

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

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अनन्यश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते।  
तेषां नित्यभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्॥ ९.२२॥

*ananyas cintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate  
tesam nityabhyuktanam yoga-ksemam vahamyaham*

To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those ever self-controlled, I secure for them what they do not possess (YOGA), and preserve for them what they already possess (KSHEMA) .



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Vishwa Hindu Parishad (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.

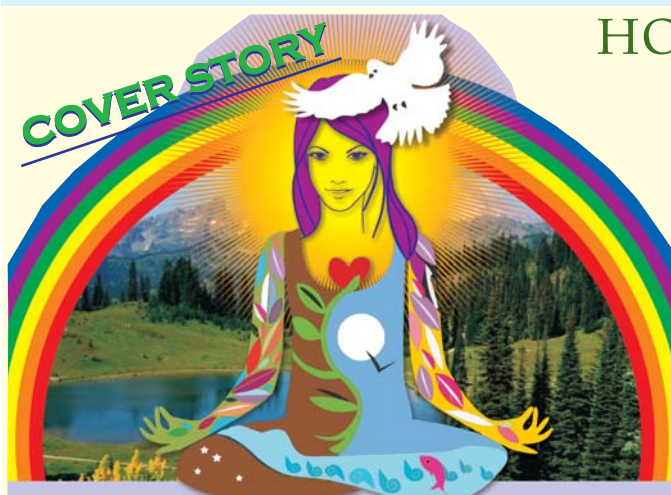
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'9/11' is synonymous with destruction of World trade center. But many of us may not be knowing the significance of this very date. On this same date, more than 100 years ago **Swami Vivekanand** first introduced North America to the unifying potential of the universal message of Bhagwad-Gita. It was on that day that the dynamic Swami Vivekananda first addressed The Parliament of Religions in Chicago and planted the seeds of a philosophy of love, peace and unity, desired by the vast majority of mankind... After 15 years, on September 11, 1906, **Mahatma Gandhi** adopted the first mass protest meeting involving the concept of Satyagraha to oppose the passage of the law compelling registration of the colony's Indian population.

- By **Ramnarine Sahadeo**  
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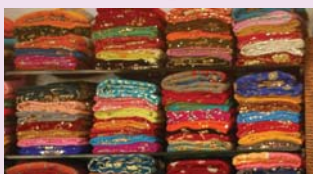
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The sari is a physical emblem of etiquette training for girls.



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## VHPA Kite Flying: on Makar Sankranti Draws Thousands

Makar Sankranti and Swami Vivekananda's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary was celebrated at the George Bush Park in Houston, Texas. Thousands of Hindus attended this event.



By **Rahul Sharma**  
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# A POTENTIAL ROLE OF HMEC

## Dissemination of Better Knowledge of Yoga

**L**ook at the collection of business cards pin-stuck upon the bulletin-board of any grocery store, or at the Classified Ad of any worthwhile newspaper, or at the shelves of any book-store, you cannot fail to notice a number of items and titles pertaining to Yoga.

Are they doing justice to their chosen subject? Most likely, the answer is: NO!

Herein lies a great need, and potential opportunity, for the Hindu Mandirs of America, aided by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, in terms of expertise and personnel, to play a grand positive role in America, apart from other customary services. "Sisters and Brothers of America," a qualifies pujari (priest) or VHPA volunteer could, and should be able to, address a gathering of interested Americans, like a new disciple or representative of Swami Vivekananda and of Hinduism, "I am proud to have the opportunity and honor of showing and telling you what Yoga truly means."

In most of the Yoga Centers dotting the landscape of the entire country, what is taught as the whole body of Yoga, the beginning and end of the matter, is just 'Hatha-Yoga - bodily postures and concentration to relax the body and mind, mainly to get rid of stress. The exposition of the full concept of Yoga - literally, being One with divinity by becoming aware of the presence of the Supreme Souls within one's own soul and within others - as propounded in the Bhagavad-Gita, is rarely a planned objective of such Centers. The actual paths of Yoga --- Jnan-Yoga

(Pursuit of Knowledge), Karma-Yoga (Righteous Action), Bhakti-Yoga (Devotion to the Divine), Raj-Yoga (High level of Meditation) --- are foreign to most of the Americans genuinely inclined on teaching Yoga, let alone their followers. In some quarters, it is even whispered that Yoga is an American invention, making many concerned Hindus worry about how to prove to them otherwise. Commercialized nature of many of these Centers is well-known.

HMEC could do a world of service to Hinduism, to USA, and to India alike by including in its plan of action a program of facilitating and enabling Mandirs - at least a selected set of them to start with and to educate the participants of various Yoga Centers, big and small, commercial or otherwise, the full precept of Yoga, and other pertinent concepts ('Karma,' Immortality of the Soul). It would serve the enthusiasts to let them know that 'Hatha-Yoga' is merely an elementary preliminary step; that true Yoga is an approach to the effulgence of KNOWLEDGE, free from the darkness of ignorance, blind superstitions, and outdated dogmas, and from fear of a wrathful God waiting to punish one with infernal fire on the Day of Judgment (while rewarding 'Believers,' especially those active in conversion or mindless violence against 'Non-believers'); that Yoga is dedicating oneself to righteous ACTION in the service of humanity; that Yoga is an unflinching DEVOTION to the Supreme Being, no matter by what name one calls Him; that Yoga teaches universal love, helping to induce peace and harmony, away from tribal ego historically causing dire division and destruction in the world in the name of religion.

In the West, and particularly in America, a crisis of spiritual identity has been taking place gradually, for good reasons. Current economic crisis adds to the delusion and difficulty for common man. Finding means to survive, as well as the Meaning of Life, is never easy. But a proactive approach on part of HMEC toward disseminating the true meaning of Yoga would certainly fill a void and become an important step, however small to start with, ultimately perhaps becoming a giant step toward service to humanism.

## EDITORIAL





**JOHN R. KASICH**  
GOVERNOR  
STATE OF OHIO

September 23, 2011

Greetings,

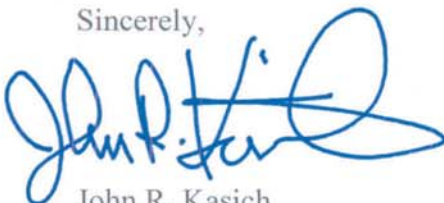
Karen and I are honored to extend our warmest greetings to everyone attending the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference September 23-25, 2011, in Columbus, Ohio.

Ohio is proud to be called home by many people of Hindu faith – individuals who contribute daily to the vast social fabric of America and the quality of life in the state of Ohio through governmental service, science, education, business and industry and especially in the arts and cultural organizations. This office recognizes the importance of rich cultural heritage and family values that are passed along to future generations through the Hindu faith.

I am delighted to acknowledge the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference and all visitors and participants for their contributions to the success of this event. As the largest Hindu organization in Ohio, I am impressed by your temples' leadership and commitment to conduct this conference. You can take great personal pride in your accomplishments.

On behalf of all Ohioans, best wishes for an enjoyable and memorable event in the greatest traditions of the Hindu faith. I hope you will enjoy all of the amenities and attractions that Columbus has to offer.

Sincerely,



John R. Kasich  
Governor



IN RECOGNITION OF  
**6<sup>th</sup> Annual**  
**Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference**

On behalf of the citizens of Ohio's 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, it is my pleasure to congratulate the Hindu Mandir Executives Conference (HMEC) and its steering committee upon organizing this event and welcome the Hindu temple delegates to Columbus.

Columbus has long remained a welcoming site for people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. The steering committee's choice to bring the HMEC to Ohio's capital proves this city's long-standing commitment to sustaining a diverse and vibrant community. The event verifies Columbus' attractiveness and ever-growing reputation in that regard. Central Ohio deeply values the contributions of the Hindu population and welcomes the HMEC to our area.

Again, congratulations on organizing this important event in our community. I would like to wish everyone involved continued success in the future!

Sincerely,



Patrick J. Tiberi  
Member of Congress



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

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**I**t is with great pleasure, I welcome you to the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) 2011. This is the 6th HMEC and every year I look forward to meet large number of Mandir Executives at one location.

In the last HMEC in Houston, based on the guidance of Pujya Swami Dayanand Saraswati, we had formed a steering committee with representatives from various Temples. Additionally, a resolution was passed urging all Mandirs to seek guidance from this committee for conflict resolutions. This will be a wiser approach than going to the governmental agencies for resolving the differences amongst the Hindu community. At the same time it behooves on part of the Steering committee to earn respect from the Hindu community.

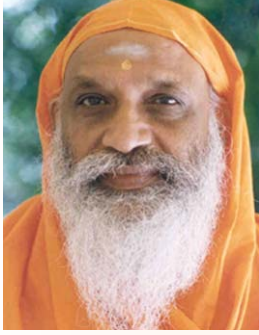
The Hindu Samskar book committee had published the 'Antyesthi' (final rites) book earlier. This year they are unveiling 'Vivah Sanskar' book. We should make extensive use of these publications to provide appropriate and timely guidance to Hindus in North America as well as other countries. At the same time, we urge this committee to continue publications on other samskars.

The message from all of you, the accomplished Hindu leaders, is loud and clear - increasing the participation of second generation Hindu youths in Mandir activities must be given the highest priority. Youths are the future caretakers of Mandirs and the preservers of Hindu Heritage. I am happy to report that under the aegis of HMEC, Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY) has been formed. They have made a wonderful beginning with great vigor and enthusiasm. We need to connect youths from various Mandirs across USA, therefore all Mandirs should encourage and welcome their activities.

This year HMEC 2011 is graciously hosted by Bharatiya Hindu Temple, Columbus, OH. Additionally the Columbus Ohio area has demonstrated great unity with 10 co-host Temples making the total number hosts at 11, an auspicious number for the divine cause. The ten co-host temples are; Chinmaya Mission, Columbus, OH, Cincinnati Hindu Temple, Cincinnati, OH, Dayton Hindu Temple, Beavercreek, OH, Durga Temple, Fairfax Station, VA, Hindu Jain Temple, Pittsburgh, PA, Hindu Temple of Central Indiana, Indianapolis, IN, Hindu Temple of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, Hindu Temple of Toledo, Toledo, OH, Sri Saibaba Temple society of Ohio, Columbus, OH and Sri Venkateswara, Temple, Pittsburgh, PA. We sincerely thank all of them for being wonderful hosts and being a nimitta for a divine cause.



**Jyotish Parekh,**  
President  
VHP of America.



## SWAMI DAYANANDA SARSWATI

### A message

I am very pleased to know that the Sixth Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference will be meeting in Columbus, Ohio. I commend the Columbus temples for coming forward to host the conference.

This is a very important time. Bharat is going through a difficult period in its history. The issues may be transformational for the Hindu culture and traditions. The Temple Executives may provide ground plan to the national leadership for this transformation. Therefore I request all of you to have session for this topic.

I look forward to my participation in this important meet.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati  
Saturday, August 27, 2011





## Swami Tejomayananda

Mahasamadhi Aradhana Camp ★ July 29- August 3 - 2011  
Hilton - Indian Lakes Resort ★ Bloomington IL 60108



Shri Abhaya Asthana,

August 1, 2011

Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference - 2011

Hari Om!

Thank you for your letter of 29 July, 2011 inviting me to your upcoming Sixth Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference - 2011 in Columbus, OH.

The concept of networking the Mandirs of USA and Canada is a much needed initiative for a more efficient and effective consolidation process.

However, I will not be able to attend due to prior commitments, but my good wishes and Pujya Gurudev's blessings are with you for a successful implementation of the plans.

With Prem and OM,

Swami Tejomayananda







## // Sanskruti Foundation //

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

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July 18th, 2011

Shri Arvindbhai Patel  
Sanskriti Parivar Centers - USA  
HMEC 2011  
156 Anderson Parkway  
Cedar Grove, New Jersey 07009



Dear Arvindbhai,

Jai Shri Krishna to you and all of the devotees!

I am delighted to learn that the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) will be taking place in Columbus, Ohio from September 23<sup>rd</sup> through 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The Mandir is truly the foundation of our lives; devotees can attain inner happiness, peace and bliss by being in the Lord's presence. Within various communities, the Mandir also serves as a venue for special religious and cultural activities that showcase our rich culture and traditions to the devotees, especially the younger generation.

The fact that temples from different communities throughout the globe are a striving to "join hands" and unite at this Annual Conference is indeed very positive. By meeting annually and striving to expand the participation to include additional organizations, there is definitely a strengthening of bonds amongst devotees and their places of worship. This will indeed generate very positive vibrations for all those who partake in the Conference activities as either organizers, volunteers or attendees.

I wish everyone involved with the conference a blissful and divine journey on the path of light to be in the Lord's Seva. I have just recently completed a visit to USA during the summer of 2011 and due to my prior commitments within India, unfortunately, I will not be able to attend this exceptional Conference. However, I am conveying my heartfelt warmest wishes and prayers for a successful, blissful and enlightening event.

With Blessings,

Rameshbhai V. Oza  
("Bhai Shri")

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(Deemed University)



## MESSAGE

I am truly delighted to know that as many as ten temples from Ohio region harmonize to sponsor the upcoming Sixth HMEC conference 2011.

I am writing this letter to extend my wishes and gratitude to all members of the organizing committee. I felt pretty honoured to be invited. As all of you must aware that Gayatri Pariwar is planning for celebrating the Birth Centenary of Acharya Shriram Sharma (1911-2011), the founder of All World Gayatri Pariwar - AWGP. A Visionary, Seer, Sage, Yug Rishi, who has heralded the arrival of Satyug and had the vision to re-establish the glory of eternal soul of India through social, ethical and intellectual revolutions and by means of Thought Transformation. No doubt, this auspicious event will be a once in a lifetime spiritual experience for all who are going to participate in this Divine Congregation during November 6th to 10th, 2011 at Haridwar, India. I would like to extend cordial invitation to all of you to attend the same. You may contact [abroadcell@awgp.org](mailto:abroadcell@awgp.org) for details. In this great moment of change, temples, social-spiritual organizations will have to start dropping their barriers and work together to become a cohesive force for positive change. Acharya ji through his lucid writings had invited the intellectuals, youths and awakened souls to come forward to join hands in the transformational change. Let us work with integrity and succeed in this direction.

In recent future, where India, the country of the Vedic Rishis, the torchbearer of the divine culture, is going to lead the world, will be referred as “Jagadguru”. In addition to the major concerns i.e., economic crisis, environmental issues, the rising hazard of natural calamities because of disruption of the harmony of the ecosystem, India is also going to guide the spiritual progress of the world. In this direction, Temples will have to become the lighthouse of our sanskriti/culture.

Therefore, HMEC’s firm efforts to establish a network among temple executives, and the initiative of “Seva Diwas” for all temples are admirable. Hope, this initiative should be able to elicit more youths for this noble cause and channelize youth potentials for self and societal development. Apart from hundreds of reformatory, educative and reconstructive programs for the welfare of the masses AWGP has been motivating and enabling people elevate their inner strength and inculcate virtuous tendencies by Gayatri Sadhana.

To mark the Birth Centenary of our Revered Gurudev in 2011 two mass campaigns “Gayatri Mantra Lekhan abhiyan” with participation of about 24 million sadhaks across the globe. Secondly we pledged to plant 10 million trees. We trade this opportunity with our benevolent services to protect our mother earth. Our Dev Sanskriti University, Haridwar, is organizing a series of international conferences jointly with ICCSUS: “Nourishing the Balance of the Universe” and WAVES: “Veda and Thought Revolution” and International Festival on Yog, Culture and Spirituality: [www.dsvv.ac.in](http://www.dsvv.ac.in)

My best wishes and blessing for the success of the HMEC 2011 conference.

Sincerely,



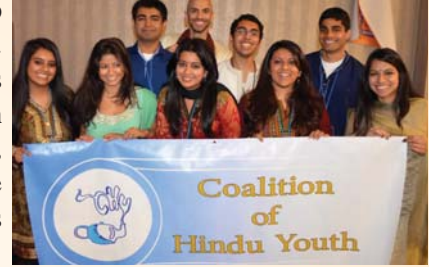
**(Dr. Pranav Pandya)**

## Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC)

# MILESTONES

### ★ Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY)

Coalition of Hindu Youth, or CHY (pronounced "chai"), a youth led group founded in 2009 at the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC). CHY's primary goal is to foster the unity of youth at the hundreds of mandirs across this land in which we have come to reside, as well as the myriad youth involved in various nationwide Hindu organizations. Only as a united body, with one voice, can we recognize that we are all striving towards the same goals and aspirations, and only then can we properly and effectively address the broader needs of a new generation of Hindu Americans.



[www.chynetwork.org](http://www.chynetwork.org) • [chy.network@gmail.com](mailto:chy.network@gmail.com) • twitter: @CHYnetwork

### ★ The Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network (HAVAN)

The Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network is launched to serve the self development and identification of service fields need for retired and to be retired members of Hindu community living in America. The acronym HAVAN is chosen to reflect the transformative lifestyle stage of Vanaprasthi. The goal is to engage them locally in meaningful community service activities, develop network, and opportunities to use their skills, specialties, and wisdom for the benefit of the society.

[http://senior.sagesurfer.com/egroups/g\\_havan.html/](http://senior.sagesurfer.com/egroups/g_havan.html/) [www.vhp-america.org](http://www.vhp-america.org) [kdave@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kdave@sbcglobal.net)

### ★ Samskar Books

- Antyeshthi Samskar book released in HMEC 2009.
- Vivah Samskar book being released in HMEC 2011.

### ★ The Hindu Mandir Seva Net

Network formation is in progress as a SEVA/Volunteer resource for the Temples. Hindu Seva Day organized by many temples on Oct 2, 2010. Hindu Temples' National Blood Donation Campaign in commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of 9/11, 2011. Over 70 temples took part in the Campaign.

### ★ Hindu Prayer Book for Hospitals

Most Hospital Chaplaincy departments don't have a Hindu chaplain, or even a priest as a consultant. Provide a prayer book in the hospital where a Hindu chaplain may or may not be available. Book is planned to be released in HMEC 2012.

## HIGHLIGHTS

★ Over 280 adult and youth delegates representing nearly 100 Mandirs and Hindu organizations, from across the world. Delegates ranged in ages from teenagers to those in their eighties and came from a variety of ethnic and career backgrounds. ★ Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami of 'Hinduism Today' spoke on 14 questions people ask about Hindu Dharma. ★ The national and local volunteers from VHPA and host Mandirs worked shoulder to shoulder for over nine months to organize this conference. ★ Sessions included a variety of topics relevant to the Mandirs and Youth - tomorrow's torchbearers of Sanatana Dharma. ★ Tejas Dave, a high school senior, presented the Yogafy project aiming to curb childhood obesity. ★ Second book in the HMEC samskar series on "Vivaha Samskar" written by Deepak Kotwal and team and published by VHP of America was released by Sadhvi Chaitanya.

## RESOLUTIONS

1. Strengthen and Uphold the Traditional Standards of Worship in Mandirs 2. Involve and Integrate Youth in Mandirs 3. Create Leadership Continuity for HMECs to Achieve Hindu Ekta 4. Create a Support Network for All Mandirs 5. Support the Global Hindu Forum - World Hindu Congress 2014 in India





**Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America  
Thanks the Host Mandirs  
For making HMEC-2011 a success!**

### **Host Temple**

Bharatiya Hindu Temple, Columbus, OH

### **Co-Host Temples**

Chinmaya Mission, Columbus, OH

Cincinnati Hindu Temple, Cincinnati, OH

Dayton Hindu temple, Beavercreek, OH

Durga Temple, Fairfax Station, VA

Hindu Jain Temple, Pittsburgh, PA

Sri Venkateshwara Temple, Pittsburgh, PA

Hindu Temple of Central Indiana, Indianapolis, IN

Hindu Temple of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

Hindu Temple of Toledo, Toledo, OH

Sri Saibaba Society of Ohio, Columbus, OH

**Narayanaya Namah  
Namo Arithantaya  
Buddham Sharanam Scahhami  
Sat Sri Akal**

# NINE ELEVEN DISTINGUISHED

*By Ramnarine Sahadeo*

Many of us who sat in our living rooms and watched in disbelief as the events of September 11, 2001 unfolded were left with the belief that mankind will forever be involved in internecine conflict. Mention nine-eleven today and our thoughts rush to the image of the twin towers in New York crumbling and taking with them the lives of thousands of innocent people from various religions, races and nationalities. The world has not been the same since that infamous date in 2001. However, lest we associate nine-eleven with division, hate, destruction, and cowardice, we should be reminded of similar dates in history which are famous examples of unity, love, hope, and courage. Yes, we must fight injustice wherever it occurs but we can do so by peaceful means without destruction of property and loss of precious lives. This article hopes to distinguish 2001 from two other nine-elevens in the hope that mankind will not permanently associate it with, and remember only the destruction. I am sure that further research will disclose more evidence of goodness on that same



Swami Vivekananda at Parliament of Religions, Chicago (1893)

date but this article will restrict itself to the philosophy and practice that originated from the culture that will forever be known as the Empire of the Spirit, the Vedic Saraswati Civilization. Peculiarly enough the first event also took place on American soil and also had a lasting impact on mankind. On September 11, 1893 North America was first introduced to the unifying potential of the universal message of



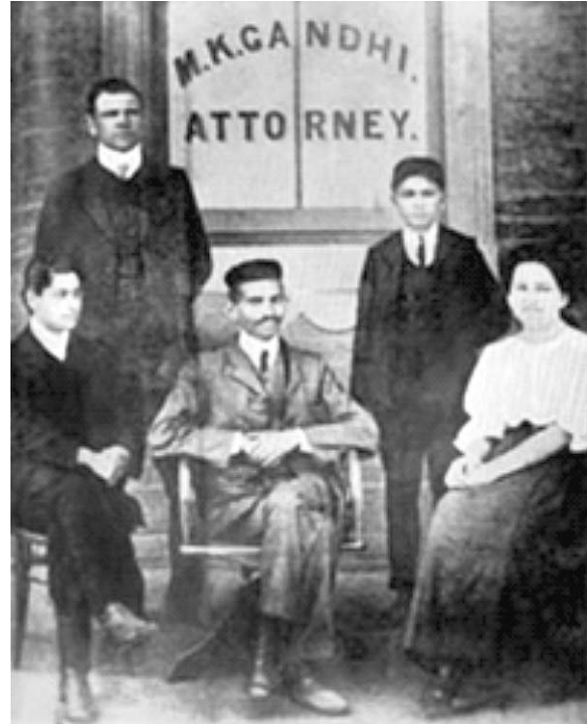
Bhagwad-Gita. It was on that day that the dynamic Swami Vivekananda first addressed The Parliament of Religions in Chicago and planted the seeds of a philosophy of love, peace and unity, desired by the vast majority of mankind. The delegates gave standing ovation when he addressed them as "Sisters and Brothers of America." "It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions, and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects." "The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is itself a vindication, a declaration to the world, of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita:

*Whosoever comes to Me,  
through whatsoever form, I reach him;  
All men struggling through paths  
which in the end lead to Me.*

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilizations, and caused whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope, that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

Although the 2001 nine-eleven and the events thereafter demonstrate that we have not seen the death-knell envisioned by this eloquent, spiritual icon but this does not mean that the philosophy he espoused has lost its relevance. Mankind still has to learn and practice it. The universal teachings are now all over the globe, and remain a potent force in most nations and cultures.

Today the landscape of most major cities in Canada, USA, and Europe are dotted with numerous awe inspiring Hindu temples which will hopefully help in spreading the message of love and peace. However, there is great concern that materialism, ignorance, short sightedness and the thirst for immediate gratification may cause many to depart from the



**Gandhi with his secretary, Miss Schlesin, and his colleague Mr. Polak in front of his office in Johannesburg (1905)**

wisdom and spiritual values that are the very foundation of the Vedic Saraswati civilization. Another nine eleven worth repeating took place in South Africa that also originated from the philosophy of non-violence repeatedly expounded in the Gita; and this event still gives greater hope to people all over the globe. On September 11, 1906 (a nine-eleven of peaceful protest) Gandhi adopted the first mass protest meeting involving the concept of Satyagraha to oppose the passage of the law compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. The next 7 years of struggle resulted in all forms of non-violent protests, and eventually the public outcry over the harsh treatment of the peaceful protestors caused General Jan Christian Smuts to compromise with Gandhi. As the concept of Satyagraha matured it became more and more refined and was the main weapon in the struggle for Indian Independence.

Injustice is not new to the world and too many find justification for it as it benefits one group over others. However, as Mahatma Gandhi stated "Truth and Justice" will in the end replace all the despots and dictators but not by methods of mass



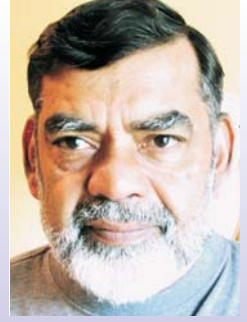
destruction, but rather by peaceful disobedience and non-cooperation with evil to bring about lasting results.

Hopefully Gita will continue to guide posterity as it served our ancestors thus fulfilling the dreams of men like Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, associate and conscience keeper of the Mahatma. He opined that a liberal education means an attainment of a sound knowledge of the great religious philosophy for which India is famous throughout the civilized world. The Bhagavad-Gita is the core of that knowledge. Albert Einstein said about Gandhi that the generations to come will hardly believe that one of flesh and blood actually walked on this earth. That time is already upon us and therefore we must revisit his spirit, his teachings "my life is my message" and distribute throughout the globe the source of his inspiration, The Bhagavad-Gita. The duty now falls to us, the temples, the scholars, parents and priests to share this knowledge with all mankind unless we wish to leave them with the haunting image of the deadly fire that engulfed the twin towers and an abundance of rights and privileges once enjoyed by most civilized nations. If

## About the author

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we do not act we would be failing in our duty for it is we, who advocate the principle Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam (The World is One Family). ■

*Editor's note: This article is a part of the preface to an upcoming book: "Mohandas K. Gandhi, thoughts, words, deeds and his source of inspiration The Bhagavad Gita."*



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# HOW WE RELATE TO THE ENVIRONMENT: A HINDU VIEW

By Dr. D.C. Rao

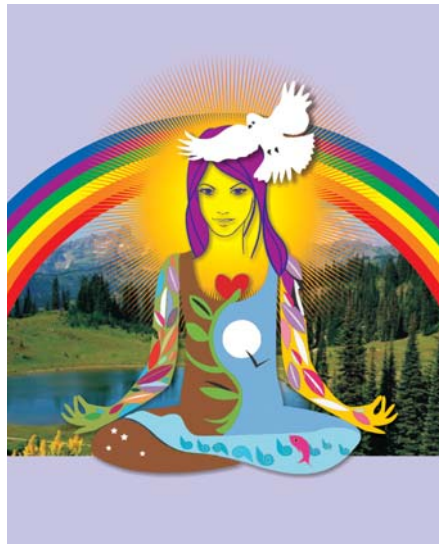
## ■ The World View

A core Hindu teaching is that the entire universe, without exception, is pervaded by the One Supreme Being. (Isha Upanishad 1) This is expressed in a poetic way in the Vedas: the universe emanated from the Divine Cosmic Person: the sun from His eyes, the moon from His mind, fire from His mouth, wind from His breath and so on. (Rig Veda X.90) The Vedas also speak of Divine manifestations in the most ordinary settings: As water, He dwells not only in the sacred rivers but also in little streams, puddles, ponds, lakes and wells; in the rain and in the clouds. (Yajur Veda 16.37,38 ) In short, since the Divine envelops and permeates every aspect of all that we experience, we should view every part of Nature as a celebration and manifestation of the Divine.

## ■ Applying this world view in our lives

Our scriptures also instruct us on how to apply this lofty world view in our daily lives. It is our obligation to play our part in the grand cosmic drama. The Bhagavad Gita explains that we owe our existence to food, which is fed by rain, that in turn is the result of cosmic processes presided over by the Creator. Nature and humans have a relationship of mutuality and one who does not honor this relationship "lives life in vain." (Bhagavad Gita verses 3.9-16) Nature serves humans; and equally, humans are servants of Nature, not its masters or stewards. Through Nature, the Divine Mother expresses Her love and compassion for all living beings. In return, humans are asked to enjoy the bounties of Nature in a responsible way. (Isha

Upanishad 1) When our greed and self-indulgence disturb the ecological balance, we violate the clear teachings of our scriptures.



## ■ Ethical injunctions

Respect for Nature is embedded in many of the fundamental values of Hinduism. (Inter Faith Conference, Values Supplement, pages 7,8) For example, Aparigraha (non-acquisitiveness) instructs us not to acquire possessions beyond our needs. Hindu philosophy teaches us that our happiness is to be found

within ourselves rather than in external objects. Consumerism is contrary to this value because it sets us back on our spiritual journey while also greatly straining the environment. Another value with direct implications for the environment is Ahimsa (non-injury). Recognizing the presence of the divine in all beings, our scriptures require us to avoid injury to others, where "others" includes all beings. Thus, Hindu dietary laws prohibit eating beef and express a preference for a vegetarian diet. The ecological benefits of a vegetarian diet are gaining wider recognition. At a social level, non-injury implies the avoidance of violence and war that threaten the destruction of our environment.

## ■ Nurturing the forces of Nature

The message that humans and the forces of Nature have a relationship of mutuality is reinforced in our scriptures through stories and practices. One scriptural



story is that of the noble king Prithu. (Srimad Bhagavatam Book 4, Chapter 18) When Prithu ascended the throne, a famine hobbled the land. The king was angry at Goddess Earth for withholding her produce and causing distress. She protested that she had been exploited for generations by his predecessors who had stolen her produce without returning to Earth what was her due. She pleaded with King Prithu to restore the respect due to her and to help her conserve rain water by landscaping the ground and creating water reservoirs. When Prithu agreed and offered to protect earth as his daughter, Goddess Earth again became prolific in her produce. Earth came to be known as Prithvi i.e. daughter of Prithu.

In another story, Lord Krishna eliminates the poisonous serpent Kaliya. (Srimad Bhagavatam Book 10, Chapter 16) Near Krishna's boyhood home, a pool of water was terribly polluted. Anyone who ventured near it and even the birds that flew over the area were killed by the poisonous fumes. The source of the poison was a giant venomous snake that had made this pool his abode. Krishna subdued the snake, banished him to the ocean, and restored the pool of water to its original purity.

Hindus worship God in multiple manifestations and in each of these manifestations God is associated with an animal or bird. This indirectly teaches Hindus to view all other living beings as possessing divinity. Two of the most popularly worshipped forms are Lord Ganesha who has an elephant head and Lord Hanuman who has the form of a monkey. The cow is regarded as particularly sacred and the eagle, snake, bull, lion, mouse, peacock, dog, fish, tortoise and owl are all associated with divinity. Fragrant flowers, coconuts and fruit form integral parts of ritual worship. Rituals in our life cycle involve sacred rivers, lakes and mountains.

Reverence for Fire is taught to show the interconnections between humans and the Divine. The very first mantra in the oldest Veda, the Rig Veda, invokes the blessings of Fire. With its infinite capacity to transform, Fire is seen as the "mouth" of the Divine, providing Divine guidance to humans and receiving the special offerings made by humans to propitiate Nature which Fire then transmits to the appropriate forces of the Divine. Our most important sacred vows, such as marriage, are witnessed by Fire. Several simple prayers that we learn as children help

us imbibe the message that the Divine is present everywhere: when we wake up we ask Mother Earth's forgiveness before stepping on her; before eating we remember that eating is a part of the cosmic drama presided over by the Divine; when we bathe, we remember the sacred rivers; we are taught never to disrespect books by putting our feet on them; we remember God before starting a new activity. Hindu homes tend to be filled with religious objects to remind us of God's presence. We are encouraged to take God's name at all times with or without reason! The personal names of most Hindus are derived from the many names of God or His qualities.

In short, our scriptures, our ethical injunctions, and the way we are brought up as Hindus emphasize that we humans are a part of the infinitely grand fabric of Nature. Humans and the natural environment are bound to each other in a mutual relationship where humans are required to nurture the forces of Nature even while enjoying its bounty. ■

#### About the author

*Dr. D.C. Rao retired from the World Bank in 1995 to pursue an intensive education in his own spiritual tradition. He is a Trustee at the Chinmaya Mission, Washington D.C. and actively associated with the Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy at Honesdale, Pa. He is a member of the Board and former*



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#### Editor's note:

*This article has been reproduced with permission from the Interfaith Conference, Washington DC. The article was written for IFC Supplement to be published this summer. The Supplement is an important part of IFC's work to strengthen the teaching about religion in public, private and parochial high schools.*



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The sari is a physical emblem of etiquette training for girls.

## IN MY MOTHER'S HANDS

# RITUAL OF SARI TYING

*By Priyanka Srinivasa*



**M**y mother unfolded the silk and pulled it above me. As cloth slipped around my shoulders, her hands pleated swiftly. Fabric fans tumbled from her fingertips, and she tucked them into my waist. Let it flow, don't forget to walk with your back straight, my mother whispered, safety pins clenched between her teeth. I held my neck high as she draped a jeweled corner across my chest as my sister watched in silence. Done! The ritual was complete. I stood in the

mirror, admiring her work, the rushes and falling of garment from my hips. Since the 1980's people of Indian origin have embarked on a mass migration to the United States. America has been a beacon of hope for those trapped in the convulsions of poverty and education for the past two decades. Whenever I ask my mother why she came to the US with my father in 1989, she replies by saying it was those movies. Stories of strong sultry women in furs and clinging to wine glasses was what I wanted. I was young. America was adventure. And so she flew over the great green ocean with the ambition that her husband would make it big. But immigration was more complex than my mother anticipated. Primarily, my parents had to decide where they would live. My parents decided on Pittsburgh, a city between Washington DC and New York City. But what set Pittsburgh apart from other cities was the fact that Pittsburgh had a strong Hindu population. The first temple in the United States was built in Pittsburgh and was the home of a tightly knit Indian community. The Indian American micro-culture helped my parents raise me, not only as an American, but as a proud desi or Indian American youth. Even though we second generation Indians live in an American society, prescribed gender roles have been passed down to us -rituals that bonded those in one micro-culture into another micro-culture. There is one ritual in particular that is the most intimate of them all -the ritual of tying a sari. My



mother and I wear saris to our local temple for prayer. But this common place act of dressing is steeped in an array of issues: gender specification, sexuality, coming of age, and the continuation of an ancient tradition. As I am analyzing the ritual from a cultural interpreter's perspective, the garment itself is a veil of several aspects of the products of migration and the disequilibrium of old and new traditions. Every aspect of this ethnic dress whether it is the garment itself, how it is worn, who teaches you how to wear it, and where you wear it demonstrates the overarching themes of Indian and Western terms of female sexuality and duty. First, we must look at the garment as an entity. The sari is six yards long of cotton or silk fabric. When I unfold the fabric on the ground, I am always astounded at the simplicity of the cloth because when it is woven around the body, it hangs so elaborately. It is wrapped, folded, and tucked around the body on top of a cropped blouse. The sari is a symbol of "womanhood" in Hindu society since the Indus River Civilization. The same design that was worn in the ancient civilization has been passed down generation after generation. Growing up, I used to watch my mother tie her sari thinking that it was the most beautiful dress in the whole world. Her upper back was exposed and the dramatic drapes gave her such an elegant stance. It is so well fastened that it will never fall, yet when women walk, the folds make them look graceful and fragile. The sari is a tableau for the complex identity of Indian women.

There are several styles of sari. From a simple cotton sari to diamond studded silk saris, the conventional cloth is so elegant because of the different styles of saris. My mother has many saris; some of them are in traditional colors of red and white, the colors of the holy days. Some of the saris are rich jewel-tones: garnet, emerald, amethyst, sapphire. Some are shocking pastels like soft corals, robin egg blue, and sea foam green. Each sari is different from the other. Each sari tells a story of weddings, holy days, birthdays, births, and sometimes death.

When my mother ties a sari for me and my sister, she tells us stories about India and her family. For a novice sari wearer, it is so difficult to tie the sari for herself. It takes a lot of opening of safety pins, holding cloth, spinning it into little fans to tuck along the waistline. So while we wait, my mother is busy weaving tales about married cousins and sleepy



village days where young girls in saris pick jasmines in desert gardens after classes.

Whenever I open old wedding albums of the women in my family, I notice the lines of young women draped in sequined cloth. They look so elegant in their dresses. They look like little dolls lined in rows by their husbands. The sari turns the girl into a woman. On my first day of college, my mother gave me a photo of her on her wedding day. She was barely twenty one, but she looked strong, confident, cool, and ready for marriage. The sari is a symbol of womanhood. It was her uniform of marriage. The sari was a mark of pride for my mother. Whenever she pulls out her wedding sari, her face flushes with emotion. She excitedly stretches the cloth over her chest and insists on me running my hands between the silk. The cloth is so fine that you can pull it through my engagement ring she gushes hurriedly. How could a piece of cloth mean so much to someone? This is the beauty of the sari: it is woven with the secret story of Indian women.

In the United States, the sari is not worn everyday like my mother did in her youth. My sister and I wear the sari during religious and cultural events at our local temple. When my sister and I wear the sari, we feel the same pride my mother feels when she wears hers. We feel pride because we know that we are keeping our traditions up and protected an ancestral tradition. For my high school graduation, the graduating females had to wear white dresses. I chose to wear my grandmother's white sari because it defined who I am. The sari is the mark of my history: my mother's struggle of adjusting to America, my grandmother's struggle of marrying at the age of ten. The sari to me is a symbol of strength. My mother was so thrilled when I decided to wear the sari because I was demonstrating what I stood for at a right of passage ceremony. I was able to wear what I

believed in and pay tribute to my culture. But the reason is not only for ourselves, because when we go to community events, wearing a sari gives us an impression that we have Indian pride. We are demonstrating to other Indian families that we are grounded in our culture. My mother believes the more beautiful and grounded the wife and daughters, more affluent and strong the family. The sari is a physical emblem of etiquette training for girls. When you wear a sari, you must do so with ease, grace, poise, and elegance. When you wear a sari, you become an instant lady. Women bring joy, luck, and pride to a family. The more poised the woman, the more refined the family. I learned quite quickly to walk tiny steps and to hold my head high so that my family will be proud of me.

In conclusion, the sari, under the microscope of a cultural interpreter, is a symbol of a complex identity of Indian women. Due to globalization, Indian women are torn between old Eastern traditions and Western, autonomous lifestyles. The tying of a sari is a secret communal act that is shared between different generations. The reason why Indian women make sure their saris are tied in a proper fashion and dress to

perfection is because their looks and demeanor are a reflection on their family. The sari, since it is a traditional apparel, brings pride that is two-fold: feeling joy that you find yourself looking beautiful and knowing that other women acknowledge the beauty of your sari folds. Those who are born and raised in the United States feel a pull to wear the sari because it is a recognizable symbol of Indian pride. As my mother adjusts the shoulder fabric, I look into the mirror and watch the pleats roll off my shoulder; I can not help but smile. I hold my neck up high, just like my mother told me to. And her mother told her. And her mother told her. We, woven together like the golden threads of a sari. ■



### About the author

*Priyanka Srinivasa is a sophomore at American University, Washington DC majoring in International Service.*

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# VHPA Kite Flying on Makar Sankranti Draws Thousands



**By Rahul Sharma**

**T**he Houston Chapter of the VHPA in conjunction with a number of other area organizations celebrated Makar Sankranti and Swami Vivekananda's birthday this year at the George Bush Park in Houston, Texas. The Houston chapter of Ekal Vidyalaya, Hindus of Greater Houston, and the Gujarati Samaj of Houston were a few of the organizations that joined in the celebrations. The community response to this event was overwhelming. People started arriving early on a gorgeous day in large numbers soon filling the

parking lot. A couple of shuttle buses ferried the crowd from the overflow parking lots. People lined up at booths manned by VHPA volunteers to buy colorful kites and strings. Soon the sky was filled with kites fluttering and flying in the breeze accompanied by the laughter and joyful voices of children and adults enjoying themselves. The whole park took on a festive atmosphere with families having a picnic as children ran around having fun.



Volunteers from the Gujarati Samaj served hot Kichidi while those from Ekal Vidyalaya served fragrant, hot chai. Arrangements had been made for fans to watch the college football game live on a stage nearby with



speakers providing the game commentary. Some people performed Surya Namaskar in the park. The six police officers had to do little as peace and joy were the order of the day.

The events ended at 5 pm as the crowd slowly left having enjoyed the day. An exceptional display of

brotherhood and collaboration among Hindu organizations in Houston made an event of this magnitude successful. Everyone greatly appreciated the teamwork that brought the community together in such a big way. We hope that this is the first of the many events to come this year. ■

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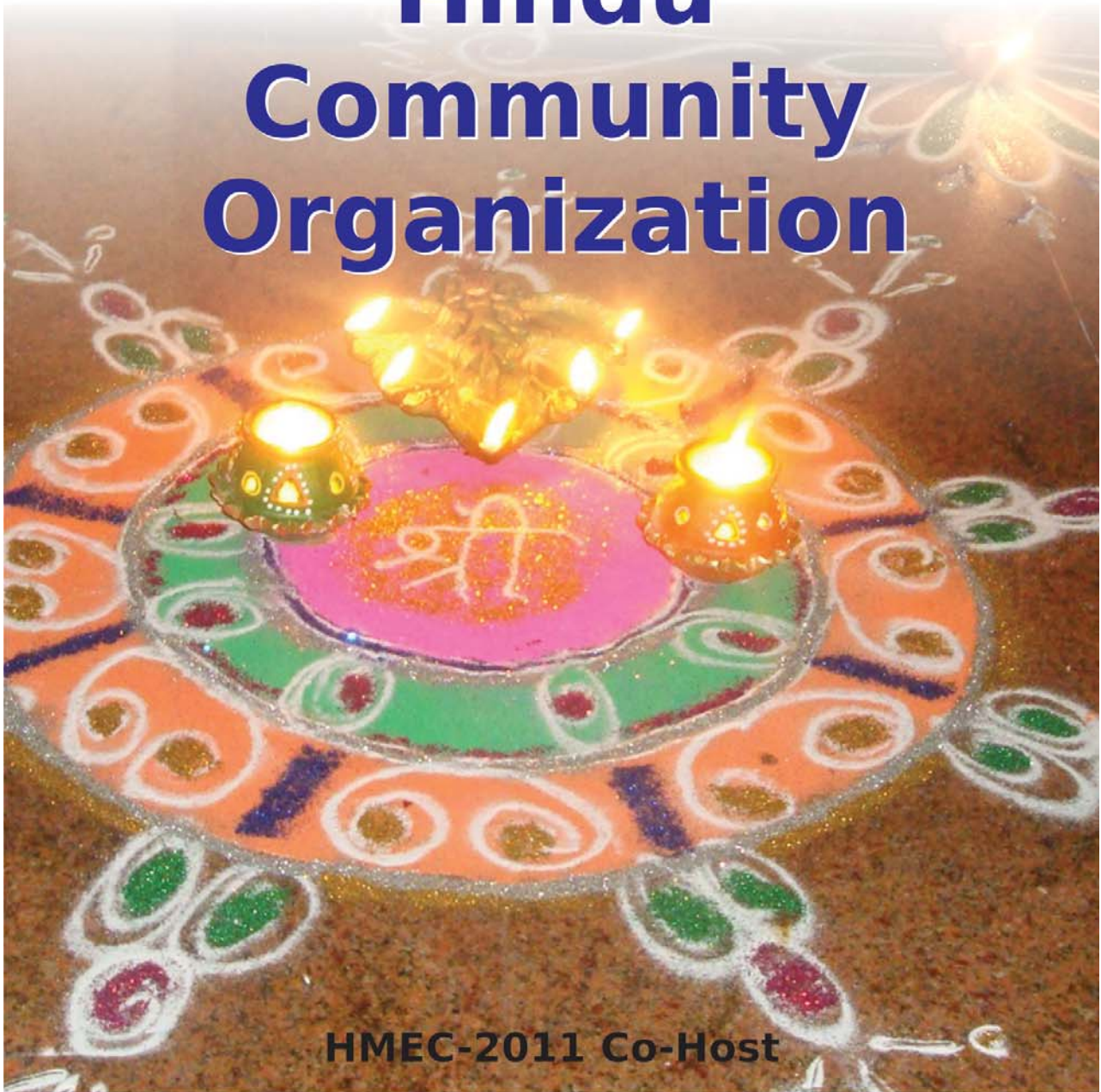
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# THE SCIENCE IS A VERIFIABLE TRUTH AND SO IS THE SANATANA DHARMA



*By Anant Garg*

**R**eligion and science tend to have a rocky relationship. From Galileo's execution in the sixteenth century to the fiery courtroom battles between creationists and evolutionists, people have always approached old-style religion with suspicion. However, there exists an ancient culture where scientists were not burned at the stake but rather celebrated and revered, a culture that welcomed questioning and encouraged experimentation. Hindu Dharma, also known as Sanatana Dharma or the eternal way of life, views science and spirituality not as conflicting but rather as supplementary. Like science, Sanatana Dharma is driven by the fervent desire to know the truth of this world. While material sciences, such as biology and chemistry, seek to understand the physical world, Sanatana Dharma is the science of spirituality and seeks to understand the mind and self. It addresses fundamental scientific questions, such as: who am I, what is God, and what is my relationship with God. The beauty of science is that it is based on natural laws that can be tried and tested and do not discriminate. For instance, the law of gravity applies to everything in the same way. Sanatana Dharma is also about discovering these laws of nature that apply to everyone uniformly and universally. For example, the law of karma states that we always bear the consequences of our thoughts and actions; thus, we create our own destiny. This law applies equally to everyone and everything in the universe. As Krishna has shown in the Mahabharat by accepting the curse of Gandhari, even God cannot escape the results of his actions. Hindu Dharma did not originate with a single prophet or at any particular point in time, but is rather based on the collective personal experiences of ancient scientists known as rishis. Their work method was scientific, empirical, and rooted in experimentation. Like any good scientific experiment, their experiments are replicable

## **YOUTH CORNER**



and can be verified by anyone, anywhere, and at any time – this is exactly what the word “sanatana” means: it was applicable in past, it was applicable today and it will be applicable in future. Over the years, many great souls have validated the truth of these spiritual teachings for themselves. In fact, the way to achieve spiritual perfection is not by simply reading and hearing about spirituality, but through personal experience out of one's own actions. Blind faith has no place in Sanatana Dharma. Such a scientific tradition was able to flourish because ancient India was an environment receptive to the collection of knowledge. The Rig Veda declares, “Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions.” The Hindu tradition embraces and encourages questioning and reasoning. For example, the Upanishads are structured as question-answer conversations between the disciple and teacher. In the 1800s, a young boy named Narendra constantly asked people whether they had seen God, only to receive negative answers. Only after Ramakrishna Paramahansa told him with confidence that he had seen God did Narendra accept Ramakrishna as his guru and grow to become the great Swami Vivekananda. It is because Hindu Dharma encourages questioning and dissent that it grew to become such a rich, all-encompassing culture. Just as science has evolved and expanded over time, people have added to the knowledge base of Sanatana Dharma over time and continue to do so in the current time. Sanatana dharma is not static and continues to evolve. In a way Hindu dharma can be thought of as relentless pursuit of truth. There are mainly two categories of Hindu scriptures. The first are the Shrutis, which includes the Vedas and Upanishads, scriptures that are sanatana and abide forever. They are built on fundamental principles and natural laws about the nature of the self

(Atman), the nature of God, and the Atman's relationship with God. The Smritis deal with the practical application of these principles and include the Puranas and Agamas. The second category can change with time, place, and situation. Great saints and reformers, such as Shankaracharya, Madhavacharya, Buddha, and Mahavir, have appeared from time to time and added to the richness of the Hindu culture by reinterpreting and devising methods of social interactions according to the needs of society at that time. The fact that Hindu Dharma has this ability to change and evolve makes it scientific in nature.

The English writer Aldous Huxley once said, "All science is the reduction of multiplicities to unities." Hindu thought encompasses this very idea. The theme of the Upanishads is to find the ultimate unity of things. The Mundaka Upanishad says, "Kismatinnu Bhagavo Vigyaate Sarvamidam Vigyaatam Bhavati - What is that by knowing which we know everything else?" The ancient rishis used the scientific method to seek principles that would unify and explain the whole of the human experience. The forest was their university, and their own mind was their laboratory. They used a discipline called yoga to concentrate their attention inwards. They discovered that this unifying principle is consciousness, and its study is called brahmavidya, translated as both the supreme science

and the science of the Supreme. They discovered that the innermost essence of our Self is the Atman, and that the Atman is no different from the ultimate reality, Brahman, the divine consciousness that permeates this entire universe. The reason Hindu Dharma is Sanatana, or eternal, is because it is scientific in nature. Therefore, it is only natural that Vedic India was home to a flourishing scientific tradition. The ancient Hindus developed modern numerals, the decimal place system, zero, algebra, and trigonometry. Surgeons like Sushruta performed and perfected operations as complex as caesarian sections and cataract surgeries. Tremendous advances were made in the fields of metallurgy, astronomy, chemistry, and Ayurveda, a holistic healthcare system. The root of these great discoveries was the scientific spirit of Sanatana Dharma, a way of life that leads us to the discovery of ourselves and the whole universe. ■

**Editor's note:** This essay was awarded First prize in the College category of essays submitted for the Sanatan Dharma Scholarship Essay Contest, sponsored by HMEC and Om Temple. The author, Anant Garg is a student at New York University, and is associated with Sarva Dev Mandir, Oxford, MA. E-mail: [anantgarg3@gmail.com](mailto:anantgarg3@gmail.com)



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# GITA SHOWS THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL LIFE

By Manu Patel

**M**any of us attend the katha of Ramayana, Bhagawat, Shiv Puran, Vishnu Puran and even attend lectures on Bhagavad Gita. On such occasions, we proudly put the book of the scripture on our head and then go around in a procession sometimes making a big show of our devotion! However, do we ever try to understand what these scriptures teach us as to how to successfully live our everyday life? When you talk to people about studying the Gita, they say “We do not have time to study this now,” “We will study it when we get old,” or “Only sanyasis study Gita, we householders don’t.” And then these people read all kinds of “modern” motivational books like “The Power of Positive Thinking,” “The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari,” “Ten Steps to Success” and others but neglect Gita in which the Lord gave the same motivational message thousands of years ago! If we make even a little bit effort to study of our own scriptures, we would get the keys to successful living right at our home; we do not need to look elsewhere! Let us see what Gita says as to how we should work in our everyday life to achieve sure success. We all know the famous shloka in Bhagavad-Gita:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।  
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भार मा ते संगस्त्वकर्मणि

भगवद् गीता २-४७

*Karmanyevadhikaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana  
Ma karma-phala-hetur bhar maa te  
sangotsvakarmani*

“Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits.



Let the fruit-of-action be not thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction.”

(Bhagavad-Gita 2-47)

This shloka presents two important keys to the Art of Successful Living:

1. We have right only to work, not to its fruits. Therefore, when performing work, we should not do it with a desire for a particular outcome, yet we should do our duty to the best of our ability.
2. At no moment in life should we resort to inaction, i.e., we should never remain idle.



Two arguments are presented against this shloka by some.

1. Some argue: “What is the point in working without any desire for some outcome? There should be some goal in life.”

2. And then some say: “Since we should not desire something in return for our work, it is no use to work.” Such people conveniently remain idle or after putting in very little effort and failing, cite this shloka in their support!

First, we must understand that the Lord never asks us to lead a goalless life. We need to understand that “goal” and “desire for fruits of action, i.e., desire for a certain outcome” are two different things! One must have goals in life. When we do any work, it is essential to have a goal. Goalless work is like traveling without a destination. But even after working very hard with a goal in mind, one must remember that attainment of that goal is not in our hand. That is, we have no right to desire that the goal be reached.

Those who put in very little or no effort in the work they undertake do not seem to have read the second

part of the shloka where the Lord tells us never to remain idle. Like all motivational leaders, the Lord asks us not to remain idle, work hard towards a goal but not be attached to the goal. As per this shloka, inaction is not an option.

Take the example of Mahatma Gandhi. He was never idle; every minute of his time was accounted for. There were days when he hardly slept for more than 3-4 hours. He led a nation of more than 300 million people in a non-violent struggle against the British colonial rule with a goal to achieve independence. Freedom was achieved.

In fact, the Lord’s affirmation “Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits” is extremely practical. In anything we do, with or without goals, we are going to get results whether we like them or not. Then why not work with utmost efficiency giving our one hundred percent to it and thus increase our chances of success? All great people in the world, who left behind them a record of accomplishments, worked exactly in accordance with this principle.

In the journey of life, one has no choice but to work. Once we perform work, we are bound to reap its

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**Children’s Camp at HSGC Temple**

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fruits sooner or later. Then why not perform the work most efficiently and with great proficiency (कौशलम्) without wasting any time in idle pursuits and without worrying about the fruits of the action? Don't you think that even God would reward such a karmayogi with great success?

To attain union with God, the yogis too perform sadhana with proficiency and one-pointed concentration. That is why the Lord beautifully defines yoga thus: Dexterity in action is yoga. By defining yoga as dexterity in action the Lord gives yet another key to success. If we follow only this principle in life and perform all our work with thorough dexterity, success is surely ours. Now even after working efficiently and with persistence, every once in a while we may not get the desired results. Then what to do? The Lord guides us here too by giving another definition of yoga:

योगस्थ कुरु कर्मणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय  
सिध्य सिध्योहः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते।  
भगवद् गीता २-४८

*Yoga-sthah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva Dhananjay  
Sidhy-asidhyoh samo bhutva samtvam yoga uchyate*

“Perform your duty equipoised, O Arjuna,  
abandoning all attachment to success or failure.  
Such equanimity is called yoga”

*(Bhagavad-Gita 2-48)*

The person who does not become proud and arrogant with occasional successes and also does not become despondent and discouraged in failures but keeps an evenness of mind in success and failure ultimately wins the battle of life. Our scriptures provide a perennial source of inspiration for great success in life. Let us diligently study Bhagavad Gita and achieve the success we truly deserve.

**Manu Bhatt**

5173 Fairlane Drive, Powell, Ohio 43065

Phone: 740-917-9227, E-mail:

manubhatt09@gmail.com



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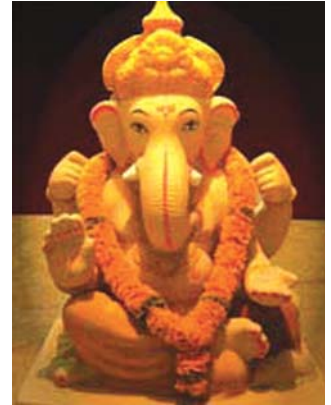
# A SCIENTIFIC AND SPIRITUAL VIEW AT DEITY WORSHIP

By Tejas N. Dave

**H**indus are often chided based on the concepts of deity worship and Mandirs. Many claim that the practices are primitive, unintelligent and unrefined. This essay, however, strives to illuminate upon the evolutionary and spiritual basis of the practices.

The first point of discussion is the concept of deity worship. As I previously mentioned, many people snicker at the practice and cast it off as primitive. However, when viewed through a scientific lens, the practice exemplifies the evolutionary identity of human beings. According to the Dual Representational Theory that originated from the research of Dr. Judy DeLoache of the University of Virginia, being able to impute characteristics beyond the purely physical characteristics of an object is what sets the human brain apart from all other animals. What this means is that we, as humans, can take an object and feel that the object has qualities that are not intrinsic to that object. It is based on this quality that we are able to utilize tools such as languages, on which our current society relies so heavily upon. Thus venerating what many call simply stone objects (Murti) as God is actually exercising the abilities that make us human; without it, we may as well slide down the evolutionary scale to chimpanzees. Based on the preceding discussion, one may understand and come to appreciate the beauty of deity worship, however another question arises. Why do these stone statues need to be housed in architecturally appealing houses, or Mandirs? Research has shown that stimulating multiple senses at the same time lead to greater retention and understanding. A Mandir, in essence, is the same concept. At the Mandir, beyond just the murtis, one smells the aroma of the agarbatis (incense sticks), and the sounds of the ghantas (bells). With multiple senses being stimulated at the same time, the meanings and feelings of holiness last longer within

the self. Another argument states asks that if God is omnipresent, why must there be temples? In response to this let us take the analogy of air. Air exists everywhere on Earth, but we still need a fan to feel that air, to create enough of a concentration of air so that it has a noticeable effect on the body. Similarly, the concentration of divinity in the temple is required in order to produce a noticeable effect on the soul. This brings us to the final part of our discussion which is the manifestation of divinity. Consider once again that in a nutshell the practice of deity worship is worshiping a piece of stone. In this process you have mentally manifested divinity in an otherwise inert, inanimate and uninteresting piece of stone. Now consider this: if you can envision God in a piece of stone, why can't you envision God in your neighbor? This is the central purpose and underlying meaning of the deity worship system and that is to recognize that God resides in every object, every person and every organism. And this is how divinity is literally manifested. One has taken a previously ordinary object or person and made it divine. Thus it is quite evident that deity worship is simply an extension of our human nature and that the Mandir system is designed in order to compound the feeling of divinity. Finally this system allows one to manifest and see divinity within other things, plants, animals and people. ■



**Editor's note:** This essay was awarded First prize in the High School category of essays submitted for the Sanatan Dharma Scholarship Essay Contest, sponsored by HMEC and Om Temple. The author, Tejas N. Dave is a associated with Shri Meenakshi Temple Society, Texas, and is a member of Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY).  
E-mail: [tejasndave@ramkrupa.com](mailto:tejasndave@ramkrupa.com)







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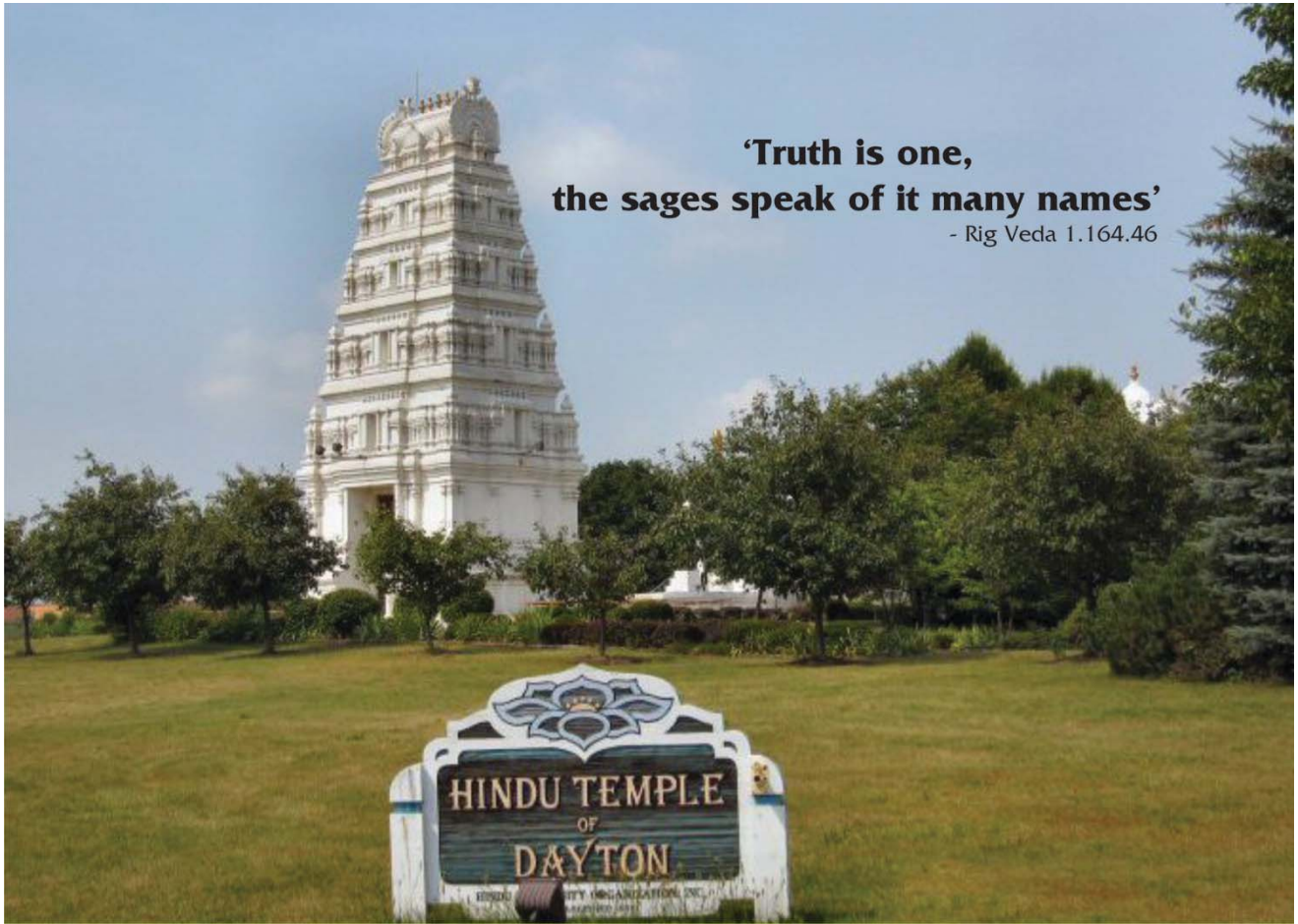
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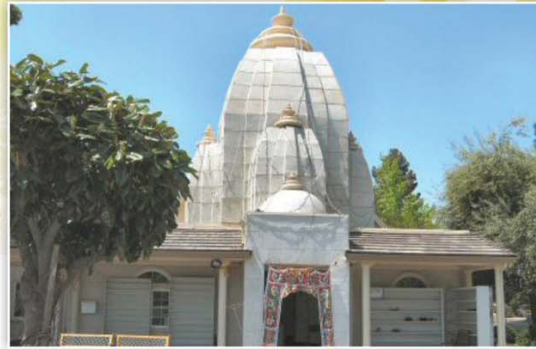
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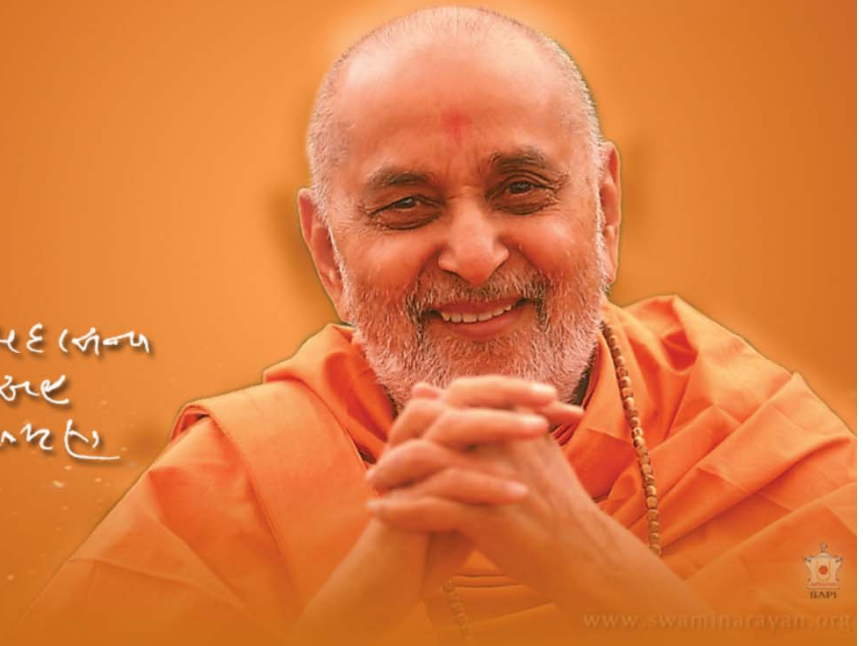
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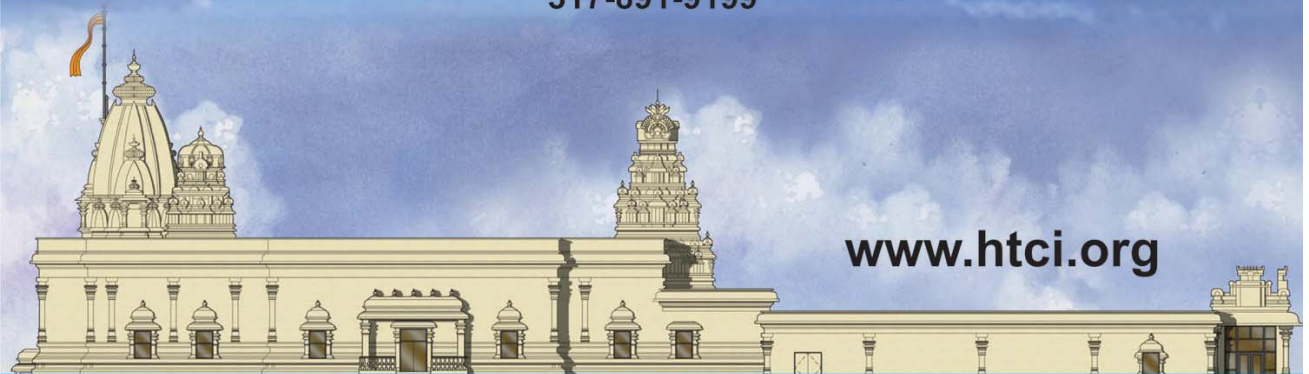
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Akhil Govil (2004 - 05)

Since its inauguration in March 1999, Durga Temple of VA has served the Hindu community's religious, cultural, educational, and social needs in Northern Virginia area. Devotees visit the temple to worship main Deities: Durga Mata, Ram Parivar, Hanuman Ji, Radha Krishan and Shiv Parivar. Other deities include: Satyanarayana Bhagavana, Sai Baba, Jhule Lal Ji, Shri Venkateshwara (Bala Ji), Ganapati Bhagavan, Lakshmi Maa, Santoshi Maa, Gayatri Maa, Saraswati Maa and Swami Narayan. Sthapana of other deities such as Kaali Maa, and others will follow in near future.

The temple has four full-time and two part-time priests. They are highly qualified and experienced in all facets of Hindu Dharma and rituals. To serve our growing community, the temple has a full-time manager. The temple offers: BalGokul; Yoga, Dance, Yoga for adults & children, Language, and SAT Classes, Sr. Citizen Group, Discourses on Gita and Hindu Dharma. Monthly free health clinic & Awareness sessions have served us all well. Highly acclaimed & renowned Spiritual Swamis visit the temple on a regular basis to deliver religious teachings & Bhajans and impart their knowledge to our community.

We celebrate all major Hindu Festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Maha Shivaratri, Janamashtami, Ram Navami, Diwali, Dusheshra, Navaratri, Saraswati Pooja, Hanuman Jayanti, Annakut, Garba, Karva Chauth, Pongal, Holi, Baisakhi, Guru Purnima, Annakoot, etc., etc. The temple places special emphasis on programs for the young & our youth. We now have an active senior citizens group with growing participation. We plan to open a library in the near future. The temple recently launched a new inter-active website. We are looking into streamlining our regular processes to achieve greater efficiencies in the temple operation to serve our members more effectively. The temple participates in the Fairfax county & other Inter-faith activities.

Directions: Fairfax County Pkwy (VA 7100) to Hooes Rd S. (SR-636) One mile, Rt. On Copper Leaf Way, just before the intersection with Silverbrook Rd.

From I-95, Take Exit 163 (Lorton), Rt. Onto Lorton Rd. (SR 642), After 2.4 mi. Rt.

Onto Silverbrook Rd (SR-600) at first TL at Hooes Rd., Lt. on Copper leaf Way.

Weekly Temple Hours		
Monday	7:00 AM – 12:00 Noon; 4:00PM – 9:00 PM	
Tuesday	9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon; 4:00PM – 9:00 PM	
Wednesday	9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon; 4:00PM – 9:00 PM	
Thursday	9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon; 4:00PM – 9:00 PM	
Friday	9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon; 4:00PM – 9:00 PM	
Sat. & Sundays	9:00 AM – 9:00 PM	
Public Holidays	9:00 AM – 9:00 PM	
Hindu Holy Days		
Weekly Poojas & Regular Religious Programs		
7:00AM – 100PM 0PM – 70PM	Mondays	Shiva Abhisheka
7:15 PM – 80 PM	Tuesdays	Hanuman Chalissa
7:00PM – PM	Thursdays:	Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi-Kirtan
7:00PM – PM	Fridays:	Sri Lalitha Sahasranamam
9:00 AM -10:15AM 10:15 AM-11:00AM	Saturdays:	Venkateswara Suprabhatam & Pooja Vishnu Sahasranaama, 11:00 AM Arti
4:00 PM – 60 PM	Sundays:	Sponsored Weekly Pooja Aarti - & Bhandara