person for lectures in schools, churches, etc., and also offer pastoral care in hospitals.

Another area that has been talked about is



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Activities

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Temple Activities: (www.vpsshaveli.org)

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- Regular SATSANG programs and discourses of scholars for all.

Vallabh Vidya Mandir Activities: (www.vymhouston.org)

- providing education in Indian culture, life style, values, arts, yoga and cooking etc. to more than 150 students.
- boasts well appointed classrooms and offers over eighteen different courses taught by its all volunteer teachers.



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prison-ministry. While we are very proud to say that Hindus are "poorly" represented in jails and prisons, it is still important to have spiritual advisors available, not only for born Hindus, but also for those of other religions, or of no religion, who might wish to benefit from the teachings of the Sanatana Dharma.

One issue that was suggested is that the Outreach Minister be empowered to officiate weddings. This initiated a very healthy discussion, with interesting results. This move was in no way made to diminish the role of the pundit-in-residence. Official Hindu weddings would continue to be conducted by priests. But it was felt by some that we could offer a great service to the larger community in a unique way.

As you know, there are great numbers of Americans who are estranged from their religion of birth. Many of these have adopted Hindu practices such as Hatha Yoga, meditation, bhajan-chanting, guru-discipleship, etc., many without fully embracing the Hindu tradition. Some refer to themselves as "spiritual-but-not-religious." When the time comes for people like this to get married, a full-blown Hindu ceremony may not be appropriate for such couples. If neither party has Indian roots, the service would be completely foreign to both parties as well as their families. So it was agreed that the Outreach Minister would be able to perform marriage ceremony for people who had an affinity for Santana Dharma but are not "charter members" or not a Hindu in

traditional sense. The wedding would include certain aspects such as prayers, chants, readings from the Vedas, a sermon based on our teachings and perhaps a short ritual with explanation. Most, if not all, of this ceremony would be conducted in English.

The last thing that needed to be negotiated was a title. "Outreach Minister" is how the job was talked about as we hammered the fine points out, but there was strong consensus that we give this position a Sanskrit name. The closest we could come up with is Pracharak. When dealing with people outside the Hindu community, we often add Outreach Minister parenthetically.

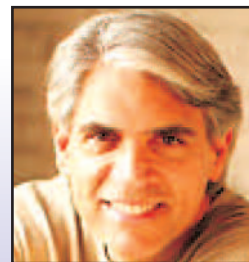
It has been a year since a Shiva Abishekam Puja initiated my own work as the temple's First Pracharak.

These past months have offered much opportunity for seva (service), and I am so grateful. Under the guidance of the Temple Board, I have officiated about half a dozen weddings; conducted a memorial service; led several churches, schools and other groups on temple tours; lectured at various churches, high schools and colleges; partnered with a church in hosting a Diwali celebration; and offered spiritual counsel to those who requested it. By all accounts, this noble experiment is fulfilling and exceeding expectations. It is our hope that someday more devotees will also be ordained in the role to answer even more calls from the community. ■

About the author

Fred Stella is President of Interfaith Dialogue Association, an adjunct instructor on the faculty of Muskegon Community College, and an actor for stage, film, TV and audio books. He has been a devotee of the Sanatana Dharma for over 25 years. He will gladly serve any Mandir that wishes to learn more about the West Michigan Hindu Temple Pracharak Program, and perhaps institute one of their own.

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COVER STORY

Global Hinduism Dharma Moves West

By Ramnarine Sahadeo

When the British Empire sent Indentured Servants from India to various places across the globe to replace slaves on the plantations, little did they know that they were sending not only physical labour but the spirit and wisdom of thousands of years of Indian heritage. The successful experience with indentured servants to Mauritius in 1834 encouraged the movement to the West. On May 5, 1838, two ships, **Whitby** and **Hesperus**, arrived in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) with 396 workers from Calcutta; 18 had died during the long trip across the *kala pani*. The conditions on board the ships that took several months to reach the Caribbean, forged new bonds and made them all **Jahaji Bhais** as the caste relations slowly lost significance and survival took precedence. This process continued until 1917 when opposition by Indian National Congress, including Mahatma Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others put an end to the system forever. However between 1838 and 1917 about half a million Indian nationals came to Guyana and the Caribbean.

A fact that has not attracted adequate scholarship or research is that while they came from different religious backgrounds most of them were Hindus taking with them the values of the ancient Vedic Saraswati civilisation. Stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata were consistently read that gave

guidance to a life of constant struggle. These epics influence many even today.

These children of India lived in several countries, learnt English, French, Dutch and Spanish. Some of the countries include

Trinidad,
Guadeloupe,
Jamaica,
Surinam,



Martinique,
St. Lucia,
Grenada, St. Vincent,
St. Kitts, French Guyana, St.

Croix and Belize. Some have totally lost the ways of their fore parents and can be connected to India only by physical appearance. Others like Guyana, Trinidad and Surinam have created "LITTLE INDIAS" in most of their villages and plantations. There are numerous forces that are persistently demanding that they forget all things Indian and be

totally Western in their values. Unless these forces are countered, the concern is that the few survivors will also be deprived of the opportunity to contribute their heritage to the development of the global village.

The Role Of North American Temples

It is because we believe that the ancient values of Sanatana Dharma are still relevant to the world today, we continue to teach and practice them wherever we go. It is the temples, the ashrams, our daily spiritual rituals and regular festivals that continue to inspire and motivate us.

Unfortunately, wealth and knowledge are not distributed equally among nations. However, in the same way in which rich nations assist the poor ones, the temples with more money, manpower and knowledge in North America, should assist those that are less fortunate in the developing nations. This is quite consistent with their primary function to provide leadership globally and promote a philosophy and a way of life that is universal and not restricted by geography or national boundaries.

Angkor Wat, Cambodia

The majestic buildings like the Angkor Wat (pictured

above) in Cambodia must have played a major role in the survival of the people who inherited their spiritual strength from India. The Swaminarayan and other Hindu temples that are now gracing the landscape of many countries is another example of how these structures have given hope and left many in awe as they are rapidly rising taking the place of what were once forests, hills, swamps, bushes or even industrial wastelands.

These inspiring architectural wonders are absent in the Caribbean where they will serve as appropriate monuments, not only to remind us of our glorious heritage, but also to celebrate the struggles, survival and success of the former citizens of Mother India, thus bridging the past and the future.

Guyana

One country which should have Vedic landmarks is Guyana, since it was there on May 5, 1838 that the culture was introduced to the Western Hemisphere. The Parliament of Canada has also recognised this initial date by celebrating May as Heritage month; provinces like Ontario enacted similar legislation.

It was decades later on September 1893 that Swami Vivekananda came to Chicago to speak about

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Sanatana Dharma and its potential of unifying humanity.

Guyana is mostly covered with virgin forests; a place where 3 rivers meet with wild life and several waterfalls. The population on these 83,000 square miles never reached one million. With comparatively cheap land, labour, materials and natural sources in abundance it is an appropriate place to establish temples and other learning institutions that reflect the spiritual heritage of Bharat Mata. It would be helpful if North American counterparts can form a partnership with others in Guyana to establish landmarks in the form of temples that inspire devotees, private colleges and gurukuls where children can experience the early life described in the Mahabharat. They can live with their gurus away from their parents, in a remote ashram with cattle, fresh fruits, vegetables, tropical flowers and sunshine year round.

Such projects can also persuade significant numbers to relocate inland, a move that is necessary for their survival. The majority of the people live along the Atlantic Coastland which is below sea level and have regularly experienced the inevitable disaster that comes with excessive rainfall and inadequate drainage.

Although Guyana and India shared the same colonial master, the educational system in Guyana emphasizes Western and Judeo-Christian values. Hindi or Sanskrit was not taught in the public schools nor spoken at home, unlike neighbouring Surinam. However those parts of the population that can trace their ancestry to India have not totally lost the values of their fore parents. A little help from North American partners with resource centres,

leadership experience and capital, can go a long way in ensuring the survival of a culture thousands of years old. Such initiative should be considered our duty because it is consistent with the overall objective of building temples and educational institutions in order to strengthening, preserving and maintaining Dharmic values globally.

The country is now starting to recognise the importance of private Hindu learning institutions so that culture, including music and language, can be learnt in the classroom but much overseas help is needed and we know it is available.

www.bushlotmandir.com

Guyana is only a few hours from Miami, hence our energetic youths who seek a unique adventure to add to their experience, excitement and resume can spend a few months each summer assisting a temple or private Hindu learning centre. Those with IT skills can even participate in distance education. There are also tremendous opportunities for those engaged in environmental studies. For those considering this challenge more information can be obtained from the Indian High Commission in Georgetown. ■

About the author

Shri Ramnarine Sahadeo

resides in Brampton, Ontario, Canada. A lawyer

by profession, he is a founding member and President of Sanatan Dharma Educational Foundation of Canada which, in cooperation with HMEC, initiated the project: A GITA IN EACH HOME.

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For the benefit of Houstonians and to fulfill her dream of establishing a big worship center for 2 spiritual saints of India, **Mrs. Lakshmi Ben Thakkar** (also known as “Maataji”), started weekly satsangs through a handful of devotees in 1996. Within 5-6 years, this center became popular and the number of devotees rose to over 300.

The aim of this religious center is to promote the philosophy of **Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi** and **Shri Jalaram Bapa of Virpur**, through regular spiritual activities. Both these saints are great mystics and god realized persons who lived in India early 20th century. They promoted universal god, love towards humanity and practiced their principles through simple communal living and social service. As an organization, our goal is to reach out several people who also believe and practice philosophy of human love and spirituality that would improve human understanding and peaceful communal living.

Following are some of the activities already in progress

- Weekly evening Prayers and Ceremonies
- Daily Aartis (morning, afternoon, evening and night)
- Frequent discourses and religious lectures on Indian spirituality
- Social service activities for helping poor and needy people
- Celebrate all the major Hindu festivals

To formalize the activities and to keep her health in check, Maataji has requested some devotees to incorporate the organization. Accordingly, a non-profit organization called **Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir (SSJM)** was incorporated in the state of Texas in 2002. The SSJM since has been governing as an independent body providing a diverse range of religious and social service activities in the Houston area.

With the number of increasing to over 700 in since 2006, the need for expanding the SSJM religious center became necessary. A new temple of 20,000+ sq. ft. was constructed in a 7.5 acre land near Sugar Land, Texas and was formally inaugurated in August 2009. With the inauguration of the new temple, number of activities has increased by several folds as we look forward for more volunteers and devotees in making all these programs successful.

Our ultimate goal as an organization is to create an environment that allows each of us to enrich our

A Rationale for the Gurukula System of Education

By Krishna Kirti Das

A *gurukula* is a traditional school that is run by an acharya, a brahmana who teaches young boys both primary educational topics and moral behavior. *Gurukula* literally means the "house of the guru." From the age of five, boys who have been accepted as students by the acharya go away from their own families to live in his ashram as members of his own family until they have completed their studies. The rationale for this system of education is to produce men who are thoroughly pure and moral in thought and behavior. Since moral behavior is best changed through close association with those who have the highest nature, and since the *gurukula* system utilizes this principle to a superlative degree, the *gurukula* system of education is necessary for establishing a high degree of moral behavior throughout all classes of society.

The authority of the *gurukula* system rests on the idea that human nature is the primary basis of moral behavior. We can understand this from our experience with petty theft. Although most people who walk into a store feel no urge to steal, a shoplifter for some reason has an irresistible urge. Even though he knows that stealing is wrong, he cannot help himself. Immoral behavior, however, is not limited to petty theft. Greedy business leaders in America have been

responsible for much of the current American recession. They already had more money than most people could ever dream of, and they took ethics courses from all the best business schools. Yet like the petty thief, they also could not check their urges. This shows that although one should know the difference between right and wrong, that knowledge alone is not enough to produce moral behavior. Those



who are predisposed to act immorally will probably act immorally, however good their education has been otherwise. A primary education should thus also strive to improve the nature of its students. This goal is the fundamental rationale for the *gurukula* system. To understand how the *gurukula* system changes and improves the nature of its students, it is necessary to understand the conception of human nature the



gurukula system is based on. This conception is found in the *sankhya* system of philosophy. According to the *sankhya* model, a particular combination of the three modes of material nature (the *gunas*) determines one's psychological nature. The three modes are goodness, passion, and ignorance (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*), and all three are always present in various proportions in all embodied living beings. Usually, one of the modes of nature is dominant, and the dominant mode will significantly color one's psychological predisposition. And this psychological predisposition will usually determine one's place in society as an intellectual, an administrator, a producer, or a worker (*brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya*, or *shudra*). All societies everywhere have these classes.

Despite psychological predisposition, the modes of nature in any one person are subject to change. As explained by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*, the modes of nature one possesses change through association: ***purusah prakrti-stho hi bhunkte prakrti-jan gunan, karanam guna-sango 'sya sad-asad-yoni-janmasu,*** "The living entity in material nature thus follows

the ways of life, enjoying the three modes of nature. This is due to his association with that material nature. Thus he meets with good and evil among various species" (*Bhagavad-gita* 13.22). The important words here are *karanam guna-sangah*, that association with the modes of nature causes one's psychological predisposition. This explains why our petty shoplifters and greedy business leaders simply cannot help themselves. *Asat-sanga*, bad association, predisposes them to immoral habits of thought and action. Classroom instruction in ethics alone cannot help them. The remedy for *asat-sanga* is *sat-sanga*, or good association. Earlier in the *Gita*, Lord Krishna introduces this truth by saying, *sangat sanjayate kamah*-from association develops desire (2.62). This is where the concept of *satsang* comes from. The *gurukula* system takes advantage of this principle by making mandatory the residence of students at the *acharya's* ashram. Because the *acharya* is a *brahmana* and therefore in the mode of goodness, or *sattva-guna*, his close association will improve the student's own nature. According to the *Gita* (18.42), the qualities of a *brahmana* are peacefulness,

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self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and religiousness. Other members of society should adopt these qualities as far as possible. Politicians and military leaders should be wise and self-controlled. Business leaders should be fair and equitable in their business dealings. And workers should be honest, diligent, and not give in to stealing. Through the principle of *satsang*, the *gurukula* system systematically develops moral behavior to the highest degree possible throughout all sections of society.

Of course, day schools will always be the main kind of school. As per the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Narada Muni* himself in a former lifetime had attended a day-school run by a brahmana. The principle of *satsang* is valid in day schools, too. But *Narada*, in narrating his life to *Vyasadeva*, credited his spiritual advancement to close association with great saintly persons who he once served during the rainy season.

O muni, in the last millennium I was born as the son of a certain maidservant engaged in the service of brahmana as who were following the principles of Vedanta. When they were living together during the four months of the rainy season, I was engaged in their personal service. Although they were impartial by nature, those followers of the Vedanta blessed me with their causeless mercy. As far as I was concerned, I was self-controlled and had no attachment for sports, even though I was a boy. In addition, I was not naughty, and I did not speak more than required. Once only, by their permission, I took

the remnants of their food, and by so doing all my sins were at once eradicated. Thus being engaged, I became purified in heart, and at that time the very nature of the transcendentalist became attractive to me.

(*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.5.23 - 25)

Narada's example here nicely illustrates the efficacy of *satsang*, which the *gurukula* utilizes to the highest degree. The difference between day schools and *gurukulas* would be something like the difference between public schools and college preparatory schools, but at the level of primary education and more for the sake of producing morally stalwart members of society. Due to close association with the *acharya*, *gurukulas* will have an advantage over day schools in their ability to produce men who are pure in thought and habit. This is the rationale for establishing *gurukulas*. This is not to say that the *gurukula* system will completely eradicate vice, but as a social institution it will do much to help control it. Temple leaders and other important people in society should thus bear in mind this purpose and function of the *gurukula* system. And according to this idea, they should establish *gurukulas* for the sake of creating a future class of leaders who are thoroughly moral in thought and habit. ■

About the author

Krishna Kirti Das is President of the *Samprajña Institute*, a public policy research center that focuses on areas where dharma and public policy meet. The *Samprajña Institute's* website can be found at samprajna.org.

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Expectations from the Mandir Management

By Gaurang G. Vaishnav

More than 400 Mandirs across USA are a testimony to the desire of the first generation Hindus to preserve and pass on

their cultural and religious heritage to the future generations. The Mandirs fulfill this role in various ways by offering daily Puja, performing religious rituals, celebrating festivals, running Bal Vihars and other youth programs, offering opportunities for community outreach through Seva projects, arranging discourses and presentations by learned and revered spiritual leaders from Bharat and elsewhere. A recent incident created unpleasant feelings among many and almost tarnished the image of a Mandir. A highly publicized five-day Bhagvat

Katha by Sadhvi Ritambhara Devi was organized at a Mandir. However, it was cancelled at the last moment due to pressure from some external groups that can at best be described as detractors of Hinduism. Furthermore, the basic principles of democratic process were totally disregarded in reaching the decision, thus depriving the devotees of a wonderful opportunity for a religious

discourse by the world renowned Sadhvi ji. Indian Muslim Council (IMC), a Muslim organization that has been in forefront of spreading vicious lies about Hindu saints and leaders sent letters to several places where Sadhvi



Ritambharaji's programs were planned. They insinuated that Ritambharaji was the instigator in the demolition of Babri structure in 1992. They see a clear threat in Ritambharaji's capacity to unite Hindus wherever she goes because of her clear and logical reasoning, her ability to juxtapose nationalism with Dharma and her tremendous service to the society through her Vatsalyagram

project. In spite of their dogged efforts, IMC failed miserably elsewhere as the organizers were strong willed, united and had the support of the society. However, one trustee at this particular Mandir fell victim to the IMC's fear mongering. Efforts by several well meaning Hindu leaders to resolve the issue failed because of one adamant individual and the event organizers were forced to find a new venue at the eleventh hour: only four days before the program.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America and a few other Hindu organizations pointed out to other trustees of the Mandir that the decisions for the Mandir operations must not be influenced by IMC, an anti-Hindu organization which clearly doesn't have the best interest of the Hindu society and Sanatana Dharma at its heart. This may also create an impression that the Mandir trustees are partnering with an anti-Hindu group, which may have serious consequences for the Mandir including loss of revenue (donations) and even boycott of the Mandir by the devotees.

Though the discourse could not be shifted back to the Mandir, the thinking trustees and executives

could see the impact of their horrendous mistake; they extended a public apology to Sadhvi Ritambharaji, which they tendered in front of 400 people, and invited Ritambharaji at the end of her five-day discourse to visit the Mandir and give a discourse, which she graciously accepted. Thus, a disaster was averted.

Mandirs are seen by the devotees as public institutions managed by trustees and elected or appointed executives, who give their time, talent and other resources. The trustees/executives conduct the business of the Mandir as a service to the Hindu community. Their decisions on the special activities of the Mandir have direct impact on the image of the Mandir and its constituents because the Mandir is a reflection of the Hindu society and its values as seen from population within and without. When a trustee starts treating the Mandir as a personal fiefdom and takes decisions, it may have far reaching negative impact on the society. This is especially critical when a decision is made to cancel a discourse by a saint or spiritual leader. Saints, spiritual leaders and learned guest speakers add value to the overall programs



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at the Mandir because they have attained certain status of reverence in the Hindu society. The devotees derive tremendous benefits from their lectures and discourse that enhance their knowledge and understanding of the Dharma. Hence, it is imperative that due diligence and objectivity must be exercised before trustees/executives decide to rescind an invitation to the revered guest speakers.

The above incident should serve as an eye opener to the executives and trustees of all Mandirs, small and big who serve in a fiduciary capacity to the temple. The lessons learned from this incident are summarized below:

- The trustees/executives should never forget that they are not the "owners" of the Mandir, regardless of the size of their contributions.
- Their primary responsibility is to act in the best interest of the Mandir and the Hindu society and not succumb to the detractors of Santana Dharma.
- A Mandir must not refuse a Hindu spiritual leader from speaking at a Mandir because of unsubstantiated allegations from non-Hindu


groups. When in doubt, the trustees must consult with various Hindu organizations to learn the facts.

- The trustees/executives must embrace and practice the democratic principles of governance.

The primary purpose of this article is to make Mandir executives aware of the unfortunate incident which could have caused permanent damage to the Mandir and the welfare of the Hindu society. HMEC should give due consideration to this serious matter so that devotees of other Mandirs are spared the ignominy of witnessing insult to their revered saints and religious leaders at the hands of the very people expected to protect Dharma and Dharmic institutions. ■

About the author

Gaurang G. Vaishnav is the Executive Vice President of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA). He may be contacted at vicharak@gmail.com



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Bal Vihar Graduation Speech

By Shweta Sen

About six years ago, before beginning Bal Vihar, I had always accepted my Indian culture, yet had an aversion to explaining it to my friends of different ethnicities and backgrounds. I had felt that I did not have the right knowledge to

gasped with a blank face, not knowing how to answer him. Swamiji then told us how, although we claim ourselves to be a Hindu, we do not have the slightest idea as to what our religion truly signifies. Swamiji then stated how Hinduism is not a faith like Christianity, Buddhism, or Islamism, but a way of life. Hinduism, also referred to as Sanatana Dharma, is a means of leading life through the path of righteousness and goodwill. Sanatana Dharma declares that something cannot come out of nothing and, therefore, the universe itself is the manifestation of the Divine being. We, as Hindus, believe that the



explain the true meaning of being an Indian and its values. Being a Hindu of Indian origin and raised in an American society always posed a dilemma to me as to how I should behave. I observed that when in school, I was more polite, reserved, and self-conscious. When in my familiar Indian surroundings, I felt free and more at ease. It remained a puzzle to me as to what my Indian culture and background truly meant to me. Upon starting Bal Vihar in fourth grade, I learned to appreciate my culture through its classes and my mindset and idealism changed as I began to understand my background.

Bal Vihar has portrayed a new dimension in my life as I have grown and matured. I recall a few years ago, Swami Tatadmananda had asked my religion class the meaning of being a Hindu. The class

universe was created by the divine being, and that everything that happens in this universe is due to the laws of the Divine.

In addition to gaining a better understanding of my (Hindu) background, I have also learned the phonetics and basics of Hindi language. Being a frequent traveler to India, learning Hindi has expanded my means of communication and has provided additional insight into my culture. Bal Vihar experiences have helped me broaden my outlook and enable me to appreciate the diversities in the world we live in. Through Bal Vihar field trips, I have come to acquire knowledge about various aspects of Hindu religion and the ways in which people follow it. Two years ago, Bal Vihar funded a trip to the Hindu American Religious Institute, commonly known as the HARI Temple,

located in Harrisburg. The visit was of valuable experience to me as I witnessed various languages and activity classes being offered there, which included Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, religion, yoga, tabla, sitar, folk dance, and Bharatnatyam.

The stories that I have learned in religion class over the past few years have also had a profound impact on me. One story Swamiji told us was about the significance of image (murti) worship. During Satsang, he began with how one day a man asked him why he was worshipping a statue. Swamiji responded by saying why do you speak into a piece of a plastic, referring to a telephone. The man was bewildered by his comment. Swamiji stated, just as we convey our messages to the person on the other line, through a plastic equipment, we convey our prayers to the Lord through the murtis. Additionally, he said how the murtis are no less than God Himself because of the Pran Prathistha ceremony. In another incident, Swamiji asked our class if we understand the meanings of our prayers. The class stared at him with no response; not directly

understanding what the Sanskrit prayers we say mean. During these years, through the efforts of Swamiji, Raj Uncle, and my teachers, Bal Vihar has provided me the opportunity to better understand the meanings of many prayers and appreciate the significance of the mantras I recite.

Bal Vihar has become a facet of my life that positively resonates within me. Bal Vihar has taught and led me to evolve as an individual. After experiencing the Bal Vihar program, I have developed a sense of confidence in handling with the diversities around me. Over the past six years, Bal Vihar has provided me a precious learning opportunity in better understanding my religion, culture, and language. I earnestly hope that the enjoyment and spirituality that Bal Vihar has invoked in me will go a long way in guiding me through the years. ■

About the author

Shweta Sen, currently in 9th grade, is from Allentown Hindu Temple in Pennsylvania.

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Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) excavation of Ayodhya confirms at least three different temple structures present underneath the disputed structure. The structure of temple 1 belongs to the cultural sequence of period VIII of the excavation of 8th century AD to the early medieval period; structure of temple 2 was of period XI of the 9th century AD, while the structure of temple 3 is of the 12th century AD in which foundation of the walls of the disputed structure were laid after cutting its floor and pillar bases.



Ayodhya Verdict

Based On

ASI Report: Archaeologist

By Sachidanand Shukla

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court relied heavily on the ASI report in its verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, says Dr AK Mishra, one of the three observer-archaeologists appointed by the high court for their vigil during the excavation by ASI at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

The report clearly indicated the presence of a huge pre-existing structure beneath the working floor of the demolished structure, Dr Mishra told HT.

Dr Mishra is also dean, Faculty of Arts and professor of Archaeology at Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Faizabad.

The High Court ordered the Archaeological Survey of

India (ASI) on March 5, 2003 to conduct an excavation at the disputed site to confirm the third issue "whether there was any temple/structure which was demolished and mosque was constructed on the disputed site"? ASI conducted its excavation from March 12, 2003 to August 7, 2003 under the direction of Hari Manjhi and B.R. Hari of the ASI, New Delhi, with a team of 21 archaeologists of the ASI of different religions.

The High Court appointed a panel of observers, including two additional district judges of Faizabad HS Dubey and MA Siddiqui, to maintain judicial transparency and three archaeologists - Prof RC Thakaran of Delhi University, Dr Jaya Menon of MS University (Baroda) and Prof AK Mishra of Dr RML Avadh University (Faizabad) - to have a close vigil on the excavation work which was carried out with



the help of about 130 laborers, having an equal ratio of Muslims and Hindus. This excavation abided by the guidelines of the Ground Penetrating Radar Survey (GPRS) report, submitted to the High Court on February 17, 2003. It concluded that a variety of anomalies, ranging from 0.5 to 5.5 meters in depth, could be associated with ancient and contemporaneous structures such as pillars, foundation walls, slab-flooring extending in a large area of disputed structure.

By the orders of the court, the GPRS was carried out from December 30, 2002 to January 17, 2003 on a total area of 3900 sq meters, comprising 132 trenches of the disputed structure.

The actual archaeological digging by ASI was focused to verify 184 anomalies indicated by the GPR survey.

"The ASI excavated 90 trenches (each of 4 x 4 meters) in the disputed area of Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid located between latitude 26° 47' 43.6" to 26° 47' 45.0" N and Longitude 82° 11' 31.1" to 82° 11' 39.9" E and around within the 50-feet limit. Out of 90 trenches, 10 were in the area of the makeshift structure, 21 in the north, 17 in the east, 23 in the south and 19 in the west to the centrally located makeshift structure," said Prof Mishra.

He added that among 184 anomalies, 39 of them were confirmed during excavation at the specified depth in location, where they were shown in the GPRS report. Out of that, 22 pillar bases were

confirmed by the excavations.

The most significant finding of the ASI is that during and after Kushan Period (100-300AD) there were large-scale structural activities of non-residential nature (means religious) up to the present level of the disputed site.

A 10.84-metre thick continuous cultural deposit was excavated, chronologically ranging from circa 1000 BC to 1700 AD.

This excavation confirmed the antiquity of Ayodhya, at least 400 years before the birth of Buddha by three radiocarbon dates from trench No. G-7.

This trench was situated north of the makeshift structure. This indicates that the excavated site of Ayodhya had a very strong religious affinity, which was confirmed by the material culture obtained from excavations.

The structure found underneath the working floor of the disputed structure had no ring-well, hearth, drain, sewer, latrine pit, kitchen, or granary. But, it contained 50 pillar bases, four floors and 28 walls of different time, in different depth as remains of a non-residential religious structure.

Among the 50 pillar bases excavated, 12 were completely exposed, 35 were partially exposed and three were traced in the section of baulk.

These pillar bases are in a proper alignment in front of the east-west oriented wall No. 16, which was attached with floor No. 2 and most of them are resting on floor No. 4. In archaeological practice, it is



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impossible to create any structure in a section of an exposed trench.

A radiocarbon date is reported between floor 2 and 3 of the 900-1300AD in trench ZH-1, which scientifically confirmed that floor No. 2 was not made after 1300 AD, and not before 900 AD, while floor no. 3 was made in between 900 AD and 1300 AD. This evidence confirms that floor No. 2, 3 and 4 and their attached pillar bases were chronologically much earlier than the floor 1 of the disputed structure of 1528 AD. Thus, it is clear from the excavation that floor No. 4, which supports the foundation of pillar bases, was a floor of a temple or non-Islamic religious structure.

Among the 28 excavated walls, wall Nos. 1-15 are either contemporary to the floor of 1500 AD or post 1500 AD, but the remaining 12 walls (wall No. 16-28) are prior to 1500 AD (because they were present underneath the floor of 1500AD) and goes back to the Shunga-Kushan period (100BC-300AD).

A 50-metre long and 1.77 meter thick east-west oriented wall (i.e. wall No. 16) was excavated behind the makeshift structure, attached to a floor of 1200 AD in which pillar bases were excavated. Another wall (wall No. 17) having the same direction and length (50 meter east-west) was also excavated below

wall No. 16.

It means wall no. 17 is earlier to the wall No. 16. When wall No. 17 was not in use, it served as a foundation of wall No.16.

A circular shrine having north-oriented pranala (water chute) to drain out the water, obviously after the abhisheka of the deity, was excavated between trench E-8 and F-8 of post Gupta Period (circa 700AD). It was also a very important finding of the ASI excavation at Ayodhya.

All pranala in India are oriented towards north where the Himalayas are situated, which is traditionally believed to be the residence of Lord Shiva.

"So, the present excavation of Ayodhya confirms at least three different temple structures present underneath the disputed structure. The structure of temple 1 belongs to the cultural sequence of period VIII of the excavation of 8th century AD to the early medieval period; structure of temple 2 was of period XI of the 9th century AD, while the structure of temple 3 is of the 12th century AD in which foundation of the walls of the disputed structure were laid after cutting its floor and pillar bases," said Prof Mishra. ■

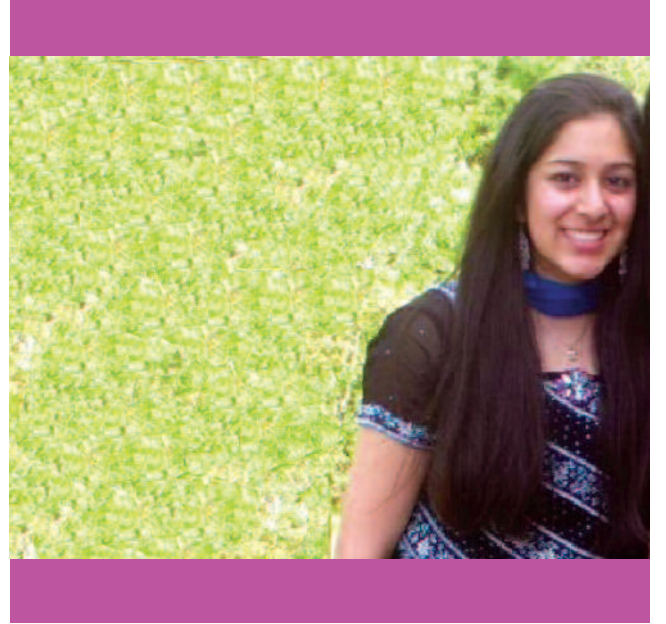
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Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam

By Gina Nathwani

The concept that the diverse individuals that make up our world coexist as one mutual family is a core idea of Hindu philosophy. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam; "vasudha" meaning the Earth, "eva" representing emphasis and "kutumbakam" meaning family, is a widely renowned phrase in Sanskrit that appears in the Vedas. The values and morals instilled in the younger generation of Hindus by the older are suggestive of the idea that the well-being of others is the mission of Indians and Hinduism. To exist as one entire family, no matter what your race, religion or beliefs, is something that the scriptures of Hinduism promote extensively. The Ramayana, Bhagwad Gita and the Vedas all include quotes on Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

The most accepted and rarely criticized view on Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam comes from the Vedas. Vedic literature is the oldest documented spiritual and philosophical text in the world. Ideally, it doesn't preach superiority of one religion over the other, but rather sanatana dharma; the eternal path for all living things with the basis on the nature of the soul. The belief in the Vedas had to do with universal brotherhood or universalism in short. Modern science has concluded that from the writings of the Vedas, the human race spawned from one common mother and father millenniums prior to the world as we know it now. Race, creed, color and other less significant features were developed later on. This Sanskrit idea is found not in the Rig Veda, Mahabharata, not even in the Puranas or the Manusmriti, but rather the Hitopadesha. The Hitopadesha, a collection of Sanskrit fable in prose written in the 12th century BC, is a Vedic scripture with an infamous shloka that speaks to the world being one family: "This is my own and that a stranger- that is the calculation of the narrow-minded; for the magnanimous hearts however, the entire earth is but a family."



Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, essentially a spiritual and cultural topic, speaks to the central idea that one may perceive if they are a part of a family. Love, co-operation, harmony and mutual support are just a few of the various aspects that make a family whole. Why not then, apply this sense of family to the entire world? Hinduism is a complex religion, based on certain morals and values that we have learned from our gurus and scriptures. However, our philosophies are heavily centered around the core idea of peace; peace of mind, peace of heart and soul, and finally, peace amongst people and the world. Various organizations based in India have been and are starting to introduce the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to their specific communities and beyond. The literature of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gives us a sense of the roots of the idea of the world living as a family, stresses that this is a mainly Indian belief, and incorporates the effects and drastic changes that could occur if the people in the world existed as one: "This gigantic idea, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, is an exclusively Indian contribution to world peace. This ancient nation evolved a

world-view based on the motto "Loka samasta sukhina bhavantu", meaning "Let the entire world be happy" long before any League of Nations or United Nations was thought of to avoid global strife. The Indian nation evolved this grand vision not by marching its armies and conquering the rest and offering peace; but by the inner-directed pursuit of universal values by the Rishis living in the forests and mountains of India."

Science, however, can correlate to the idea of the world being one family. Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection seem to argue against this fact. After the discovery of Pangea, we now know that the seven continents had indeed been one whole unified pasture of land. Continental drift and the process of plate tectonics had shifted the Earth's crust, altering the massive piece of land and placing the smaller sections in the arrangement they are today. Now if Pangea did exist, who are we to say that all humans at one point had not been equal? They all lived on the same stretch of land, so why couldn't they all be the same in race, beliefs and habits? And lastly, if they could coexist mutually back then as a family, then why not now? The idea of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam can be

shown through this point; that the world could have been living in harmony at one point in time. Who is to say that it cannot happen again?

The philosophy of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam is one that is debated on controversially and is sometimes not taken seriously. However, making the world into one family could in fact solve everything that is wrong. Race, religious beliefs, values and morals are a few things that separate the people that inhabit this Earth. However, all of this separation does have grave consequences. War, conflict, hatred, greed, lust, suffering, envy, the list could go on. The philosophy of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam is a Hindu belief, but it should be the belief of every single person, everything and everyone, whether they are religiously affiliated or not. To make the world a better place, and for us Hindus to experience the path of sanatana dharma, Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam is something that we must continue to pursue no matter what the circumstances. ■

About the essay

The above essay was awarded the first prize by Sanatan Dharma Scholarship in the High School category.



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55	Ganesh Temple	Nashville	TN
56	Arya Samaj Greater Houston	Houston	TX
57	Austin Hindu Temple & Community Center	Austin	TX
58	Austin Sikh Temple	Austin	TX
59	B.A.P.S. Shri Swaminarayan Mandir	Stafford	TX
60	Barsana Dham	Austin	TX
61	D/FW Hindu Temple	Irving	TX
62	Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation	Houston	TX
63	Hindu Heritage Foundation of America	Pearland	TX
64	Hindu Association Of West Texas	Midland	TX
65	Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh (HSS)	Richmond	TX
66	Hindu Temple Of the Woodlands	Conroe	TX
67	Hindu Worship Society	Houston	TX
68	Hindus Of Greater Houston	Houston	TX
69	Houston Durgabari Society	Houston	TX
70	ISKCON	Houston	TX
71	International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization (ISSO)	Houston	TX
72	Jain Ashram	Dallas	TX
73	Sanatan Dharma Foundation	Dallas	TX
74	Sanatan Hindu Center	Houston	TX
75	Sanatan Shiv-Shakti Mandir	Houston	TX
76	Shri Guruvayurappan Temple	Houston	TX
77	Shirdi Sai Jalaram Mandir	Sugar Land	TX
78	South Texas Hindu Society, S.V. Temple	Corpus Christi	TX
79	Sri Astalxmi Temple	Sugar Land	TX
80	Sri Meenakshi Temple	Pearland	TX
81	Sri Shirdi Sai Baba Temple of Austin	Cedar Park	TX
82	Vallabh Priti Seva Samaj (VPSS)	Houston	TX
83	Durga Temple	Fairfax Station	VA
84	Rajdhani Mandir	Chantilly	VA
85	Sarda Mandir & Sanskrit Pathshala	Chesapeake	VA
86	US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC)	Reston	VA
87	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA)		USA
88	Hindu Heritage Centre	Mississauga	ON, Canada
89	Sanatan Dharm Educational Foundation	Mississauga	ON, Canada
90	Sripuram, Narayani Peedam	Vellore	Tamil Nadu, Bharat
91	Vitasta Publishing	New Delhi	Bharat



Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc. (World Hindu Council of America)

National Office: P.O. Box 611, Iselin, NJ 08830 Tax ID# 51-0156325
Tel: 732-744-0851 Email: office@vhp-america.org www.vhp-america.org

VHPA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

(Fields marked with * cannot be left blank)

Salutation _____ *First Name _____ M.I. _____ *Last Name _____

Spouse's Name: _____ *Street/P. O. Box No.: _____

*City: _____ *State _____ *Zip Code _____

*Home Telephone: _____ *Email Address: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Work Telephone: _____

*Age Group 18-35 ☐ 36-50 ☐ 51-65 ☐ 65+ ☐ (Minimum age for becoming a member is 18 years)

Membership Desired: (select one)

☐ Patron \$1000

☐ Life Membership \$500

☐ Primary Membership, Five years \$100

☐ Primary Membership, Three years \$70

☐ Primary Membership, One year \$25

Please accept my Additional Contribution of \$ _____ for

☐ General Use ☐ Seva in USA ☐ Seva in Bharat ☐ Support A child

☐ Youth Development Programs ☐ Publications ☐ Media Outreach and PR

☐ Liaison with Hindu Mandirs & Hindu Institutions ☐ Hindu Awareness Yaatra

see overleaf

I agree with the aims and objectives of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. I believe in, practice and/or respect the spiritual and religious principles and practices having roots in Bharat (India)

Signature _____

Date _____

Check No. _____ (Check Payable to VHPA) OR Charge it to a credit card

(Name and address must match with that on the credit card, for using the credit card.)

Credit Card Name: ☐ VISA ☐ MASTER CARD ☐ DISCOVER

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

□ □ □ □

Credit Card Number

Month Year

Expiration Date

Signature _____

Date _____

Mail to: VHPA, PO Box 441505, Houston, TX 77244-1505 Contact Tel.: 732-744-0851

OR

Become member using your credit card on our website: www.vhp-america.org

Institutional Membership is available; First year dues are \$201 (\$90 Initiation fee + \$111 membership).

Call 732-744-0851 or email to office@vhp-america.org for application form and more information.



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■ Email: office@vhp-america.org
■ Website: www.vhp-america.org

Affiliate Membership Application Form

(Fields marked with * cannot be left blank)

Name of the Mandir /

Spiritual Organization _____

*Street/P. O. Box No.: _____

*City: _____

*State: _____ *Zip Code: _____

*Telephone: _____ *Web site: _____

*Email Address: _____

*First Name _____ M. I. _____ *Last Name _____

*Telephone: _____

Affiliate Membership:

☐ First year dues \$201 ☐ Yearly Renewal \$111

Additional Contribution, if desired: \$ _____

Check No. _____ (Check Payable to VHPA) OR Charge it to a credit card

(If Name and address above do not match with that on the credit card, fill out the following.)

First _____ Last (Name as it appears on the card) _____

Street (Address must match on your credit card) _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Credit Card Name: ☐ VISA ☐ MASTER CARD ☐ DISCOVER

Credit Card Number

Month Year
Expiration Date

Signature _____

Date _____

Mail to: VHPA, PO Box 611, Iselin, NJ 08830 Contact Tel.: 732-744-0851



Delegates gathered from America, Canada and abroad for HMEC 2010