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# HINDU VISHWA

## Vishwa Dharma Digest

## Two Great Architects of the Modern Hindu Awakening



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Around 50 million devotees are expected to attend the Kumbh mela in Ujjain  
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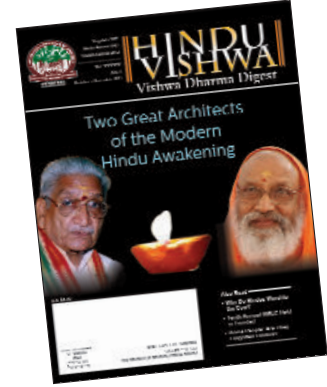
वासंसी जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।  
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ।।

श्रीमद् भगवद् गीता २-२२

vasansi jirnani yatha vihaya navani grhnati naro parani  
tatha sarirani vihaya jirna nyanyani samyati navani dehi

Shri Mad Bhagavad Gita 2-22

Just as a person gives up old worn out garments and accepts  
other new apparel, in the same way the embodied soul giving up old  
and worn out bodies verily accepts new bodies.



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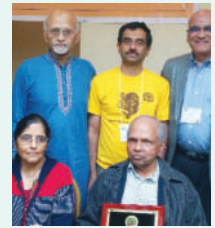


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Cover design & page layout by Akshar Vyavsthapan, Mumbai. E-mail: oakswanand@gmail.com

# Why Do Hindus Worship the Cow?



**W**hat lies at the root of Hindu view of cow being venerated? Hindus might be asked by their American peers to demystify this view, and may be at a loss to do so due to their own unfamiliarity with this issue. The following explanation is mainly for their benefit just in case this subject has not been properly discussed or exposed to them.

First, the COW: Why do Hindus call the cow mother ('GAU-MATA')? In all likelihood it is simply because of the following reasons.

(A) Hindus are predominantly from India and India was, and still remains, primarily an agriculture-based ('*krishi-pradhan*') country, with the prevalent practice of tilling the land with yokes ('*hal*') drawn by bullocks. The foundation of India's many thousands years old system (way before the advent of tractors) of economy and culture, therefore, perceived protection of the cow to be a vital part for the stability and well-being of the system and of the society.

(B) Hindus are, almost genetically, given to respect everything in Nature beneficial to mankind, calling the Earth and rivers mother ('*Dharati-Mata*', '*Ganga-Mata*'), because they hold the clues for making life possible and livable. In this vein, Hindus intrinsically regard forces and prime entities of Nature (the Sun, Water, Air, Fire...) as gods ('*Soorya-Devata*', '*Varun-Devata*', '*Pawan-Devata*', '*Agni-Devata*'), and even worship trees and so on. This is neither a reflection of superstitious mentality (as many Westerners are quick to ascribe), nor a polytheistic artifact in place of a monotheistic philosophy. These '*Devatas*' (literally, One Who Gives) are nothing but the symbolic personification of divine forces of Nature. The Vedic Mantras, the highest form of devotional poetry, were composed to venerate these forces millennia before the western civilization and orthodox religions came into being. Subsequently, the Upanishads submitted that the whole universe has but one 'Ultimate Reality' ('*Brahman*') to



whom all that exists is subservient and changes with time. The main takeaway from this universal hierarchy is that the cow is protected and venerated because it is a key entity for agriculture and the survival of man.

(C) Isn't it true that almost every newborn and growing baby, regardless of geographical location, country, faith, or economic strata, drinks cow-milk in addition to his or her own mother's milk? Indeed, this factor alone can qualify the cow to be accorded a prominent place in human life, closely comparable to one's mother. Such a predisposition is highly accentuated if one possesses a thoughtful, grateful, and sensitive and, for that matter, even a rational bend of mind.

There is much to provide an exposition of why Hindus venerate the cow, calling it 'Mother.' In fact, as evident from above, veneration for all living beings along with the environment is integral to Hindu Dharma. ■

## Two Great Architects of the Modern Hindu awakening



### SHRADDHANJALI श्रद्धांजली

We at Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America feel privileged to have had Swami Dayananda Saraswati Ji as our guiding force over the years. It was Swamiji who directed us in late 90's to hold Dharma Samsad in USA to assemble all Saints and Gurus of Western hemisphere; it was with Swamiji's blessings that we embarked upon Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) initiative in 2006, which has become a great success.

*By Ma. ASHOK SINGHAL,*

*September 28, 2015*

Brahmaleen Pujya Swami Dayanand Ji Saraswati had been closely connected with Vishva Hindu Parishad right from its inception in 1964 CE at Chinmaya Ashram, Powai, Mumbai and was also instrumental in the writing of its aims & objects as delivered by Sri Guruji Golwalkar, Swami Chinmayanandaji and K.M. Munshiji. He was then the most prominent Sannyasi of the Powai Ashram. For all its major activities that the VHP began undertaking after its Global Hindu Meet in 1966 (Prayag Kumbh), he was taking keen interest in it and gave guidance from time to time.

Spreading the message of Advait Vedanta was Pujya Swamiji's life's mission. In the entire span of his life his achievements cannot be expressed in words. The creation of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam - an institute for the traditional study of Advaita Vedanta and Sanskrit - at the foothills of the picturesque Nilgiri Mountains off Coimbatore, its chapters in Rishikesh (Himalayas), Pennsylvania (USA) and a large number of centers throughout the country, speak of the tremendous task of inculcating Vedantic ideals producing thousands of devotees, teachers, ascetics, monks, Sannyasis and Sannyasinis to take Vedanta to the masses!



In order to strengthen Hindu Society and Dharma and articulate and to promote the cause of Hindus in national and international fora, Swamiji felt the need to carry the Mantra of Togetherness to all the traditional Mathadhipathis, Dharmacharyas, Mahamandaleshwars, Adheenamkartars and leaders of other Sampradayas (heads of Hindu spirituo-religious organizations); bring them together under the umbrella of the HINDU DHARMA ACHARYA SABHA (f. 2003), and make them work together. He travelled across the country, personally met the heads of the various mathas, he convinced them of the importance of establishing a body that would be the official voice of Hindu consciousness. The Sabha now comprises of more than 130 Hindu religious leaders heading Mathas and Peethas in Bharat (institutions of Hindu religious learning and practice) that are at least 200 years old, with an unbroken lineage from their founding, and with a huge current following. It was one of the most difficult tasks to bring on one platform the leaders of various indigenous spirituo-religious schools each having a hoary history. But he accomplished this desirable but virtually unfeasible task working it out in the role of a Nepathya-Naayak - champion behind the scenes. The Sabha is the largest gathering of Dharma Acharyas of the country concerning all Hindu Sampradayas. In the first Acharya Sabha meet, important decisions were taken for resolving challenging problems facing the Hindu society. The Vishva Hindu Parishad has been a key participant in all its Conferences.

I had very great reverence for Swamiji. His love, affection and warmth for me cannot be expressed in words. In order to bless me on my 80th birthday in a special way, he wished to conduct a Vedic Anushthan (ceremonial celebration, Yajna) for me. This Anushthan, with his blessings, was conducted as per Vedic rites in Arsha Vidya Gurukulam temple premises at

Anaikatti by renowned Vedic scholars. In the closing ceremony of the Yajna, I was blessed with the Vrihat Kalash Snan. I have been lucky to have received his blessing all these years which I can never forget.

When in the month of June-2015 he was to leave for USA for his medical treatment, a day before he left for USA, Swami Paramatmanandji and I decided to take guidance on a large number of problems facing the country and get some Margdarshan for our VHP organization also. For practically one hour in the morning he listened to the questions and issues one by one using his ear-phone and gave straight answers to all the queries. Even with his failing health, he reminded us that it was 11 O'Clock and that he had to leave to take his classes. I told him that I would meet him in Pennsylvania during my US tour in August-September, 2015.

I reached USA on 24 th of August after my UK and Holland tours, and all of a sudden we heard the news that Swamiji's condition was deteriorating and becoming more and more serious. He always wanted that in his last journey he should be taken to Rishikesh on the holy banks of Maa Ganga in the foothills of the Himalayas and was thus brought there from USA on 25th of August by an air ambulance. We can imagine the agony that he would have put up with during this long air ambulance journey in this condition. During my US tours till 15th of September, I was in live-touch with Swami Paramatmanandaji about Swamiji's health. Swamiji had to undergo dialysis every day at the Himalayan Institute Hospital near Jolly Grant Airport, Dehradun! It was a life saving device. Swamiji insisted that he should be given Jivit Mahasamadhi. Thousands of his devotees and well-wishers could not accept this decision as to them it was most untenable, but Swamiji would not listen. In my telephonic talk with Swamiji, I very emphatically insisted that

the country needed him and he must change his decision. The thousands of followers who had gathered at Rishikesh heaved a sigh of relief when Swamiji said that he would postpone the decision for a short term. After this he took dialysis. He returned to the Ashram.

Before his last journey, Swamiji must have had a feeling to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modiji, realizing this within himself paid a visit to Swamiji at the Rishikesh Ashram on September 11. During the long talk with the Prime Minister, I am told, Swamiji advised him to address the miseries of the poor man: the last man in society.

Swamiji was again admitted to the Hospital in a serious condition. From my foreign tour I landed in Delhi in the afternoon on 16th September. By the time I reached our Karyalay, we got the news that Swamiji's condition had further deteriorated. The next morning I flew to the Jolly Grant Airport, Dehradun. By that time his condition had improved. Swami

Paramatmanandji conveyed to Swamiji in the ICU through earphone that Ashokji had come and wanted to speak to him. When I talked to him Swamiji was full with divine emotion. He took hold of my hand for full five minutes I was standing before him and tears welled up in his eyes. When I told him that I was departing, Swamiji raised both his hands giving his departing blessings.

Seva (service) was Swamiji's message to all his devotees and the youths of our country. The hundreds of Seva activities under the banner of AIM for Seva (All India Movement for Seva) was his great mission for the uplift of the last man (Antyodaya) that was uppermost in his mind. We have to accomplish the dreams of Swamiji to reach out to the unreachable brethren in our country, to serve them, so that they are empowered enough to independently uplift themselves and their communities. This is Pujya Swamiji's message to all of us to materialize. ■

## Shraddhanjali to Ma. Ashok Singhal

It's with a very heavy heart we write this that two great architects of the modern Hindu awakening left us in as many months for their heavenly abode, which is hardly enough time to recover from such successive and irreparable loss of great personalities. In fact Ma. Ashok ji wrote the above Shraddhanjali for Swami ji, being totally unaware of the limited time span he had.

"Ashok" means 'without sorrow' or 'not causing sorrow' and "Singhal" means "Lion". This way the former Maharaja of Travancore His Majesty Late Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma in God's own Country, Kerala, affectionately interpreted Ashokji's name and eulogized him for being "Ashok" inside and a

"Lion" outside.

The rallying calls of Shri Ashokji Singhal during the Sri Ram Janma Bhumi Movement always thrilled and exalted the Ram devotees. We may call him a Sannyasin, Cyclonic Monk in white wear, or a warrior, but he identified himself as a Pracharak of Rashtriya





Swayamsevak Sangh. He was born on Ashwin Krishna Panchami (September 27, 1926) in the home of his maternal grandfather in Agra. He was the fourth sibling amongst his seven brothers and a sister.

The Singhal family was a native of village Bijouli in Aligarh District, Uttar Pradesh. His father Sri Mahavir Singh Singhal held a high rank in the administrative services. The family often hosted visitors from the class of people endowed with character, spirit of service and sacrifice and dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, who kept themselves away from positions of pelf and power, that is, monks, Yogis and religio-spiritual scholars. So, from his very childhood Ashokji developed a love for Hindu Dharma, that is, the *Rishi-Krishi Kulaachaar* (Culture). While studying at Prayag (Allahabad), Rajju Bhaiyya made him a Swayamsevak in 1942. Rajju Bhaiyya rendered and elucidated the Sangh Praarthana (Prayer) to Ashokji's mother Smt. Vidyawati. Impressed by it she allowed Ashokji to join the Sangh Shakha.

At the time of the partition of the country in 1947, the Congress leaders were celebrating the gaining of power, but the hearts of the patriots were going up in flames at the partition and they were worried as to what would be the future of the country in the hands of such power-greedy leaders. Ashokji was one of those nationalists. In order to help change such air and go in for national renaissance and reconstruction on time-tested indigenous terms, he offered his life to the vision and mission of Sangh. He had an interest in classical music since childhood and also had trained under a Guru. He worked out rhythms, melodies and modulations for many patriotic songs of Sangh. He earned an engineering degree in metallurgy from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Sangh was banned in 1948 and he courted arrest under the Satyagrah movement and suffered incarceration. After coming out of the jail, he sat for his final examinations. In 1950, renouncing the temptations of his family riches and splendors,

he became a *Pracharak* that combines the life of a monk and a social engineer in one as it calls for giving up a thousand things in life, leading an itinerant life, adopting a life of voluntary poverty, celibacy, obedience/commitment/dedication to the *Ishwariya Kaarya* (God's Work), that is, persistent work for the cause of uncompromising cultural nationalism, Hindu resuscitation, rejuvenation, renaissance and consolidation of the *mrityunjayi* (enduring/immortal) Hindu nation and help take it to the highest pinnacle of national glory.

In the capacity of a *Pracharak*, initially he served regions such as Gorakhpur bordering Nepal, Prayag, Saharanpur and mainly Kanpur. He was very close to Sarasanghachalak Sri Guruji. In Kanpur, he came in contact with the eminent scholar of the Vedas Shri Ramchandra Tiwari. Ashokji considered these two outstanding personages as having profoundly molded his life. In 1975 during the fight against the Emergency, ban on Sangh and autocracy of Indira Gandhi, he mobilized people on a large scale. After the Emergency, he became the *Prant Pracharak* of Delhi and Haryana.

In 1981, a mammoth Hindu conference under the banner of "Virat Hindu Samaj" led by Dr. Karan Singh was held at the Boat Club, New Delhi, but its *Nepathya Naayaks* (backstage heroes) were Sri Ashokji and the Sangh. In July 1982, he was entrusted with the responsibility of Joint General Secretary of Vishva Hindu Parishad. As a result of the Ekatmata RathYatra, Sri Ram-Jaanaki RathYatra, Sanskriti Raksha Nidhi and Sri Ram Janma Bhumi Liberation Movement, there was a mass awakening of Hindus not only in Bharat but also abroad and the name of Vishva Hindu Parishad rang everywhere. After this, the works of the Parishad such as Cow Protection, Aviral Ganga - Nirmal Ganga, Dharma Prasar, Seva, Sanskrit, Ekal Vidyalay, etc., gained momentum. Above all was the Sri Ram Janma Bhumi Liberation Movement. It proved to be a turning point for the social and political history of the country

which took a direction on indigenous lines. In the VHP, Ashokji held posts of Joint General Secretary (1982-1986), Secretary General (1986-1995), Working President (1996-June 2005) and President (2005-December 2011). After this, he played the role of Patron, continued with his itinerant life in Bharat and abroad, and oriented Karyakartas as a friend, philosopher, and guide and had rendezvous with *Sant-Mahatmas* and like-minded leading figures from all walks of life.

Thousands of *Sant-Mahatmas* joined the VHP's movements due to Ashokji's humility, mass mobilization abilities and integrity and began speaking their hearts and minds about the problems and challenges facing the society and country. During this period, several times he was banned by the U.P. state government from entering Ayodhya, but every time he reached Ayodhya outwitting and getting around their fortifications. Ashokji ardently stood for reclamation of our holistic, altruistic and syncretic *Rishi-Krishi* heritage and cultural nationalism.

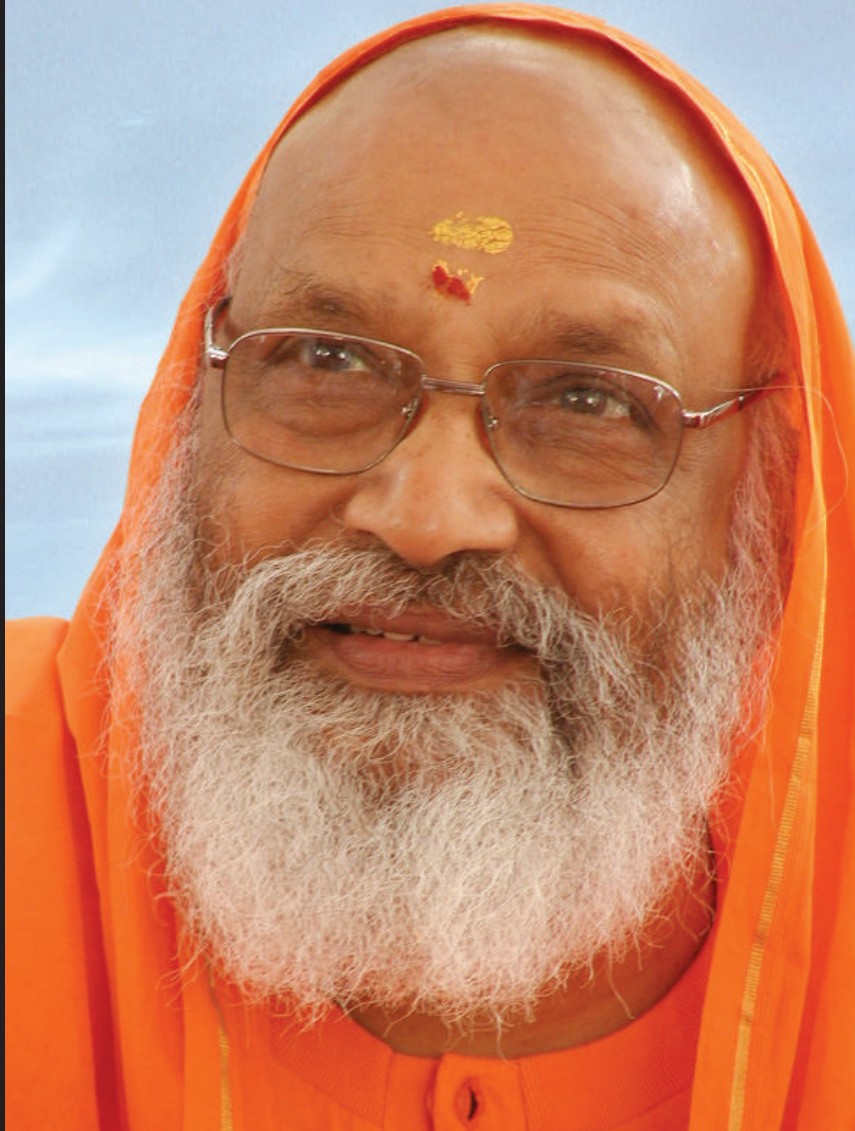
Ashokji undertook organizational trips to several countries including Trinidad & Tobago, USA, UK, The Netherlands, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa, Kenya, etc. Notwithstanding his uncooperative physical health at 89, he, in 2015 August-September, undertook a hectic and arduous month-long trip to the UK, Holland and USA. He was suffering from pulmonary infections for a long time and on November 17, 2015 it took its toll and he left his overworked and disobliging body at the ripe age of ninety at the Medanta Medicity Hospital at Gurgaon near New Delhi. Even during the terminal days, he was deeply engrossed (before 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 2015) in the comprehensive drafting of some solid plans and projects for the cause of formal promotion of Vedic Sciences at the academic level. He always talked of the cause of Sri Ram Janma Bhumi and organizational strength of Vishva Hindu Parishad and consequent consolidation and empowerment of Hindu society based on the Mantra of "*Sanghe Shakti Kali-yuge*". His mind

was quite alert, vigilant and proactive even in the hospital. Acute physical weakness notwithstanding, he called Adhikaris and Karyakartas to have interactions with them! On 10<sup>th</sup> of November, in the Medanta ICU, he exchanged views with Parampujya Sarasanghachalak of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Mananiya Mohan Rao Bhagwat. On 12<sup>th</sup> of November, the hospital declared him fit and he went to his nephew Sri Ravi Singhal's place at New Delhi. The 13<sup>th</sup> November saw him happy in the midst of family members. There in the evening for an hour he talked with the Hon'ble Government of Bharat Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD) Shrimati Smriti Irani whom he had called for. That evening itself at 09.00 P.M. he had a teleconference with Baba Ramdevji. During the teleconference itself, his voice began warping and then he could not speak. He was re-admitted to Medanta at 02.30 A.M. the same night. On November 14, 15, 16, the team of doctors tried their best, but the body was not responsive to the treatment, and on November 17, 2015 at 02.24, he found peace and left the mortal coil to take his place at the Lotus Feet of his Ishtadev.

We can say that he only lounged for 89 years in the gross plane and then his astral body flew to his *Ishtadev*. Once Ashokji quoted Param Pujaniya Sri Guruji that it is only the pyre that is the place of rest.

The best tribute to him would be to reconstruct the grand temple at Sri Ram Janma Bhumi as per the aspirations of Hindus of the entire world who form 1/6th of the 7 billion global population as it would represent national reconstruction, dignity, self-esteem and a catalyst of cultural nationalism and cultural independence. ■

# Swami Dayananda: The Patriot Saint



*By S Gurumurthy*

**S** Swami Dayananda Saraswati - a master exponent of the inclusive Hindu philosophy who declared there was not 'ONE GOD,' but 'ONLY GOD,' a teacher of Vedanta who created hundreds of teachers to continue the ancient Indian tradition, a great organizer who founded the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha as the representative body

of unorganized Hindu religious traditions, a philosopher who harmonized and validated, from the Hindu perspective of Theo-diversity, all forms of worship from paganism to monism, an intellectual who re-articulated and established that religious conversion, regarded as the right of evangelist religions, is itself violence, and finally a



patriot saint who, like Maharishi Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, saw, in the ancient nation of India, the very manifestation of all that he had learnt and taught - is no more. Indeed he was the latest reincarnation in the tradition of nationalist saints of India.

Endowed with unparalleled intellectual skills and unlimited knowledge base, Dayananda first made it a mission of his life to teach and did take Vedanta to a vast elite audience in India and outside, which would otherwise have been half-westernized in world view and as much Christianized culturally. He aligned Vedanta to India as a national entity and cultural phenomenon and to Indians as the chosen people entrusted with the sacred duty to live, sustain and protect it not only for them but also for the good of the world. In his exposition, Vedanta was not just a philosophy but it found expression in the culture and life of India founded on the idea of dharma - in its arts and music, literature and sculpture, society and family, and in the Indian traditional respect for elders, teachers and women and ultimately in the reverence for this nation itself as Sacred and in the love of the entire creation, both animate and inanimate. Starting off as student and disciple of the redoubtable Swami Chinmayananda, the originator of the contemporary school of exposition of Vedanta, Dayananda Saraswati rapidly grew up as an accomplished scholar and unparalleled

teacher.

After having worked for decades and succeeded in his mission to teach and create teachers of Vedanta, he turned his attention to some critical issues of contemporary importance which would have long-term and adverse implications for the very purpose and soul of this ancient nation. With this new turn, in the late 1990s a paradigm shift took place in his entire course of thought and action and this led to his founding of the Dharma Rakshana Samiti in Chennai in 1999. It was in that unique event, a confluence of some highly regarded saints, spiritualists, and intellectuals, that Swami Dayananda made one of his most memorable speeches where he declared that the very concept of religious conversion was itself violence - a spiritual, mental and cultural violence. This redefined the very notion of conversion which till then had some acceptability among non-Gandhian secularists as a right of religions - which in effect meant only the proselytizing religions - to convert others to their faith. Gandhiji's contempt for religious conversion is too well-known for the pseudo-secularists to appropriate Mahatma Gandhi to support conversion as integral secularism. This is amongst the greatest contributions of Swami Dayananda to global inter-religious discourse. The redefinition of religious conversion as violence robbed the concept of conversion of benignity and exposed its malignant character.

In 1999 when the then Pope visited India, Swami Dayananda constituted and led a group of multi-religious scholars and intellectuals and welcomed him, but asked him to declare that he was happy to visit a nation which has respected all faiths and that he also respected all faiths. But the Pope preferred not to accept Swami Dayananda's suggestion. However, with his unmatched intellectual prowess Swami Dayananda took the battle against conversion in the world fora. He proposed self-discipline among faiths in the Millennium summit of the United Nations in the year 2000, calling upon religions to respect each other, not to abuse one another and not to convert the faithful of other religions by force or by inducement to one's fold.

There was consensus on his view but finally the proselytizing faiths did not agree and the Millennium harmony proposal therefore did not succeed. But it took just eight more years for Swami Dayananda to convince the world religious leaders of the need for trans-religious self-regulation.

In the human rights declaration of world religious leaders in Amsterdam on December 10, 2008 on the 60th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Declaration, all world religious leaders, including those of the proselytizing faiths, accepted the Dayananda approach - namely that religions should mutually respect and accept each other, that they should not abuse or trivialize one another's faiths or symbols, that they should recognize the right of a person to be in the religion of his birth, and that there should be no conversion by force or by inducement - and signed the historic declaration. It is the substance of the Amsterdam declaration which Prime Minister Narendra Modi adopted as the approach of his government to different faiths when he addressed the Christian religious meet in Delhi to celebrate the canonization of saints from Kerala.

In this period, from 1999 to 2008, Swami Dayananda undertook some far-reaching initiatives,

which included the constitution of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha - one of his greatest achievements and equally a great contribution to the Indian civilization. The Acharya Sabha has given the diverse and unorganized Hindu religions, which had long suffered disadvantage relative to the organized and proselytizing faiths, a platform to come together as Dharma religions and to participate in the global discourse. Till then, any secularist masquerading as a religious person would sign on the dotted line on behalf of Hinduism in the global fora.

His next big move was to bring together elders of all indigenous faiths - whether from South America or North America, Africa or Europe - at Delhi. Swami Dayananda declared that all faiths are sacred and valid and no faith can and should be allowed to claim to be superior to another faiths. He articulated religious diversity, which is the strongest point of Hinduism, in the most acceptable, rational and logical manner and challenged and debunked the claim that some faiths are only true faiths and others false faiths, which, he argued, is the cause for the widespread hate and violence today.

The great successes of this great sanyasi, molded in the ancient traditions of India, is not, however, as well-known as he himself was. That also demonstrated the high point of his personality - humility. Maharishi Aurobindo said that the greatest achievements have been least noisy. This aptly applied to Swami Dayananda's work and life. In his demise, the Hindu philosophy has lost its greatest exponent of recent times, Hindu religion one of its staunchest defenders, and the nation a great patriot saint. ■

## About the Author



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# Remembering Mananiya Ashok Singhalji

A *Yug* has ended in the Hindu movement.

- Mahesh Mehta

Mananeeya Ashokji was a visionary. He came out with a unique approach for the very difficult task of uniting Hindus and it worked. Under his leadership VHP had astronomical growth and became a world renowned organization. Leaders like Ashokji take birth very rarely on this earth and the Hindu Society is fortunate to have him as a leader in critical times.

- Jyotish Parekh

One of the purest and most devoted sons of Ma Bharti, a Rishi, has moved on. He was to us like a father, *Pitamah*, who generously showered his blessings and guidance. He was a friend and a companion in the journey of VHP of America since the mid 80's. We, in the USA, are fortunate to have been in his company earlier this year. Those moments, precious and treasured, are enshrined in our consciousness.

- Abhaya Asthana

Many of us will agree that our lives were impacted to a great extent and changed for the better by Ma. Ashok Singhal Ji. I was fortunate to have come in contact with him in the early eighties and then had the providence to be with him a number of times, having close discussions and observing his deep commitment to the Hindu Dharma and Hindu Rashtra. My most memorable time was the MahaKumbh in 2000, where some of us stayed at his home in Prayag. I dare say that no leader other than Guruji was held in such a high esteem by all the saints and swamis.

- Gaurang Vaishnav

When I saw Anjaliben's message about Ashokji's *dehant*, I was reading in Srimad Bhagwat the glories of Manu and Shatarupa *Vansh*: King Rishabh, King Bharat and how they established Bharat-Varsha. Ma. Ashokji represented the true lineage of Manu and Shatarupa and was the true son of Bharat *Bhoomi*. He will always remain with us. *Koti pranam* to the *Rishi* and our *marg-darshak*.

- Sanjay Mehta

We lost our father and mentor.

- Vimal Sodhani

Truly a saint passed away. It is a great loss to all Hindus. He touched all of us and our families deeply. He gave us Marg- Darshana how to live a life by sacrificing everything he had and dedicated his life for Hindu cause and betterment of all Hindus. He truly showed us a path for- how to preserve, promote and propagate Hindu values. We will miss him sorely but we must continue to fulfill his legacy and dream to build the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Hari Om.

- Girish Gandhi

Ma. Ashok ji was a great role model of Tyag and Tapsaya. A true Karmayogi who woke up daily with recitation of Bhagvad Gita. He was indeed father and mentor for Hindus. His courage, determination, vision and leadership qualities will remain unparalleled. We feel very privileged to have been so close to him.

- Umesh Shukla

He was true Marg-darshak. We have lost a great *Vibhuti*. A true tribute would be the



construction of a *Bhavya* Ram Mandir.

- Sneha and Vasav Mehta

Many of us had this rare opportunity to be with him a few months back. Inspirations and his legacy will remain with us forever to carry on the work. May his *Atman* attain *moksha*.

- Shyam Tiwari

I will carry the inspirations I got from Ma. Ashok Singhalji's life work with me till end. May Ashokji continue to bless us all.

- Ajay shah

It is sad to lose our great Hindu Saint Pujya Shree. On behalf of CT Chapter we offer our prayer for his soul to rest in peace. A few of us were fortunate to meet him and listen to his so-called last message to VHPA *Karyakartas*.

- Hasit Parikh

We were fortunate to meet him recently. He specially came to see us all the way to USA in spite of his ill health. We love him very much.

- Ila Sukhadia, Parveen Sharma

We should document and preserve his legacy for future generations for inspirations.

- Renu Gupta and Sandip Shah

The Hindu Samrath has taken his heavenly journey. Seeds of vibrant Hindu Samaj which are planted by him will grow into even a bigger tree in all times to come. We are very thankful to God for sending him to touch our heart.

- Hitesh Joshi

Oh, so sorry to hear this! He was an amazingly great man

- Atul Thakur

Great loss, may his *Atman* attain *sadgati*.

- Ela Aneja

He visited us last month, Our Shraddanjali and *pranam* to the great leader.

- Kusum Khurana

May his *Atman* attain *sadgati*, We pray.

- Parag More

Shraddanjali and *pranam* to our mentor and patron.

- Brahm Sharma

Prayer and hope all his works continue.

- Arjun Joshi

Ma. Ashok ji's life shows his unconditional love for Bharat Desh and Hindu Dharma. He coined the slogan गर्व से कहो हम हिंदू हैं!.. His modesty and humility coupled with विचार और विवेक sets high standard for all leaders to follow.

- Sheela Kene

His inspiration is in our DNA!

- Prakash Waghmare

Hindus have lost their great leader plus a great man. After attaining Moksha the vacuum which has been created is hard to fill.

- Sanjay Jhingan

जो करते डरते नहीं, करें न देर सवेर। अशोक सिंघल जी बने, हिंदुत्व के शेर।।  
हिंदुत्व के शेर, बिना गरजे जो बरसे। ऐसे बादल बने, कृषक हिय जिनको तरसे।।  
कर्म सभी कर रहे, धर्म की सुधि न सबको। सिंघल एक 'मशाल', नमन बिंदल का उनको।।

- हरि बिंदल







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# Tenth Annual HMEC Held in Trinidad



**T**he tenth Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) was held at Port of Spain, Trinidad, at the Radisson Hotel from October 2 to 4, 2015. This was the first time ever in the Caribbean and it proved to be a tremendous success. The conference sessions were well received by both foreign and local (Caribbean) delegates. One of the highlights of the conference was a Gala Dinner and Cultural Evening held at the Divali Nagar in central Trinidad. This program showcased ancestral Indian dance, folk songs, music still practiced by today's youth - sixth generation born Hindu Trinidadians. Foreign delegates also opted for local tours of both Trinidad and Tobago.

There were over 25 Grand Hosts and Co-Hosts of the conference mainly from USA, Canada, and Trinidad & Tobago. Some 200 adult and youth delegates drawn from over 80 organizations and 6 countries

participated in the conference. The conference was organized through the efforts of the conveners, Vipul Patel and Deeroop Teemal, committees from USA, Canada, and the host committee in Trinidad & Tobago. The local host organizing committee included lead inputs from Pandita Indrani Rampersad and Pandit Amar Seepersad and drew from many large and small mandirs from across Trinidad & Tobago.

The theme of the conference was: Strengthening the Hindu Family. HMEC 2015 provided a platform for stakeholders like mandirs, other Hindu organizations, pandits, gurus, teachers, sants, sanyasis, scholars, activists, and practitioners and non-practitioners to celebrate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the state of Dharma in North America and the Caribbean and for coming up with strategies and action plans.

In the inaugural session on Friday, October 2, Swami

Dayananda Saraswati Ji's video message from the past was played. His inspiration was the prime motivator for HMEC and for stressing the importance of all Hindu temples working together. A moment of silence was observed in his memory. In his welcome remarks, Shri Sat Maharaj of Trinidad summarized the history of migration of Hindus from India to the Caribbean island starting in 1838. Vallabha Tantry of MN Hindu Temple stressed the importance of family's role in educating and exposing children to our Dharma and in explaining rituals. Fred Stella of Michigan cited and decoded Pew Research's recent reports on the challenges that Abrahamic and Dharmic faith traditions are facing to retain their next generation in their fold. Dr. Vindya Vasini Persaud of Guyana spoke on the Hindu Women's role and contribution to the family and society. Pt. Roopnauth Sharma of Ram Mandir Canada spoke about the science behind a successful marriage. In his inaugural address, Swami Pratyagbodhananda of AVG spoke on 'Strengthening the Hindu Family.' The session ended with closing remarks by Gauri Shankar Gupta, High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago. Since its inception, HMEC has bred many worthwhile projects and initiatives. A summary was presented to share progress with the audience. Among them are: HMPC (Hindu Mandir Priest Conference), CHY (Coalition of Hindu Youth), Publication of Sanskar books, Hindu SevaDiwas: For a number of

years, Blood donation and Bone Marrow Drives have been conducted through the mandirs which is led by Dr. Rahul Jindal of DC, HAVAN (Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network), Hindu Chaplaincy program, Sanatana Dharma Scholarship for youth. A number of parallel sessions were held to cover large number of important and relevant topics. The moderators and the presenters were from the Caribbean islands, US, Canada, and India. The titles included:

1. Sustaining the family structure (in the foreign lands)
2. Role of Hindu institutions in strengthening Hindu families
3. Dharmic Education (and resisting external pressures and distractions)
4. Institution of Marriage: Foundation of Hindu Family
5. Role of Priest in strengthening Hindu families
6. Leveraging Knowledge through Technology and social media
7. Servicing the Hindu Devotees' needs - diverse group and unique needs for each

Additionally, there were three sessions for the Youth, designed and conducted by the youth. The topics included were: Planning and Ready for Marriage, Understanding the Family Model and Parenting, Progressive Awakening of Latent Hindu Faith, South Asian Syndrome, Dharma & Mental Health, Living as a Hindu and Identity crisis, What it means to be a Hindu, and (religious) Conversion.





**The Tenth HMEC deliberated on the following five resolutions:**

1. HMEC with Hindu organizations' support in North America and the Caribbean will set up a task force comprising of Hindu educators and specialists such as psychiatrists to assist the leadership in Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, and nearby smaller islands.
2. HMEC approves the formation of a group of legal practitioners including lawyers and mediators from Canada, USA, and the Caribbean to assist Mandirs and Hindu organizations in these countries.
3. HMEC appeals to the governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to give Hindu Temples and other Hindu religious institutions the same privileges that are accorded to Churches and Mosques.
4. It is hereby resolved by HMEC that every Mandir in NA and Caribbean should have a Teacher (Acharya) just like they have a priest. The teacher should be able to provide education and also answer questions related to puja, rituals and Hindu Dharma

in general.

5. It is hereby resolved by HMEC that Mandirs should come together and conduct a collaborative seva project in India. Mandir representatives from Atlanta, GA and Indianapolis, IN announced the hosting of HMEC 2016 and HMEC 2017 in their respective areas. The concluding thoughts were delivered by Swami Parmeshwarananda of Guyana.

***HMEC***

*The vision of HMEC is to be the network of Hindu Organizations for effective leadership generation to generation in North America. Representatives from Hindu temples meet to deliberate and solve issues collectively. This conference provides a great opportunity to community leaders to learn from each other and ultimately grow as one community. The 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. For more information on VHPA, please write to [office@vhp-america.org](mailto:office@vhp-america.org) or visit [www.vhp-america.org](http://www.vhp-america.org)*



***Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference - An Initiative of VHP of America***



# Narain Kataria

## An Iconic Hindu Activist

*By Prakash Waghmare*

**T**he 'Hindu Lion' that roared relentlessly for more than 30 years in the interest of his community, passed away quietly in his sleep, sometime on 2nd November night. In all his approaches to tackle various issues, Narain ji was 'Shri Balasaheb Thakare of USA' - fearless, passionate, and determined to uphold the dignity of 'Hindus and Hindutva'. Narain ji was a staunch nationalist, a superb community organizer and an incomparable political activist for

Hindu-diaspora in USA for decades. When it came to Hindu aspirations, related worthy socio-political causes or injustice meted out to Hindus, he was unapologetically partisan in his 'politicking.' If I can recall, I met him for the first time in 1984 during the '10th International Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America Conference' at Madison Square Garden, in NYC, NY. From the very beginning, I was impressed by his boldness and courage with which he expressed his inner thoughts in conversations. I really got to know him well, soon thereafter, when we, as the part of

Indian community converged on Washington D.C., to pressurize the U.S. Congress to deny state-of-the-art AWAC surveillance planes to Pakistan. The friendship that started then got strengthened over the years as we went through countless events, rallies, protests, and issue-centric conferences together.

Narain ji was a victim of a horrific historic trauma called the Partition of India. As a teenager in Sindh, what he saw and experienced during the Partition was what shaped him for the future. He was born on February 15, 1930 in Sukkur, Sindh, which became Pakistan after the partition. His parents died when he was quite young and so, as the eldest son, he not only had to look after his family of 3 siblings but also ensure their safe passage to India. After settling down in Ulhasnagar near Mumbai, he once again started pursuing his passion for education, earning a Master's Degree in History while simultaneously working day and night, to support his family. In May 1956, he married Bhagwanti ji and they had two daughters, Meena and Rajni. After a stint at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Mumbai, Narain ji came to USA in the early 1970s and started working as a Legal Assistant for the law firm Cahill Gordon until he retired in 1998.

From the beginning, Narain ji, was troubled by Hindus' callous indifference towards preserving and propagating their culture & religion. He strongly felt that vested interests of some of the minority sections of society were bent upon marginalizing Hindu society and the nation's character with the help of leftist media. He used his proficiency in writing to educate the masses about this impending danger. He was not only a prolific writer but also had the ability to rouse the readers through his razor-sharp, opinionated prose. Narain ji probably had the most exhaustive listing of e-mails through which he reached out to tens of thousands of his supporters and admirers on weekly basis. He invested every single working moment of his life to awaken Hindus. He had admirers, not just in USA, but also in other countries. The man who was so 'vocal' in his writings was surprisingly shy or at loss for words when it came to public-speaking and tried to avoid it as much as possible. Nevertheless, he gave numerous interviews on TV and radio and arranged record number of protests and rallies with his inseparable dear friend, Arish ji Sahani. I, myself, have participated in 12-15 of them. He also founded Hindu American Intellectual Forum to take his mission to the elites of the society. To bring the entire Hindu-diaspora on a single Hindu-platform, irrespective of its minute

sub-divisions, he successfully started organizing *Hindu Sangathan Din* (Hindu Solidarity Day), 20 years ago. Now, it is one of the most eagerly-awaited events in New York. Once during a Mumbai trip, he wanted to meet Shri Balasaheb Thakare whom he idolized and asked me to arrange it. As a Maharashtrian, I knew some people who were very close to Balasaheb and so I obliged.

Always sharply dressed in suite and tie, Narain ji was a people person with his trademark broad smile and over-spilling enthusiasm to attend every event that brought the Indian community together. On the lighter side, with his favorite-Uncle persona, also came a child-like mischievousness. Though he was very devoted to his family, he invariably moved everywhere without them. Once on a rare occasion, when I met his wife for the first time, I said to him, "Now, at last, I know that you are married." With his usual hearty laugh, and without missing a beat he responded, "What makes you think that I am really married to her?" Narain ji was very passionate about music, especially old nostalgic Bollywood melodies, and could play the banjo like a pro. His exuberance, energy and uprightness made him almost ageless. Moreover he had that rare ability to make anyone feel that he was their age. The Queens Borough president once proclaimed a 'Narain Kataria Day' in Queens County, NY in his honor to acknowledge his contributions to the society. Once, Narain ji confided in me that many a times he had been threatened of bodily harm by his detractors but he simply couldn't care less. The happiest day in his life was when BJP got a majority in the Indian Parliament in 2014 and Shri Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India. Sadly, it was also the time when his wife of more than half a century passed away in September of that year. In spite of this loss of a life-time, Narain ji, without taking refuge in his personal grief, worked hard organizing support-rallies in New York for PM Modi when he visited USA in 2014 and in 2015.

Narain ji was larger-than-life and touched millions of lives, inspiring countless amongst them not just on East-coast or in USA but in several other countries. So many superlatives have been tagged on him from all over the world after his departure. Make no mistake—each one of them is true and defines him. He was one of a kind '*Karmayogi*' who served Bharat and Hindus while residing thousands of miles away in a modest one-bedroom apartment with his family. ■

# THE NEW HINDU

**On the basis of Hindu thoughts we can give the answers  
to all challenges in Information Technology era**

**By Sushri Ananda**

**T**he status that now matters is not whether you are awake or asleep, but whether you are: online or offline.

## Greatest Dilemma

The most fundamental debate for our youth is the choice between Android, iOS or Windows.

At the dawn of the 1st January 2000, in many parts of the world, celebrations were held to herald the coming of the third millennium. Everyone celebrated. The Youth celebrated it more joyfully and sincerely in their earnest desire to relate themselves to the future and hope that a great future lies ahead.

It is only natural that the next generation looks towards future. But then the future is rooted in the past and is shaped in the present. Direction and flow of life in past, action in the present, and vision of the future shape the mind of any civilization.

**I would like to divide the period of human history in 3 parts:**

- 1** Pre Modern - Agricultural revolution
- 2** Modern - Industrial revolution
- 3** Post Modern - Info Tech Revolution

## Who is The New Hindu?

We are living in this Post Modern era. The age of information technology, the digital world. Where all types of knowledge is on the tips of our fingers, there is an explosion of knowledge & information, with technical gadgets, computers and all types of devices. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his recent visit to the United States, whilst addressing an audience in New York, said that many of us have met maybe not in New Delhi or New York but on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These are the new neighborhoods of our new world. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third most populous one and the most connected. Google today has made teachers less awe-inspiring and grandparents more idle. Twitter has turned everyone into a reporter. The traffic lights that need to work the



best are on CISCO routers. From computing to communication, entertainment to education, from printing documents to printing products, and, now to internet of things, it's been a long journey in a

short time. So there is a dramatic effect in human psychology and thinking. We are under the influence of great change and transformation.

## Challenges of Post Modern age:

In this Post Modern Era, blended with positivity & negativity. Family life is broken, we are faced with Pollution and Eco changes, danger through terrorism with atomic energy. In this most challenging period in human history Only Sanatan Hindu Dharma can give the solutions to these Post Modern challenges with the face of our New Hindu. So it is the duty of every present Hindu civilization to remove the negativity and go toward positivity.

So the New Hindu, Our generation of Hindus living in this Post Modern age shoulder a great responsibility to continue passing the torch to the next generation for the Protection Preservation and Propagation of our Eternal Values in a Changing Society. Every period has challenges and those challenges give the solutions also.

Thus at present, the New Hindu is under the influence of these Post Modern changes. We have a strong cultural foundation in our Hindu philosophy, culture, customs and traditions, rituals and spirituals with our Hindu consciousness in Eternal Values. But with our Spirituality we are bound to accept the fruits of modern science and the great changes of the present global effect on the Hindu society, family and Hindu mind. If we want to understand and learn about the Hindu thoughts and progress in this Post Modern Era, all technologies, social media and devices should become our engineering tools. In the face of new

global changes, the New Hindu cannot be a separate island and ignore the world around us. We are bound to feel and face them.

Before there was a great bond of relations - Blood relations, family relations, community relations, Consumer relations - which are based on the profit, benefit and business

Cultural relations - now all cultures are being assimilated east, west, north and south.

This new culture also is forcing to change the infrastructure of the Hindu community. It is a burning question how to protect values, moralities, norms and standards of Hindu thoughts and way of living. Now we have computer relations, but this relation has no strong bond

### Gems of Our Dharma

Sanatan Hindu Dharma has many great valuable gems that is not only for Hindus but for all human beings. Because 'Hinduness' is 'Humanness'. Those valuable Hindu gems are

- Yoga and meditation
- Family values
- Sattvic food
- Ideal of marriage
- Respect to grey hair(elders)
- Aware of reincarnation (rebirth)
- Consciousness about the divinity with enlightenment
- Help to all beings from ant to elephant
- No belief in fundamentalism and terrorism
- No faith in conversion. But a modern need for

Hindu protection

### Role of The New Hindu

Shoulder great responsibilities! On the base of our Hindu thoughts The New Hindu can prepare a multicultural, multiethnic and rainbow culture in any country because Hindus believe in the interconnectedness of the entire universe (doing puja of all rivers as *Ma Ganga*, respect to land as Mother earth, worship hills and mountains as the Himalayas, and offers respect to banyan and peepal trees as God). On the basis of these gems we can give the answers to all challenges in PM era.

### Need to be:

Organized, educated, informed, informative, aware, awake, and active for the preservation, propagation, protection of our eternal values in the changing society for the growth and progress of our Hindu civilization and next generation!!

Swami Vivekananda said that for humanity to achieve its full potential we need to have holistic personalities. Such a personality whose mission is clear, vision

perfect and worked with passion in fulfilling his mission and vision in our Dharma is Shri Hanuman ji.

Shri Hanumanji is an ideal personality for humanity to emulate. Humanity is complete and perfect if harmony exists among us. Humanity will flourish when every individual has strength in his or her body, love in heart and knowledge in head. The synthesis of these three qualities will allow humanity to blossom with peace, love, truth and compassion. As an ideal personality, Shri Hanumanji embodies all these characteristics and much more. He holds the humility of the holy Mother Ganges, yet the grand stance of the majestic Himalayas.

Hanumanji has a strong body, compassionate heart, and Vedantic brain! A perfect example of the holistic human being!

### The New Hindu Equipped:

Thus With these valuable gems and Himalayan thoughts (*vasudaivakutumbakam, ishavyamidamsarvam, sarvebhavantusukhinah, matri devo bhav, pitri devo bhav, atithi devo bhav, krinvantuvishwamaryam, vishwa shanti*) and qualities equipped with the science of the postmodern age, being masters of the digital age, The New Hindu can create a Peaceful Planet. The New Hindu can be the beacon of light. The New Hindu can become a source for all solutions & knowledge. The new Hindu can make Heaven on Earth.

Prepared Path only we need to walk

Man can fly in the sky like a bird

Man can swim in the ocean like a fish

But man has yet to learn how to walk on the face of this earth!

It is the duty of the New Hindu to teach humanity how to walk on the face of this earth.

*Kahai Richapati Sunu Hanumana  
Kaa Chup Saadhi Rahehu Balvaana  
Pavan Tanay Bal Pavan Samanaa |  
Buddhi Bibek Bigyan Nidhanaa ||  
Kawan So Kaaj Kathin Jag Maahi |  
Jo Nahi Hoi Tat Tumh Paai ||  
Raam kaaj Lagi Tav Avataara  
Sunatahi Bhayeu Parvatakara.*

### *About the Author*

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# RESPECT FOR OTHER RELIGIONS



**By Dr. D. C. Rao**

**R**espect for other religions is part of the Hindu fabric. Hindus naturally accept the validity of the spiritual paths defined by other religions and have no hesitation in participating in worship with followers of other religions.

The primary source of this intrinsic respect for other religions is in the core philosophy of Hindu scriptures: that the Supreme Divine Truth is beyond human comprehension. Anyone who thinks he "understands" this Truth, doesn't. The essence of spirituality in Hinduism is seeking better understanding of the Truth about our own true nature, our relationship with each other, and with the Divine Source of all being. As each religion is capable of casting some light on this goal, Hindus treat them all with respect and are ready to learn from them. Even within Hinduism, different philosophical traditions co-exist and are vigorously debated, creating a willingness to engage respectfully with other viewpoints. Hindus are not out to defend a doctrine and, therefore, do not feel threatened by the ideas of other religions.

Another fundamental feature of Hindu philosophy is the belief that Divine Consciousness is all pervasive, present in all beings. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that God does not favor or reject any being. The idea that any being may be "doomed" is alien to this philosophy. Every human being is believed to be capable of evolving spiritually and God accepts all forms of spiritual practice provided only that it is offered with devotion. Indeed, practitioners are cautioned not to disturb the equilibrium of those who are less spiritually evolved but rather to encourage them in maintaining their practice.

There is a great variety of spiritual paths within Hinduism. Recognizing that spiritual seekers differ greatly in personal temperament, physical and mental abilities and preferences, scriptures offer a variety of spiritual practices suited to different seekers. Thus, Hindus are accustomed to seeing a variety of practices even within their own families and this diversity is embraced. Some visit temples regularly and frequently, others do not. Some engage in formal worship at home, others are more casual about it. Some fast, others don't. It is natural, therefore, to refrain from being critical of the practices followed



by other religions.

The readiness to embrace diversity is seen also in the concept of "God". There are those who worship the Divine as abstract Consciousness while most Hindus express their devotion to particular manifestations of Consciousness as a personal God. Hindus believe that God has appeared in a great variety of forms. They cultivate devotion to God by developing a close personal relationship with a "chosen" form of God through worship of an image, recounting stories and constant remembrance of God. Within a family, preferences might vary and a typical family altar would contain images of several different forms of God. The different images are not seen as different Gods, or as competing forms of God but rather as diverse manifestations of the One Supreme Being. Thus Hindus recoil from the proposition that there is only one legitimate form of God, rendering the worship of other forms as

somehow wrong or inferior. They view the Supreme Reality as being beyond all description while yet open to being described in many different ways. Descriptions offered by other religions are thus naturally deserving of respect.

This expansive view of the nature of Divinity has led to a long history of Hinduism co-existing with other religions in India. For about 800 years since the 12th CE, India was ruled by non-Hindus—first Muslim and then Christian—until Independence in 1947. Tensions arising from this period continue to reverberate in India today. Throughout Indian history, Hindus have not embarked on wars to subdue other religions. Since independence, India has been governed under a secular Constitution that guarantees the rights of minorities to freely worship and follow their faith.

Buddhism originated in India in the 5th BCE. Siddhartha was enlightened at age 35 and preached extensively in India as the Buddha for 45 years until he died a natural death at the age of about 80 years. Buddhism remained a dominant religion in India for about a thousand years, during which time it spread through most of Asia. Hindus still worship Buddha as one of the major incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Although concepts of God differ greatly, Hinduism and Buddhism share much of their philosophy, ethics and spiritual practices, especially in the field of Tantra. Hinduism adopted from Buddhism the concept of monastic orders to promote scriptural study and practice. Followers of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhist leaders have had shelter and support in India since 1959.

Jainism predates Buddhism and has coexisted with Hinduism since ancient times. Its followers were known first as Sramans, then as Nirgranthis and, after Lord Mahavira who preached in India slightly earlier than Buddha, as Jains. The first Jain Tirthankar, or teacher, has a prominent place in Hindu scriptures. Despite major theological differences between Hinduism and Jainism, worship practices in the two traditions are very similar although specific rituals differ. Many families practice both Jainism and Hinduism and there are temples that serve both religions. The cultures are so intertwined that it is hard to identify boundaries.

Sikhism was founded in Punjab, India, by Guru Nanak at a time when Muslims ruled over most of India and there was a strong wave of Hindu saints who emphasized a devotional approach to spirituality. There are strong similarities and

differences between Hinduism and Sikhism in terms of theology and religious practice. Culturally, however, there has been a very close affinity among Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs. When the Sikhs fought the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the 17th CE to defend Hindus' religious freedom, the bonds between Hindus and Sikhs were strengthened. It became common in Punjabi Hindu families for the eldest son to practice Sikhism and Hindu families often prayed at Sikh Gurudwaras. Sikh discontent in recent decades reflected political issues rather than any form of religious discrimination.

In addition to the religions born in India, India has provided a home for followers of other world religions too. They have been an integral part of Indian society, made great contributions to the building of modern India and have been prominent leaders in government and business. The world's largest populations of Baha'i and Zoroastrians, and the second largest population of Muslims live in India.

★ India has among the oldest surviving Jewish communities in the world and is said to be one of the few countries that has never seen any anti-Semitic persecution. Waves of Jewish migrants came to India more than two thousand years ago, following the destruction of the first and second Jewish Temples. They were welcomed by Hindu rulers and flourished ever since.

★ Christianity came to India from its earliest days, perhaps as early as "Apostle St. Thomas" in 1st CE. Portuguese settlers came in the 15th CE and were allocated land and trading rights by local rulers. The early Christians who were later persecuted by the Portuguese in India were protected by Hindu rulers. However, as Christian missionary activity grew under British colonial rule, it caused distrust. Violent conflicts between Hindus and Christians have arisen in protest against religious conversion or reflecting ancient rivalries among competing social groups that have adopted different religions.

★ Muslims came to India in 8<sup>th</sup> CE both as traders and as rulers. Some Muslim rulers were open-minded on religion; some levied a religion tax, encouraged forced conversions and destroyed temples, replacing them by mosques. The legacy of these actions against Hindus has been continued social tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India that are easily fanned into violence by political

forces.

★ Zoroastrians took refuge in India in about the 10<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing from persecution by Muslims in Iran. They came to an amicable arrangement with the Hindu rulers and have flourished since, preserving their ancient religious practices.

★ India's connection with the Baha'i faith goes back to 1844, before the Bahauallah proclaimed himself as the Promised One. The first Indian who became Baha'i in 1909 was a Hindu and there are now more than a million Baha'i in India.

While Hindus readily accept the validity of other religions as spiritual paths, they are offended by claims of exclusivity or dogmatic assertions by which a religion rejects the validity of Hindu religious practices. Missionaries have long been active in India, sometimes with official encouragement and always with substantial funding from overseas. Sometimes their proselytizing zeal takes advantage of economic deprivation or lack of education among poorer sections of Hindu society. Hindus generally view these activities as a form of coercion and some groups have resorted to violence. But this has not altered the fundamental ethos of co-existence among the diverse religions in India. ■

## About the Author



**Dr. D. C. Rao**

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*Above is part of a larger collection of essays written by Dr. D. C. Rao and published by the Hindu American Foundation. The full e-book is available at <http://hafs.org/hinduism-101/recommended-reading-hinduism>.*



**By Umesh Gulati, Ph.D.**

**I**n the nineteenth century, India saw the advent of quite a few social reformers that saved the Hindu society from decaying and falling apart. One of them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy and another was Swami Dayananda. Ram Mohan got the help of the then British governor general to abolish the most abominable custom of sati under which the young widows were forced to set themselves on fire along with the cremation of their dead husbands. Ram Mohan also preached the equality of all religions as equally legitimate paths to salvation. He started a society called the Brahma Samaj, akin to the Unitarianism of the West. Swami Dayananda started Arya Samaj in 1875. Although he was opposed to image worship, his main contribution to the revival of the Hindu society was the campaign he launched for widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages, women's education, and reconverting back to Hinduism those who had been converted into Christianity or Islam.

Around 1870 or so, the leadership of Brahma Samaj passed into the hands of Keshab Chandra Sen. But there was a great difference between Ram Mohan and Keshab Chandra. While Ram Mohan had Eastern upbringing and nurturing, including India's Vedic thought, Keshab Sen, on the other hand, had absorbed many ideas from the Western philosophy. He was also a great master of English, and his eloquence equaled that of Gladstone, one of the famous prime ministers of England. He also had gone to England where he met Queen Victoria.

Keshab Sen also came into contact with Sri

# Idolatry: What is It?

Ramakrishna, and over a period of some time began to love and respect Sri Ramakrishna. But the two men were quite different. While Keshab Sen was the master of the English language and philosophy, and knew about Jesus Christ and many of the Hindu saints, Sri Ramakrishna scarcely had any formal education, even in his native Bengali. While Keshab Sen preached one Formless God, Sri Ramakrishna though believing in one God, always proclaimed that one God could have many names, Shiva or Vishnu, Jehovah or Allah. He also asserted that God could be formless and also with form. Keshab Sen considered the belief of many Hindus in the God with form as idolatry, and one of the objectives of his reform movement was to cleanse Hinduism of this 'abomination'.

However, Keshab Sen had to learn a lesson of his lifetime from Sri Ramakrishna about what real idolatry is. Christian Missionaries and English literature had taught the Brahmos of Bengal that God is formless and that it is a great sin to believe that God can be present in an image, and to pray and worship Him in that form. But then they heard the Master's remarks on image worship: 'As formless water freezes and becomes ice, so the formless *Satchidananda* is frozen, as it were, by devotion and given form.' Or, 'As an imitation custard apple reminds one of the real fruit, so one can experience the true nature God by worshipping an image that represents Him.' In other words, an image of Shiva or Vishnu reminds the devotee of Shiva or Vishnu and to concentrate on his Ideal and realize Him. So, one is worshipping Shiva or Vishnu through their images, not the images in themselves.

On the other hand, the Brahma leaders like Keshab Sen, often spoke of glories and powers of God, being merciful, kind, forgiving, and so forth, in their sermons, which the Master believed made Him distant from His children that we are. Besides, it was this recounting of such attributes, which the Master thought was real idolatry, because one had to make mental images first to recount those attributes, and therefore, were not different from making images of metals and stones, etc.

What Sri Ramakrishna meant was that when some value like worshipping images, endlessly praising of God, or what Karen Armstrong has said in her *A History of God*, a Western value of individualism becomes an end in itself, it is idolatry .

Swami Vivekananda had said the same thing more than hundred years ago that if an image is worshipped as such and not as a "help to the vision" of God, it is idolatry. So the point that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda wanted to emphasize was that the main objective of a man of religion is to realize God and to have His vision. If a stone image is helpful as a means in doing so, or the image provides a suggestion of the Ultimate Reality that it represents, and turns our minds to its realization, it is perfectly valid form of worship.

Harvard University professor Diana Eck, too, concurs with the above viewpoint about what is idolatry and what is not. "The king, the lord, the shepherd, the father, the God with a mighty arm stretched through history are images, too. Even so, many of us ... think that those who address God through material images are idolaters, while those whose images are shaped by words are not. There is idolatry on both sides, but it has to do with the shortsightedness of those whose vision stops at the image. The image is a window, not an object. The eighteen-foot image of Vishnu is no more an idol than the cross, the 'Our Father,' or the bread at Holy Communion. ... Idolatry is in the eye of the beholder."

The cross, indeed, is the greatest symbol of Christianity. It signifies not only the death of Christ but also the redemption of man. For, here the blood of Christ cleanses man of the original sin. Islam, which is the most vehement opponent of images, and yet Muslims use the graves of their saints and martyrs almost in place of images. In fact, since such worship in both Christianity and Islam is for the objects in themselves and not as a means of having the vision of God, such worship is real idolatry.

Mind you, the images of God Hindus use are symbols to express the invisible by visible or sensuous representations. All our contact with the world outside is through symbols. Our language is nothing but symbols. Our art, our poetry, in fact every aspect of our life is based on symbols. According to *Vishishtadvaita* or qualified non-dualism, the whole universe is but one vast symbol of *Brahman* (or God). The *Advaitin* asks: "is not everything *Brahman* when the name and the form have been removed from it?"

In other words, worshipping God through images or Pratikas, taken as substitutes for God-not God itself-is



*So long as we use the image of any Deity to realize the invisible God, it is not idolatry.*

quite legitimate means for realizing God. The important thing, as Sri Ramakrishna said, is sincerity and yearning as a kitten has for the mother cat. In fact, having been appointed as a priest of the Kali Temple, Sri Ramakrishna wanted to know if the Divine Mother was real, and not just an image carved by an artist. He would often become restless and yearned to see the Mother behind the image of Kali. At last the Mother heard his prayer; so Sri Ramakrishna had one of his great visions of the Divine Mother Kali. Later, he himself described his first vision of the Mother:

"I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered with a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realize Her [Divine Mother Kali] in this life. I could not bear the separation from Her any longer. Life seemed to be not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. I determined to put an end to my life. When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself. The building with its different parts, the temple, and



*The cross is the greatest symbol of Christianity. Islam, which is the most vehement opponent of images, and yet Muslims use the graves of their saints and martyrs almost in place of images. In fact, since such worship in both Christianity and Islam is for the objects in themselves and not as a means of having the vision of God, such worship is real idolatry.*

everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent Ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the divine Mother." It is not clear from Sri Ramakrishna's account that he actually saw the form of Mother Kali in the midst of this vision of shining consciousness. But it would seem that he did; because the first words that he uttered on coming to himself were 'Mother, Mother!'

This experience of Sri Ramakrishna is a vindication of many spiritually realized persons who have realized God by meditating on their Ideal through Its image. The thing to remember is that so long as we use the image of any Deity to realize the invisible God, it is not idolatry. How else can we concentrate on something, which is beyond thought or form? The image helps us focus on the invisible.

Let us illustrate this by an encounter Swami Vivekananda had with Maharaja Mangal Singh of Alwar, now a part of Rajasthan, in February 1891; Swami Vivekananda was then a wandering monk and happened to pass through that state. The Maharaja opened the conversation and one of his remarks was, "Well, Swamiji Maharaj, I have no faith in idol-

worship. What is going to be my fate?" The Maharaja smiled as he spoke, apparently on his own sarcastic remark. "Surely you are joking", said the Swami. "No, Swamiji, not at all. You see I really cannot worship wood, earth, stone or metal, like other people. Does this mean that I shall fare worse in the life hereafter?" "Well, I suppose every man should follow the religious ideal according to his own faith," the Swami responded. But Swamiji had not yet finished; his eyes lighted on a picture of the Maharaja, which was hanging on the wall. At his desire, the picture was passed to him. Holding it in his hand he asked, "Whose picture is this?" The Maharaja's minister answered that the picture was of the Maharaja. The Swami commanded, "Spit on it." He repeated his command, "Any one of you may spit on it. What is it but a piece of paper? What objection can you have against doing so?"

The Maharaja seemed shaken up, and all those present were thunderstruck and feared that some thing terrible was about to happen for such an insolent remark by the Swami. But the Swami persisted in his demand, "The Maharaja is not bodily present in this photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It doesn't contain his bones, flesh or blood. And still if you refuse to spit on this picture, it is because it is the shadow of the Maharaja; indeed by spitting on this photo, you feel that you will be insulting the Maharaja himself."

Then turning to the Maharaja, the Swami continued, "You see, Your Highness, though this picture is not you in one sense, in another sense, it is you. That is why your servants were so reluctant to spit on it. It is a shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. In the same way with the devotees who worship stone images of gods and goddesses, which bring to their minds the thought of their Ishta, or some special form and attributes of the Divinity, and help them to concentrate. I have traveled in many places, but nowhere have I found a single Hindu worshipping an image, saying, 'O Stone, I worship Thee.' 'O Metal, be merciful to me.' Everyone, Maharaja, is worshipping the same one God who is the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of Pure Knowledge. And God appears to all according to their understanding and their representation of Him."

Maharaja Mangal Singh felt greatly embarrassed and with folded hands asked the Swami's forgiveness and said, "Swamiji, you have opened my eyes. I had never met anyone who explained to me the meaning of worshipping God through an image the way you have told me today. But what will be my fate? Have mercy on me." The Swami assured the Maharaja that God

alone could be merciful. "Pray to God; He will show His mercy to you."

After returning from his very successful tour of America and Europe between early 1893 and the end of 1896, Swami Vivekananda embarked on a tour of India. In early 1897 Swamiji delivered a lecture at The Victoria Hall, Madras (Chennai). There he dwelt, among others, on the subject of idolatry. For, in his time and as it is also now, it had become fashionable and a sign of being an intellectual to say that idolatry was wrong without understanding what it really means. Swamiji said that Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa realized everything through idols, and said, "If such Ramakrishna Paramhansas are produced by idol-worship, what will you have-the reformer's creed or any number of idols?"

As a point of fact, installation of images in temples follows an elaborate procedure of preliminary rituals. The priests sing Vedic chants and say prayers to invoke and sanctify, and thereby enliven the presence of the Divine in the image (Pran-pratishtha) for worship. Once again, worship is offered to the consecrated Deity in the image and not to the image as such. Just as a picture of our father reminds us of our father and not of the paper on which the picture appears, so also the image of Shiva reminds us of Shiva Himself. In ordinary life when we salute the national flag, we are not doing it for the piece of cloth with some markings, but for the honor of the country or nation that it represents. Similarly, images of the Deity, though humanly conceived, represent the invisible divinity that receives our worship.

The worship of God through an image, however, is not a compulsory practice for every Hindu. But it has certain advantages. In the first place, as we mentioned before, an image helps the worshiper concentrate on the Deity within oneself, which the image outside is just the representation of. In the second place, worship through images indirectly allows a devotee offer services-plucking flowers, making sandal paste, polishing the utensils of worship, arranging offering, etc.-to the Deities incidental to their worship, thereby keeping the body, senses, and mind engaged in the thought of the Deity. Finally, and quite importantly according to Diana Eck, images of the Deities, artistically sculptured as they are, serve both theological and narrative functions. In a country like India, where a large percentage of population is still without formal education, images are visual 'theologies', and they continue to be 'read' that way by the Hindus.

Eck illustrates her point with reference to the icon of the four-armed Shiva or Natraja, dancing in a ring of fire, which displays the many aspects of this God in one visual symbol. The flaming circle in which he dances is the circle of creation and destruction called *samsara* (the earthly round of birth and death) or *maya* (the illusory world). The Lord who dances in the circle of this changing world holds in two of his hands the drum of creation and the fire of destruction. He displays his strength by crushing a demon under his foot. Simultaneously, he shows his mercy by raising his palm to the worshiper in the 'fear-not' gesture and with another hand, by pointing to his upraised foot, where the worshiper may take refuge. It is a wild dance, for the coils of his hair are flying in all directions, and yet the face of the Lord seems very peaceful and serene, while his limbs are in complete balance. Around one of his arms the Lord has put the ancient serpent as an ornament that he has incorporated as his power. In his hair sits the mermaid river Ganga (Ganges), who landed first on Shiva's hair when she first fell from heaven to earth (Ibid.).

Moreover, says Eck, not only are images visual theologies, they are also visual scriptures. Many myths of the tradition are narrated in living stone. On the railing around the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut, India, one can see some of the earliest sculptural reliefs with carved medallions that tell Jataka tales. Similarly, many Hindu temples in India display bas-relief portrayals of myths and legends. One such relief of the late Gupta period depicts the story of the descent of the River Ganga. The bas-relief shows Shiva standing, flanked by his consort Parvati and Bhagiratha, a great Yogi, who had performed austerities for thousands of years in order to bring the Ganga to earth. Bhagiratha, all skin and bones, is shown in an ascetic posture, holding his arms up in the air, while the Triple-Pathed Ganga-flowing in heaven, on the earth, and in the netherworlds-hovers over Shiva's head in the form of three mermaids (Ibid.).

While we hope to have brought home the point that image worship is not idolatrous, it should be borne in mind that this type of worship is only the kindergarten of devotional service to God. In fact all rituals in all religions and in many sects of these religions are merely the preparatory form (Gauni) of *bhakti* or devotion. Religious quarrels we often encounter are over such rituals, dos and don'ts of religions. Only when through such preparatory form, worship ripens into what is called *para bhakti* or supreme devotion that the objective of the worship, which is experiencing the

direct vision of God within oneself, is achieved. That becomes possible when our hearts get purified through preparatory worship and we develop intense yearning for the vision (*darshan*) of God as a child has a yearning for his or her mother. Keeping the company of holy people, attending spiritual retreats from time to time, cultivating dispassion and discrimination, and having constant awareness of what one thinks, speaks and does, helps this kind of attitude.

Since the worship through images and performing many rituals enjoined by our scriptures are only the means for having darshan or view of God, and if and when through intense yearning the objective has been achieved, does a devotee continue to worship through images? The answer is quite obvious; it is a clear no. Sri Ramakrishna, as was mentioned before, became quite casual about visiting the Kali temple, or performing other rituals. He used to illustrate it through many similes. One such simile was about using one thorn to remove another thorn from the body, and when the task has been accomplished, both thorns may be thrown away. Similarly, it is said in the Bhagavad-Gita that when the whole country is flooded, the reservoir becomes superfluous. So to an illumined seer, the Vedas are all superfluous (BG: 2.46).

Sri Ramakrishna also said that books, scriptures, rituals, and worshipping through images, etc., only

point out the way to reach God. After finding the way, what more need is there of books and scriptures? Then comes the time for action. In other words, one must follow the spiritual disciplines to realize Him. And once God has been realized, all rituals, reading books, etc. drop off. There is no need for them anymore. He always reminded his devotees that scholarship was not the goal of religion; it was spirituality. He said: scholars without spiritual inclination and practice behave like vultures, soaring high up in the sky but their attention is always on the dead bodies on the earth. It was more so with respect to performing rituals, going to temples and pilgrimages. Besides, a person with a philosophical attitude or an attitude for meditation will be scarcely interested in ritual worship. ■

### About the Author

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*Shri Gulati, based in Durham, NC, is a Vedantist, and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He has regularly published articles in Vedanta Kesari from Chennai and Prabuddhabharata from Kolkata, and also in Vedanta magazine from England. Lately he also published articles in Marg magazine. After receiving Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Virginia in 1967, he joined East Carolina University in Greenville, NC the same year and retired in 1999.*

## Dr. Shardanand honored!

Veteran scholar of Hinduism, a prominent advocate of Hindus in America and author of several books Dr. Shardanand ji was honored for his life-long, selfless service for the cause by VHPA. In a special ceremony during annual Governing council meeting held at Glen Burnie MD, on November 7, 2015, VHPA president Dr. Abhay Asthana & Shri Gaurang Vaishnav presented him a plaque (*Manapatra*). The contributions of Shrimati Madhur Shardanand was also acknowledged. Many of Dr. Shardanand ji's wel-wishers & VHPA karyakartas were present at the occasion.





# Seeing the Divinity in Each of Us

**By Stephen Knapp**

*(Sri Nandanandana Dasa)*

**T**his is why I have formed what I call the 11th commandment. The other commandments we hear about are but moralistic principles, but now is the time to add real transcendence to the equation, and this 11th Commandment is: "Thou shall recognize the Divinity in all living beings, and that the spirit in all forms of life is part of the Supreme Spirit." This is the way we need to recognize each other, which if applied properly, would create great social change.

Viewing it in another way, Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of the Aikido method of martial arts said: "Above all, one must unite one's heart with that of the gods. The essence of God is love, an all-pervading love that reaches every corner of the universe. If one is not united to God, the universe cannot be harmonized. Martial artists who are not in harmony with the universe are merely executing combat techniques, not Aiki (Ai--uniting harmony and love with ki--the universal energy)."

This understanding is very important even in everyday life. If we are not working in harmony with love and universal energy, if we are not recognizing the Divinity in all living beings, we are simply going through daily routines that are ineffectual and empty of any spiritual value. We need to practice the methods which also awaken the connection we have with God, the universe, and each other. This is the way we can



fully grow and develop. Then our life will have meaning and purpose. We will be guided by our own upliftment and will be able to assist in the upliftment of others. And we will be able to recognize the all-pervasiveness of the Supreme Being. This is the goal of yoga and the Dharmic spiritual process.

The essence of this perception again has been related in the ancient Vedic texts, as we find in the Svetasvatara Upanishad (6.11) which states, "He is the one God hidden in all beings, all pervading, the self within all beings, watching over all worlds, dwelling in all beings, the witness, and the perceiver." If one can truly understand this and become enlightened in this way, he will see that he is a part of the Supreme Reality and realize his union with all beings. Within that enlightenment one can reach Divine Love. This love is based on the spiritual oneness and harmony between all beings, which is sublime. It is a source of spiritual bliss. It is a love based not on bodily relations or mutual attraction, but it is based on being one in spirit, beyond the temporary nature of the material body. This is the love for which everyone searches, from which springs forth peace, harmony, and unity, of which all other kinds of love are but mere reflections. This state of being is reached through that spirituality as taught in the Dharmic traditions, especially in Bhakti-yoga. Therefore, a life without spirituality is a life incomplete. All have the need to fill their souls with spirituality, the presence of God, in order to feel fullness, peace, contentment, and unity.

To begin seeing how things really are, and to recognize the Divinity in each of us, we have to start adjusting our consciousness. This takes place by being trained in the Vedic spiritual knowledge and by the practice of yoga which purifies or spiritualizes the mind. When the mind becomes purified and the false ego no longer influences our vision, we become sensible people.

As the Bhagavad-gita (13.31-32) says, when a sensible man ceases to see different identities due to different material bodies, he attains the spiritual conception. Those with the vision of eternity see that the soul is transcendental, eternal, and beyond the modes of nature. Despite being within the material body, the soul is above material contact.

In this way, we can understand that all of us are but small reflections of the Supreme Consciousness. When we put the greater whole above ourselves, and realize



*All of us are but small reflections  
of the Supreme Consciousness.*

that we all contribute to the condition of this planet, then uniting with a common cause and with that Supreme Consciousness will be easy.

This planet does not allow us to be isolated. We all must work together and interface with others on some level. One lesson that this school of existence on this planet forces us to learn is that when we come together willingly to communicate, with a positive purpose, or to pray together, and to unite for the good of the whole, then harmony and peace can exist. That peace forms and manifests when we focus on our spiritual nature, which brings between us our unity in the Supreme, as children of the same Supreme Father. Making this the center of our existence will easily bring peace, unity, and harmony in this world because it brings in the spiritual vibration that emanates from God. That vibration is one of spiritual love. It is all that is eternal. All else is temporary. All else comes and goes. Therefore, focusing on and using our energy on temporary emotions such as envy, jealousy, and anger, will only keep us far away from the Supreme, and from reaching any peace or unity between us.

We have to recognize how similar we are in order to expand our heart toward others whom we may have previously rejected. This is how love and understanding can dissolve the boundaries that keep us stifled as a society and individuals, and keep us from entering higher dimensions of consciousness. There is no other way to grow spiritually. A lack of love toward each other is a reflection of a lack of love for God, regardless of how religious a person poses to be.

When we think in spiritual consciousness, we do

not recognize others by their differences, but we see our similarities. This is easy when we think in terms of being sons and daughters of the same Supreme Father, parts of His creation, and all sharing this world together. We all belong to the One, to God. Only in this way can there be universal love among all living entities. Only in this way can we begin to think that we are all related to each other. Once we establish our relationship with the Supreme, then we can establish our true relationship with everyone else.

Remember, our spiritual nature is eternal, and our spiritual relation with the Supreme is eternal. Therefore, our spiritual relationship with each other is also eternal. We simply have to reach that stage of awareness. This central point has to be established in order for there to be universal peace, brotherhood, equality, and unity in the world.

In essence, yoga and the Dharmic principles teach us that we are all consciousness in material forms. Consciousness cannot be destroyed. It is the symptom of the soul, which is the essence of God in each of us. We are all spiritual beings, reflections of the Divine. We are not our beliefs, our cultures, or our minds and bodies. We are all divine souls on a wondrous journey through Truth. We have all manifested from God, the Supreme Truth, and we are all evolving back to God. As the Manu-samhita (12.125) relates, "Thus, he who by means of Self sees the self [soul] in all created things, after attaining equality with all, enters into Brahman [spiritual consciousness], the highest place." That is the ultimate goal.

The Bhagavad-gita (4.39) states: "A faithful man

who is dedicated to transcendental knowledge and who subdues his senses is eligible to achieve such knowledge, and having achieved it he quickly attains the supreme spiritual peace."

This is how the Dharmic values and principles can spread to affect all of humanity for its greatest social good, which then also affects all life on this planet.

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May I also conclude with the fact that the Vedic philosophy does not have the idea of conversion as part of its premise, nor has India and its people ever gone on campaigns to conquer other people or countries or religions. The Vedic culture has continually promoted the Sanskrit saying *Vaisudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means the whole world is one family--the whole world. I rarely hear that in any other country today, or in any other religion.

This is actually the reason why many people, especially in the West, often say they are not so religious but are more spiritual. They no longer want to be associated with a narrow belief system, but want to attain a natural spiritual realization without the confines imposed by religions and all their superficialities that no longer make sense. They want a more wholesome form of spiritual development. In this way, enlightenment of the spirit is more important than pushing on the victory or popularity of a particular religion or even political ideology. This is what Vedic Dharma has to offer for anyone who investigates its holistic spiritual knowledge and understanding.

This means that the behavior of any person must be consistent with Sanatana Dharma, the eternal spiritual path, which contains truthfulness, devotion, nonviolence, goodness, service to others, help toward the poor, service and prayer to God, and spiritual realization. And this must be without racial or ethnic discrimination. In this condition there is an opportunity to attain the real goal of spiritual Vedic Dharma, beyond religion, and reach the natural condition of realizing our spiritual identity and connection with God, which also means our natural relation with each other. It is the Vedic tradition that points us in this direction.

Herein it is clear that it is natural for us to feel that all people are connected. That is the spiritual essence in all of us. It is the ego which makes us look at our differences and create a feeling of unity only with those of us who seem alike. The fact is we are all alike. But the ego must be stifled and the spiritual identity

must be brought to the center for us to recognize that. However, we all inherently do want to do that. But we have turned our back on that natural inclination, and now only recognize our differences, either by politics, localized religion, racial barriers, or so many other things. This is why the Vedic culture has emphasized the path which will take down our ego and raise up the means to recognize our spiritual identity, which we need now more than ever. Unless this is done with earnest, peace in the world will never happen, nor will society ever become civilized.

The spiritual principles in the Vedic tradition teaches us to embrace all human beings and all living entities of all species. It sets aside false pride, and the sense of superiority. This is our spiritual quality as the outcome of a noble life that knows no distinction of rich and poor, or the high and low. This is our ideal culture.

The Vedic philosophy points out that the whole purpose as a human being is to live harmoniously with nature, with the world, and all of society to accomplish the true goal of life. It is this human life and this planet earth that is like a portal through which we can attain many different realms of existence. After death, our consciousness carries us to the most appropriate place for us to continue our existence. It only depends on how we use this life. So the whole purpose of this planet earth and life on it is to raise our consciousness and understand and perceive who we really are as spiritual beings, rising above this human experience and to attain our real and spiritual identity, and then to act in that way. But how long that takes is up to us. That is what we are meant to do, and by clearly understanding and being educated in this Vedic culture, and following its principles, is the way we can attain that goal.

This is called Sanatana Dharma, the timeless, universal spiritual truths, which do not conflict with anyone, but are applicable for everyone, for any time in history, and for any place in the universe. This is the uplifting nature of Vedic Dharma.

*Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah, and Jai Sri Krishna.*

*Read the complete article at the source.*

*More information on this topic is elaborated in Stephen Knapp's books: Toward World Peace: Seeing the Unity Between Us All and The Eleventh Commandment: The Next Step in Social Spiritual Development.*

Visit <http://www.stephen-knapp.com>

Source: [http://www.stephen-knapp.com/can\\_vedic\\_dharma\\_bring\\_peace\\_to\\_the\\_world.htm](http://www.stephen-knapp.com/can_vedic_dharma_bring_peace_to_the_world.htm)



## ROMA PEOPLE: ARE THEY FORGOTTEN HINDUS?

By **Abhishek Gaur, MD**

**A**n angel kidnapped by gypsies?' When I read this newspaper headline a few years ago it started my journey to find out, 'Who are these gypsies?' What intrigued me was that they said the gypsies originate from northwestern parts of India. Really, is that really possible?

Growing up in India, we watched Hindi movies where they generally showed gypsies as kind-hearted but different and with having little attachment to the fixed assets of civilization. They are shown as fun-loving but intense entertainers and honest fortune-tellers, I wondered about them and sometimes admired their will to be different. We remember the movie Sholay with Jalal Aga as the gypsy singer who also played the guitar? Clearly, I had not heard that gypsies kidnapped children or were all thieves. Why would anyone want to steal children and raise them as if they were their own?

Even sometimes the nomadic tribes currently in India like Banjaras in India were referred to as gypsies. Was there any connection?

The word gypsy literally means someone from Egypt and is now considered incorrect and pejorative or racist. They are more correctly called 'Roma' or 'Romani' though they have no connection to Rome or Romans. The origin of the word is 'Rom' meaning man and plural is Roma and feminine adjective Romani. These



Top: [Share.america.gov/for-romani-survival-is-matter-of-tradition](http://Share.america.gov/for-romani-survival-is-matter-of-tradition). Stephen Kaufman - Girls dressed in traditional Romani clothing at the start of Romani dignity march, Bucharest, Rumania, copyright AP

Above right: Initial story - An Angel kidnapped by gypsies. Guardian Oct 23, 2013 Later story: Maria is Roma. Guardian Oct 28, 2013



*Romani Family:  
Image courtesy  
Wikipedia*

people have always called themselves Rom. Most of us know Mahmud of Ghazni for his plunder of the Somnath Mandir to fund his military expeditions and his Ghazi ambitions of conversion and spread of Islam among the infidels. His Arab chronicler and personal secretary Utbi Abu's account details how Sultan Mahmud "purified Hind from idolatry and raised mosques" and how after the victory, Mahmud is said to have directed the 'polluted infidel' Jaipal (the King of Shahi dynasty of Peshawar) be paraded about in shame and disgrace so that the fear of Islam might fly about through the country. What we did not know until recently is that the tragic story of the Romani people is tied with his invasion of Sindh, Punjab and parts of Northwestern India and Uttar Pradesh. It is believed that the people enslaved by his armies migrated with them, based on written historic evidence supported by linguistic elements.

Romani scholars have divided Roma people's history into four phases:

### **I. Origin (Proto-gypsies or Teljaripé or the beginning):**

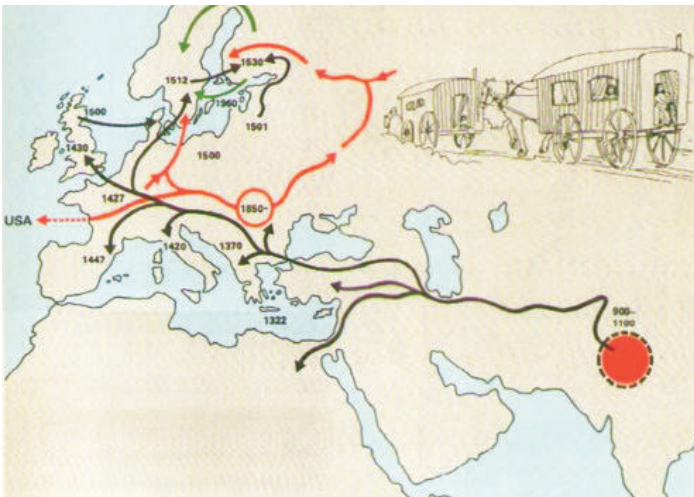
There are several clues about their origin. As noted by well-known Romani researcher Ian Hancock and Others, the masculine and feminine genders in the third person are the same in Braj (spoken in

western part of Kannauj) and Romani (the predominant language of these people). The names and adjectives often end with letter sound 'O' as in Braj and Nepali. There is also similarity with Awadhi in the way of using the possessive post-position. The city of Domba Kannauj attracted a number of artists to the area. However, contrary to the common belief, they did not belong to lower castes.

The historic written clue is a passage from 'Kitab al Yamini' (Book of Yamin) by the Arab chronicler Utbi Abu. I quote: "rich and poor, light and dark, most notable artists and artisans" to sell "whole



*Romani Flag created in 1933 and adopted by Romani Congress in 1971 - Image courtesy Wikipedia*



Map of Romani people's migration ([Indianraga.blogspot.com](http://Indianraga.blogspot.com))

families" in Ghazni and Kabul. Later, in the book he says: Khorasan, Transoxiana (Dandaquan) and Iraq were "full of this population." Once made captive and enslaved they moved northwest towards the Ghazanvid Empire in modern day Afghanistan. It is a well known fact that the armies of Mahmud were the most professional at that time. Here, these unfortunate people worked as slaves-Ghulam soldiers, entertainers, blacksmiths, tending animals etc. (based on the traditional skills they had brought with them).

As per Bosworth, in 1040 the Seljuk Turks advance and attack the castle in Dandaquan and defeat the armies of Mahmud's son in the battle of Dandaquan. The Hindu slaves serving the Ghaznavids were now captured by the Seljuk Tughril Masud Beg, the victor, and were taken as slaves with the new Islamic masters. Here, they were organized differently.

## II. The next time division called Nakhipé or idle

This corresponds to their initial experiences in Asia Minor and their march towards Europe. Clearly, the Seljuk Turks advanced towards Baghdad and Armenia and fought in the battles against the Byzantine Empire, bringing these people to Europe. There is no accurate historic account of the Roma during this time and history is reconstructed based on circumstances.

## III. Arrival in Europe or Aresipé

After probably fighting for various armies and getting organized based on clans and vocations, ultimately we find the evidence for emerging gypsy identity in Anatolia. Here they were also referred to as 'Gitano' and were a source of attraction and

repulsion, fascination and fear- a problem that persists throughout their further existence.

Formed by the amalgamation of cultures of ghulam soldiers, Persians, Georgians, Armenians, Greeks and Azerbaijanis in the Byzantine Empire, they acquire the identity of 'gypsy' or 'Egyptian' or 'Aigupta'. During this process these Hindus incorporated elements of Islam, Zoroastrianism, Armenian Christianity and Byzantine building into what is referred to as gypsy cosmogony.

## IV. Spread of Roma throughout Europe or Buxlaripe'

This refers to spread of Roma throughout Europe. Again, this time another group of Turks- the Ottoman Turks who invaded the Byzantium in

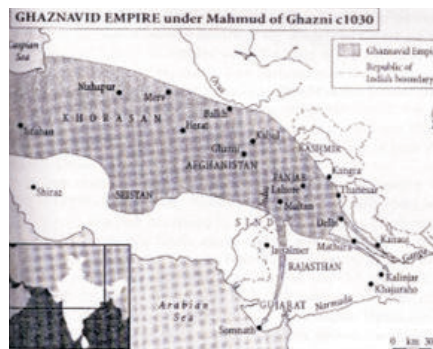
1453 and conquered the Balkans were prime movers -though it happened over a period of time. The Turks, like the Ghazanvids, used them in their military. The Roma were often blamed for the spread of bubonic plague.

In the next article, we will discuss the subsequent Roma

history since their initial spread throughout Europe.

Going back to where I started, the so-called kidnapped white girl, Maria was being looked after by the Romani couple with the permission of her Bulgarian Roma birth mother (proven genetically). The world is working hard to break the negative stereotype of the Romani people. As Indians, it is very important to learn from the history and help these original Hindus now numbering almost four million who have fought to survive for their existence. Unfortunately, they still continue to be persecuted.

In Romani when you love someone you say 'I eat your heart or I eat your belly' as states Sarah Carmona, a leading Romani historian from New York. This expression is similar to what we Indians say when we lovingly play with our children! ■



Invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni ([Prideofindia.net](http://Prideofindia.net))

## About the Author

**Dr. Abhishek Gaur**

is a Cardiologist in a private practice in Georgia.

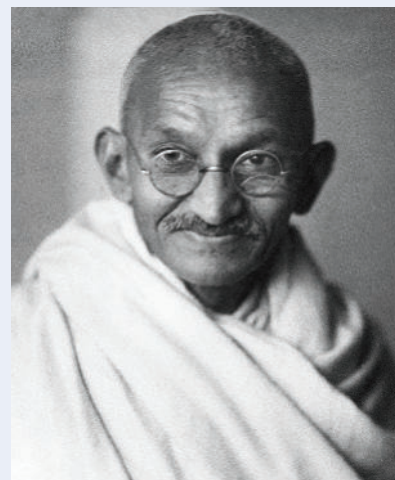
# Why is Truth the Base of Righteousness?

**T**hroughout history great heroes are remembered in many cultures for their honorable deeds and pure hearts. All of these different righteous warriors and learned scholars have vastly different background stories and quests. However there is one thing all these heroes have always done, in all their quests for thousands of Years; Tell only the truth. Telling the truth is what heroes have done for millennia, from the times of the Great King Harishchandra, to the years of Mahatma Gandhi's. But what's it all the blood-thirsty demons and power-hungry rulers have done for all eternity? How is it that they have deceived many and punctured their own souls beyond the breaking point? They have issued all this mass terror, and woe? Through lies. So, between great evil and pure greatness, the only true difference is the truth of one's words.

Good and evil have lived, and both at times thrived on the surface of the earth. And as such many liars and great "truth telling" men have lived. I believe one great man who personified these ideals of truth and evil was Mahatma Gandhi. When Gandhi was young one of his friends convinced him to eat meat and smoke cigarettes (which were against Gandhi's religious ideals). Finally, seeing his ill father on his deathbed, Gandhi confessed. Gandhi's father died knowing his son would grow to be a good man. Every time you lie it's like a droplet falling into a pit to form an ocean of evil. The weight adds up until your soul itself is obliterated under a mountain of regret. But every time you do what Gandhi did and resolve your lie, you relieve that stress, and free your soul. Even the ancient king Harishchandra is revered for always telling only the truth. Even after losing his kingdom and his family, the resilient man stuck to his word. After sacrificing everything in the pursuit of simply telling the truth, God manifested before Harishchandra, telling him that all of the untoward incidents in his life where a test, to see if he would always stay true to his word. Due to the fact that Harishchandra made amazing sacrifices in name of the truth, he was granted back his prosperous kingdom, his family and (as gift for persevering all the God's trials) he would always be remembered, and praised for telling only the truth.

In summary, truth has always been the base of righteousness, and from time to time lies the base of evil. People, both mighty and wise, have stood by their words, no matter what the circumstances. When you utter words carrying the clarity of truth you cleanse both your mind and soul. Everyday millions of people lie, trick and deceive one another, when it would be so easy to simply tell the truth. The truth is so simple and yet so complex, and powerful. So, why live life with the pain of lies and evil, when it's so much simpler to just, tell the truth. ■

*By Adesh Urval*



## *About the Author*



*Adesh Urval,  
based in West Virginia, is in sixth  
grade.*



## VHPA Atlanta Diwali Celebration Showcases Cultural Extravaganza

**By Smita Daftardar**

**A**fter a lazy American summer, the Indian community abroad starts to come to life with the festival season that culminates into Diwali, the Queen of all festivals! World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), Atlanta Chapter has been organizing Diwali celebrations featuring some of the best performing arts talent in and around Atlanta in a daylong event every year for over a decade at the prestigious Centennial Olympic Park Amphitheatre. However due to heavy rains, this year VHPA Atlanta chapter had to reschedule the date and change the venue. The Festival of Lights celebration was moved to Ambaji USA Shri Shakti Mandir, who most graciously offered their massive premises to hold the festival on November 15, 2015.

The Chief Guests for the event were Shri R Srinivasan, Consul of Indian Consulate in Atlanta and his wife Smt. Anagha Srinivasan, and Shri Pratap Singh Chauhan, a leading entrepreneur of Atlanta region. Smt Kusum Khurana, President of VHPA, Atlanta Chapter, gave the welcome address and invited the Chief Guests to light the lamp. Kusum Khurana also extended special thanks to the Shakti Mandir management for hosting the show and sponsoring the food for the entire event.

The Festival of Lights 2015 witnessed a sizable crowd, enjoying the cultural program, free snacks and free lunch provided by Shri Shakti Mandir, and Mehndi and face painting by Induji and her team of volunteers. The attendees also got a chance to shop for a variety of ethnic clothes, jewelry and handicrafts offered at

attractive deals by local vendors Sai Kiran Fashions, Mayuri Elegance, Shakti Gifts, and The Mandi. Also at hand were some information booths: Chetan Vyas provided information and enrollment for Obama Care, financial protection and legal shield, while representatives of Atlanta Gastro shared information on digestive health disorders. Young volunteers and students of Balvihar, Divya Rangunathan, Mugdha Daftardar, Garv Gaur, Shubhi Dhar and Kamyia Mehra sold raffle tickets to the audience, getting a really good response.

This year, MCs for the event were Sabitha Venugopal, and two young volunteers, Aadithya Rangunathan, a bio-medical engineering student at Ga Tech and Eesha Oza, a medical student at Georgia Regents University, both graduates of Balvihar. The cultural program started with prayers recited by Balvihar students and VHPA volunteers, followed by a classic kathak piece by Leera Rawal, a disciple of Pandit Birju Maharaj and Smt. Kumudini ben Lakhia. Eesha Oza, the multi-talented co-emcee, performed a solo dance representing her Indian home state of Gujrat. The emcees introduced each item with interesting information about the state of India being represented, along with some fun trivia questions to engage and test the audiences' knowledge about India. The show continued for the next 5 hours with scintillating dances and melodious songs.

Aadithya Prem, a Ga Tech student and Bharatanatyam dancer par excellence, who has performed at this event since he was in middle school, once again gave a great solo performance as did his young students from Mahek Dance Academy,



performing a Hindi Film fusion dance medley. Students of Cobb Balvihar gave a rocking dance performance, which was choreographed by Shweta Khatri. The little kids from her dance school presented two more dances which were very well received by the audience, especially considering the young age of participants. Not to be outdone by the youngsters, Cobb Balvihar teachers, led by Neetu Sharma, performed on a medley of foot-tapping songs, from folk to the contemporary "Chittiyankalaiyaanve....". Neetu Singh Chauhan coordinated two colorful dances, a traditional Rajasthani folk dance and a Kathak based Hindi Film fusion dance. A group of talented ladies, dressed in traditional 9-yard sarees, presented an energetic Kannada Folk dance that combined dance moves with agile acrobatics. This group was coordinated by Shobha Shivram, and drew a huge applause from the audience.

Sagnika Mukherjee gave a captivating performance, bringing to the show the refreshingly unique flavor of Bengal, with her two solo dances. Natya Mayuri group performed two dances, a beautiful Rajasthani folk by kids and a fusion by the ladies. The fusion dancers brought to life the emotional roller-coaster in Shankar Mahadevan's blockbuster "Breathless" with steps and facial expressions befitting the beautiful and intense lyrics. An item that pretty much rocked the auditorium itself was a Hindi Film dance by the duo Shrey Thaker and Chintan Sheth of the group "N3XT CR3W", a high energy performance that had the audience cheering, especially on the mega-hit "tumereereee, main teraarara.."

A special treat was a group of Bhutanese kids, who performed two dances, the Nepali Maruni dance and a Nepali-Bhutani traditional dance where young girls reminisce about their beautiful village life, an emotion almost all adults in the audience could relate to. These children performed under the guidance of Manikala Basnet from the Bhutanese Temple.

While the Indian community is a great patron of Indian dance forms, both traditional and contemporary, it is equally passionate about the music of India. And thanks to Hindi Films, for decades, generations of Indians have grown up on a staple diet of love-songs, along with the more traditional Hindustani and Karnatic music. The music of Hindi Films has a personality of its own, unmistakably Indian, unapologetically romantic, irreverent of any regional boundary, and loved by all. And so, continuing the musical tradition, the audience was regaled by an array of Hindi Film songs, solos as well as duets, by talented singers Nishith Oza, Anilnath Malappan, Manoj

Hanumatha, Aradhana Chaturvedi, Smita Daftardar and Gopendar Sharma, accompanied by Guitarist Sajith Shetty. The musical group "Desi Rhythms of Atlanta" gave an outstanding performance of songs, from old classics to latest chartbusters; one could imagine these artists in a recording studio somewhere in Bollywood, recording the next musical hit!! The singers were Vidya Parameswaran, Madhavi Perumpalath, Geeta Khanna, Jyoti Sharma, Saras Jain, Navin Gurnaney, and Somu Ray.

Last but not the least, Akhil Turaga the title winner of Zee TV's "Dance India Dance Little Masters of North America", presented an electrifying dance, truly contributing the "Grand" in the "Grand finale" of the show.

The cultural show concluded with a Vote of Thanks by Shri Ragunathan Veeraraghavan, Treasurer, VHPA, Atlanta Chapter, who thanked all the volunteers and generous donors and sponsors, with a special thank you to all the artists who shared their wonderful talent, and the members of audience who appreciated them with rousing applauses! The indoor activities ended with Sangh Prarthana and the crowd moved outside to witness the last *Ravan Dahan* event of the season. Every year, Balvihar Hindi School, an educational program of VHPA, celebrates Dussera and Diwali with *Ravan Dahan* and fireworks. This year, the event was combined with the Festival of Lights celebration, adding to the festivities and extending the day-long program well into the evening. Kids and adults enjoyed the burning of Ravan, and cheered enthusiastically as the Demon King succumbed to the flames. This was followed by distribution of fireworks to everyone. A great time was had by all, with a huge collection of fireworks, set off with proper adult supervision. There is something about Dussera and Diwali that always brings out the child in every adult; this was evident in the fun that everyone had!

VHPA Atlanta chapter appreciates the continued support of all the major Indian businesses, spiritual organizations and individual contributors to the Annual Festival of Lights program. A program like this, showcasing the choicest talent of Atlanta, completely free and with no expectation of any material gain by anyone involved, can only be realized with the support of the community. In return, Volunteers of VHPA, in the true spirit of "*Seva Parmo Dharmah*", are thankful to have the opportunity to serve the community and the purpose of Sanatan Dharma. ■



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# Glimpses of VHPA Atlanta Diwali Celebration





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