

## WORLD HINDU COUNCIL OF AMERICA (VHPA)

National Headquarter:  
P. O. Box 441505, Houston, TX 77244-1505

[www.vhp-america.org](http://www.vhp-america.org)

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

Volume XXXIII

No. 4

October-December 2014

पवनः पवतामस्मि रामः शस्त्राभृतामहम् ।  
झषाणां मकरश्चास्मि स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी ।।

श्रीमद्भगवद् गीता १०-३१

*pavanah pavatam asmi ramah sastra-bhrutam aham  
jhasanam makaras casmi srotasam asmi jahnvi*

**Of the swift moving I am the wind, of all the wielders of  
weapons I am Rama, of fishes the shark and of flowing  
rivers the river Ganga**



<b>President</b>	Dr. Abhaya Asthana	508-875-0432	president@vhp-america.org
<b>General Secretary</b>	Shree Sanjay Mehta	412-276-2670	genssecy@vhp-america.org
<b>Treasurer</b>	Shree Vasav Mehta	770-365-6126	treasurer@vhp-america.org
<b>Vice Presidents</b>			
<b>Seva</b>	Shree Girish Gandhi	561-244-5813	vp_seva@vhp-america.org
<b>Publications</b>	Shree Shyam Tiwari	770-962-2669	vp_pb@vhp-america.org
<b>Interorganizational Relations</b>	Dr. Umesh Shukla	908-431-9845	vp_ior@vhp-america.org
<b>Finance</b>	Shree Vimal Sodhani	973-334-5917	vp_finance@vhp-america.org
<b>Organizing Secretaries</b>			
<b>Youth Development Programs</b>	Smt. Nayana Modh	516-935-0002	orgsecy1@vhp-america.org
<b>Southeast Region</b>	Smt. Sneha Mehta	770-394-1353	orgsecy2@vhp-america.org
<b>Membership &amp; HAY</b>	Shree Sanjay Kaul	781-893-4982	sanjaykaul@hotmail.com
<b>Mid West Region</b>	Shree Dhaval Joshipura	773-696-5864	orgsecy6@vhp-america.org

### Editorial Team

<b>Managing Editor:</b>	Shyam Tiwari	vp_pb@vhp-america.org
<b>Editor:</b>	Dr. Ashok Sinha	Kosha.Ahnis@gmail.com
		aksinha@sbcglobal.net
<b>Associate Editor:</b>	Surendra Pandey	pandeysn@yahoo.com
<b>Copy Editor:</b>	Sabitha Venugopal	raguv1@gmail.com
<b>Assistant Editor:</b>	Rachna Gupta	rgupta242@yahoo.com
<b>Advisors:</b>	Dr. Abhay Asthana	abhayaji@gmail.com
	Dr. Shardananda	prayagraj@erols.com

### About the HINDU VISHWA

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

**For Advertising inquiries please contact:**

**Shyam Tiwari at 770.962.2669**

**or Email - srtiwari@hotmail.com**

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

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.

© Copyright 2014 World Hindu Council of America (VHPA). All rights reserved. No parts and contents of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of VHP of America, Inc.

## C O N T E N T S

### EDITORIAL

The Tragic Plight of the  
Yezidi Community,  
Under Siege by ISIL

3

## Cover Story

MANY INDIANS DREAM TO  
BE UP THERE AT LEAST  
ONCE IN A LIFETIME TO  
TAKE A PURIFYING BATH IN  
THE GANGA MA. SHE  
SYMBOLIZES THE FEMALE,  
CARING ASPECT OF THE  
UNIVERSAL POWER WHICH  
GOVERNS ALL OUR LIVES.

Page - 13



VHPA Diwali Celebration  
Enlivens Atlanta Community  
at Centennial Olympic Park

4

8

Legacy for Hindu Youth Diaspora



5,000-year-old  
Harappan stepwell  
found in Kutch, bigger  
than Mohenjodaro's

10

12

My Visit to a Girls' Hostel in Bharat

Hindus in the United States:  
Challenges and Needs

17

Narendra Modi  
and Barack Obama:  
A New Vision for  
Both India and  
World Hinduism

20



23

Pooja Ghar:  
Shrine at Home



Hindu Women's  
Conference  
Facilitates  
Empowerment  
through Knowledge

25



In Defense of  
Puranas

28

30

Be Genuine

Book Review: India Unveiled

32

Bangladesh: Rebuild  
War-Destroyed Shri Shri  
Ramna Kali Mandir

33



हिंदी कविता : एक तेज, ओढ़ तन आया था

35

36

Radhikrishnan's Core Hindu Principles  
and American Academic Culture

Attacks on Hindu Temples  
in Pakistan a Worrying Trend

38

Cover design & page layout by Akshar Vyavsthapan, Mumbai. E-mail: oakswanand@gmail.com

2

October- December 2014

## The Tragic Plight of the Yezidi Community, Under Siege by ISIL



E  
D  
I  
T  
O  
R  
I  
A  
L

**W**hat is the most perilous epidemic looming at the horizon in the entire history of the world? Ebola, right? Wrong! As great threat to the human health as Ebola is, the most dangerous epidemic of global tsunami-proportion is the dark cloud of savagery sweeping the Middle East by the extreme of the extremist groups called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), aka ISIS.



To witness on the television screen or YouTube acts of unimaginable violence and cruelty, as part of a campaign of terror, in the name of Islam, by ISIL in this twenty-first century is beyond belief. And the Yezidi (aka Yazidi) community vividly exemplifies the boundless tragedy in the form of genocide, rape, and torture unleashed by ISIL.

Yezidi people are a unique religious community, a relatively small ethnic group peacefully living in northern Iraq with a history dating back to 4750 BCE. Core Yezidi cosmology has a pre-Zoroastrian Iranian origin. The Yezidis are monotheists, believing in God as creator of the world, which he has placed under the care of seven "holy beings" or angels, the "chief" (archangel) is Melek Taus, the "Peacock Angel." They hold many spiritual beliefs and practices that appear similar to Hindu traditions and philosophy and Sun worship is one of such practices. ISIS treats them as Kafirs (nonbelievers) and want to 'convert' them (See "Who, What, Why...Who are the Yezidis?" BBC News Magazine Monitor, 7 August 2014.)

"UN Confirms 5,000 Yezidis men were executed and 7,000 women are now sex-slaves," said the Daily Mail, Retrieved 20 October 2014. Said Ivan Watson, "Treated like cattle, Yezidi women (are) sold, raped, enslaved by ISIS," in CNN, 30 October 2014. Yezidi girls in Iraq allegedly raped by ISIL fighters have committed suicide by jumping to their death from Mount Sinjar. Amnesty International has also accused ISIS of abducting thousands of Yezidi women and girls. Bernard Haykel writes, "For Al Qaeda, violence is a means to an end; for ISIS. It is an end in itself."

More than 300,000 surviving Yezidis are currently in critical need of aid after having been driven from their homes by the ISIS. A handful of Yezidi families who migrated to USA in 2012, are now trying to raise awareness and support for their surviving members back in Iraq, currently battling cold and rain under the open sky, at nine locations atop the mountain Sinjar, surviving on food and aid materials air-dropped by U.S. military aircraft. The Yezidi immigrants now in U.S. have formed coalition with their "Hindu Brethren" in USA, seeking help for them.

The ISIS leader, the self-proclaimed caliph -- the present-day Changez Khan -- is probably the gravest threat to humanity at large at this point of history. With its planned agenda to take over the world, ISIL (ISIS) is potentially far more dangerous and devastating than the epidemic Ebola. It is high time civilized and freedom-loving people all over the world gird up against this menace of ISIS. Trying to help out the Yezidi people under siege at the Sinjar mountain-tops may well be one of the most valuable humanitarian steps in this direction. The alternative, simply stated, is dire extinction of a peaceful people with unique qualities and deep-rooted history of their own, called the Yezidis. ■



*By Smita Daftardar*

The fall season is synonymous with a lot of colors but here in Atlanta, however, it is not just the trees that are showing off their beautiful hues of red, yellow, orange and purple. The Hindu Festival season being in full swing, the community can be seen dressed in their colorful traditional best, celebrating Navaratri, Golu, Durga Pooja and Dussera, and preparing for Diwali-the Grand Finale!! And it is thus, every year that the beautiful Centennial Olympic Park, on a crisp Autumn Sunday gets transformed into a pretty kaleidoscope of colors, with the Indian community gathered together to celebrate "Diwali-Festival of Lights," an event organized by World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), Atlanta Chapter.



## VHPA Diwali Celebration Enlivens Atlanta Community at Centennial Olympic Park

**T**his year, though, the program took off with a rather shaky and wet start, the morning of Oct. 12th bore witness to an unusually brisk rain. Miraculously, by 11 am the clouds gave way to a bright sunny sky and the event proceeded without any major hiccups. This was the 9th annual celebration and, like every year, it presented the music and dances of India performed by the talented artists from the Atlanta Indian community. The event was free and open to public, with free snacks, tea and lunch for the entire crowd. The attendance this year was about a thousand people, much less compared to the past, in part due to the inclement weather in and around Atlanta, not to mention the traffic and parking challenges posed by the Falcons game in downtown. The performing artists- about 20 different groups/individuals- braved all these challenges, made it to the venue and gave an outstanding performance. They were greatly appreciated by the audience, who cheered, clapped and at times broke into impromptu dances on the green lawns of the amphitheater.

The program was opened with the traditional Ganesh and Saraswati Vandana by the students of Balvihar and all the kids present in the audience. Kusum Khuranaji, President of VHPA, Atlanta chapter gave the welcome address. The traditional lamp was lit by the chief guest for



the occasion, Deputy Consul in the Consulate of India, Atlanta, Hon'ble R. Srinivasji and his wife Anaghaji. After a brief address by Srinivasji, the cultural program commenced with a pure classical Kathak dance by Leera Rawal, a disciple of Birju Maharaj and Smt. Kumudiniben Lakhia, followed by variety of classical, fusion, folk and Hindi Film dances, along with melodious old and new Hindi songs. The 5-7 year old students of Sreedevi Dadithota of the Natyaabhinaya Dance School presented a beautiful invocatory dance, in the Kuchipudi dance form. The performance was especially impressive, because of the young age of the dancers! Cobb Balvihar students team coordinated by Neetu Sharma put forth a dance medley, choreographed by Nikki Bagadi set to popular Hindi Film songs. Cobb Balvihar teachers and volunteers, Neetu, Varsha Gupta, Seema Laddha, Ritu Sehgal and Nicky Bagadi presented another fast paced medley and got the crowd dancing along with them. Balgokulam students group, coordinated by Arti Sarda, performed a traditional Garba. Another group of talented kids under the tutelage of Sweta Khatri, danced on a sweet medley starting with the name of Lord Ganesha followed by Punjabi Bhangra, Hindi film and Rajasthani dance forms. An artist deserving special mention, Komal Bhullar, a self taught 10 year old, danced to a lively combination of authentic Punjabi songs, complete with props and traditional Bhangra. Mrunal Saggere from Maharashtra Mandal of Atlanta, coordinated and choreographed a kids group dance, set to "Deva Shri Ganesha". The group, too large to be accommodated



on the stage, danced on the green lawns, with an adorable Bal-Ganesh amidst them. The talented young ladies from the Kalaivani Dance and Music Academy performed a Bharatnatyam Fusion dance. Sure to make Guru Padmaja Kelam proud, their skilled moves and great coordination drew a large round of applause. While the kids presented a beautiful array of dance forms, the adults were not to be left behind, with their energetic and quality dance performances. Aadithya Prem, a long time favorite with the audience and organizers alike, and Mahek Patel, an accomplished dancer from Mahek Dance Academy performed a fusion dance, with beautifully choreographed moves and striking dance costumes. Also showcased were the beautiful folk dances of India: the Gopika-Kolatam, choreographed by Swetha Pakala, was performed by "Natya Mayuri".





The participants were Swetha, Vidya Ktragadda, Anu Khandavalli and Neelima Sunder Sen, a group of talented ladies with a passion for dance. The Koli or Fisherman Dance from Maharashtra was performed by three enthusiastic couples Mrunal/Sanjay Saggere, Radhika/Sandesh Shinde and Dipti/Sunil Kulkarni, dressed in the unique Koli costumes. The most popular, fast paced "Lavani", performed by Neha Worlikar Patil and Ruchi Dave Iyengar, was a huge success. Both the Lavani and Koli dances were choreographed by Neha who has been training a lot of groups for Maharashtra Mandal. The "Jogwa" a prayer dance paying homage to Goddess Durga was performed with flourish by Pratima & Jaywant Dhumal, Vandana & Shailesh Pawar, Neeta Sorte, Manjula Kirangi, Rekha Yadav & Sushil Varma. The dance, choreographed by Pratima, ended with the formation of the Raudra Roop of Goddess Durga, making for a really good photo-op. Adding a completely different flavor to the show, was the high energy performance of Zumba, a popular dance cum exercise routine, led by Shiela Devlia of the "Z Fitness With Shiela" accompanied by Hema Vishwanathan and Prina Patel.

The cultural program at the VHPA Festival of Lights has always showcased some of the best talents from Atlanta and this year, it was a great pleasure to listen to Amol Khanapurkar, a singer par excellence who enthralled the crowd with two Hindi film songs. Shyam Gupta, a well known vocalist who really does not need an introduction, gave an excellent impromptu performance. Jiten Singh sang an old favorite "Mere Desh ki Dharti" and Shyam Tiwari

soulfully did justice to "Tumko Dekha to yeh Khayal ayaa...". Another gazal "hum to hain pardes mein, des mein nikla hoga chand, sung by the under-signed, Smita, reminisced about the faraway homeland of India. The organizers, mindful of the love of dance of the Indian Community at large, from time to time, invited the audience to an open dance session on the lawns, playing popular songs from Tamil, Gujrathi, Marathi, Bengali and Punjabi. The audience gladly took the center stage for a rocking good time! Sabitha Venugopal kept the audience engaged and informed with her efficient emceeing, making sure they knew about the food, mehandi, face painting and the raffle drawing. Among the raffle prizes were gift certificates from Madras Chettinad, Boba Moca and Venky's India Bhavan. There was a Nexus 7 table from an anonymous donor to be only left behind by the grand prize Kindle Fire HD sponsored by Expedite Technology Solutions. The major sponsors







for the VHPA "Festival of Lights" were Ambaji Shakti Mandir, Global Mall, House of Spices, Pratap Singh Chauhan, Chandra Tiwari, Neera Bahl and Drs. Swati and Abhishek Gaur. Ajay Houde from HSS and Milind Bavadekar from Maharashtra Mandal of Atlanta, along with their team of volunteers provided valuable support in the planning and execution of the event. The Mehendi and face painting booths were run by our talented adult volunteers Indu Goel and Chandra Chandora, and not to be left behind by energetic youngsters Shreya Dube, Anushka Shivram, Yasmen Khoramabadi and Shreya Mishra. A group of GaTech student volunteers from Sigma Phi Epsilon helped throughout the day, from set-up to clean-up. The DJ for the event was Bally from DJ Bally International. The youngest volunteers were the students of Balvihar who sold the

raffle tickets all day long. Last, but not the least, the artists who performed at the event was the largest group of volunteers - students, working professionals, moms & dads - who took time from their busy schedules to make this event a great success. The volunteers from VHPA, Atlanta Chapter could not have pulled off a challenge like this without the active support of the Indian community, especially since it is resolved to keep the event free and open to public. With the growing success of this event, with each passing year, the team at VHPA, Atlanta Chapter is committed to present outstanding programs in future and continue its efforts to bring the community together. ■



*By Hiro Badlani  
M.D.*

The future decades may be challenging for Hindus in many ways.

Synthesizing modern science with traditional religious activities may bring forth golden opportunities previously unimagined.

Hindus would do very well to build ultramodern, hygienically superior and comfortable places of worship, where they may spend some time in search of the higher values of the Divine.

## Legacy for Hindu Youth Diaspora

**B**irth of Hinduism coincides with the superior development of the human mind, sumati.

With the advent of higher brain about fifty thousand years ago, man took longer strides toward mental awakening and spiritual consciousness. There is some evidence to suggest that various prehistoric tribes passed through Bharat around this period. Harnessing the mind in a spiritual manner to make it noble, sattvic, and non-hurting has been prompted by Hindu Rishis through the ages. The Gayatri Mantra became the beacon of the noble sattvic mind.



*Swami Vivekananda boldly carried the message that all religions are but manifestations of one supreme truth.*

The seed of Hindu thought sprouted first in the holy land, Punya Bhumi, of Bharat. Chains of Rishis meditated on riverbanks, mountaintops, and in the forests. In their deep sojourns, they established a communion with the Divine. From this spiritual union, they heard the inner voice of God and created thousands of sacred hymns, which would in course of time form the eternal Vedas. These scriptures attained supreme authority, which is still considered sagacious. Hindu theology, however, soon charted a new direction. The old teachings were always respected and revered but subtly changed as the situation and

circumstance demanded. Dynamic character became visible, but no force or violence was deployed. Changes came in succession through the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and many other Holy writings. Through more such changes, new religions were formed, such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Many new sects (sampardaya) were also organized. New ideas percolated, giving the impetus to grow and survive through oncoming challenges. In our own times, the energetic roar of Swami Vivekananda became the bugle of another major reform movement. He boldly carried the message of his guru Sri Ramakrishna that all religions are but manifestations of one supreme truth. He reaffirmed that true religion lies in the transformation of our inner being (antahkaran). He regarded service as the karma yoga.



Any form of good and useful service rendered with sincerity and unselfishness merits as good karma, and spiritually rewarding. He also taught that religion need not be in the hands of a few learned priests; we all may learn the principles of religion and use these in everyday living. The great swami even proclaimed, "There is nothing like a closed book on Vedantism. Something, which is considered useful to human society, may be adopted at any time."

Hindus are at the threshold of a major transformation. After centuries of subjugation, they are now making bold and mammoth progress in various fields. They live in most countries of the world, and their contribution toward religious development is obvious in all places. Hindu temple activities have made a tremendous impact in recent years all over the globe. Religion is always a major factor in the lives of Hindus. Living a good material life alone, however, is not the end in itself; but aiming to live a virtuous and moral life by using the tools of material and scientific advantages would be considered the perfect goal.

The future decades may be challenging for Hindus in many ways. Synthesizing modern science with traditional religious activities may bring forth golden opportunities previously unimagined. Hindus would do very well to build ultramodern, hygienically superior and comfortable places of worship, where they may spend some time in search of the higher values of the Divine.

This article is dedicated especially to the Hindu Youth Diaspora that is now settling in many countries. There are some protocols and conventions that all immigrants should follow when they choose to live in other lands. Loyalty and integrity form the basis of such conventions. Observing the laws of the land is mandatory for all, perhaps even more so for immigrants. They may serve and love their new country with complete sincerity and honesty without disrupting the roots with the country of their origin. Despite some inevitable mistakes, there are many noble and glorious achievements in Hindu culture. A sincere effort may be made to acquaint the Hindu Youth Diaspora of their grand heritage and restore their pride and confidence in their own ancestry. The spiritual virtues taught in the Hindu religion are our best assets in life. Hindu Rishis, throughout millennia, have always stressed the spiritual values of truth, integrity, love, forgiveness, compassion, and



*Hindu youth may serve and love their new country with complete sincerity and honesty without disrupting the roots with the country of their origin.*

humility. For Hindus, the moral teachings of religion have always been the bedrock of good living. Religion—loosely translated as dharma—is basically like a classroom, a school where we get the instruction for the moral and virtuous pedagogy. Ultimately, however, it becomes our responsibility to learn and understand these spiritual teachings properly and put them into use in everyday living. Even more than that, we may imbibe dharma deep into our mindset (antahkaran), so that we think in a moral and spiritual manner, harboring no hatred, ill will, or harm to others. Is it easy? No, it probably is not easy, but the rewards are incredible and fabulous. In a world where we are always searching for a moment of peace and joy, a question was put to Reverend Pramukh Swami Maharaj of the Swaminarayan Sanstha: "You have a master key; as a result, you are always happy and at peace, no matter what difficulties you face. What is the secret?"

He replied, "Sarvamangal—one who is always happy—has the master key! It is to obey the command of God at all times, to be tolerant, humble, and to serve everyone."

## About the Author

*Dr. Hiro Badlani is the author of  
Hinduism: Path of the Ancient Wisdom  
[www.hinduismpath.com](http://www.hinduismpath.com).*

*He lives at Los Angeles and can be contacted at:  
E-mail: [hgbadlani@aol.com](mailto:hgbadlani@aol.com), Phone 562-865-5880*

*By Ankur Tewari*

**AHMEDABAD:** A 5,000-year-old stepwell has been found in one of the largest Harappan cities, Dholavira, in Kutch, which is three times bigger than the Great Bath at Mohenjo Daro.



## 5,000-year-old Harappan stepwell found in Kutch, bigger than Mohenjodaro's



The stepwell that was found during the excavation by ASI in Dholavira, Kutch.

**L**ocated in the eastern reservoir of Dholavira by experts from the Archaeological Survey of India working with IIT-Gandhinagar, the site represents the largest, grandest, and the best furnished ancient reservoir discovered so far in the country.

It's rectangular and 73.4m long, 29.3m wide, and 10m deep. Another site, the ornate Rani ki Vav in Patan, called the queen of stepwells, is already on Unesco list.

"This is almost three times bigger than the Great Bath of Mohenjo

Daro that's 12m in length, 7m in width, and 2.4m in depth," said V N Prabhakar, visiting faculty at IIT and superintending archaeologist, ASI.

"We will conduct spot analysis in December as various surveys have indicated other reservoirs and stepwells may be buried in Dholavira," Prabhakar told TOI.

"We also suspect a huge lake and an ancient shoreline are buried in the archaeological site that's one of the five largest Harappan sites and the most prominent archaeological site in India belonging to the Indus Valley



## TREASURE OF CIVILIZATION

Pic source: ASI

- The Dholavira stepwell dates back to bronze age
- It's located beneath the eastern reservoir of Dholavira
- ASI says a huge lake and an ancient shoreline are buried in the site
- Surveys indicate the presence of more Harappan-age reservoirs and stepwells in the vicinity
- Archaeologists to excavate tanks, stoneware, and sanitation chambers



civilization," he added.

Experts will investigate the advanced hydraulic engineering used by Harappans for building the stepwell through 3D laser scanner, remote sensing technology and ground-penetrating radar system.

"We will study how water flowed into the well and what was the idea behind water conservation," said Prabhakar. The IIT Gandhinagar team and ASI officials will also excavate various tanks, stoneware, finely furnished brick blocks, sanitation chambers and semi-precious stones hidden at the site.

Precious stones like carnelian were in great demand during the Harappan era. Gujarat was the hub of bead and craft manufacturing industries. "Agate carnelian beads were also coveted," Prabhakar said.

Siddharth Rai and V Vinod of IIT-Gn are working on characterization of internal structures of various forms of pottery unearthed from the site to identify the diet

followed by Harappans. "Through pottery typology, we'll find out whether different communities lived in Dholavira," Rai said. The team will also analyze precious copper and bronze artifacts. ■

**Source:**

*timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/5000-year-old-Harappan-stepwell-found-in-Kutch-bigger-than-Mohenjodaros/articleshow/44638220.cms*



**By Renu Gupta**  
Director, SAC

## My Visit to a Girls' Hostel in Bharat

As part of a self commitment to visit SAC hostels when I travel to Bharat every year, I visited Maatri Aanchal Kanyaa Vidyapeeth for Girls in Haridwar. It was a very enlightening experience.

*SAC (Support A Child) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt program of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).*

**T**here are about 80 girls, ages 5 to 14, living in a hostel and attending the Saraswati Shishu Mandir in the same facility. This school is up to 6th grade and later girls continue education at Vidya Bharati for high school. The building was very old and in bad shape, but I was very much impressed with the efforts of cleanliness and discipline. The atmosphere was full of compassion, love and dedication. The new building was ready for moving in by summer. The girls, mostly orphans, came from nearby areas or broken homes and have seen the worst situations. But in the Maatri Aanchal they feel as if they are home. Older girls act as elder sisters. Resident teachers and domestic helpers were very friendly and helpful.

### Few important points

- 1) These children receive not only basic education but participate in sports, music and art. They are well versed in bhajans and shloka. Every hostel contains a small Mandir and regular prayers are performed. I believe these children enjoy better overall personality development and samskaar than the children living in normal home.
- 2) Besides help from NRIs, local residents often distribute goods, sweaters, blankets, medicine and books. Many people bring food to celebrate their birthdays with these children. Local business people



provide free sugar, rice, lentils, wheat, etc. Doctors also provide free medical aid.

### Working of the SAC Program

- 1) Children (boys and girls) are selected from underprivileged, terrorist affected areas of Bharat, most of them are orphans or have very poor parents.
- 2) Currently SAC is supporting children in many states of Bharat and there are good chances that you can reach out to a child in your home state.
- 3) SAC supported children stay in hostels and attend government recognized reputed schools such as Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Vidya Bharati and more. Schools provide both education as well as samskaar to these children.
- 4) SAC supports students from 1st grade till 12th grade. They also actively participate in cultural activities such as music, art, craft and sports like track, cricket, hockey, and soccer.
- 5) Many SAC students have completed college education and some have achieved the highest education such as a PhD. Many of them are working as doctors, engineers and teachers.
- 6) Donors receive a yearly report card along with the photo of the child, grade report and other personal information.
- 7) We encourage all donors to meet their supported children and their hostels or schools. Please contact SAC in advance of the visit.

E-mail: [renurajvanshigupta@gmail.com](mailto:renurajvanshigupta@gmail.com)





*By Maria Wirth*

Many Indians dream to be up there at least once in a lifetime, in the stillness of the mountains, surrounded by snow-capped peaks which rise into the sky over 6000 meters high and to take a purifying bath in the young and lively Ganga Ma.

Young, modern Indians, too, come and have great reverence and trust in Ganga Ma. She symbolizes the female, caring aspect of the universal power which governs all our lives.



## At the Source of Ganga Ma



**J**ust see, how this lady overcomes obstacles - calmly, coolly and graciously. She has no fixed behavior pattern, reacts according to the situation. She has inspired me since long and I have learnt a lot from her." I stood next to the engineering student from Hyderabad, when he pointed out the lady to me and expressed his admiration for her, yet all I could see was a river, the Ganges, which jumped, frolicked, whirled over the rocks in her path, or flowed around them in a gentle embrace. Ganga Ma, who is depicted as a young, beautiful woman with long, flowing hair on the posters for sale, remained hidden to my western conditioned mind. It however made me pensive how naturally the

student, 21 years young and not a poet, invested the river with aliveness, which in the west is usually reserved for human beings and animals. Afterwards it almost seemed to me, as if "she" indeed not only jumped, frolicked, whirled and embraced, but also as if she enjoyed it, happy to be present, alive.

We were standing in Gangotri at a height of 3140 meters near the Tibetan border. It is a popular travel destination, because the temple dedicated to Ganga Ma is located there. It is the place, where earlier, how much earlier nobody could tell me, Ganga Ma was born from the glacier. Over the centuries the glacier receded and is still receding. It is nowadays some 18 km to the east of Gangotri.

According to scriptures it was the Rishi Bhagirathi, who brought Ganga from heaven down to the earth thousands of years ago. As the mighty impact of the fall would have been disastrous, Shiva caught her first in his hair. Whoever stands near the mouth of the glacier, called Gomukh, and witnesses with which immense power the newly born river surges out of the cave in the ice, will not be surprised that it needed Shiva to soften her fall.

Many Indians dream to be up there at least once in a lifetime, in the stillness of the mountains, surrounded by snow-capped peaks which rise into the sky over 6000 meters high and to take a purifying bath in the young and lively Ganga Ma. Young, modern Indians, too, come and have great reverence and trust in Ganga Ma. She symbolizes the female, caring aspect of the universal power which governs all our lives. The pilgrims undergo a lot of hardship to reach there. The journey to the source of the Ganges leads through an impressive landscape, but is arduous and dangerous. The roads are narrow, winding and often full of potholes. Landslides keep interrupting the journey. Looking down into the deep gorge of the river can be frightening, yet equally frightening to me was the risky driving. Our share jeep kept audaciously overtaking in curves, and escaped a few times only narrowly a head on collision. Once, the

driver had to make a sudden halt. My bag, which was on top of the jeep and obviously not properly secured, landed right in front of us on the road and luckily not in the gorge of the Ganges.

The bus stand in Gangotri presented a colorful picture: old and young people from the plains poured out from buses and jeeps and slowly moved in their family clans from shop to shop towards the temple, on the way comparing the prices for the offerings. They were mostly poor without pullovers and in slippers, holding their children by the hand.

Members of the middle class in contrast looked stout, well equipped with windcheaters, caps and sneakers, yet the elderly among them seemed to have little stamina. Especially corpulent women gasped for the thin air and took a break after every few steps.

Then there were lanky sadhus with matted hair and ash smeared on their foreheads. They often were barefoot and wrapped only in thin cotton cloth.

And there were tourists from abroad, on one hand young backpackers, who searched and found cheap places to stay, and on the other hand older, wealthy foreigners, who arrived by taxi and lodged in the most expensive hotel of the place.

The ghat of the Ganges bustled with life. Small groups of people were sitting around pandas, doing poojas. Others bravely took a bath in the ice cold





waters. Even some children were not spared. They tried hard, yet unsuccessfully to escape the grip of their parents and evade the mug that was poured down over their backs. Yet after the procedure they looked happy and definitely fresh.

The evening Arti accompanied by drums was a wonderful experience. A big crowd had gathered in front of the brightly lit temple with high mountains standing guard and the dark, cool night surrounding it. The devotion of the pilgrims was palpable. It permeated the atmosphere and pulled everyone in, including one of the two soldiers who was on duty at the entrance of the temple. He handed over his gun to some lay person, who probably was a friend, took off his boots and joined the queue into the temple. After a while he reappeared, put on his boots and took back his gun.

I stayed in a small wooden hut in Yoga Niketan, a small ashram on the other, quieter side of the Ganges. Some foreigners from all over the world stayed there, too, and a young sadhu, Yogananda, taught us yoga. Once, over lunch, he told a few of us his story: He had studied psychology in Varanasi. His parents were happy, when he presented them with his academic degree. They did not suspect that they would lose their son the next morning. His father was determined to get him married as soon as possible, now, after he had finished his studies, even though he knew that his son did not want to marry. As a

teenager he had already declared that he wanted to become a sanyasi. Yet the father had gone ahead and had selected a bride. She was the only daughter of a wealthy friend. Early in the next morning the young man sneaked out of the house and never came back. "I had no other choice. My family lives in a very backward area. My father would have had to shoot me for not obeying him to save his honor," he claimed. After finding a guru and taking sanyas, he called his home. His sister in law picked up the phone. He told her that he had renounced the world. She started to cry and he put the receiver down. Ever since, for seven years, he had not contacted his family.

"They will miss you. Why don't you at least call them", I suggested.

"Why should they miss me? My family consists of 19 members. Furthermore, Indian parents secretly are pleased at having a son who has dedicated his life to God, though they don't admit it and even put obstacles in his way. He brings blessings for the whole family and they know it", he argued.

"India is a different world altogether", a young woman from South Africa sighed after hearing his story.

One day I started on my trek to Gomukh, the source of the Ganga. The sky was deep blue, the sun merciless and my nose thickly smeared with sunscreen. With a small backpack I first climbed



many big steps right behind the temple, which steeply lead up to a path. From then on the trek was easy - a climb of only 800 meters over a distance of 18 kilometers. It was a wonderful feeling to walk in this grandiose landscape. The snow covered peaks were near and overpowering.

There were few people trekking, not like the heavy stream of pilgrims who used to walk the last 14 kilometers to reach the temple in Kedarnath before the disaster struck in 2013, or the six kilometers to Yamunotri. As buses can drive right up to Gangotri, most pilgrims are content with doing pooja at the temple there. Yet the sadhus usually go to the source and also some of those who are not on a tight travel schedule.

The local horsemen and even porters were walking fast. Most sadhus, however, moved slowly. Once, a sadhu came from the opposite direction. He had only one leg and supported himself with a stick. I was amazed and he noticed it. "Jay Ganga Ma!" he shouted the customary salutation with a big smile on his face. He obviously was in good spirits and joyfully and swiftly moved on with the help of the stick.

For some time a boy was following me. He wore only a shirt and trousers, had no bag and probably not a single paisa. During the lunch break I talked to him. He was from Nepal, 11 years old and had come alone. He didn't have any money.

"How do you want to manage without money?" I asked. The boy turned his palms upwards, shrank his shoulders and smiled. I offered him food and then asked him to move on.

In the ashram of Lal Baba in Bojwasa, about 4 kilometers' distance from Gomukh, I saw him again. It was already afternoon, cloudy and cold. He held tightly a hot tea cup with both hands, like everyone else. Whoever entered the ashram was straight away given hot tea, which was gratefully received especially by the thinly clad sadhus. Lal Baba, an old sadhu who exuded authority now questioned the boy and then sent him to the kitchen to help.

On the next morning, after a sleepless night in a tiny, windowless cubby-hole, sleepless due to the smell from the toilet next door, I trekked the last 4 kilometers over rocky terrain to Gomukh, the mouth of the glacier.

There I stood at the source of the river. What immense power, with which Ganga Ma starts her journey from the glacier. I sat down on a big rock and

for a long time let myself be enveloped by the thunderous roar of Ganga Ma in the midst of silence. Suddenly the Nepali boy sprang up to where I was sitting. He had come with a group of sadhus and had spotted me. He looked full of joy, wearing an oversized pullover and holding two blocks of ice in his hands. "Photo, photo!" he demanded urgently. On my way back a German caught up with me. He was in his early thirties and except for the whiter skin indistinguishable from his Indian sadhu colleagues. His hair was matted, he wore several malas around his neck, was barefoot in flip-flops and fluent in Hindi. But when he switched to German, his dialect clearly gave him away as a native from Nuremberg, my own home district. He has been a sadhu since ten years, he told me. At first, he took drugs. But then an Indian sadhu advised him not to waste his life. He underwent a detox treatment and became the disciple of a guru, who earlier was an officer with the secret service "and even today does not trust anybody". We trekked together till Gangotri, where he stayed in a small room by the Ganges.

I went back to my hut in Yoga Niketan. It looked now comfortable and life in Gangotri almost city-like.

## About the Author

*Maria Wirth is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the Ardh Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri*

*Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India's spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.*

*She may be contacted via email [mariawirth12@gmail.com](mailto:mariawirth12@gmail.com)*





*By Anantanand  
Rambachan*

One of the imperatives for confronting our contemporary challenges is Hindu unity. Religious divisions that would hardly cause a ripple in a population of 1,200 million in India become major fractures when that population is a minority. There is an urgent need for different traditions of Hinduism to reflect on and to affirm the common aspects of our Hindu heritage collectively. This unity about which I speak is not one that requires the overlooking or elimination of differences of doctrine and practice that exist among us. Hindu unity, however, will certainly enable us to better utilize our limited resources and speak with a common voice on matters of shared concern.



# Hindus in the United States: Challenges and Needs

## THREE CHALLENGES FOR HINDUS IN AMERICA

### ● Being a Religious Minority

While the number of Hindus in North America has been increasing, Hindus still constitute a small percentage of the total population of the United States and Canada. The preservation and transmission of religious values become increasingly difficult when these have to be done in a context where the norms of the dominant culture are different and in some instances in conflict with Hindu ideals. Our children are exposed to a variety of religious and cultural choices. Minorities wrestle, more than others, with issues of identity and carry a greater burden of self-explanation. The children of minorities often seek the acceptance and approval of the majority community and, for this reason, may be more willing to accept the values of this community, even when these contradict their own.

### ● The separation of religion and culture in America

Historically, Hinduism has embraced both religion and culture and the disentanglement of one from the other is quite difficult. It is significant that there is no Sanskrit equivalent for the word, "religion," and the term, dharma, which is sometimes equated with "religion", is far more inclusive. The detachment of religion and culture, however, is rapidly becoming a reality in the experience of a new generation of Hindus born in the western world. The unity of religion and culture is being severed and the traditionally pervasive influence of Hinduism is relegated to fewer areas of life. Musical tastes, cuisine, recreational activities, and dress are increasingly influenced by sources outside of the Hindu tradition. This separation of religion and culture, presents us with challenges and questions. How will the Hindu tradition develop and thrive in a context in which it does not exert a pervasive cultural influence? What forms will it assume and what would it mean to be a Hindu? What will be its public character, if any?

### ● Religious transmission

The growing separation between religion and culture highlights a third feature and challenge of our new context. The unity of religion and culture, to which I have already referred, minimized the need for special agencies for the transmission of the tradition. It was correctly assumed that a child would receive the necessary religious exposure by the mere fact of growing up in a particular community where Hindu traditions were embedded in the culture. When I was a child attending a Hindu primary school, we used to recite a series of questions and answers about Hinduism from a small text. One of the questions was, "Why are you a Hindu?" and the answer following was, "Because I was born a Hindu." It may have been a good answer in that time, but I am not sure that it will work for a

new generation today. For the first time, increasing numbers of Hindus will be Hindus by choice.

## TEN NEEDS OF HINDUS IN AMERICA

### ● **Hindu unity**

One of the imperatives for confronting our contemporary challenges is Hindu unity. Religious divisions that would hardly cause a ripple in a population of 1,200 million in India become major fractures when that population is a minority. There is an urgent need for different traditions of Hinduism to reflect on and to affirm the common aspects of our Hindu heritage collectively. This unity about which I speak is not one that requires the overlooking or elimination of differences of doctrine and practice that exist among us. Hindu unity, however, will certainly enable us to better utilize our limited resources and speak with a common voice on matters of shared concern.

### ● **Greater focus on jñana (wisdom)**

We must have a deeper focus on and appreciation for the wisdom or jñana dimension of our tradition. It is accurate to say that in the transmission of the tradition the emphasis, historically, has been on orthopraxis, with a focus on ritual worship. In the western world, however, Hindus are increasingly challenged to articulate and transmit their tradition in a manner that places more emphasis on its fundamental teachings. If we desire young Hindus to commit themselves to this tradition, we will have to convince them of its worth by a reasonable explanation of its teachings in relation to other competing views.

### ● **Hindu teachers**

The number of dedicated Hindu educators is too few in number. Traditionally, Hinduism distinguished between the function of the ritual specialist and the religious teacher or educator. The ritual specialist is the purohit or pujari who officiated in home and temple rituals and whose training consisted primarily in the recitation of mantras and the performance of ritual. The guru or acharya is the teacher of wisdom. These

teachers were, in many cases, though not all, monks (sannyasis) and their training was entirely different. They were trained in the authoritative Hindu texts such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. The Hindu teachers and educators who are needed today must be well-versed, not only in the traditions of Hinduism, but also in the major trends of contemporary intellectual discourse in the various branches of human knowledge so that they could provide coherent, rational and articulate interpretations of Hinduism. We need to establish institutions and design curricula where such training is afforded to students with the proper religious and intellectual aptitudes.

### ● **An expanded temple role**

The new context and challenges require an expanded role for the traditional Hindu temple. The traditional Hindu temple is primarily a place of worship where the sacred murti is housed. We visit our temples for darshana (to see the murti), and to offer ritual worship (puja). Preserving this central purpose, our temples must increasingly become centers of teaching and learning about the Hindu tradition, ensuring the successful transmission of the tradition from one generation to another. The temple as a center of teaching must now complement as a center of worship.

### ● **Strengthening Hindu families**

An emphasis on an expanded role for the Hindu temples must not be at the expense of the practice of Hinduism in our homes. The vital and living center of Hinduism, throughout its history, is the home and family. It is in the family that one's identity as a Hindu is formed and one understands first what it means to be Hindu. If we wish our children to learn about the Hindu tradition, we must take the initiative to become learners ourselves. Our own desire and effort to learn will ignite and inspire them. Above all else, our lives must embody the finest values of our tradition. In the matter of religion, children learn from what we do; not what we say. A child's faith is undermined by adult religious hypocrisy.

### ● **Overcoming the privatization of Hinduism**

We must ensure, as Hindus, that we do not treat our religious teachings and values as private. Privatization implies compartmentalization. Such a compartmentalization of human life may lead to fundamental and problematic contradictions in





human conduct. The privatization of religion leads also to its increasing irrelevance. If our traditions cannot guide us in our helping us to make decisions and choices about the significant issues of our times, our tradition will grow in irrelevance. It means that the sphere of influence of our tradition will be extremely limited and narrow. The major national debates in which religion is involved are conducted largely without Hindu voices. If we wish to be participants in these significant discussions, we must begin by clarifying our own positions on these issues and then finding the appropriate spaces to ensure that Hindu voices contribute to these debates.

### ● **A Hindu outreach to the larger community**

Hinduism continues, for many reasons, to be a deeply misunderstood religion in the United States. In a survey of American attitudes about Hindus, over 600 persons, two-thirds of those surveyed, had no knowledge of Hindu beliefs and practices. Most respondents associated Hinduism with "cow worship," "many gods and temples," and "India." I mention this reality to make the point that Hindu temples, in addition to our primary obligations to the Hindu community, must also reach out to the larger community in order to ensure that there is accurate and sympathetic understanding of Hinduism.

### ● **Humility and self-criticism**

One of the great values of our tradition is vinamrata or humility. The Bhagavadgita commends the person who is rich in learning (vidya) and humility. Humility is the recognition that, as human beings, we are limited in knowledge and in the practice of virtue. There is always more to know and always room for growth in the development of a virtuous

character.

### ● **Right commitment**

Our commitment to the Hindu tradition must be for the right reasons. Many young persons are turning away from religion because religion seems so much to be associated with violence and hatred. Almost every major conflict in the world today has an intrareligious or interreligious element. Our commitment to the Hindu tradition does not require us to hate or stereotype persons of other faiths, ethnicities or cultures. Our Hindu identity must be positive, not negative.

### ● **Remembering the central teaching of the Hindu tradition**

My final suggestion is the necessity for us all to remember what the core teaching of our tradition is and to be guided in all aspects of our lives by this. This teaching is articulated repeatedly in our sacred texts. In the Bhagavadgita (13:27), Bhagavan Krishna describes true seeing as knowing God to exist equally in all beings (samam sarvesu bhutesu tisthantam paramesvaram). To value a boy over a girl, to exploit children, to abuse women, to mistreat the elderly, to discriminate against the disabled are all expressions of blindness to this truth. This is the teaching that draws us into lives of compassion and service of others and which led Swami Vivekananda to declare that "they alone live who live for others." ■

### *About the Author*

*Anantanand Rambachan is a professor of religion at St. Olaf College in Minnesota.  
E-mail: rambacha@stolaf.edu*

*By David Frawley  
Pandit Vamadeva Shastri*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States brought about many glowing statements from the American government, both about Modi and about India.

These included productive meetings with President Barack Obama, Vice-President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State John Kerry, who were quite elated with Modi's visit. The camaraderie extended to Bill and Hillary Clinton, as well as various congressional leaders Republican and Democrat.



# Narendra Modi and Barack Obama: A New Vision for Both India and World Hinduism



**P** rime Minister Narendra Modi's visit was a great success for the Indo-American community, particularly with his Madison Square Garden program, and for India-America business ties. The success of his visit extended to the western media, with CNN going as far as referring

to Modi in a video as, "Is this the world's most interesting man?"

Predictably, the Indian left was upset with the success of Modi's visit. They had long used Modi's American visa rejection in 2005 - which they played a major part in bringing about - to highlight how the world rejected Modi and his





policies. Now America is embracing Modi in a powerful way and ignoring the complaints of Indian leftists.

Of course the Indian media, which still has a Marxist slant, brought out the usual Marxist spokesmen as well as Congress politicians to criticize Modi's trip as unsuccessful. But these comments fell flat before Modi's firm embrace by the Democrats, America's left wing party.

In fact, Modi's policies of promoting trade, developing defense ties, cleaning up India, protecting women's rights, and promoting ecology in the light of climate change are hardly the fascist agendas that he is accused of, but that of the center left in the West like the Democratic Party of Obama.

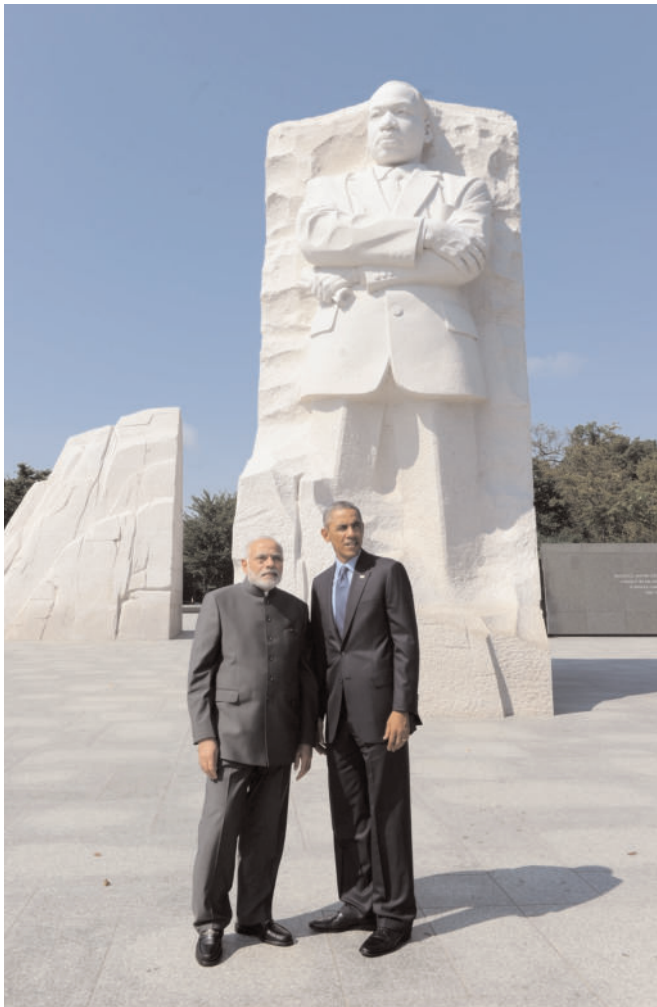
However in all of this political posturing, another important event has been missed. Modi's visit was not only a personal victory for Modi, or for BJP, or India, it was also a victory for Hinduism itself.

Modi came to the West not merely as a Prime Minister of India but as a proud Hindu. He completed his entire grueling overseas program while engaged in a nine day fast for Navaratri that celebrates the Goddess or Shakti. His Facebook account posted for each day, the form of the Goddess Durga to be worshipped, with the PM's greetings. Yet Modi was not trying to promote Hinduism in a

propagandistic manner, he was simply continuing in his own personal practices as he always fasts on Navaratri.

Modi feels there is no contradiction between being a good Hindu and the Prime Minister of India at the same time - and why should there be? Political leaders all over the world honor various religions, particularly the majority religions of their own countries, even if they are heads of secular states. Up to now, however, most of the Indian media and political parties have given the impression that for a Hindu to be a respectable political leader in India is only possible if a Hindu downplays his religion. Most importantly in this regard, Modi and Obama cosigned a special op-ed in the Washington Post on Sept. 30, highlighting their relationship. What it says about Hinduism is most interesting. I am quoting the first two paragraphs of this op-ed below.

"As nations committed to democracy, liberty, diversity and enterprise, India and the United States are bound by common values and mutual interests. We have each shaped the positive trajectory of human history, and through our joint efforts, our natural and unique partnership can help shape international security and peace for years to come. Ties between the United States and India are rooted in



the shared desire of our citizens for justice and equality. When Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism as a world religion, he did so at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. When Martin Luther King Jr. sought to end discrimination and prejudice against African Americans, he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent teachings. Gandhiji himself drew upon the writings of Henry David Thoreau."

Let us highlight specifically the second paragraph. It notes Swami Vivekananda's historic visit to the US in 1893 and his speech before the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, but for Vivekananda having presented "Hinduism as a world religion" at the Parliament, connected in the same paragraph to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Henry David Thoreau.

This is quite a statement and one that both Obama and Modi must have carefully considered before

letting it be published in such a prominent manner. The joint statement is an honoring of Vivekananda and India relative to World Hinduism. It recognizes World Hinduism as important for India and its independence movement, and for America and its civil rights movement for the pursuit of justice and equality. We must remember for all the India emphasis on Gandhi as secular that Gandhi described himself as a Hindu, and was quite critical of the Christian missionaries who came to convert him.

Today Hinduism is a much more positive word in the United States than in India. This is not only due to Vivekananda and Gandhi, but also owing to the over three million Indo-Americans who are predominantly Hindu in religion, just as India is. Hindus in America are the most affluent and best educated of all religious groups along with the Jews. Recognizing this fact, American politicians like Obama and Clinton see Hinduism as something to be respected and as a force for the future, not a superstition from the past.

The remark on Hinduism as a World Religion is important in many ways. Many scholars in the West, particularly Marxists, routinely deny that there is anything such thing as "World Hinduism." They would reduce Hinduism to scattered, often unrelated or conflicting cults and practices of India that do not merit the name of any single religion. And they would not equate Hinduism with any social justice and equality, but only with an oppressive caste system.

We could say that Modi's visit raises not only the presence of India on the world stage but also that of Hinduism as a World Religion. Yoga and Vedanta, which Swami Vivekananda also emphasized and which are now popular worldwide, reflect this greater tradition of World Hinduism. The remarks show that Hinduism is not a liability for India but one of its greatest contributions to the world.

Clearly a new era is dawning in which India is gaining its proper respect and so is Hinduism as a world religion. And we cannot entirely separate the two. This is because Hinduism is based on a universal vision that is relevant to everyone and asks us to put the cause of truth and Self-realization above any dogmas or institutions. ■

Source: [vedanet.com/2014/10/19/narendra-modi-and-barack-obama-a-new-vision-for-both-india-and-world-hinduism](http://vedanet.com/2014/10/19/narendra-modi-and-barack-obama-a-new-vision-for-both-india-and-world-hinduism)



By Dr. Jayant Mehta

A small designated corner or special room for Pooja (worship) is a unique feature of every Hindu home. When I was growing up in India we had a small replica of a temple; about 14" x16" and about 6" deep. This was the place where my parents kept few images of gods and goddesses, and the whole family used this corner for individual or group prayer every day. Framed pictures and small images of the gods were washed, red powder-kum kum-- and rice was offered and a lamp was lighted. Milk or a sweet food item was offered during Pooja, and later respectfully eaten by the family members as "Prasad."



# Pooja Ghar Shrine at Home



Over the years, family members kept on adding new murtis and photographs. At one time number of "gods" became so large that no one in our family was willing to take the job of daily ritual of washing these images. The whole process took about half an hour every morning. Sleep in the early morning and keeping the school-time was more important. We, brothers and sisters, used to try our best to escape this daily task. We recited verses very quickly with a hope that we can finish the ritual faster. One day my grandfather found a very practical solution. After reciting a verse for "visarjan" (submerging the murti in water at the conclusion of Pooja) he removed

most of the pictures and murtis. He made a rule of keeping only five images in the temple at the most, and the Pooja ritual brief. Some other lengthy rituals were to be observed weekly rather than daily. After these simplifications we stopped disliking the task of daily Pooja.

Forty five years ago when I came to the USA, I restarted this tradition in my house in the USA. Pooja dais was kept clean and simple. Number of images was kept to a maximum of five. I am glad we still have a small Mandir at our home. Devotional music and fragrance sticks were used but ritual was short and simple. I love my grandfather's idea of simplicity during prayers. Clean



and clutter-free Pooja-Ghar can facilitate meditation and devotional service with good concentration. In our Pooja-Ghar, I explained the essentials of Hindu Dharma to our US-born children.

I share this experience because I admire this ancient idea of daily Pooja at home. When I visit some of the big community temples, I see lots of images, as if it is a museum. I see clutter on the stage where a big row of images are kept. In USA, when we want to build a large new temple, we need to raise funds, lots of funds. In order to raise money for the maintenance we organize fund-raising events and provide free high-carbohydrate food. Socialization, fun, and free food become more important than spirituality.

I have observed that many Hindus are afraid of discarding old pictures and calendars that have pictures of gods and goddesses. You can discard extra pictures or images after offering a brief respect or doing a "visarjan" Pooja. A picture of god is nothing more than an art work of an artist. It becomes an object of devotion when you pour your faith to it. Statues can be submerged in lake or rivers keeping public safety in view. Our love for God should be free from fear and greed.

I do not think that our temple gods need lots of silver and gold. According to Bhagavat Gita: "Simple offering of flower or water is enough to please Me (God)". Main offering is that of love and devotion. It is our faith that makes a stone-statue "god."

I appeal to all my Hindu brothers and sisters to appropriately modify Hindu traditions in the USA. One has to adopt according to the time and

place; otherwise, like the dinosaur one would perish. Huge amounts of money need not be spent in elaborate stone structures, or in filling our temples with gold and silver. Look at the history of India: Large treasures of gold and diamonds in so many of the Hindu temples attracted Muslim invaders to attack them. God does not care for the material wealth. I realize the importance of large community temples, where people can perform group-prayers or visit a special temple for the Darshan or pilgrimage. We already have 600+ small and large temples in the USA. If we organize properly and make existing temples perform multiple tasks for the NRI community, many more new temples may not be critically required. Money could be better spent in education, health-care, and socio-political field, including awarding scholarships to needy students to visit and spend time in India to learn more about ancient Hindu culture and philosophy, or establishing "Chairs" for proper studies of Hinduism-related studies by faculty of Department of Religion in universities to correct the present situation where such studies and courses present distorted views and training, intentionally or by default. We should also try to break the narrow paths based on denominations and support the main stream of the Vedic Dharma. Bhakti (devotion) starts at home and our heart is the best Devalaya (temple) of God. Doing our duty is dharma to be practiced both at work and in day-to-day life.

I think Pooja Ghar-- a place of worship at home-- is the unique cornerstone of daily Hindu worship. It is simple and effective. Family that prays together stays together. All knowledge needed for ritual is available in books and on internet, thus negating the need to depend on someone else. Simple rituals, silent meditation, and swadhyay (self study) will bring faith in our family and day-to-day life. Root of Santana Dharma is in our mind and our heart. Honesty and kindness in our thought, speech, and action is the essence of Dharma. ■

## About the Author

*Dr. J. Mehta, based in Johnson City TN, is a professor of Medicine and a lifelong student of comparative religion.*



By Smita Daftardar

The conference started off with the traditional lamp lighting by the guest of honor and keynote speaker Pujya Didiji, Sushree Siddhehswari Devi of the Radha Madhav Society, and welcome addresses by Kusum Khuranaji, the President of VHPA, Atlanta Chapter and the coordinator of the conference, Manju Tiwariji.



## Hindu Women's Conference Facilitates Empowerment through Knowledge



When a group of teenage girls get together they compete with each other, when a group of women get together they empower each other!" If ever a quote managed to perfectly reflect the essence of a gathering of about a hundred women, this was it!! The occasion: the Second Annual Hindu Women's Conference, organized by the Atlanta Chapter of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), at the Pinckneyville Community Center in Norcross, GA, on Sep 13th, 2014. The overarching theme of the conference was "Empowerment through Knowledge". The daylong conference was designed to share knowledge from experts on spiritual, medical and financial issues and, equally important, to give women a forum to voice their opinions on current issues; an arena where the audience were not only listeners, but also

became spontaneous advisors on the complexities of life, their roles interchanging between mentors and mentees. The attendees came from all age groups and a variety of professions and backgrounds: young moms to grandmas, bringing with them their own unique perspective.

The conference started off with the traditional lamp lighting by the guest of honor and keynote speaker Pujya Didiji, Sushree Siddhehswari Devi of the Radha Madhav Society, and welcome addresses by Kusum Khuranaji, the President of VHPA, Atlanta Chapter and the coordinator of the conference, Manju Tiwariji.

Pujya Didiji, a spiritual leader and an inspiring orator gave the keynote speech, a tribute to the great women that shaped her life, highlighting the crucial role women play in the upbringing of a child. The Q&A session that

followed, dealt with a diverse range of issues, from violence against women, gender inequality in society, to Hindu Dharma's stand on issues like divorce, abortion & reproductive rights of women, which is a raging debate, especially here in the US. Didiji answered all the questions with a calm serenity that is such an integral part of her personality. Her message though, was quite clear: Women have to take initiative to change the situation they are in and they need to be more confident and self-reliant. The other important take away from her words was that The Vedas and ancient Hindu scriptures were very progressive and actually empower women through their teachings to take the decision that is right and justified under the circumstances.



The keynote speech was followed by a brief presentation on the mission, vision and various programs of VHPA. Congress Woman Tulsi Gabbard sent a specially recorded video message with her best wishes for the Hindu Women's Conference, which was played for the audience.

A very important aspect of women empowerment, often overlooked by women themselves, is knowledge of finances and financial planning. Shri Puneet Seth, a knowledgeable financial adviser from New York Life conducted an hour long financial planning and Q&A session with topics like taxation and retirement planning. An engaging speaker with the ability to reach out to the listeners with relevant information in an easy to understand format, he enjoyed undivided attention from the audience. The ladies had quite a few questions for him, which shows that women are getting involved in financial matters of the family.

The post lunch session took off with a 10 minute "Yog Nidra" led by Arti Sardaji, intended to refresh and

energize the audience. This was followed by two information segments: first, a lecture and Q&A session by Dr. Seshu Sarma, a leading gynecologist and obstetrician and second, the career workshop "workforce 2020". Dr. Sarma delivered a most informative session on women's health, risk factors, recommended screenings, treatments and therapies for various health issues. She also talked about depression among women and the urgent need for these women to get diagnosed and seek treatment. She especially emphasized the need for women to be proactive in taking care of their own health, which for the ever multi-tasking woman of today, gets pushed to the least priority.

The work force 2020 workshop made available experts from different professions who provided the attendees career guidance. They also shared resources and websites with relevant information. The group of experts comprised of healthcare professionals Kamlesh Pathak, Kusum Mahendru and Aruna Gupta, education expert Priya Ambekar, IT staffer Harshi Krishnaswami ,





financial experts Poorvi Bhavsar and Sony Shivdasani. In an effort to keep the attendees actively engaged, the organizers had put together a newsletter with articles on current events and issues related to women. These articles were the basis of some really interesting discussions that took place over tea and lunch. The first such session "Penny for your thoughts?" asked the audience to react to two articles: one advising young women to find husbands while still in grad school and the other about women leaving Science, Technology and Engineering fields in spite of being highly qualified and capable. When asked what advice would you give your daughters, the answers ranged far and wide! And one of the most welcomed answer was Dr. Shesu Sarma's "don't try to run your child's life", as was the advice to be supportive of your child's decisions and its consequence. A sobering advice was to teach girls to be able to "reasonably" adjust in order to have a successful marriage, in the wake of the alarmingly high number of divorces seen in Indian society these days! The discussion continued over lunch and moved on to the "Sweet & Tart" session about the "body image" issue among young girls. Here again, a meaningful exchange of ideas and advice could be seen, with focus on raising healthy and confident children. On one hand, the need for girls to break away from the stereotype of "cute" and "pretty" was stressed and on the other hand, the universal feminine instinct to look pretty and attractive, especially young women, and the need to celebrate femininity, was rightfully acknowledged.

Not to leave our esteemed senior citizens behind, the "Chai Pe Charcha" was a debate on whether aging

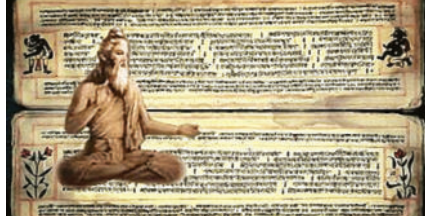
grandparents should be asked to take the role of (free) baby-sitters for their grand kids, in the case where both parents are working. Again, the audience responded with strong views on both sides of the issue. The objective or the scope of all these sessions was decidedly NOT to provide a solution to all problems, rather to start a healthy conversation where all aspects were given due consideration so that the final course of action is a win-win for all concerned parties. The audience proved to be a mature and balanced group of individuals, willing to embrace the Golden Mean path or the "madhyam pratipad" rather than to take extreme views. If the world was run by women, it would surely be a more peaceful and happy place to be in!

The conference concluded with a vote of thanks by Manjula Reddyji, Vice President, VHPA, Atlanta Chapter. A special thank was offered to the student volunteers of the Beta Club of Peachtree Ridge High School and a team of young volunteers from Balvihar: Richa Das, Divya Raghunathan, Yumin Shivdasani, Mugdha Daftardar and Anushka Shivram and last but not the least, the official photographer for the event Mina Menonji.

The conference was made possible by the efforts of dedicated VHPA volunteers and the financial support from New York Life. The conference received an overwhelmingly positive feedback on all aspects, the content, the management, the punctuality and of course the catered delicious lunch and afternoon snacks. The VHPA Atlanta chapter would like to thank the community for their continued support and will strive to continue this tradition of quality programs in future too.

By Dr. A.V.  
(Sheenu) Srinivasan

Pujyasri Jagadguru  
Shri  
Chandrasekharendra  
Saraswati, the 68th  
pontiff of Kanchi  
Kamakoti Peetham,  
lovingly called  
Pariyavaal ('beloved  
elder' in Tamil),  
referred to the Puranas  
as magnifying glasses of  
the Vedas, since they  
clarify the mandates of  
scriptures from those  
Vedic texts in a clear  
way that can be readily  
absorbed.



## In Defense of Puranas

**Tell me a fact and I will learn. Tell me a truth and I will believe. But  
tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.**  
- An American Indian Proverb

**P**uranas apparently did not occupy the same level of respect and reverence as the Vedas did. Many Hindus may not realize that Hinduism could not have survived had it not been for the ingenious and essential conduits to expand and expound on the carefully crafted and terse mandates of the Vedas. These conduits are indeed the Puranas -- most absorbing and attention getting stories of gods and demons.

Literally pura means past and Purana translates as events or stories or anecdotes of the past. Stories and storytelling have served as essential foundations for all cultures around the world. Rarely do we indeed find a human who is not stirred by anecdotes and tales that reinforce the various belief systems driving home a scriptural mandate or two. Hindus are big in this experience and have always been so. Stories of major and minor gods and goddesses told and retold by professional Harikatha Dasas (literal meaning: Servants of God stories) through recitals embellished by gestures and songs and jokes used to be a common feature of rural India. These experiences throughout India in villages and towns taking place for thousands of years escaped the attention of alien rulers; and the culture, values and traditions were preserved! It deserves mention that this was not an organized attempt on any level. It makes me feel humbled and grateful to Hindu ancestors who devised this natural, uncomplicated approach. If you never touched or read the Veda, you are not at a loss because Puranas took care of you! There isn't a day that goes by in India where folks do not cite a character or episode from the stories to drive home a point. The influence of these stories is woven into the very fabric of Hindu lives and thought.

The Puranas open up the often abstruse material of the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads in digestible form. For example, mandates such as सत्यं वद *Satyam vada* (Speak the Truth) or धर्मं चर *Dharmam chara* (Practice Dharma) outlined in the Taittiriya School of Yajurveda are crisp and clear. They are part of the concise instructions given by the guru to a student in ancient times completing his Vedic studies. Such statements are also dry. But when described through stories in context about what happened to Harishchandra or Yudhishtira or Duryodhana, the concept comes alive. The stories may be simple, complex or unbelievable but they all keep the interest level high. धर्मं चर (Practice Dharma) is a principle that many Hindus are aware of but it took Vyasa a hundred-thousand couplets to elaborate and drive home the import of this fundamental Hindu belief!

Consider another example. Chapter 6, stanza 30 of the Bhagavad Gita states:

यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति।

तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति॥३०॥

*Yo ma pasyati sarvatra sarvam ca mayi pasyati*

*Tasyaham na pranasyami sa ca me na pranasyati*||30||

A person who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me never becomes separated



from me nor do I become separated from that person. A story, in the Srimadbhagavatam (Canto 7), of a young boy named Prahalada, proves this point and illustrates the power of stories to drive home the fundamental principle stated above.

## Number of Puranas

There are 18 puranas identified as Mahapuranas (great puranas or main puranas), 19 if you include Vayu (Wind god) Purana, an equal number of Upa-puranas (sub or second level puranas), and puranas that are regional, highly localized puranas (sthala puranas) - not necessarily recognized or acknowledged on a global level but nevertheless associated with many holy places.

The Mahapuranas together contain 400,000 shlokas, of which a single purana (Skanda Purana) alone contains 100,000 shlokas! Generally each purana focuses on a single deity, though there are exceptions.

*The Mahapuranas are Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Shiva Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Narada Purana, Markandeya Purana, Agni Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Linga Purana, Varaha Purana, Skanda Purana, Vamana Purana, Kurma Purana, Matsya Purana, Garuda Purana, and Brahmanda Purana.*

A manuscript is qualified as a Purana if it meets the five main criteria (referred to as Panchalakshnam):

- Creation stories
- Stories covering the Evolution of Creation, including appropriate geographical descriptions
- Stories of descendents in certain dynasties (vansha)
- A history of Manus from whom all mankind originated
- A history of kings who were descendents of the Sun god ("Surya Vamsha") and the Moon God ("Chandra Vamsha").

## Conclusion

Puranas are anecdotes, plots within plots, depicting sometimes hilarious and sometimes deadly serious and dangerous situations --- all geared towards translating what may be termed as a terse philosophical mandate into an elaborate scenario to teach the true meaning of applying that principle so we can lead better lives on this earth.

A good example may be Newton's second law of motion, which simply states that the force acting on a body in motion is the product of its mass and its acceleration. A purist needs to know no more. All that is implied in this equation is clear and evident to the purist. But the rest of us may be able to understand,

appreciate and enjoy the beauty of this principle when we learn that there isn't a single machine operating on land, water or air that can function without the proper application of this equation in its design. Students of physics and engineering brighten up in class seeing an analysis showing how a car operates or an airplane flies when this equation is used in the designs of the components. Thus Newton's Second Law of Motion is indeed like the "gist-story" or "purana" of a Mercedes Benz or a Boeing-747 plane!

Puranas can therefore be enjoyed at various levels. They can be and are appreciated as mere stories that tell the trials and tribulations of heroes and others as they go through life - or as messages of a moral or ethical nature that one needs to pay attention to in dealing with somewhat similar situations. Hindu children growing up listening to the stories develop a lasting attachment to the characters. The stories are also acted out in dramas where the audiences may identify with the pain, suffering, or joy of the characters as they comply with, violate, or adopt a moral code of conduct. Millions enjoy to this day the great contributions of Vyasa or Valmiki. The world is richer for it. B. R. Chopra's vast series of films on the Mahabharata running as an Indian television program for months, or Peter Brooks' nine hour drama of the Mahabharata, are examples of how Indian, European, and American audiences enjoyed the experience.

The fact that some of these events may have occurred thousands of years ago may not convince the stubborn of their relevance to modern times. Even accepting that there are likely exaggerations, interpolations, and additions to the basic stories over the course of time to magnify a point may not be satisfactory to those who do not or cannot feel the stories. Legends and stories in every culture raise similar questions. Perhaps Karl Sagan's declaration that 'Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence' may be invoked to simply enjoy the tales. Many Hindus have naturally done so for thousands of years and there is no indication that that will change any time soon. Thank goodness! ■

## About the Author

*Dr. Srinivasan is the founder of Connecticut Valley Hindu Temple Society and his recent publications include: Vedic Wedding: Origins, Tradition and Practice and Hinduism for Dummies.*  
www.avsrinivasan.com

*By Siddheshwari  
Devi (Didi ji)*

Though we are not all-knowing, yet it's not very difficult to spot a fake smile, a half-hearted handshake, or a false compliment. Of course we cannot be 100% genuine, but being true to yourself is the right thing to do, and it is the easy thing to do. There is no problem in being yourself, but there is a great deal of effort involved in being something you are not.

## Be Genuine



**W**hat does it mean to be genuine? It means many things. It means that if you don't know the answer to a question, just say so. If you make something up, you will lose credibility and self-respect. It also means that you don't flip-flop depending on who is with you or where you happen to be at the time. Don't say 'yes' because the person with you wants to hear it; say it because you mean it. Another aspect of being genuine is being true to your word. Do not make promises you cannot keep, but once you have made a promise, be true to your word.

Being genuine also extends to not denying your cultural heritage, your religion, your family

background, your mother tongue and your beliefs. You may not like your family background or your past, but you should not deny it. Many people go to great lengths to make their skin color lighter, and they prefer to befriend only those who are of the 'right' color. We should be comfortable in our skin, literally and figuratively.

Others may try to change you to make you 'fit in.' If you are trying to fit into a social group that goes completely against what you believe in, you will eventually feel miserable.

Be true to yourself. Be genuine.

### Good and Bad Coexist

No person is completely good, just as no individual is completely





bad. Even the best person has flaws, and even the worst sinner has virtues. We like to categorize people as being good or bad, but we have both virtue and vice within us. The trick is to defeat the bad and encourage the good to flourish.

To develop good and virtuous qualities within, we must turn towards God, who is the source of these qualities. All the traits we admire in others and that we wish to have within are Godly traits. God is infinitely merciful and compassionate, and compassion is a trait we value greatly. God is gentle, forgiving and loving. We are drawn towards these qualities. God is unlimited knowledge and happiness, and we all wish to be happy and knowledgeable.

Good and bad dwell within our mind. To fill the mind with goodness, we need to concentrate on the one with unlimited goodness. By reminding ourselves deliberately of God's omnipresence, we automatically bring His divine qualities within. Our mind becomes calmer, more peaceful, more compassionate, more tolerant and more forgiving. Our actions, therefore, start to reflect what is in our mind.

The festival of Diwali reminds us of Ram and Ravan. Ram represents good and Ravan represents evil. The killing of Ravan represents the victory of good over evil.

May we all become victorious in our internal fight against evil.

## God and His Grace

Vedas and Vedic scriptures explain that it is only by knowing God that the soul can attain

liberation. At the same time, they state that God cannot be known. To explain this statement they cite many logical reasons. These reasons are powerful and convince us that it is impossible for us to gain Godly knowledge.

Firstly, God is divine, whereas our senses, mind and intellect are material. What to speak of knowing God, our sense, mind and intellect fail to gain the knowledge of many material phenomena.

Secondly, our senses, mind and intellect are enlightened, inspired and empowered by God.

Therefore, they cannot shed light on Him.

Thirdly, God is full of mutual contradictions. He is smaller than the smallest, yet bigger than the biggest. At the same time, the Vedas declare Him to be neither big nor small. He is nearer than the nearest, yet farther than the farthest. God does not take birth, yet takes birth countless times. He is the father of all, but is also known as Nand Kumar (Son of Nand) and Kaushalya Nandan (Son of Kaushalya). He has no eyes, ears, tongue, skin or nose, but is able to see, hear, taste, touch and smell. He does not have a mind, but thinks. Devoid of an intellect, He takes decisions.

Just when we are convinced that God cannot be known, scriptures proclaim that He can be known, but only through His grace. No one can know God using individual effort, but everyone can know Him through His grace. ■

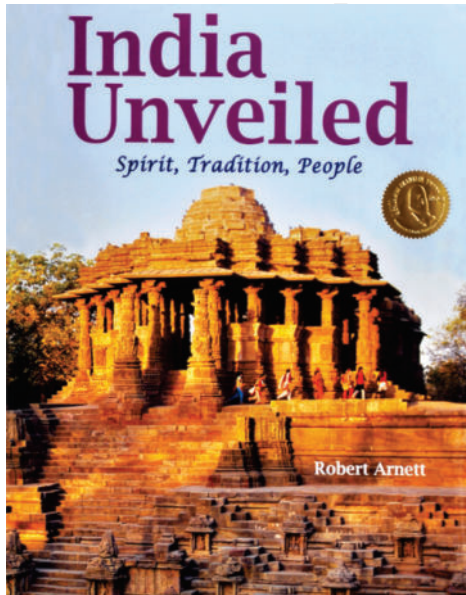
Visit [www.radhamadhavsociety.org](http://www.radhamadhavsociety.org)

Email: [s\\_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org](mailto:s_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org)



By Ankit Tiwari

## Book Review



# India Unveiled

**T**he first thing you notice about the new edition of Robert Arnett's *India Unveiled* is that it is pretty. That's even before you glance at the content. It has an authoritative heft and the paper quality is fantastic. Sit this book on a coffee table and even the most philistine of your guests will take notice. However, the real gem, of course, is the content.

This edition contains 307 gorgeous photographs taken by Arnett and others representing two years worth of trips to India by Arnett studying Indian culture. This collection of India's diverse culture and landscapes will make even the most experienced traveler envious.

The introduction starts the reader off with a brief immersion into the historical, cultural and spiritual context of India. It explains India's diverse languages, religions and even more subtle concepts such as Athithi Devo Bhava (The Guest is God), and the importance of devotion in Indian life. The rest of the book is divided into six main chapters each focusing on specific regions of India. This new edition includes a welcome look at India's gorgeous and often overlooked northeast including the Double Decker Root Bridge in Meghalaya. However, the chapters don't only consist of photographs. Descriptions are given of each location and region which often include detailed explanations of related rituals and history. For example, the description for Ujjain

includes Arnett offering a lotus at the Mahakaleshwar Temple and an explanation of the symbolism of the lotus in Hindu philosophy. Arnett traveled to Omkareshwar, where Adi Shakaracharya is thought to have met his guru, so a brief explanation of Shankara's life and teachings are mentioned here. Tidbits such as these are placed organically throughout the book and make each page a must read. Some of the best passages are Arnett's random interactions with people such as the little girl in Khajuraho ringing a bell in a roadside shrine and the pages dedicated to the famed dabbawalas of Mumbai. The author's interactions with spicy food and stories of kindness by others add personal touches which keep the book grounded in the India of today. The new edition also contains additions to the Appendix including a history of the British Raj, a timeline of India and the world and quotes about India.

*India Unveiled* contains a seeker's journey, cultural primer, travel guide and visuals which cause you to catch yourself staring. The information within explains many difficult to comprehend parts of India and Indian life simply and succinctly. The most significant experience the book offers is the urge to get up, pack some clothes and set off to replicate Arnett's exquisite travels. ■

*Book is easily available at various book stores. For more information or to order autographed copy of the book, visit Atman Press at [www.atmanpress.com](http://www.atmanpress.com) or call 706-323-6377.*



*By Ranbindranath  
Trivedi*

The present state of Hindus in Bangladesh has to be viewed in the light of the past because without understanding the past we cannot understand the present. The Hindu population in Bangladesh has dropped to 9.5% in 2011 from 30% in 1947. Hindus suffer constant threats to their lives, security and property. Many Hindu temples were desecrated and destroyed in Pakistan during the War of Bangladesh in 1971. The state failed to provide security to the minorities despite equal rights guaranteed to them in the constitution. The self-contradictory "State Religion Provision" and "Vested Property Act" compromised making the State pledge meaningless. The Vested Property Act and 15th amendment in the Constitution contradict the basic spirit of the Proclamation of Independence of Bangladesh and the basic premises of the Constitutional provisions of "equality, equity, freedom and justice for all citizens."

# Bangladesh: Rebuild War-Destroyed Shri Shri Ramna Kali Mandir



**B**angladesh was born to be a secular -democratic Bengali nation-state out of Islamic Republic of Pakistan by the sacrifices of Bengali freedom fighters and cemented by Indian soldiers' blood in December 1971. There are more than 30,000 temples and religious citadels in Bangladesh, and most of those were ransacked, demolished and desecrated. Bangladesh could be divided into 6 tirtha (pilgrimage) regions. Shri Shri Ramna Kali Mandir, one of the oldest Pithasthali temples of Bangladesh was built on 2.22 acre land in Central Dhaka in 14th century. Later the Ramna Kali Temple was built by "Dasanagthi" group of people who were followers of Sankaracharyay. Swami Gopal Giri of Badri Narayan Joshi Math came to Dhaka about 600 years ago and first founded a monastery

at Ramna. Subsequently, the main temple was built here by Swami Haricharan Giri. Although the temple was built in the architectural style of Bengali Hindus, Islamic style was also noticed on the structure. A 120 feet high peak extending over the second floor of the main temple could be observed from far distant places. The peak of the temple could be noticed as a landmark structure of Ramna in the well-publicized photograph showing Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman making his historic call for independence; "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is the struggle for Independence" on March 7, 1971. A beautiful image of Goddess Bhadrakali was seated on a wooden throne in the temple and the temple was surrounded by the wall of the Race Course

Ground. To the right side of this image was the deity Kali of the Bhawals. The priests, worshipers, and other devotees lived in the rooms on north-east and western sides of the Temple. There was also a Shiva Temple on the side.

On the night on March 27, 1971 all the 250 Hindu men, women and children, who lived in and around the 600-year old Ramna Kali Mandir, in the heart of Dacca, were massacred. The priest of the temple Sreemath Swami Paramananda Giri held the deity and prayed to Goddess Kali and he remained like that until incendiaries of the Pak army 'cremated' him alive along with all others. It may be mentioned here that an American eyewitness said, "There are no more Hindus in Ramna Kali Bari... I went to see it. Houses were still aflame and bodies were stacked at grotesque angles." Mr. Gordon Allott's speech in the US Senate on July 14, 1971 mentioned that the, "Ramna Kali Bari is an ancient small Hindu settlement situated in the middle of the Dacca racecourse. Even during the most violent Hindu-Muslim riots of partition, the village was able to avoid participation in communal strife ...on March 29, 1971 a pile of bodies charred and machine-gunned, was on visible display in Kali Bari. The entire village was burned to the ground." On December 16, 1971, the combined forces of the Indians and guerrillas overpowered West Pakistan; the Pakistani commander Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi surrendered to Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, the Commander of the Joint Forces, at the same place where Sheikh Mujib had made his historic call for independence on March 7, 1971. More than 91,498 Pakistani soldiers were taken as prisoners of war by Indian forces at this Ramna Kali Bari terrace which was then an extension of the grassy racetrack of Dhaka.

After 42 years of independent Bangladesh, we have become endangered species in Bangladesh. Many of these temples are in disrepair, and many have been attacked by fundamentalists. Regarding the efforts for rebuilding the destroyed temple and ashram, the Justice K. M. Sobhan Commission in 2000 noted that such demands came not only from the Hindus. Demands also came from the respectable

representatives of the society to rebuild the famous Kali Temple and Ma Anandamoyee Ashram in independent Bangladesh. After 34 years, in 2000, the government of Sheikh Hasina finally conceded the demand of Bangladeshi Hindus that had been made' perennially, to allow worship again on the site of the original temple. In 2004, a semi-permanent makeshift place of worship was built, and an image of the Goddess Kali was installed. Our rights for religion must be fulfilled and we want our co-religious Sanatan brothers to come forward to raise a voice for our cause for pilgrimage and rehabilitation of temples in Bangladesh. Hindus in Bangladesh will remain with you as members of the greatest Hindu civilization. Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to holy Pasupatinath temple in Nepal on August 4, 2014 inspired us with a new course of action and direction. So we do believe that the government of India under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi would take initiative to rebuild the 600-year old historic Ramna Kali temple complex through proper use of Hindu architectural know how with experts and funded by India under a bilateral discussion with Bangladesh counterpart.

We appeal to the people of India, NRIs and to the Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi that he would extend his good offices and necessary assistance in laying the foundation stone of reconstruction of Ramna Kali Mandir complex as a 'Monument of India's sacrifices and victory' during his august visit to Bangladesh in Dhaka. ■

### *About the Author*

*Shri Rabindranath Trivedi, a Retired Additional Secretary (Bangladesh) and a Freedom Fighter is founder member of Bangladesh Secretariat at Mujibnagar (April 1971); Secretary General Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM), an NGO in Special consultative status with ECOSOC of the United Nations  
E-mail: trivedi1944@gmail.com*

**Editors' note: For pictures and more information, visit the following sites:**

<https://www.google.com/search?q=shri+ramna+kali+temple+bangladesh&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=JCMGVlr9J8jKgWSH04CABQ&ved=0CB0QsAQ&biw=1152&bih=681>

<http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2009/09/20/bangladesh-demolition-ramana-kali-temple-march-1971>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramna\\_Kali\\_Mandir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramna_Kali_Mandir)



## एक तेज, ओढ तन आया था

- डॉ. मधुसूदन



पूजनीय स्वामी तिलक जी

एक तेज, ओढ तन आया था, पथ आलोकित कर चला गया ॥१॥  
नहीं चमक-दमक; नहीं तड़क-भड़क। पर ब्रह्म तेज की, सौम्य झलक ॥  
नहीं दाम याचना, नाम चाहना। अहम्, दंभ; आडम्बर हीना ॥  
सरल निर्मल, तिलक तिल तिल। जीवन देकर चला गया ॥  
एक तेज ओढ ....॥१॥

तरुवर सभीपर, छाया धरते, नदी दूजों की, प्यास बुझाती ॥  
नगर ग्राम, गिरि देश देश, धूप वर्षा, बर्फ फिकर ना लेश ॥  
गैरिक प्रतिभा, सदैव घूमती गरिमा मंडित,  
नग्न चरण परिव्राज, ज्ञान की गागर लुटाकर चला गया ॥  
एक तेज ओढ ....॥२॥

कैसी बंशी, बजाई तुमने, मोह लिया, मोहन-सा जैसे।  
अभी तलक, बजती है ताने, उन स्मृतियों की, भूलें कैसे ?  
आलोक राह के, अधिकारी तुम, पहिचान न पाए, हम कैसे ?  
भारत माँ के भाग्य भालपर, 'तिलक' लगाकर चला गया ॥  
एक तेज ओढ ....॥३॥

यह अंधेर नगरी दुनिया है, तम का सारा राज, तम ही हैं।  
षड् रिपुओं से, जकड़े कहते, ऊंचे स्वर से, ज्ञानी हम ही हैं।  
कृपा चाहिए, परम पिता की, तब कोई, ज्ञानी को पहिचाने ॥  
कितने सरल, अहं रहित तुम, कि ठगे गये, चालाक ॥  
सरल हृदय, पहिचान ज्ञानी को, हो गए मूक आवाक ॥  
जितेंद्रिय 'बजरंग शिष्य' था मुक्त पवन, सौरभ फैलाकर चला गया ॥  
एक तेज ओढ ....॥४॥



मधुसूदनजी ने तकनीकी (Engineering) में एम. एस. तथा पी.एच.डी. की उपाधियाँ प्राप्त की हैं। भारतीय अमेरिकी शोधकर्ता के रूप में मशहूर हैं। हिन्दी के प्रखर पुरस्कर्ता हैं एवं हिन्दी, मराठी, गुजराती के अभ्यासी हैं। अनेक संस्थाओं से जुड़े हुए और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय हिंदी समिति (अमेरिका) के आजीवन सदस्य हैं। वर्तमान में अमेरिका की प्रतिष्ठित संस्था युनिवर्सिटी ऑफ मॅसाच्युसेट्स में निर्माण अभियांत्रिकी में प्रोफेसर हैं।

By Dr. Richard Grego

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan emphasizes the practical character of Hindu thinking. He notes that in all Hindu thought, "Philosophy is for life. It is to be lived. It is not enough to know the truth. One must live it....realize it, become one with it". Similarly, American thought and academic culture has always been focused on the application, rather than just the theory, of knowledge, and both students and scholars in America seek wisdom that speaks to the demands of daily life. It is no accident that the most genuinely American of modern philosophies is called "Pragmatism" and, in the words of its founder William James, addresses the "cash value" and concrete application of ideas.



## Challenges in Hindu Education for Non-Hindus: Radhakrishnan's Core Hindu Principles and American Academic Culture

**A**s a professor of comparative religious philosophy and cultural history, I have always been interested in how religious and philosophical ideas translate cross-culturally. Since my experience in this connection as a non-Hindu scholar in the United States has been confined almost exclusively to making Hindu ideas palatable and relevant to American students, I have had ample opportunity to reflect on the kinds of themes in the Hindu tradition that these students find agreeable, and why this is. What I have discovered over the years is that while Hinduism may appear, at first glance, to be an alien and unfamiliar legacy to American students -who are culturally steeped in the ideology, language, and rituals of a Judeo-Christian or secular-commercial western society -- Hinduism becomes not only more philosophically recognizable, but also more ideologically appealing to them as they come to understand the essential spirit that this tradition represents.

The explanation for this affinity may be that, despite initial-and perhaps superficial-- appearances to the contrary, the Hindu tradition actually embodies a canon of values and worldviews that

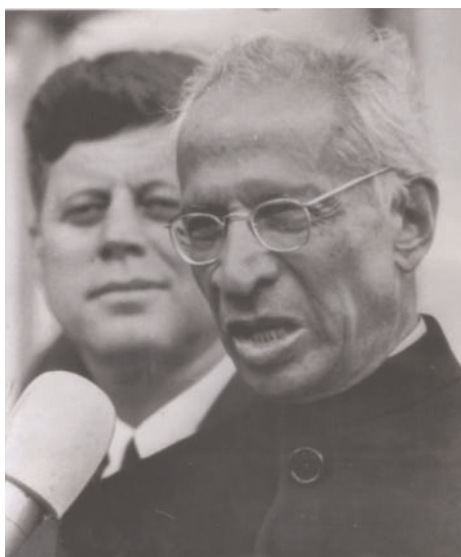
comport with many of the ideals that American academics and students have always considered foundational to their institutions and moral life. In the introduction to his classic anthology of Indian philosophies, the preeminent philosopher and statesman, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, noted several principles essential to what he called the "spirit of Hindu philosophy". These principles are also essential in many ways to the spirit of American intellectual and academic life, and they resonate deeply with American students learning about Hinduism.

Radhakrishnan, for instance, notes that a distinguishing feature of Hindu philosophy is its focus on spirituality-A focus that reflects the wider Indian culture from which it emerged, and that speaks directly to a similar pervasive cultural spirituality in the United States. Informed by a basic worldview that envisions humanity and the physical cosmos as expressions of a divine and transcendent destiny, Hindu traditions from Vedanta to Samkhya-Yoga reject the currently popular reductive scientific materialistic view of the universe as a meaningless physical mechanism and of human-beings as merely clever animals. Similarly, American intellectual



as its own religious, literary and philosophical traditions testify - is also thoroughly spiritual in this way, notwithstanding even the formative influence of contemporary science on the western mind. I have often found in fact, that many students are attracted to Hindu philosophy precisely because they see it as a clear alternative to the current materialistic and commercial American popular culture that they perceive as devoid of redemptive spiritual meaning or human dignity.

Along these same lines, Radhakrishnan also points out that Hindu philosophy is characterized by an appreciation for personal introspection and intuition as ways of understanding our deeply spiritual world, above and beyond the more superficial kind of instrumental logic and empirical analysis used by the sciences to comprehend a spiritually vacuous physical universe. Hindu thought, Radhakrishnan claims, is "dominated by concern with inner life and self-reflection rather than the external world of physical nature. Physical science, though well developed in Hindu culture, was never considered to be the primary road to ultimate truth. Truth is to be sought and found within [subjective experience]". In a similar vein, Ralph Waldo Emerson-founder of Transcendentalism and quintessential American Philosopher-insisted that deep wisdom looks inward to the soul rather than outward to the empirical world for the source of all truth. "Let us be silent" he says, echoing the Hindu Vedas that he so much admired, "that we may hear the whispers of the gods". And "Great men are those who see that the spiritual is stronger than any material force-that thoughts rule the world" . Radhakrishnan also emphasizes the practical character of Hindu thinking. He notes that in all Hindu thought, "Philosophy is for life. It is to be lived. It is not enough to know the truth. One must live it....realize it, become one with it". Similarly, American thought and academic culture has always been focused on the application, rather than just the theory, of knowledge, and both students and scholars in America seek wisdom that speaks to the demands of daily life. It is no accident that the most genuinely American of modern philosophies is called "Pragmatism" and, in the words of its founder William James, addresses the "cash value" and



concrete application of ideas. Its practical nature is one reason why, according Radhakrishnan, Hinduism is also perhaps the most ideologically, culturally, and spiritually diverse of the world's religious and philosophical traditions. Invoking the Rig Veda's claim that, "Truth is one but men call it by many names", he points out how "true religion comprehends all

religions" and that Hinduism has a unique capacity to embrace multiple worldviews through its diversity, variety, and holism. Similarly, American academic culture, although shaped in many ways by the homogenizing influence of a reductive science and a monotheistic worldview, has nonetheless also admired and sought the kind of spiritual diversity and openness that the Hindu tradition exemplifies. Trusting that --other formative influences notwithstanding-- Emerson is correct in asserting: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds" , American intellectuals have agreed with their preeminent poet Walt Whitman when he declares "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. I am large. I contain Multitudes" , and they have sought to incorporate a respect for diverse views into educational and civic life. Indeed, the latest Pew-Research studies indicate that although the majority of Americans (78%) remain Christian in religious affiliation, as many as 44% (almost half) of Americans also change religious affiliations several times during their lives, and this trend is increasing over time. This suggests that there is a growing desire by especially younger Americans to mix, match, experiment with, and incorporate new and disparate spiritual perspectives into their worldviews. Interestingly, the Pew study also found that among all religious groups in America, Hindus change affiliations the least (almost 0% , VS 44% in other faiths) -Perhaps suggesting that Hindus have found the kind of pluralism and tolerance in their worldview that other Americans must seek through ever-changing religious identities. Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose philosophy, poetry and

*(Continued on page 39)*



## Attacks on Hindu Temples in Pakistan a Worrying Trend

*With a population of around seven million, Hindus form the largest religious minority group in Pakistan, which, at 195 million, is the second largest Muslim nation in the world after Indonesia.*

**ISLAMABAD:** In the latest incident of its kind, a Hindu temple was attacked by fanatics in Pakistan, the temple was torched, the Murti of Lord Hanuman blackened with soot, and some religious books burnt. This Nov 21st attack on the Hindu temple in the Tando Mohammad Khan area in Sindh - and reported in the Dawn newspaper - is however, not a one-off incident in a country where such attacks are increasingly turning out to be the rule, rather than an exception.

With a population of around seven million, Hindus form the largest religious minority group in Pakistan, is the second largest Muslim nation in the world after Indonesia.

In a similar March 28th attack this year, a small Hindu temple was torched near Fateh Chowk in Hyderabad, Sindh, triggering widespread protests by the Hindu community.

Only a couple of weeks before that, a dharamshala, or a pilgrims' rest-house, was set ablaze and some statues of Hindu deities in an adjacent temple in Larkana were damaged to protest the alleged desecration of the Islamic holy text Quran.

The arson attacks on Hindu places of worship are seen as attempts to fan flames of communal violence. In Karachi, the Rama Peer temple has been the subject of property disputes involving commercial builders, BBC reported in December 2012. It is one of the many Hindu temples in the city that have in the recent years been the subject of such property disputes.

All these incidents have been reported in the media, in the highly regarded Dawn newspaper, as well as by BBC and others.

Even the Jinnah Institute, a think tank, has chronicled these incidents.

The arson attacks on Hindu temples and other incidents of religious intolerance have made the Hindu community in Pakistan nervous, according to media here.

With kidnappings and forced conversions of teenage Hindu girls, abduction of Hindu traders for ransom, and desecration of temples, many Hindus have been forced to migrate to India and elsewhere, Dawn reported in September this year.

"As a last resort, we have decided to migrate to India," a Dawn report in November quoted a Hindu man in Sindh as saying.

"We are completely insecure here. We are looted, but our voice is not heard by the people in the saddle, our temples are attacked in broad daylight, but no one takes action, our girls are kidnapped and forcibly converted only to hear more empty promises of justice," he said.

"Nothing happened in the last 65 years and we don't expect any improvement in future. Things will only become worse," he added.

"Minorities are still as vulnerable as they were one-and-a-half years ago and to add to their misery, the land mafia is actively engaged in illegally occupying the religious places of the minorities, and kidnappings of Hindu girls are still happening," said Chela Ram



Kewlani of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

The Hindus are the most vulnerable in Pakistani society, wrote vice president of the Pakistan Hindu Seva Chander Kolhi in an article titled "Forced conversions -- a peril for Hindus" in the Daily Times Friday.

"They are unable to educate their children and it is also difficult for them to have their children treated in government hospitals. In some localities, where girl children from the Hindu community are sent to school, they are abducted, raped or are forcefully converted at a minor age," Kolhi stated.

The Pakistan Hindu Council had proposed the establishment of an active committee at the federal level under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to prevent atrocities against the minorities.

While the Pakistani statute books still carry laws from the colonial period that prescribe punishment for the desecration of religious places and articles, their enforcement has come to depend on how far a

community is willing to go to make those laws work, a BBC report noted in December 2012.

The Pakistan Hindu Council said, after the Nov 21 attack on the Hindu temple in Tando Mohammad Khan, that around 1,400 Hindu religious sites across the country were in dire need of protection by the government.

Following this attack, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif approved the setting up of a national commission on minorities to promote religious tolerance and harmony in the country, in accordance with the June 19 Supreme Court judgment on rights of minority communities.

While one hopes that the attacks on Hindu temples and other instances of intolerance against the Hindu minorities in Pakistan cease, only time will tell how far those hopes would be fulfilled.

However, till that happens, the Hindus in Pakistan continue to live a life on the edge. ■

Source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Attacks-on-Hindu-temples-in-Pakistan-a-worrying-trend/articleshow/45317888.cms>.

## Challenges in Hindu Education for Non-Hindus:

### Radhikrishnan's Core Hindu Principles and American Academic Culture

(Continued from page 37) essays were deeply influenced by the Hindu tradition, once wrote that Hindu philosophy speaks to the American mind "as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions that exercise us". Emerson's sentiments speak, in turn, for the American cultural ethos that they have engendered. Contemporary American intellectual culture generally, and the academic world specifically, has always striven to realize many of the values and ideals that, as Radhakrishnan points out, the Hindu legacy exemplifies. Although they may be largely unaware of it, American students and scholars are attempting to build a community that manifests many of the principles that have been central to the spirit of Hinduism for countless ages. As repositories of this spirit, Hindu Temples and teachers are well-positioned to educate the American academic community and to serve as a resource for students and scholars who have long been seeking to realize the foundational principles that both cultures hold sacred. ■

RadhaKrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*. (Princeton: University Press) 1957

Radhakrishnan, xxiii

Radhakrishnan, xxiv

Emerson, R.W., *Progress of Culture*. Phi Beta Kappa Address, July 18, 1867

Radhakrishnan, xxiv

James, W. *The Meaning of Truth*. (New York: Prometheus) 1997 and many other places

Radhakrishnan, xxvii

Emerson, *Self-Reliance: Selected Essays*. (New York: Bantam) 2007, 150-170

Whitman, W. *Song of Myself: Modern American and British Poetry*. (New York: Harcourt-Brace) 1950, 19-21

Pew Research: *Religion and Public Life Project* (2007)

xi Emerson, *The Oversoul* (2007) 175-193

#### About the Author

Dr. Richard Grego is a professor of Philosophy and Cultural History at Florida State College-Jacksonville.



## 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 Yatra

I would like to be part of the mission to sustain and strengthen Hindu Dharma and traditions.  
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](http://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.