



Yugabdh: 5126
Shaka Samvat: 1946
Vikram Samvat: 2081

HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest

EXPLORING THE DEEP ROOTS OF
JEWISH-HINDU CONNECTIONS



Suggested Donation \$5.00

Vishwa Hindu Parishad America Inc.
200 New Bond Street,
Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171

Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Houston, TX
PERMIT NO. 8376



VHPA Announces

ANJLEEBAHEN PANDYA MEMORIAL FUND



Anjeebhen Pandya
(1949-2021)

Anjeebhen's life was dedicated to the cause of Hindu Dharma. She exemplified selfless service. She was an organizer and leader par excellence. To keep her memory alive, we are announcing scholarships to deserving women at the Hindu University of America (HUA) and Emerging Hindu Women Leadership Internships for high school and college students.

Please make a tax deductible contribution and help us reach our goal of **\$300,000**.

MAIL CHECK TO:

VHPA
P O BOX 200,
SUGAR GROVE , IL 60554



WORLD HINDU COUNCIL OF AMERICA (VHPA)

National Office:
200 New Bond Street,
Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171

www.vhp-america.org

Tel.: 732-744-0851
office@vhp-america.org

Volume: LVI

No.: 3

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2024



EDITORIAL TEAM

Managing Editor
Shyam Tiwari
srtiwari@hotmail.com

Editor
Sanjay Gupta
sgatlanta@gmail.com

Contributor
Sarika Jaswani

Advisor
Dr. Abhay Asthana
abhayaji@gmail.com

जरामरणमोक्षाय मामाश्रित्य यतन्ति ये |
ते ब्रह्म तद्विदुः कृत्स्नमध्यात्मं कर्म चाखिलम् ||

- श्रीमद्भागवद्गीता, 7.29

jarā-maraṇa-mokṣhāya mām āśhṛitya yatanti ye
te brahma tadviduḥ kṛitsnam adhyātmaṁ karma chākhilam

Those who take shelter in Me, striving for liberation from old-age and death, come to know the Brahman, the individual self, and the entire field of karmic action.

- Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, 7.29

ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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

Advertising Inquiries: Shyam Tiwari
Tel: (770)962-2669
Email: srtiwari@hotmail.com

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

The views expressed in the articles presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization, officials, editorial staff or the donors. © Copyright 2022 World Hindu Council of America (VHPA). All rights reserved. No parts and contents of this publication may be reproduced in any form, without the written permission of VHP of America, Inc.

IN THIS ISSUE

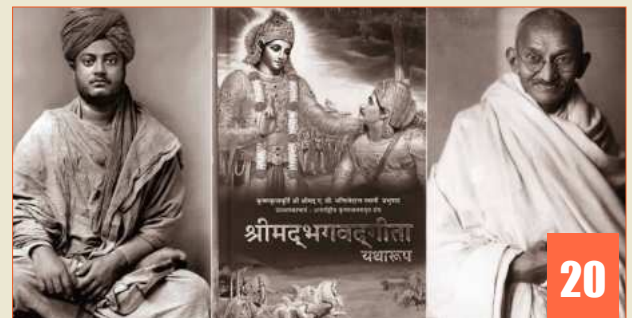
Editorial	3
Jews and Hindus March Together : A Historic Display of Unity at NYC's India Day Parade	5
VHPA Showcases Magnificent Shri Ram Mandir Replica at India Day Parade in NY	8
Vivekananda Family Camp Blends Fun with Spiritual and Cultural Activities	10
Exploring the Deep Roots of Jewish-Hindu Connections with Dr. Nathan Katz: Part I	15

The Un-Made Trip to Ayodhya



12

Swami Vivekanand Gandhi and the Gita



20

Hinduism Misunderstood All Over the World Because Hindus Don't Articulate Its Essence Well

Bhagwad Gita for Children II



30



24

THE BANGLADESH HINDU GENOCIDE

The Bangladesh Hindu Genocide evokes a sense of déjà vu when one observes the historical decline of the Hindu population in countries neighboring India such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. This demographic shift demonstrates a concerning pattern of dwindling Hindu communities in the Indian Subcontinent, where persecution, incessant violence, and systemic discrimination have driven Hindus to the brink of extinction. Their fate seems grim, as their numbers continue to shrink, raising questions about their long-term survival and cultural continuity.

Will decline of the Hindu population in Bangladesh be mirroring the plight of Hindus in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which historically once had significant Hindu populations, and which have now been almost wiped out due to forced conversions, communal hatred, violence, and systemic discrimination? Is Bangladesh precariously in the same mode? Or is there still any

hope for a different outcome?

One might ponder whether Hindus' lack of unity and a sense of community has aided in their vulnerability, or where at times Hindu Dharma, with its emphasis on non-violence and spiritual liberation, might be seen wrongly as lacking the assertiveness required for self-preservation in hostile environments.

Are we merely witnessing and documenting Hindu genocide, where their demographic, cultural, and religious identity is systematically being erased? Documenting these events is crucial not only for historical accuracy but also for mobilizing international awareness and action. However, if documentation merely serves to record suffering sans any concrete action, it could be seen as a passive acceptance of a tragic fate.

History is not static, and the future may hold reversals of current trends. History is replete with instances where oppressed communities have





reclaimed their space and dignity and the possibility of such reversals offers a glimmer of hope for Hindus facing existential threats. However, such reversals require concerted effort, strategic planning, and a shift in the approach to self-defense and preservation.

The role of government in exacerbating the plight of Hindus cannot be overstated. Bangladesh's government, has failed to protect Hindus and worse, has actively participated in their persecution, the result has been catastrophic.

The consequences of "othering" inherent in the Islamists' dogma practiced by the marauders has played a key role in the ongoing Hindu persecution. While philosophical and moral arguments are essential, they are

The Bangladesh Hindu Genocide is not just a tragedy of the past; it is a present and ongoing danger that demands attention and swift action.

insufficient in the face of such grave physical threats. The need for both intellectual and physical protection is paramount. The Hindu concept of "Kshatriyata" (warrior spirit) emphasizes the importance of defending

Dharma (righteousness). This principle must be re-emphasized to ensure the survival of Hindus facing existential threats.

The Bangladesh Hindu Genocide is not just a tragedy of the past; it is a present and ongoing danger that demands attention and swift action. By understanding the religious underpinnings, and comparative religious dynamics, we can better ensure the protection and preservation of Dharmic communities. The future may yet hold the potential for change, but it will require a concerted effort to deter repeated pogroms against Hindus and to turn the tide against the bigotry and the persecution of the vulnerable Hindu community in Bangladesh and elsewhere. ■



Jews and Hindus March Together : A Historic Display of Unity at NYC's India Day Parade

By Sherona Varulkar Kelley

“ The parade saw the convergence of cultures as Indian Jews proudly marched with the Shri Ram Mandir float, reflecting centuries of shared history. ”



The parade brought the rich culture and traditions of India to the NYC streets. The vibrant music of the drums and cymbals rocked the crowds. People broke out in spontaneous dancing and rejoicing. Thousands, American Indians, New Yorkers and tourists from all around the world, thronged the Madison Ave, the parade route, to cheer about forty floats, fifty marching groups and over thirty marching bands. Many were decked out in Indian attire carrying Indian flags. The NYC parade was organized by the Federation of Indian Associations.

This year, Sonakshi Sinha, an Indian actress was the grand marshal of the parade, while actors Pankaj Tripathi and Bhojpuri superstar Manoj Tiwari were the guests of honor.

Various religious minorities of India, who have lived in harmony with their fellow Indians marched in the parade to show their solidarity with the Hindus and Indians. What was of particular interest was the Indian Jewish contingent marching in the parade. Alongside the traditional Hindu flags of red and orange and the Indian tri-color, also flew the blue and white Israeli flag for the first time in the parade's history.

Atithi Devo Bhava, a guest is like God, is how India has always treated anyone who came to her in peace. India is a nation of tolerance and diverse cultures and it is plainly visible in her acceptance and inclusion of Jews and many other minorities as equal citizens. Jews have lived and thrived in India for over two thousand years with never a trace of antisemitism. In today's world of growing antisemitism, divisive propaganda and fake news, it is a singular stellar achievement that stands as a testament to Hindu hospitality and forbearance. Thus, there are five different groups of Indian Jews still calling India home: The Bene Israel settled in coastal Maharashtra and Mumbai, the Cochini Jews living in Cochin and surrounding areas in Kerala, Bnei Menashe in Manipur and Mizoram, Bene Ephraim in Andhra Pradesh, and Jews fleeing persecution in Iraq, the Baghdadi Jews, who settled in Mumbai, Pune, Calcutta and Gujarat.

Before the common era, many Jews fled the land of the Bible- Canaan, which is present day Israel, West Bank, Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria and western Jordan, to escape persecution, enslavement and killings.

In the recent years, India has recognized Jews as a minority group in Maharashtra, West Bengal and Gujarat.

This year, Dr. Jai Bansal, VP, Education and a prominent member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), John Perry, founder of International Organization of Bene

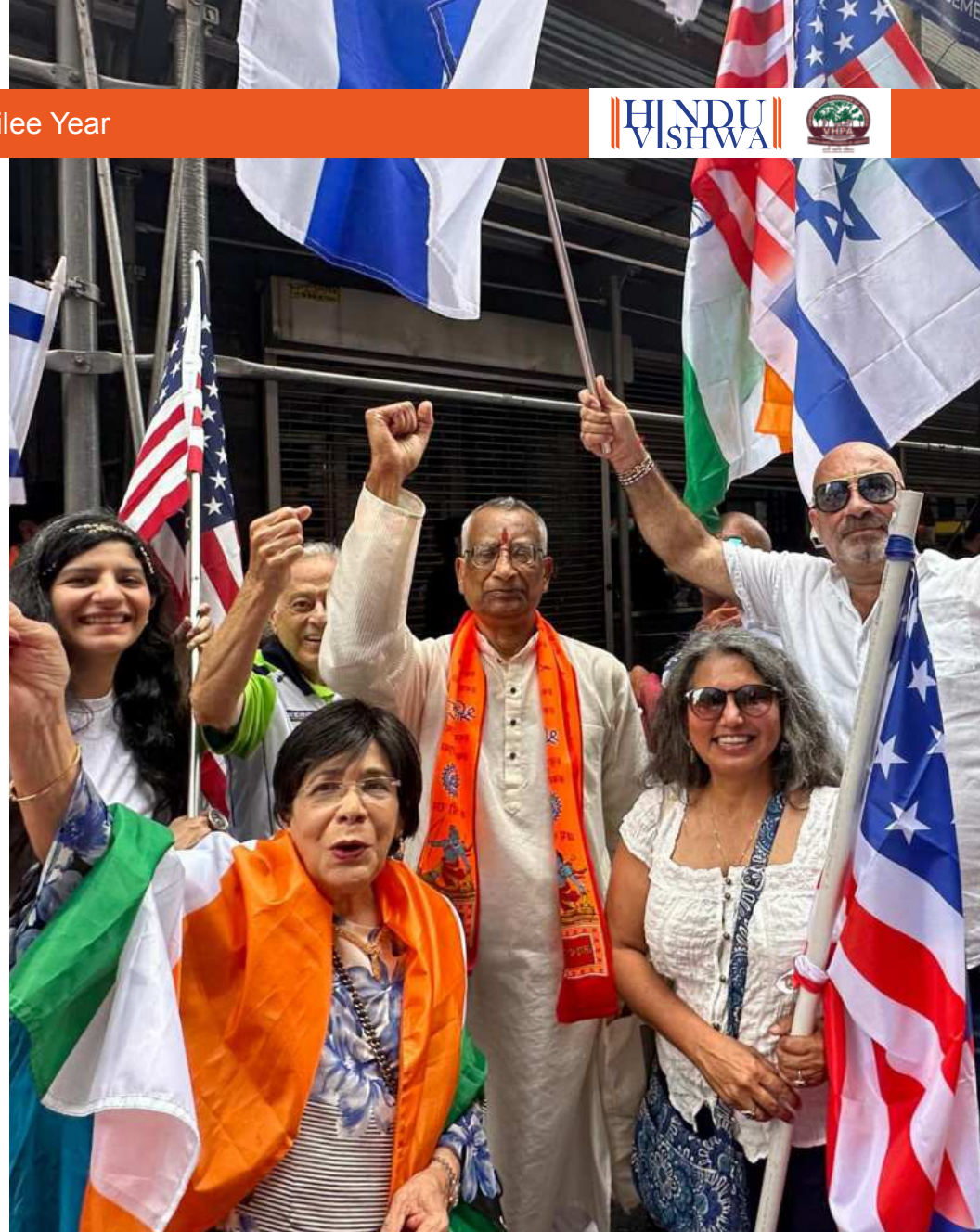


Israelis (IOBI) and Sherona Varulkar, VP IOBI USA collaborated to feature a separate group of Indian Jews to walk in the parade, just behind the VHPA Ram mandir float and their 500 strong contingent. The love and respect between the two communities was evident with many Bene Israel octogenarians proudly waving the Indian, Israeli and American flags and walking the entire stretch of the mile long parade route.

The parade ended with a festival of Indian food and dance at E 25th street and Madison Avenue.

The Indian American Muslim Council was opposed to the Ram Mandir float of VHPA calling it “anti-Muslim” and had urged Mayor Adams to disallow its inclusion. After thousands of Hindus and others flooded the Mayor’s office with letters to support its inclusion, Mayor Adams backpedaled on his initial stand. While over 200 million Muslims call India home, they arrived there first as invaders and conquerors of the indigenous population of Hindus. Despite the controversy of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, it would behoove us well to know the brutal history of the conflict. The original site was a Hindu temple, Ram mandir, which is of highest historical and religious significance to the Hindus. The city of Ayodhya where it is situated is the birthplace of Lord Rama in 5114 B.C.E. Gautama, the Buddha also resided here in 5th century B.C.E., when it was known as Saravasti. When the Muslim Moghuls invaded India, like other brutal conquerors of the world, they destroyed the holy sites of the indigenous population to assert their dominance. In the 16th century, Babri Masjid was constructed over the demolished Ram Mandir.

In 2019, the Supreme court of India



finally approved the construction of Ram mandir on its original site. The Muslims are enraged at the destruction of their site and the construction of the temple. A few thousand have lost their lives in the ensuing conflict. Whether the BJP, a Hindu nationalist party, and heading the present government of India did the right thing or not could be an endless debate but the historical facts are clear.

In the Middle East, the Muslim holy shrine of the Al Aqsa Mosque was built over the demolished ruins of two Jewish holy temples. Fortunately, part of the Temple Mount still survives as the Wailing Wall where the Jews pray.

Under the Israeli control, the Wailing wall provides a buffer that separates the mosque, where only Muslims can pray and provides access for the Jews, Christians and the rest of the world to some part of the Holy Mount for religious worship. The Jewish theology of waiting for the Messiah to arrive to build the Third temple has avoided a conflict over the Jewish claim to their holy site.

While this year’s India Day Parade has brought the Hindu Muslim conflicts from India to the streets of New York, it was also a symbol and show of solidarity and celebration of all things Indian. ■



VHPA Showcases Magnificent **Shri Ram Mandir** Replica at India Day Parade in NY

New York, NY – August 18, 2024: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America's (VHPA) stunning replica of Shri Ram Mandir was the highlight of the annual India Day Parade (IDP), organized by the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA), in Manhattan. The Shree Ram Temple float, measuring 18 feet in length, 9 feet in width, and 8 feet in height, captivated thousands of spectators as it made its way down Madison Avenue from East 38th Street to East 27th Street. Celebrating India's rich cultural heritage, the float became the most cherished subject for photography

and videography, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.

One parade participant expressed their gratitude, stating, "I wanted to extend my heartfelt gratitude for your incredible efforts in bringing the replica of the Ram Mandir to the India Day Parade in New York. Your dedication in organizing this event not only created an electrifying atmosphere but also brought us all together in a deeply unifying experience."

Another participant captured the sentiments of

millions of Hindu Americans: “The presence of the Ram Mandir replica was a powerful symbol of our shared heritage and values, and it resonated with everyone present.”

Sherona Varulkar Kelley, a community leader representing the Jews of India who proudly walked with their Hindu brothers in the parade, remarked, “We are so proud to have been able to walk in solidarity with our Hindu brothers and sisters. India has been a most unique place for the Jews. India, our motherland, gave us shelter for over two thousand years. Jews, especially the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, never knew antisemitism. Only in India! Our love, respect, and eternal gratitude to all the Hindus.”

Ironically, this great cultural icon nearly missed being part of the India Day Parade due to a vitriolic campaign launched by several Muslim fringe groups and their cronies just days before the event. These groups pressured New York City Hall and Mayor Eric Adams to issue a statement condemning the float. In a move that was patently non-inclusive, Mayor Adams labeled the float as anti-Muslim, reflecting a profound lack of understanding of the temple's cultural and religious importance. The Mayor's remarks not only censored the Hindu community's freedom of expression but also undermined the values of inclusivity and diversity, sowing divisions within the community.

However, the VHVA successfully launched a major letter-writing campaign, mobilizing millions of Hindu Americans and many non-Hindu organizations in support of the float's inclusion in the parade. Within hours, nearly 30,000 emails flooded the inboxes of elected officials at city and state levels, prompting a swift



response. Recognizing the public relations disaster they had unleashed, the officials relented. Mayor Adams and his staff acted in the nick of time, avoiding the branding of New York City as pandering to fringe

Islamic groups while insulting millions of highly contributing Hindu Americans—an especially precarious move in this highly charged election season. ■

Vivekananda Family Camp Blends Fun with Spiritual and Cultural Activities



The theme of the camp was Ramayan. Children participated in a daily hour-long education class, with fascinating stories and stimulating discussions based on the Ramayan.

The week-long residential VHPA Family Camp has been run successfully since 1979. This year was no exception. Nestled on the shores of Thorndike Pond, in the shadow of Mount Monadnock, in Dublin, NH, children and adults gathered together to spend a week filled with spiritual growth, cultural enrichment, and outdoor adventure.

Over 75 children and adults spent a week engaged in a diverse range of activities designed to nurture the mind, body, and spirit. The camp featured daily yoga sessions, arts

and crafts workshops, education and discussion classes, waterfront activities such as swimming, paddle-boating, kayaking, or simply basking in the sun. Mornings started with a wake-up call at 7 AM, followed by daily Yoga sessions. Evenings were filled with Indian games, a cultural program where everyone showcased their talents with dances, songs, skits, musical performances and many more, all in a relaxed, fun-filled atmosphere. There was a daily Aarti, where all rejuvenated their spirit. The Camp Song, a favorite with all, was sung with gusto by young and old alike. Even first-time



campers had learned the song by the end of camp.

The theme of the camp was Ramayan. Children participated in a daily hour-long education class, with fascinating stories and stimulating discussions based on the Ramayan. The highlight of the education program was the scavenger hunt-type activity on Friday, where groups of children traversed the entire campsite and showed off their newly learned knowledge of Ramayan. They had to answer questions, which led them to their next location. One day, the children re-traced the journey taken by Shri Ram, Devi Sita and Lakshman Bhaiya. They ‘visited’ Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Panchvati, Kishkindha and Lanka, and learned about what life was like in ancient times, and what those places are like today. While going through the deep dark woods, they even had to fend off a few Rakshshasas, who threatened to harm them. But Shri Ram came to their rescue, and they were able to pass unharmed.

Not to be outdone, the adults had their own education and social programs, with sessions such as retirement planning, end of life care, first aid and wound care and discussions on Ramayan, Sixteen Samskaras, etc. There was a lively quiz on Ramayan for adults, which brought out the child in all the adults.

A highlight of the camp was the hike to Pack Monadnock, where campers were transported by school bus to the trailhead. After a fulfilling hike, participants enjoyed a well-deserved lunch at the summit, with lunch and refreshments provided in drawstring bags. The panoramic views and shared camaraderie made for an unforgettable day.

Another highlight was the Campfire, with joyous gatherings around the fire, where participants enjoyed s'mores, sang songs, and participated in the symbolic burning of an effigy of Ravan, fostering a sense of community and tradition. The week culminated in vibrant dance sessions, including Garba, Sanedo and Bhangra, which were enthusiastically enjoyed by both young and old alike.

The culinary offerings at the camp were a treat in themselves, with delicious Indian cuisine served for dinner, and a mix of Italian and Mexican dishes provided for lunch. Each night ended with the comforting ritual of milk and cookies, while nightly security ensured a safe and peaceful environment for all.

Overall, the Vivekananda Family Camp was a resounding success, offering a unique blend of cultural heritage, physical activity, and spiritual reflection. Participants left with cherished memories and a strengthened sense of community, eagerly looking forward to next year’s camp in the second week of August 2025. ■

For more information and to see pictures and videos, please visit the camp website,

www.vhpfamilycamp.com



The Un-Made Trip to Ayodhya

By Sarika Jaswani

Here's my humble attempt to debunk the narratives that overshadow the Pran Pratishtha (consecration) of Ram Mandir and presenting it with a barefaced, unambiguous light that illuminates and enlightens.

In the vast panorama of human existence, one theme remains ubiquitous and consistent: the narrative we build around ourselves. This narrative dictates the way we perceive events, the way we react, and ultimately, the lives we live. Too often, individuals find themselves trapped in their circumscribed view. There lies the danger: when our narratives dominate, it becomes challenging to see life as it truly is.

Here's my humble attempt to debunk the narratives that overshadow the Pran Pratishtha (consecration) of Ram Mandir and presenting it with a barefaced, unambiguous light that illuminates and enlightens.

I facetiously announce to my 21-year-old on the spectrum while she unsuccessfully tries to put away her plates in the dishwasher after dinner, 'it looks like I have given birth to a curious case of Benjamin Button.'

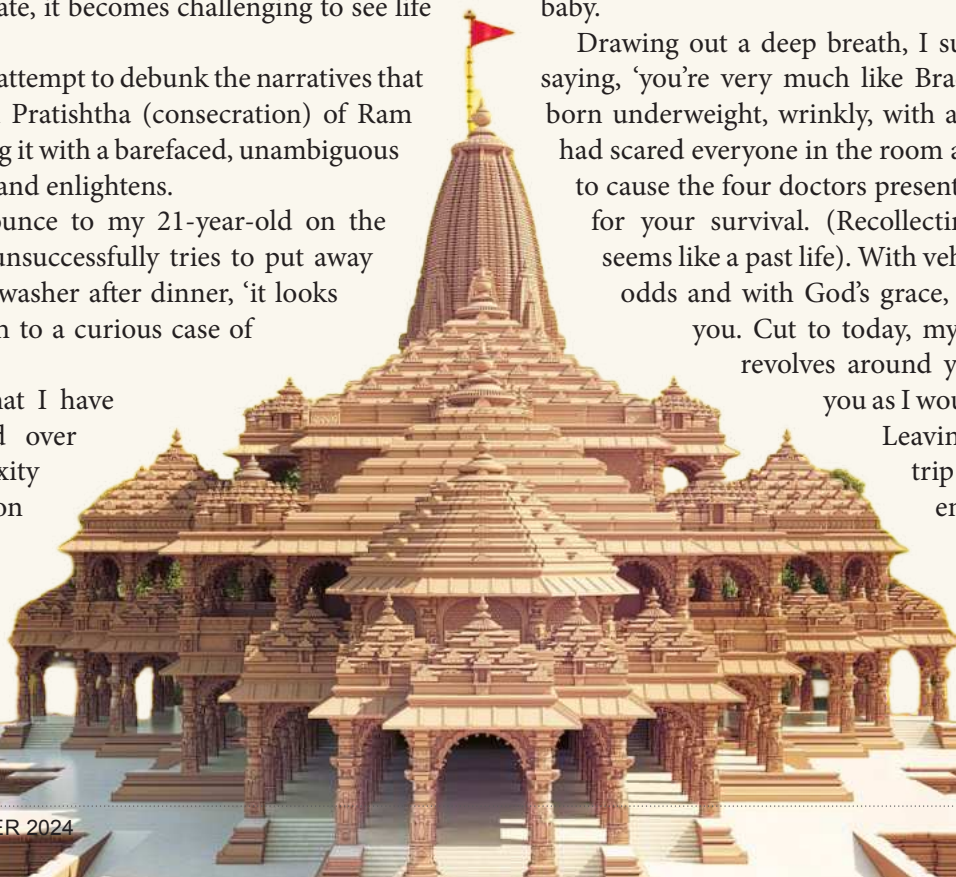
Her stoic brow that I have come to understand over the years is not a laxity for remarks made on her but a beseech to break down all the curly letters in a

straight font.

I give her the gist of the 2008 film where Cate Blanchett plays a role of a mother who gives birth to a baby whose ailments are of an eighty-four-year-old. The baby grows to be a young man played by Brad Pitt, and instead of growing older, grows younger and younger until he is a newborn baby.

Drawing out a deep breath, I summarize the story saying, 'you're very much like Brad Pitt, as you were born underweight, wrinkly, with a concave belly. You had scared everyone in the room at that time, enough to cause the four doctors present in the room worry for your survival. (Recollecting this occurrence seems like a past life). With vehemence to fight the odds and with God's grace, I breathed life into you. Cut to today, my life, like the earth revolves around your sun. I care for you as I would attend to elderly.

Leaving you or going on a trip are liberties that I enjoy vicariously--scrolling through what others post on their social





media pages.

However, life always follows Newton's third law and loves to throw curve balls. In 2021, I did what I had never done and took off solo for my hometown after my mother passed away during COVID. Since her passing, trips that were usually once in a couple of years are now every year. And although I don't get quantitative time to spend with my father because of onus here, I make a point to spend qualitative time with him.

August 2024, against all odds, was planned as a 'Hum Saath Saath Hain' style Tirth Yatra trip along with the extended family. Starting with Ram Lalla darshan at Ayodhya and completing the three-point triangle Yatra of Varanasi and Prayag. My maternal family was skeptical for travel during August since the month is riddled by extreme heat or heavy rains enough to dampen the itinerary planned through some posh travel agents in the country.

'Man proposes and God disposes' is an apt analogy when on June 5th I received news that my father suffered a hemiplegic attack. My focus shifted to keeping tabs on his slow recovery and tonic movements of his extremities. Dismayed but resolved, I sat down to write about my made and then un-made trip to Ayodhya. With fieriness I had noted all the fervor on the news during the Pran Pratishtha

of the temple. The opening was a mega affair attended by a galaxy of stars, invocations, and festivities.

The temple is built on a 2.67-acre site inside a 70-acre complex, but that is only the first phase. The completion of the second phase's construction is estimated to be around December 2025. The humongous project is estimated to cost around 1500 crores and will be entirely funded by donations within the country.

The temple in Ayodhya is a grand affair and was celebrated by millions around the globe on Jan 22nd, 2024. The Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla's Murti began with 'Mangal Dhvani', for which more than 50 different musical instruments were played together for two hours. These included pakhawaj, flute, and dholak of Uttar Pradesh, veena of Karnataka, sundari of Maharashtra, algoza of Punjab, mardal of Odisha, santoor of Madhya Pradesh, pung of Manipur, nagada and kali of Assam, tambura of Chhattisgarh, pakhawaj of Bihar, shehnai of Delhi, ravanahatha of Rajasthan, srikhol and sarod of Bengal, ghatam of Andhra Pradesh, sitar of Jharkhand, santar of Gujarat, nagaswaram, tavil, mridang and hudka of Uttarakhand. A world record was created by collective blowing of 1,111 conch shells. Over 35,000 artists performed in the religious gatherings in Ayodhya and other places in Uttar Pradesh from Makar Sankranti to Holi. About 500 artists performed every day, Beyond





the cultural performances, Ayodhya hosted a series of events after the Pran Pratishtha ceremony, promising an unforgettable experience for attendees. Highlights included Ramleela by Shri Ram Bharti Kala Kendra, Sarayu Aarti at Ram Ki Paidi, a projection show, a laser show, and an eco-friendly fireworks display. Each day approximately 80,000 people come to Ayodhya for darshan. The temple has accommodations for visitors to sit on benches as they queue in line. The temple is made senior friendly with wheelchair provisions throughout the temple corridors.

The old Ram Lalla Murti that was excavated reportedly appeared inside the Babri structure on the night of December 22, 1949, and had intensified religious sentiments leading to a legal battle that went on for decades. The old Murti from the makeshift tent is now established opposite the new Ram Lalla Murti.

The new Murti is sculpted by Mysuru based 38-year-old artist Arun Yogiraj and was placed in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple during the grand Prana Pratishtha ceremony at Ayodhya. The 200 kg and 5 ft tall Murti is carved from 2.5-billion-year-old granite, tested and certified by NIRM facility at Bengaluru, and holds a golden bow and an arrow. The Krishna Shila stone is highly durable, resistant to climate change and requires minimum maintenance at least for the next 1000 years.

Beyond portraying Lord Rama, the Ram Lalla Murti also showcases all ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. These incarnations include Matsya(fish), Kurma(tortoise), Varaha(boar), Narsimha(man-loon), Vamana(dwarf), Parashurama(warrior), Rama(prince), Krishna(cowherd), Buddha(enlightened), and Kalki(yet to incarnate).

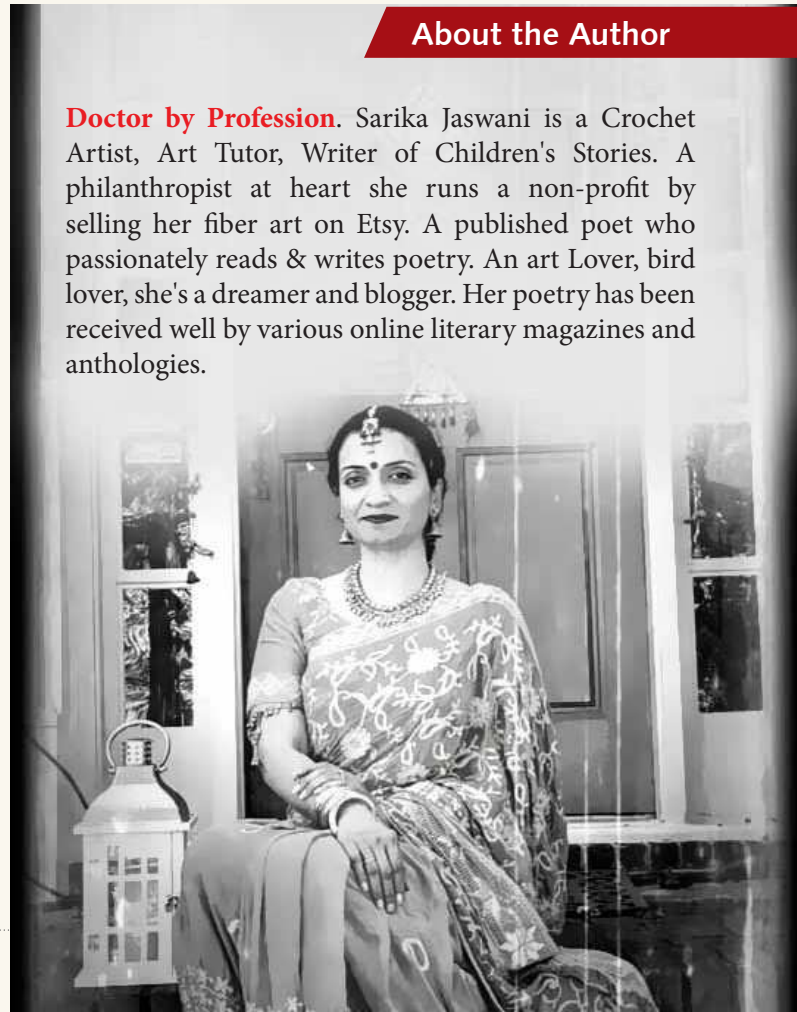
Despite the controversies concocted around the world surrounding the establishment of the temple, the Ram Lalla Murti continues to serve as a unifying force, transcending religious and cultural divides.

For me and my un-made trip to Ayodhya, the Ram Lalla Murti is nothing short of a testament – to enduring values of tolerance, compassion, and coexistence – Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam that I continue to parade through my trying times and are the bedrock of Indian society. These values are our legacy and are as old as the first human walking the earth. And we all strive to pass them on to our next generation.

The Ram Lalla Murti represents the divine infant Rama and is a symbol of faith, devotion, and unity as we navigate the complexities of the modern world. Ram Lalla, just like my 21-year-old, is the Benjamin Button of Hindu values. The values whose origins are rooted in history and are old as time. It is now more than ever that we need to draw inspiration from these time-tested teachings that are woven into the cultural fabric of India. To nurture and nourish these values, for a society that matures and grows—founded in love, compassion, and mutual respect. ■

About the Author

Doctor by Profession. Sarika Jaswani is a Crochet Artist, Art Tutor, Writer of Children's Stories. A philanthropist at heart she runs a non-profit by selling her fiber art on Etsy. A published poet who passionately reads & writes poetry. An art Lover, bird lover, she's a dreamer and blogger. Her poetry has been received well by various online literary magazines and anthologies.



Exploring the Deep Roots of Jewish-Hindu Connections with Dr. Nathan Katz: Part I

By Dr. Jai Bansal

Insights from an Indic scholar on India's embrace of diverse communities

This article is based on one of his interviews with Dharma Explorers. A complete video recording of the interview can be accessed here at

<https://stophindudvesha.org/event/exploring-the-deep-roots-of-jewish-hindu-connections-with-dr-nathan-katz/>

■ *Dr. Nathan Katz, a distinguished scholar of Indic studies, discusses his academic journey, extensive contributions to Indo-Judaic studies, and his experiences in India.*

■ *Highlighting the harmonious coexistence of Jews in India, Katz recounts his experiences with the Jewish community in Kochi, emphasizing their dual identity as proud Jews and Indians, and the acceptance and lack of anti-Semitism they experienced.*

■ *Katz elaborates on the similarities and differences between old religions like Hinduism and Judaism and newer, more missionary-oriented religions, discussing their respective approaches to spirituality, tradition, and proselytization.*

■ *Katz reflects on India's long-standing tradition of welcoming and integrating diverse religious and cultural communities, contrasting it with the history of persecution faced by Jews in Europe and emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and understanding between different faiths.*

Dr. Nathan Katz is a distinguished professor emeritus at Florida International University. He also served as the Bhagwan Mahaveer Professor of Jain Studies, Director of Jewish Studies, and founding Chair of the Department of Religious Studies. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Camden, New Jersey, Nathan earned his BA from Temple University in 1970. He spent two years in India studying classical languages before returning to Temple for graduate studies in religion. He was a Fulbright dissertation fellow in Sri Lanka and India from 1976 to 1978 and received his PhD in 1979.

Nathan has taught at many prestigious schools, ultimately



joining Florida International University, where he started the Department of Religious Studies. He also helped launch programs in Jewish Studies, Asian Studies, Gender JAIN Studies, and the Study of Spirituality. He is best known for his work in Indo-Judaic Studies and has written several books on the subject. Nathan has also been an adjunct professor of Hinduism at the Hindu University of America and taught at the Sivananda Yoga Ashram in the Bahamas. Currently, he is the Dean of CYS College of Jewish Studies.

Nathan has received numerous awards and accolades, including being a finalist for 'Who Are The Jews of India?' and winning the 2004 Vyasa Award from Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan Vak Devi Saraswati Award from India. He received the President's Award for Achievement and Excellence and Florida International University's Faculty Senate Awards for Research and Service. He was named Scholar of the Year by the University of South Florida in 1992.

After a distinguished career spanning 38 years, Dr. Bansal retired in 2014 as the Chief Scientific Officer and the Global Technology Development Advisor of a global petrochemical company. From 2014 to 2018, he served as an advisor to the Argonne National Laboratory, Chicago, and the US Department of Energy. He holds a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Waterloo, Canada, and a B.Sc. (Distinction) from Panjab University. He has published widely and holds over two dozen scientific patents.

■ **Nathan, your accomplishments are nothing short of impressive, and I'm truly envious of your resume. How did you ever find the time to do all this?**

Now that I'm retired, I can't imagine how I did it either. (laughter)

■ **You must have been a busy person! Please tell us a bit about your background, particularly your growing up years? Were there any people or events that influenced your worldview? How did you become interested in Indic civilization?**

When I was five years old, during a family dinner, I suddenly announced that I would go to India at my first chance. I don't remember why I said it, but it was something my mother told me I declared. This curiosity about India might have started with our neighbor at our summer cabin, a Hindu renunciate man named Yubal Cambell, who studied under Swami Yukteswarananda at the Ramakrishna Mission in Philadelphia. He was intriguing and fun, playing games with us kids and showing us his unique traditions, like being a vegetarian, which was new to me.

As I grew older, my interest in Asian cultures deepened. During the 1960s, many young Americans, including myself, were drawn to Asian spirituality. This led me to major in English literature at Temple University and pursue a minor in its excellent religion department. I learned from teachers who were not only scholars but also practitioners of their faiths, like a Korean Zen monk and disciples of Sri Aurobindo.

This experience shaped my academic career. When I later established the Department of Religion at Florida International University, I focused on hiring faculty who were deeply rooted in their traditions, not just academically but spiritually. This approach helped us build a strong and respected department. My early encounters and continuous education contributed significantly to my understanding and appreciation of Indian spirituality and culture.

■ **You've spent considerable time in India studying and later teaching its various religions. I'm particularly interested in your work on the Jews of India. Given the small size of the Jewish community there, what did you learn about their experiences living in a largely Hindu-majority society?**

As I mentioned earlier, my academic background includes training in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and the textual traditions of South Asia. During a sabbatical in Sri Lanka, I was deeply involved in studying Buddhist monasticism. After completing my work there, I discussed with my wife the possibility of visiting Kochi in Southern India, as I had heard of the old Jewish community residing there. This was in 1983. Our decision was to explore Kochi and then travel around India for a few months before returning home.

Upon arriving in Kochi, we visited the local synagogue and began conversing with the people we met there. This experience was profoundly heartwarming, leading to instant friendships. What struck me most profoundly was the dual identity of the Jews in Kochi; they were immensely proud both of their Jewish heritage and their Indian nationality. This dual pride reminded me of my own identities as a

proud Jew and an American. Unlike the backdrop of my upbringing in America, where the Holocaust was a constant, somber presence, the Jews in Kochi exhibited none of the defensive postures typical of those raised with such a traumatic legacy. In India, being Jewish was celebrated openly and without reservation, which was incredibly refreshing and enlightening for me.

The Jews of Kochi had seamlessly integrated into Indian society. I learned that anti-Semitism was virtually unknown in their community—a stark contrast to the experiences of Jews elsewhere. The Jewish community in Kochi was multilingual and well-versed in their religious traditions, speaking Hebrew, a form of Ladino, Malayalam, and often Hindi, which was more practical for their daily interactions across India.

One evening, we were invited to the home of Elias Koder, a leader in the local Jewish community. The gathering he hosted was termed a "drinking club," where friends from diverse backgrounds convened around a large table, sharing food and drinks in a convivial atmosphere. This group included not only Jews but also Zoroastrians, referred to affectionately as 'Parsi Jews' due to their close association with the Jewish community and even the president of the local Jain temple. The Jain's presence was particularly notable as he often brought snacks that everyone could eat, respecting the dietary restrictions prevalent among the different faiths. This inclusiveness extended to Hindu and Muslim neighbors as well, reflecting a microcosm of



Kerala's diverse social tapestry.

This communal harmony was emblematic of what many locals referred to as “God’s own country,” a place where such peaceful coexistence wasn’t just rare but was the norm. During our time in Kochi, it became clear that this was a community where differences were celebrated and mutual respect was commonplace.

The friendships and interactions within this community were profound, illustrating a society where religious and cultural boundaries were transcended as a routine matter. It was a powerful example of how communities could live together in peace despite deep religious differences. This experience in Kochi not only enriched my understanding but also inspired several books I later wrote about the region and its unique Jewish community.

Living among the Jews of Kochi showed me a different way of experiencing Jewish identity—one not overshadowed by the trauma of the Holocaust but illuminated by the richness of peaceful coexistence and cultural integration. This profound experience reshaped my understanding of religious coexistence and has stayed with me as a cornerstone of my academic and personal reflections on the potential for harmony in diverse societies.

■ Given your extensive knowledge of India’s religions, including Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, could you summarize the main similarities and significant differences among these religions?

We often focus too much on the differences between religions while overlooking their important similarities. This tendency might stem from the conventional division of religions into Abrahamic (like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and Dharmic (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism) or into Eastern and Western religious traditions. But I believe there’s another way to understand the world’s religions by categorizing them as either “old” or “new” religions.

Let’s consider Hinduism and Judaism as examples of old religions. These faiths share many common elements, particularly in their concerns for ritual purity, dietary laws, and the sanctity of specific places. For instance, both traditions emphasize the importance of water in purification rituals—Hindus have their temple tanks, and Jews have the mikvah, pools of natural water used for ritual immersion. Dietary rules are central, too, with Jews following kosher laws and many Hindus practicing vegetarianism, which reflects their respect for life.

Old religions also place great importance on specific

locations. In Hinduism, certain sites like Varanasi or Mount Kailash are irreplaceable for performing specific rituals. Similarly, for Jews, Jerusalem and specifically the Temple Mount hold unparalleled spiritual significance. The attachment to these places isn’t just about the physical locations but about their deep historical and spiritual connections to the faith. This has been a source of both strength and vulnerability, as neither Hindus nor Jews have always had control over these sacred places.



In contrast, new religions, which emerged from these older traditions, often have a more universal approach to where worship and practice can occur. Buddhism and Islam, for example, do not require adherence to a specific geographic location. These religions also tend to be more missionary, actively seeking to convert others, which is a stark contrast to the more localized and non-proselytizing nature of old religions. These newer religions can be practiced almost anywhere and often adapt to local cultures and societies as they spread, which has helped them grow. Christianity and Islam, for example, are practiced worldwide and adapt their practices to fit various cultures, which might involve converting people from other faiths.

However, the local nature of old religions like Judaism and Hinduism means that they are deeply intertwined with the histories and cultures of specific places. For Jews, Israel is not just a country but the historical and spiritual home of the Jewish people. For Hindus, the land of Bharat (India) is not just a piece of earth but a sacred geography imbued with spirituality and tradition.

This connection to a place has significant implications. It means that these religions are not just about beliefs or practices but are also about maintaining a continuous link with a tradition that is rooted in a particular land and culture. It’s not simply about faith; it’s also about identity, history, and the continuity of a community.



The distinctions between old and new religions bring out a crucial aspect of how religions interact with the world. While new religions may adapt and spread across the globe, old religions often act as keepers of tradition, maintaining practices that have been passed down through generations and are tied to specific geographical areas. This has both preserved their traditions and posed challenges, especially when followers are dispersed or when their sacred sites are under the control of others.

This distinction has led to a mutual appreciation between Jews and Hindus. Both communities value the integrity of their traditions and the non-proselytizing aspect of their faiths, which respects the religious boundaries of others. This respect is crucial in a world where religious conversion can lead to cultural erosion and familial strife.

In summary, while new religions have the flexibility of being practiced anywhere, appealing to a global audience, and actively seeking new adherents, old religions like Hinduism and Judaism offer a deep, unbroken connection to their historical and spiritual pasts. This connection enriches their followers' lives and provides a sense of belonging and continuity that is rare and profound. These characteristics highlight the depth and diversity of religious experiences across the globe, showing that while all religions seek to answer life's big questions, they do so in uniquely meaningful ways.

■ **That's a very unique and clear exposition of the similarities and differences. We should also add the spiritual aspect, the focus on family, and the emphasis on knowledge. These are important similarities between Hinduism and Judaism.**

Now, given India's history of welcoming repressed people from all over the world, including Jews, Christians, Parsis, and even Polish refugees during WWII, how do you think these diverse groups have been received and integrated into Indian society?

Discussing the broader aspect of inclusiveness within Indian society, it's notable that India has historically been a sanctuary for oppressed communities worldwide. This

extends well beyond Jewish refugees; for instance, one of the oldest Christian churches can be found in Southern India. Additionally, the Parsis, who were expelled from Iran in the 8th century, and the Bahá'ís, fleeing persecution 200 years ago, found refuge and respect in India. During the Second World War, India also warmly welcomed a contingent of Polish refugees. These examples highlight a consistent pattern of acceptance and integration that characterizes Indian society.

From my perspective, the harmonious integration of these communities, including Jews, can partly be attributed to their relatively small numbers, which perhaps made assimilation smoother. Both historically and in contemporary times, these groups have contributed significantly to Indian society, not only culturally but also through trade and commerce, enhancing prosperity in their adopted homeland.

For Jews, our historical narrative in India has been profoundly positive. Whether in Mumbai or Kochi, Jewish communities have thrived under the benevolent acceptance of local leaders and the broader community. This acceptance is reflected in the stories of Jews and Parsis arriving by ship and being warmly greeted by local rulers.

The story of the Tibetan refugees is another poignant example. Like the Jews and Parsis, Tibetans have received governmental support and have generally attained a higher standard of living than the average Indian citizen, all without invoking jealousy or resentment.

In my latest book, "Jews and India," I explore the deep, mutual influences between Jews and Indians over two millennia. It's fascinating to see how, despite our small numbers, the Jewish community has significantly impacted Indian society. Many Jews who fled the Holocaust found not only refuge in India but also a new spiritual path. Some of them became prominent Swamis, Buddhist monks, or nuns, contributing to the spiritual life of India and, in turn, influencing the development of Buddhism globally.

Furthermore, the women's movement, which originated in the West, found a different expression in India. Jewish women, along with their Indian counterparts, have played

critical roles in advancing women’s rights and education within various religious communities. This cross-cultural exchange has enriched both societies, showcasing the dynamic ways in which minority communities can influence a larger host culture.

Overall, the Jewish experience in India exemplifies how inclusiveness and open-mindedness in a society can lead to profound and mutually beneficial relationships. India’s history of accepting and integrating diverse communities speaks volumes about its cultural ethos and provides a model of tolerance and pluralism that the world can learn from.

■ **And, then, we have Europe’s long history of widespread discrimination against Jews and Roma people. What’s your take on this sharp contrast between the Indian and European reception of the oppressed people?**

Growing up, I always dreamed of visiting distant lands like India and Africa; Europe, however, never featured on my travel list. My infrequent visits to Europe were professional obligations rather than personal choices. Despite its undeniable beauty, from the magnificent architecture to the exquisite arts and delicious food, Europe always evoked mixed feelings for me.

The dark undertones of Europe’s history, especially its treatment of Jews, cast a long shadow over its aesthetic charms. My own family’s history is a testament to this. Long before the Holocaust, my father fled Ukraine during the Russian Revolution due to the violent anti-Semitism that

pervaded Europe—not just from the Nazis but from wider society. This history of persecution deeply influenced my reluctance to connect with Europe.

A few years ago, I did visit Tuscany, Italy, with my wife. It’s undeniably one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever seen, with its rich history, stunning art, and grand buildings. Yet, even in such a picturesque setting, I couldn’t shake off a sense of historical weight. During a Sabbath visit to one of Florence’s famed synagogues, I was reminded of the darker chapters of its past. During World War II, as American forces advanced through Italy, Italian fascists attempted to burn down this beautiful synagogue—not out of a rejection of its aesthetics, but out of spite and hatred towards the Jewish community. It was Italian partisans, opposed to fascism, who ultimately saved the building. They perhaps acted not out of love for the Jewish people but out of respect for the synagogue’s artistic value.

Contrast this with my experiences in India, where Jews have historically been welcomed with open arms and treated with warmth and respect akin to family. In India, Jews have enjoyed privileges and acceptance, often feeling more like honored guests than wary refugees. The difference in my experiences in Europe and India is stark: one marked by historical trauma and the other by an embracing warmth.

My time in India spans years, filled with positive interactions and a deep sense of belonging, whereas my visits to Europe are counted in mere months, laden with historical burdens. This profound disparity in my experiences shapes my view of both these worlds.

About the Author

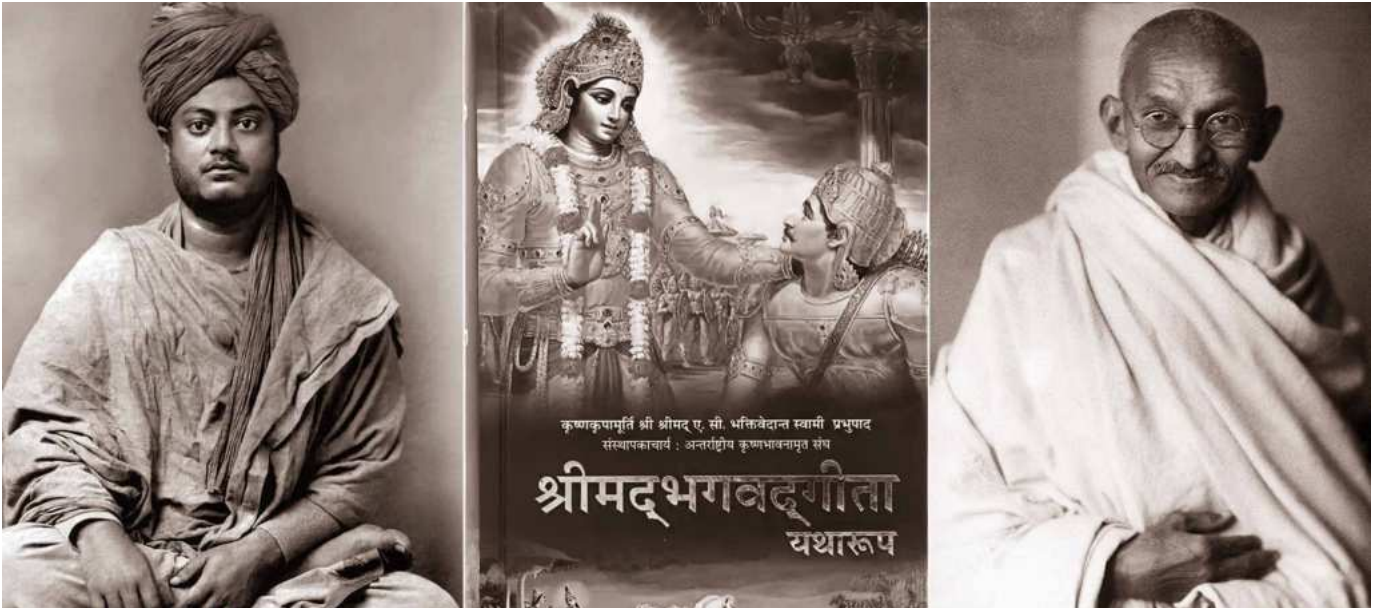
Dr. Jai Bansal is a scientist, author, and community leader with a keen interest in Indian history and in exploring the contributions of the Hindu civilization to the world. He currently serves as the Vice President of Education for the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), as well as a member of its executive board and the governing council.

After a distinguished career spanning 38 years, Dr. Bansal retired in 2014 as the Chief Scientific Officer and the Global Technology Development Advisor of a global petrochemical company. From 2014 to 2018, he served as an advisor to the Argonne National Laboratory, Chicago, and the US Department of Energy. He holds a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the University of Waterloo, Canada, and a B.Sc. (Distinction) from Panjab University. He has published widely and holds over two dozen scientific patents.



Swami Vivekanand Gandhi and the Gita

By Ramnarine Sahadeo



There is no doubt that Hindu Dharma or Vedanta received its biggest historical boost when Swami Vivekananda visited Chicago and impressed his audience with his speech at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893.

Of all the historical places that one can visit in the West, the Art Institute of Chicago on Michigan Avenue is probably the one that Hindus are most proud of. In fact, the stage on which Swami Vivekananda spoke allows visitors the opportunity to stand on the location where Hindu Dharma first attained some attention and respect from the West. A plaque outside Fullerton Hall reminds us of the words that preceded standing ovations and which replaced the customary opening "ladies and gentlemen" with SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF AMERICA. And following the salutation of Sita-Ram the female gender was first.

It was the 9/11 of the East that advocated peace and unity, not one of violence even though the media still do not see fit to limit the 2001 date to the infamous destructive hateful acts that brought down buildings and took thousands of

lives of people of all religions, races and nationalities in New York.

However, it must be recalled that practitioners of the most ancient system of achieving Moksha started arriving in the West by large numbers since May 5, 1838. On this memorable date two ships Whitby and Hesperus landed in then British Guiana (Guyana) with a cargo of labourers who survived the trip across the KALA PANI. to replace slaves on the plantations. This experiment in Mauritius in 1834 was successful so the system of Indentureship was copied to then British Guiana and other countries in the Caribbean until 1920. Mahatma Gandhi's experience in South Africa had convinced him and Congress that this system described as a new form of slavery had to end.

The survival of the principles of Sanatan Dharma depends on those who live by example.

Many still have to learn about these principles even though they were born and educated in the greatest spiritual empire on earth, Bharat.

Consider the education of Mohandas Karamchand



Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) in his early years and discuss whether it was unique or more widespread. When in England to study law he was exposed to the teachings of the bible but not the wisdom of the Gita. He was a married man at age 13 but promised his mother to observe the Hindu practices of abstaining from meat, alcohol and promiscuity. He felt ashamed and miserable when during his second year two Englishmen persuaded him to read Krishna's message to Arjuna that has been handed down for all mankind.

It may not be idle speculation that many Hindus wherever they reside may not have read the Gita described by Swami Vivekananda as "a bouquet composed of the beautiful flowers of spiritual truths, collected from the Vedas and the Upanishads." What is certain is that many in the West who have been exposed to its eternal wisdom have abundant praise for it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "it was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us...the voice of an old intelligence, which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us." Henry David Thoreau: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad-Gita, in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny".

Whatever one may think of Gandhi and the decisions he had to make in his political life, few can question the fact that once he was exposed to the Gita he tried to live it daily. In the hands of progressive national leaders like Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh and others who supported the freedom movement, the Gita became a powerful weapon in the fight against British Imperialism.

Those of us who live in the West can make significant contributions to any country not just by paying taxes, obeying just laws, and participating in the political system but by living a lifestyle guided by the universal principles

enshrined in this instruction manual. Recent experience with Covid-19 has demonstrated vividly that we cannot flood hospitals which need its limited resources for emergency patients. If Yoga, meditation, exercise, a vegetarian diet and ayurveda lifestyle can result in making space for those who have heart surgery or lifesaving operations it's an invaluable contribution to society.

The Gita bristles with numerous verses that teach us to avoid lust, anger and greed. Look at the allegations behind any criminal charges or civil disputes and one can easily find numerous situations where one or more of these guidelines were ignored.

The Gita cannot distribute itself. It is the duty of everyone to find a way to get one in each home. (See article in Hindu Vishwa of Jan-March 2010 page 38 for suggestions.)

Since 2009 HMEC USA along with supporters from Canada and elsewhere have been part of the distribution stream for Gita. Many temples and individuals have sponsored copies as they are still the regular meeting place for community activity. Individuals have added this food for the mind to the meals often shared at religious ceremonies recognizing that it is the best gift for any occasion.

The pocket-size edition is unique in that inside the first cover it states quite clearly that the book is in the public domain and no one can claim copyright. In addition, it has a preface and a background so first-time readers can learn about events leading up to the battle field of Kurukshetra, about 100 miles from Delhi where the Kauravas and their cousins, the Pandavas faced each other on the eve of the MAHABARAT war. It is pocket-sized and can even fit in a purse. Best of all no batteries needed to read it under a tree or on a bus, train or plane. The PDF is available free of cost from the writer to any organization to expand the distribution. ■

About the Author



Ramnarine Sahadeo was born in Guyana while Gandhi ji was still alive. Now a retired lawyer in Canada he has initiated Gandhi Scholarship at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Edited the Gita that has been distributed since 2009. He authored the book MOHANDASK. GANDHI, THOUGHTS, WORDS, DEEDS and his inspiration The BHAGAVAD-GITA

E-mail: ramjihindu@rogers.com

T: 416-970-1492

HWN Book Club Hosts Author of Yuganta

The VHPA run HWN Book club had its quarterly author's meet virtually on September 11th, 2024, with author Mr. Jeevan Rao.

Moderator of the book club Sarika Jaswani under coaction of Ms. Veena Katdare – the president of VHPA Atlanta Chapter, welcomed the author on cybernetic stage bringing down the distance between two countries — India and United States of America at a pixelated level.

“Yuganta: The Advent of Kali Yuga” is Jeevan's debut book and he has plans for more in future. He has presented papers at the conference on Puranas conducted by Indic Academy, been a guest speaker for IEEE Pune and authored many articles on a wide range of subjects for online portals and magazines.

Jeevan Rao is a young researcher, a writer, speaker, and an IT consultant. He holds a BE degree in Electrical Engineering. He writes extensively on forgotten, least discussed aspects of ancient Indian history. Jeevan aims to create awareness and understanding of the forgotten aspects of the Indian civilization in an easily comprehensible way through simple language and strong logical reasoning. He lives in Bengaluru, India.

The range of his research spans the dating of Adi Shankaracharya, re-identifying Vishwamitra star, finding the city Vatsyapura along the Indian meridian, finding Ravana's Lanka, tracking the location of Jatayu's fall, and many more.

Jeevan has dealt with the beginning of Kali Yuga unlike any other researcher of the past because he focuses his study primarily on the Mahabharata text rather than depending heavily on secondary sources. He has managed to extract more than one hundred pieces of evidence for Kali Yuga from Mahabharata and Puranas during his research. He has also analyzed the ancient texts of Surya Siddhanta and Aryabhata to substantiate his Mahabharata research findings.

Below are the projects worked/working on:




- 1) Dating of Adi Shankaracharya
- 2) Identification of Vatsyapura on Prime Meridian
- 3) Kaliyuga: Mahabharata, Puranas, Surya Siddhanta, Aryabhata and Aihole inscription
- 4) Identification of Star Vishwamitra
- 5) Geography of Ramayana: Panchavati, Jatayu's fall, Mahendra Parvat, Sampaathi, Ravana's Lanka


Kali Yuga has been the sheet anchor for the reconstruction of Indian chronology, at least for the last 1500 years. The concept of Kali Yuga has been an integral part of the cultural ethos of the nation and has been invariably linked to the Mahabharata War. Therefore, knowing the beginning of Kali Yuga significantly affects the chronology of Indian history.

This book not only answers the questions about the beginning of Kali Yuga but goes a step further and highlights the implications the beginning of Kali Yuga has on the dating of the Mahabharata War. The contents of the book have the potential to change the way, we had understood the link between Kali Yuga and the Mahabharata War.


Using close to one hundred hitherto untapped pieces of evidence from the Mahabharata text, Jeevan Rao's excellent book has dealt with the question of Kali

**Hindu Women's Network
Book club Meeting**
Some Discussion Some Chit Chat.
Meet the Author . Jeevan Rao G S
To discuss **Yuganta - The Advent of
Kaliyuga**
(All Readers Welcome)
If you would like to attend,
Please email
vhpa.hwc@gmail.com.
We will send you Skype link,
11th September 2024
9 PM EST
Contact vhpa.hwc@gmail.com/770-988-4974 for more
information and to connect.
HWN is program of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) - a
5013c organization



Come join us for some reading
and discussions.



Yuga beginning unlike any other research of the past. The book displays the beauty of the rich chronology and astronomy evidence of the Mahabharata text, which provides a stringent constraint for the beginning of Kali Yuga, when combined with the concepts of Indian Luni-Solar calendar.

This book encompasses a detailed Purva-Paksha on the concept of Yuga, Purva-Paksha on the Puranic traditions for Kali Yuga, along with the analysis of the extensive, diverse and robust internal evidence of the Mahabharata text and also the evaluation of various claims for the year of Mahabharata War, intended at tracing the “Advent of Kali Yuga” i.e. the exact beginning of the Kali Yuga.

Well-known author Nilesh Nilkanth Oak, who introduces himself as a seeker, researcher, author, and speaker says, “The book is written by a 23-year-old young Indian who began his research when he was merely 20 years old. The book is a quick read, engaging, crisp, and follows a logical path to its decisive conclusion. It is suitable for readers of all ages. It solves the dilemma of a few millenniums that has stagnated Indian chronology research yet serves as a reference book on the shelf of every serious researcher of Indian civilization. Read it. Gift it. Share and discuss the findings.”

The twenty-five odd and growing members of the HWN Book club asked questions related to the current book Yuganta on their reading list. The questions that

classified existing under the blue sky ranging from — why we should read the book – Yuganta? And ending in how do we spread the word so more people may get interested in reading the book? Author Mr. Rao patiently responded to each question in the meeting that lasted for 90 minutes bridging the gap of night and day that lies between two countries.

Mr. Rao shared details about his upcoming research and work. The wordsmith hinted on release of his new book. He shared one of his articles published and ended the call with references of the books that inspired and stirred at his heartstrings. His counsel for the aspiring writers is to read and then read some more. The mature audience present hung on to the young author’s words mesmerized as he talked about CE and BCE times in our almost forgotten history. The call ended with thank you notes and great appreciation for each other . ■

The article and books shared by the author **Mr. Jeevan Rao**

<https://myind.net/Home/viewArticle/the-eternal-resistance-of-somanath>

-Aavarana by Bhyrappa

-Eternal shine of Somanath by K.M Munshi



Bhagwad Gita for Children II

What is Atma? Atma is the energy inside of us, loosely speaking. It can also be called Consciousness. We talked about the example of electricity.

From a series of talks by Sanjay Mehta, transcribed and compiled by Jaya Asthana
Before we begin our studies, we bow down and pay respect to our Gurus (our Teachers).

*“Sadashiva Samarambham Shankaracharya Madhyamam
Asmad Acharya Paryantam Vande Guru Paramparam”*

Beginning with Sadashiva, through Adi Shankaracharya in between and upto my own Guru, I bow with reverence to the entire tradition of Guru’s

*“Vasudēva sutaṃ dēvaṃ Kaṃsa Chāṇūra mardanam I
Dēvakī paramānandaṃ Kṛṣṇaṃ vandē jagadgurum II*

I worship Bhagwan Krishna, who is the son of Vasudeva,

Who killed Kamsa and Chanura, who is the bliss of Devaki.

In the last class, we learned that Karma is action, the doer is Karta and the consequence of the action is the fruit of the action, Karma phal.

To re-cap, the first chapter of Bhagavad-Gita is “Arjun Vishad”, which means in simple terms Arjun’s delusion or confusion. Arjun was confused about what to do. So what did he do? When we are confused, we look for someone who might be able to help us. In the same way Arjun went to Krishna and said, Bhagwan, I am confused, tell me what Shreyas is. I am forgetting my swadharma, my duty in the current situation.

These two words
a p p e a r
throughout
the entire



Bhagavad-Gita: Swadharma, your current duty, and Shreyas, the greatest good for all. That is why we are repeating it. Shreyas is the opposite of Preyas, which means 'that which is good only for me,' something I may like but it is not necessarily good for another person.

Now we move to the second chapter, which is called "Sankhya Yog".

Bhagwan is going to tell Arjun about what the basic principles or fundamentals of human life are.

Bhagwan explained to Arjun what Atma is. Atma is commonly translated as Soul, but it is not Soul, it doesn't have a good English translation. If I want to call you, I just call you by your name, I don't translate it. So, let's just use the Sanskrit word Atma, without translating it.

What is Atma? Atma is the energy inside of us, loosely speaking. It can also be called Consciousness. We talked about the example of electricity. When the bulb is on, it uses electricity, but we don't see the electricity, we see the manifestation of electricity through the bulb. In the same way Atma is energy, but we don't see it. Because of Atma the body exists. My core nature is Atma, the power behind the consciousness.

Now let's move to Shloke 48, please read the last three words:

"Samatvam Yog ucchyate". This means "the evenness of mind".

The nature of the mind is that it is always wandering. Evenness means a mind that is just focused on one, it is not wandering.

Bhagwan Krishna says that when your mind is even it can comprehend learning. Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Bhagwan says anything we do, we have to be efficient and effective in action. That is called kaushalam. Kaushal means Perfection, so perfection in action or skillful action is Yog. So there are two definitions for Yog, one is evenness of mind is Yog, and the second is the skill in action.

Shloke 50, last three words are:
"Yog karmasu kaushalam"

Effectiveness and efficiency. Efficiency means you're doing things, but is what you are doing useful? I'm coming to the class every week because my parent says so, I attend class efficiently, but am I learning or not? Am I effective?

Bhagwan says anything we do, we have to be efficient and effective in action. That is called kaushalam. Kaushal means Perfection, so perfection in action or skillful action is Yog. So there are two definitions for Yog, one is evenness of mind is Yog, and the second is the skill in action. When you are playing a musical

instrument, you become one with the music, that is called Yog, that is called Kaushalam.

In shloke number 54, Arjun asks Krishna, “what are the characteristics of a Self-realized person, one who is stable of mind and completely tranquil?”

Bhagwan replies, “One whose mind is not wavering, who doesn’t crave anything, and is joyful in himself, that is called a stable person.”

For example, a thought has come to mind that I should go and eat two ice creams today. But then you decide to eat one. Who decides that? The mind (Man) got that thought, but the Buddhi (intellect) made the decision to have only one ice cream.

In Ch 2 shloke 55 Sri Bhagwan says-

Prajahaati yada kaman sarvan Parth manogatan

Atmanyevaatmana tutsah sthitapragyas tadocyate

Arjun, when one thoroughly casts off all cravings of the mind and is satisfied in the Self through the joy of the Self, he is then called stable of mind. This is called Sthita pragya.

Bhagwan also talks about “samadhi”. Samadhi means you are established in that

evenness of mind, where all illegitimate desires are given up, confusions are resolved, and the mind is not disturbed. It is the difference between need and greed. Greed only satisfies one’s ego. For instance, I buy a sandwich, but I cannot finish it, so I throw it away, thinking that I bought it so I can do with it whatever I want. I don’t think about all the children around the world that are hungry. That is greed. That results in a disturbed mind. Another example, if you have a craving for chocolate or ice cream, you are dependent on it, and your mind gets disturbed.

When a person takes only whatever he needs and

is satisfied within himself, that person is called a Sthita Pragya. He is not dependent on anything outside of him, so his mind is even.

Now let us go to the Gayatri Mantra.

We have seen that it starts with OM, and that Om is that which protects. We talked about Bhu, which is the Earth which protects all of us, it upholds and sustains all of us.

Today we will talk about Bhuva, which is space. Space is the distance between two objects. The Sun, the stars, all are in space. Even the Earth, with you on it, is in space. Space is everywhere, it is all pervading. It is in my pen, it is in my car, it is everywhere. The second quality of space is that it is untouched, immobile, it doesn’t move. All objects in space remain where they are. If you live in Boston and go on vacation, when you come back Boston is still there, it has not moved. The third quality is that space is not contaminated. So, space has the quality that it doesn't move, it is all pervading, and it is always pure, and that's the reason why we say Bhagwan is Space.

Let us end with our closing Parthana:

Om Puurnnam-Adah Puurnnam-Idam Puurnnaat
Puurnnam Udacyate |

Puurnnasya Puurnnam-Aadaaya Puurnnam Eva
vashissyate ||

Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||

Om, That (Outer World) is Purna (Full of Divine Consciousness); This (Inner World) is also Purna (Full of Divine Consciousness); From Purna is manifested Purna (From the Fullness of Divine Consciousness the World is manifested), Taking Purna from Purna, Purna indeed remains.

Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shantihi,



HWN DC Chapter Celebrates “Bringing Glory Back”

The gathering was vibrant and enlightening, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds to discuss and explore the nuances of Hindu Dharma in the modern world. The theme, “Bringing Glory Back,” aimed to honor and praise the beauty, excellence, and splendor of Sanatan Dharma.

The Hindu Women’s Network (HWN) DC Chapter celebrated their Spring event, “Bringing Glory Back,” in Fair Oaks, Virginia on April 6th, 2024. This event was a confluence of Sanatana Dharma, tradition, science, and cultural continuity. 95 ladies were traditionally welcomed with a haldi kumkum/gopi chandan tika on their forehead, accompanied by upbeat shehnai music. The event commenced with a Ganesh invocation sung by Radhikaji, Bhawnaji, Madhumitaji, and Mrinalji, setting a serene and spiritual ambiance. The gathering was vibrant and enlightening, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds to discuss and explore the nuances of Hindu Dharma in the modern world. The theme, “Bringing Glory Back,” aimed to honor and praise the beauty, excellence, and splendor of Sanatan Dharma.

The vibes were electric, and positive energy radiated throughout. Women came to learn



HWN Volunteers and panelists from left to right: Sandya Singh, Rupali Sharma, Falguni Singh, Shiveta Tuli, Geetanjali Katyal, Mrinal Sinha, Saifali Gupta, Geetanjali Chaturvedi, Rajika Mahan, Madhumita Chavani, Triveni Madduluri, Shravalya Valet, Dr. Archana Shyamsunder, Dr. Suchira Pande, Sundri Woodcock

and be with like-minded people that had purposeful intent. All came dressed in traditional, bright and colorful sarees, salwars, and shararas. They longed to be a part of something great. The atmosphere was set for a comfortable and deep conversation that would ensue for the next 4 hours. On the agenda

were two panel discussions, lunch/networking, a silent Madhubani saree auction and a sneak-peak trailer of women who played major roles in the Srimad Valmiki Ramayana.

The day started with welcoming the ladies, socializing, appetizers and mingling. HWN-DC Chapter

Coordinator, Geetanjali Chaturvedi kicked off the event by talking about the HWN organization, its purpose and why we need it. Hindutva was on the agenda and she effectively communicated the WHY of its importance and the WHY we need to practice our culture and traditions and dharma, along with the essence of passing it on to our children.

We started with Panel 1: Hindu Dharma - Science versus Superstition. The panelists were Dr. Suchira Pande, Dr. Vasanti Vittal and Dr. Archana Shyamsunder
Moderator: Rupali Sharma

The panel discussion delved into Hindu practices, their scientific basis, and their application in daily life. Topics included Dinacharya (daily routine), Abhishek (temple offering), and the cultural perspective on women and menstruation. The panelists, citing ancient scriptures and modern research, debunked myths and emphasized the importance of understanding these practices in their historical and cultural context. The discussion, which sparked significant interest and led to a follow-up session, served as a platform for learning and fostered a sense of community and mutual respect.

Panel 2: Bridging the Gap - The Hindu Way of Life in America

Panelists: Triveni Madduluri, Rajika Mahan, Sundari Woodcock, Shravalya Valet
Moderator: Falguni Singh

The second panel discussion featured four inspiring women who, despite growing up in different parts of the world, have maintained their Hindu identity. They shared their personal journeys of being practicing Hindus in America, emphasizing their commitment to preserving their Indian heritage, culture, roots, and traditions. They spoke passionately about how they are passing on their rich cultural heritage to their children, ensuring the continuity of their traditions in a multicultural society. They discussed celebrating Indian festivals, teaching their children Indian languages and literature, wearing traditional clothing, introducing traditional Indian cuisine, incorporating yoga and meditation into their daily routines, and participating in community service. These practices not only helped them preserve their Hindu heritage but also enriched their American communities, successfully bridging the cultural gap. Their stories served as a testament to the

<https://www.cognitoforms.com/VHPA1/HWNDCSpringEvent2024>
Photography- Aarti Mistry
Sponsor- Patel brothers
DJ- Dev Gajjar



MEET OUR PANELISTS

Dr. Suchira Pande
PANEL 1

Dr. Vasanti Vittal
PANEL 1

Dr. Archana Shyamsunder
PANEL 1

Triveni Madduluri
PANEL 2

Rajika Mahan
PANEL 2

Sundri Woodcock
PANEL 2

Shravalya Valet
PANEL 2

HINDUWOMENNNETWORK.ORG



HWN-DC Coordinator - Geetanjali Chaturvedi giving opening remarks and keynote

strength, resilience, and adaptability of Hindu women in a globalized world.

The next event featured a silent auction, showcased by Mrinal Sinha and Shaifali Gupta, with the star being the Madhubani Ramayana Sari. This hand-painted piece by artisans from Bihar, India, depicted scenes from the Ramayana, blending fashion and storytelling.



Group photo of HWNDC participants

The auction saw a final bid of \$1008 USD for the saree, reflecting appreciation for the artisans' skill and cultural heritage. The saree was particularly coveted this year, with the celebrations of Ram Janma Bhoomi and the upcoming Ramnavmi(20th April). The event concluded with Geetanjali's closing remarks, promising future gatherings and updates on various club activities.

The HWN volunteers expressed deep gratitude to their chapter coordinator, Geetanjali Chaturvedi. Her vision and leadership transformed the event into a significant platform for dialogue and understanding, celebrating the richness of their heritage.

The HWN Team and volunteers, including Madhumita Chavan, Mrinal Sinha, Rashmi Sinha, Rupali Sharma, Shaifali Gupta, Bhawana

Bisht, Shiveta Tuli, Sandya Singh, and Falguni Singh, were commended for their dedication and hard work. Special thanks went to DJ Dev Gajjar and photographer Arti Mistry for adding a special touch to the event, and to the sponsor, Patel Brothers,

for their generous support.

The event concluded with a promise of future gatherings and updates on various club activities, leaving attendees inspired, uplifted, and part of something great. ■



Madhubani Ramayan Saree silent auction went to the highest bidder: Kartik Shyamsunder

Hinduism Misunderstood All Over the World Because Hindus Don't Articulate Its Essence Well

By Maria Wirth

WORLD HINDU CONGRESS 2023

जयस्य आयतनं धर्मः

Jayasya Aayatanam Dharmah

24 - 26 November, Bangkok, Thailand



In recent weeks, two big American influencers, Russel Brand and Candace Owen, declared that they got baptized. Others, who are Christians like Tucker Carlson, keep stressing the importance of Christianity for a healthy society. Jordan Peterson explained why atheism is irrational. And of course, he is right. There MUST be a power greater than humans behind this miraculous, vast universe.

Even though I criticize Christianity, I consider it for normal Westerners (not clerics) much preferable to believe in Jesus and his Godfather than to be rootless atheists or communists, as long as these Christians don't buy into the dogma that "only Christianity can save you".

Unfortunately, in America (not so much in Europe), many buy into the supremacy claim, as they have only Islam and Judaism as comparison, and the Christian God of the



New Testament is relatively less violent and less fiercely protective of only his own people.

NRI Hindus generally do not discuss their faith, and have allowed the Church to shape a negative view of Hinduism. But even in Bharat, many Hindus don't articulate, and maybe don't know, the essence of the tradition, which they have inherited.

I watched recently a documentary on India which had been aired on German public TV. It was highly biased against PM Modi and Hindus. Yet there was an incident, where a diamond businessman could have easily corrected the view of Hinduism for the German viewers:

"What is special about India", the businessman was asked.

His reply: "we believe in God, get our strength from Him, start our day with a common prayer."

"Which God? You have so many," the interviewer asked.

"Yes, we have many. I personally pray to Swami Narayana." He then asked someone standing nearby, 'to whom do you pray?'

If only he had mentioned that all the different Gods are aspects of the one all-pervading Brahman, Hinduism would have looked very differently to the German viewers and closer to the truth, as well.

I recently tweeted: "A pity that Vedic knowledge/Hinduism is not known in the West. It is the best option for humanity. Sadly, certain forces don't want people to know that."

A foreigner reacted to my tweet:

"Excuse me, but yoking yourself to Hindu DEMON GODS is NOT the best path for humanity."

This tweeter has obviously fallen for mischievous propaganda.

It reminded me of the World Hindu Congress in Bangkok in November 2023. I was asked to talk about "Articulating Hindu Thoughts", because this is an area

NRI Hindus generally do not discuss their faith, and have allowed the Church to shape a negative view of Hinduism. But even in Bharat, many Hindus don't articulate, and maybe don't know, the essence of the tradition, which they have inherited.

where Hindus don't do a good job. And unfortunately, it's true.

There are several videos on the net, where for example Shiva is compared to Satan – not by missionaries but by people who talk positively about the Gods of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. Usually, India's ancient tradition is not mentioned at all, and if it is, negatively.

So, the comment about the Hindu DEMON GODS didn't surprise me, but pained me nevertheless. Can we Hindus do a better job in communicating what Hinduism is about? (I use Hinduism, as this is the term under which the Vedic tradition is known abroad, even though Hindu



highest truth, is within us? Are we not all conscious, even though we are usually conscious only of the 'objects' (thoughts) within our 'pure' (thought-free) consciousness?

To discover the thought-free consciousness is the meaning of life. And this thought-free consciousness is of course very close to us. Closer is not even possible. It is our essence, our Self.

Does this make sense? Does it not sound like top philosophy?

200 years ago and even until 40 years ago, it made sense also to people in the West, to philosophers, to scientists and to many hippies.

Yet today, this profound knowledge

or Sanatana Dharma would be better, as 'ism' connotes a dogmatic system, which Hinduism is not.)

I remembered my notes from the World Hindu Congress:

First: we need to clearly articulate what is most essential in the Vedic tradition. It is: you are not what you think you are. You are not a separate body and mind but you are one with the one Brahman.

Brahman alone is true. The world is an appearance in Brahman. (Brahman satya, Jagat mithya)

Brahman is the absolute Truth, and the world and everything in it, is the relative truth.

It means, only Brahman is fully independent. It needs nothing else to exist and is eternal. Yet the world is dependent on Brahman and temporary. And here 'the world' includes not only the visible universe but also the much maligned "many Hindu Gods", who are far more powerful and long-lived than humans, and as real as we humans, but are also not absolutely true. They also depend on the one Brahman for their existence.

Brahman is beyond words and thoughts. It is pure, thought-free consciousness or awareness. **It is purely "I AM" without "this or that".**

This pure consciousness is the substratum on which thoughts and everything else appear. **Thoughts are also objects. I can observe 'my' thoughts. So, who am I? This is the most important question.**

Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman) or Ayam Atma Brahma (this Atma is Brahman) claim the Vedas. Sadhana is needed to wear down the veil that hides our innermost Self. Brahman is the only Subject.

So, is there any doubt that "God", as the West calls the

is completely blacked out. If you google "the greatest philosophers of all time", not a single Indian is mentioned among the 50 listed, while ancient Greeks, Chinese and Arabs are mentioned.

WHY???

This is surely intriguing.

Unfortunately, even modern Indians have forgotten this basic knowledge.

Yet those Hindus who knew, didn't do a good job in communicating their knowledge. Even a few years ago, 70 years after the British left, I attended an Interfaith Dialogues and was shocked that the Hindu side didn't ask any straight question to the representatives of the Abrahamic religions and did not mention the positive sides of Hindu Dharma.

"I can't afford to be controversial. I have a family", a participant explained to me his timidity during tea break.

This is very unfortunate, because not to put things straight can become very costly for Hindus in future. Tens



of millions of Hindus have been killed due to a terrible misunderstanding or due to an intentional disinformation campaign that “Hindus go against the Will of the “only true God” who doesn’t want other Gods to be worshipped beside Him.”

The Abrahamic religions claim, “there is only one God (separate from his creation)”.

The Rishis claim “there is only God /Brahman (pervading and containing the universe)”.

Is it possible to discover who is right?

Yes, it is. Because the truth can be experienced. Even some Christian and Muslim mystics discovered their oneness with God or Allah – names don’t matter for That what is unnamable. Hindus, too, have other names besides Brahman, for example simply Tat (That), Parabrahma, Parama Shiva...

Other points which speaks greatly in favour of Hindus.

For example, only Hindus pray for the whole world to be happy. “Loka samasthasukhinobhavantu.” In contrast, the Abrahamic religions pray only for their own group and even – incredibly – believe that their God is favouring only them and sends others to hell. It means, their God is more like a tribal God and not the source and basis of all that exists.

Further, Hindus pray to the Gods and not to the demons. Every day, in thousands of temples, the Gods are worshipped. Gods are called Devas and demons are called Asuras.



The difference between them is this: The Gods are compassionate and helpful. The Demons are egoistic and walk even over dead bodies to get their advantage.

Both are within this world of Maya. Therefore, DEMON GODS are not possible in India/ Bharat. Yet today, even the Asuras of extinguished ancient cultures, are ignorantly called Gods.

In the West, demons are more likely to be worshipped than in Bharat – egoistical pursuit of one’s own advantage is paramount in our times, never mind if other humans or animals suffer...

Open-minded Christians, Muslims and atheists should be able to understand which view is closer to the truth and which is more likely to promote harmony in society.

The Hindu view or the view of the Abrahamic religions? ■

About the Author



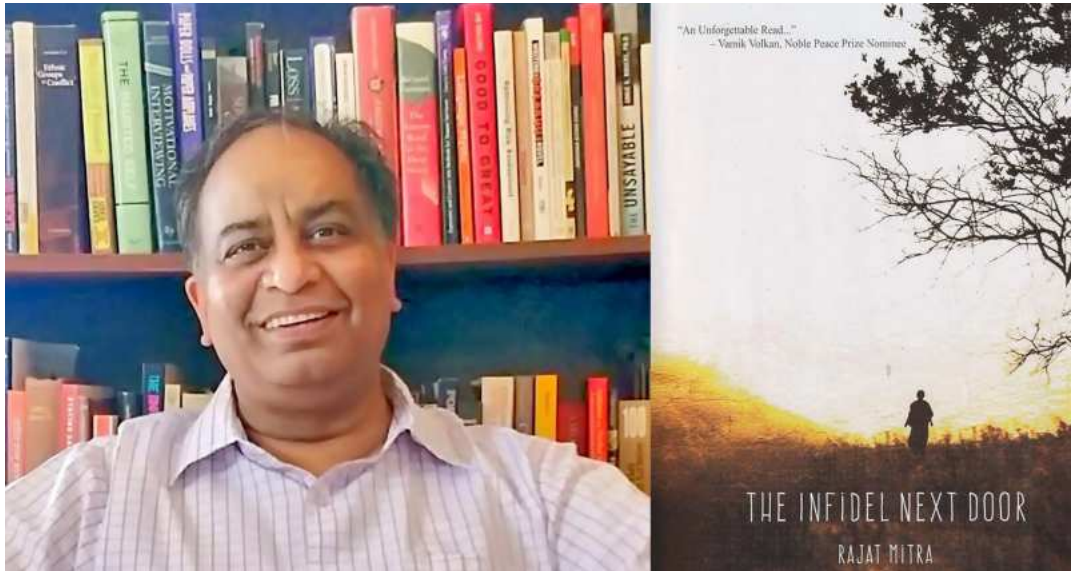
Maria Wirth is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the Ardh Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India’s spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.

She may be contacted via email mariawirth12@gmail.com

Source: <https://mariawirth.com/hinduism-is-misunderstood-all-over-the-world-because-hindus-dont-articulate-its-essence-well/>

The Bheel Mother Who Wanted Her Child to be Born in Bharat – **An Ode to Freedom**

By **Rajat Mitra**



Posted on June 29, 2024

“I wanted my child to be born in India,” she said caressing her child.

“How old is she?” I asked, “and when did you come to Bharat?”

“She is only a week old, and we came a month ago.”

“You made this journey full of danger in this condition knowing all that?” one of us asked. “When you are carrying a child, do you know what a risk you took?”

She smiled as if it had no effect on her. “I made this journey for the freedom of my child.”

This was not a response we had expected from her. She is a refugee coming from Pakistan. We talked in a shanty hut made of straws and plastic sheets for protection from the dust flying all around. The hut like structure was in a mountainous terrain where she had come a month ago with her husband.

“We had applied for visa and then after that realized I was pregnant. We also knew it was our only chance to run away from a place where there was no dignity for us,” she said. The baby smiled and slept peacefully as if listening to us. She was oblivious to the dust and the heat. Her bed was made up of a few pieces of handmade ragged clothes. A few

older women sat around taking care of them.

“You took a very big risk in coming here in this state. You could have waited, given her birth and then could have brought her here. What was the need to come here in a hurry? Aren’t children born there?” I asked.

The mother had a look in her eyes that said it all. “I am a Bheel, and I pray to Mahadev. I wanted my child to be born in ‘free air’. I could not wait.”

Freedom was one of the topics that I had studied in my course on human rights at Harvard. I had been taught that a primary drive for refugees when they run towards another country is their search for freedom. For this they overcome every challenge and risk their lives. They do so by overcoming every hardship, even death on the journey. But that they do so for their child to be born in freedom, I did not know.

I confess, I had not expected to hear such a statement from a woman who was illiterate, never gone to school or even beyond her village. Freedom is something I had always associated with intellectuals, an abstract concept associated with professors and intellectuals, never with people who lived in poverty, on the edge of the society for whom survival is everything. The woman in front of me changed that.

Had she learnt that term from other refugees, I wondered. Could it be that she was being impulsive who didn't want to listen to anyone. "What do you understand by freedom?" I asked.

"I told you. I wanted my child to take her first breath in Bharat." Her voice was calm.

"You could have atleast gone to a hospital over there. Even the closest doctor is so far away from here."

"There is nothing higher than being born in 'free air,'" she said it again in her rustic, rural dialect that I strained to follow. "All my life, as a woman I lived in terror of being kidnapped or raped. I didn't want to have the same future for my child. I told my husband, let us go. He tried to dissuade me saying what is the hurry. Let's postpone it. Let us have the delivery here. Then we can try again. He and I, we knew both it may not be possible again. Once we don't go, families don't get a visa again that easily. If they do, the officials give visa for parents without the child making it sure we would be forced come back."

"How was your journey?" I asked.

"I spoke to the child in the womb all the way. I told her, I am taking you to freedom. I felt I would lose her at times, but I told her, you have to live. I am taking you away so that you never face what your mother faced."

"How was it for you to grow up in Pakistan?" I asked.

"A woman has no freedom. She stays indoors all the time. If she ever goes out, she has to accompanied by a male and put a chador all around to cover herself."

"So, how did you know it will be different in Bharat?"

"I knew it." It was her simple answer. "Growing up in freedom is the best gift I have given to my child." Her eyes said it all.

The longing for freedom is universal amongst human beings. In refugees it was the desire to give the child what she had missed which she would not compromise upon.

Seeing my look she said, "We are Bheels. A Bheel child knows about freedom from the moment he takes his first breath. It was we who taught Maharana Pratap about freedom. He played with Bheel children and that is where

he understood his fight for freedom."

Bheels are Hindus who are the largest Tribal group in India. Their name finds mention in Ramayana and Mahabharata.

A memory came to me. Many years ago while attending a workshop in South Africa, a colleague of Nelson Mandela had told the audience that a journalist had once asked Mandela where did he get his relentless struggle for freedom from? He had expected that Mandela would reply that he had got it from reading some book on western philosophy or from a western intellectual. The answer Mandela gave had stunned him. Mandela had replied that he got his idea of freedom from his village elders, from a village philosophy called 'ubuntu'. It meant that all human beings are equal, and no one is above the other and no one is below either and no one can take it away. The white reporter had felt disappointed that Mandela had got it from a nondescript village elder.

Today, that Bheel woman taught me something similar. She taught me freedom is rooted in the blood and heart of every woman like her who is oppressed and persecuted. That it flows in the veins of mothers, the tribals, the aborigines whom we don't associate with that. That is how they fought the British and the Mughals. That it is rooted in the soul of Bharat, in her air, in her history, in her myths that around us. Freedom is not an esoteric concept that we have to learn in schools. In our freedom struggle it didn't come from any party or was an outside idea but ran in our blood and was rooted in the soil. As long as Bharat exists, this yearning will always come out like it did with the Bheel mother whom we met in the refugee camp.

She also taught me a universal truth that I had always known but never so clearly, that for millions of men, women and children, Bharat is a land that will always be a hope of shelter to the persecuted.

The above narrative comes from a project made possible by Dharmansh Foundation of Jaipur supporting research on the psychological trauma of refugees who come from Pakistan. ■



About the Author

Rajat Mitra is a Psychologist, Speaker and Author of 'The Infidel Next Door'

www.rajatmitra.co.in

TAKE WISE DECISIONS

By Siddheshwari Devi 'Didi ji'



Giving to others brings immense satisfaction to the mind. There is a great need for givers in the world; there always has been and will always be. We are children of the most magnanimous and generous God who never tires of giving. Let's try to follow in His footsteps.

Decide to lose.

When engaged in a battle of words with a family member, decide to lose the argument. You will emerge victorious, with the twin bounty of peace and humility in your hands.

Decide to say something.

If you hear someone insulting another or judging others by their looks, color, race or religion, decide to not remain quiet. Say something. Let it be known that you don't agree.

Decide to make every day special.

Take a decision that every day will be special. Decide to value every moment and be grateful for life.

Decide to discover the joy in small things.

It's human tendency to wait for happiness to come along. While we are waiting, we feel anxious. Decide to look for joy that surrounds you 24 hours a day.

Decide to take time out for yourself.

You will not become a martyr to your family for sacrificing your health for their sake. You will be blamed instead. So, decide to take care of your physical and mental health.

Decide to be spontaneous.

Take a walk in the middle of the day, or bake cookies, or play in the backyard with your children, or take a comedy break. Be spontaneous.

Decide to break the tension.

Look at your face in the mirror and make a funny face. Shake off the tension and the gloom by laughing at yourself.

Tragedies teach us

The horrific events that unfolded on September 11, 2001 sent shock waves throughout the U.S. 23 years later, we can still vividly remember where we were on that morning and recall the whole gamut of emotions we felt in the aftermath. Our world was never going to be the same again. A dark cloud hovered for a long time over our collective consciousness and individual minds.

At the same time, there is always a silver lining behind every dark cloud. Every tragedy forces us to accept truths that are otherwise too uncomfortable for us to reflect on. Every tragedy leaves us with lessons that we have no choice



but to accept, simply because they stare us glaringly in the face. We saw on that sad day that life is unpredictable, and death is inevitable. When those who perished on that day left home in the morning they did not think that this was going to be their final day on earth. None of us is privy to that information.

Tragedies also force us to accept that life doesn't always remain the same. Life is not a stagnant pond. Life is an ever-flowing river. Things change; people change; situations change. The only constant in life is 'change'.

When faced with excruciatingly difficult situations in life, we learn that we humans are resilient creatures. When we are in the depths of despair, we have no way to go except up. We cry; we grieve; we become despondent, but then we rise up. We rebuild ourselves and continue to live, hopefully wiser, due to the lessons tragedy has taught us.

An Ending Leads to a New Beginning

We hear and use the expression, "Everything good must come to an end one day." We speak these words with a regretful sigh. We lament the passing of something good that we had in life. It's true that everything good comes to an end one day. It's also true that everything bad comes to an end one day. If a marriage comes to an end, the abuse, fights and arguments between two people also come to an end. If a popular boys' band breaks up, it is the beginning of a solo career for band members. When high school education comes to an end, college life begins.

Rather than grieving the end of something we hold dear, let's celebrate the beginning of something new. When spring comes to an end, summertime arrives. When summer comes to an end, the autumn season arrives. When autumn comes to an end, winter begins. Every season has its own beauty worth noticing and appreciating.

When life as we knew it comes to an end, challenges begin. It's a waste of time brooding over the changes and wishing everything to have remained the same. We should live constructively by embracing challenges and adapting ourselves to meet these challenges. We should also keep in mind that challenges will also come to an end one day.

We reminisce about the 'good old days.' We mourn the days that will never return. While mourning the loss of our past, we overlook the present which is not bad at all. The days of the past had to end for the present to arrive. Appreciate the new beginnings rather than holding on to the past.

The caterpillar must shed its former self for the butterfly to arrive. Every ending leads to a new beginning.

Best Things to Give

Giving to others brings immense satisfaction to the mind. There is a great need for givers in the world; there always has been and will always be. We are children of the most magnanimous and generous God who never tires of giving. Let's try to follow in His footsteps. I will begin by giving some suggestions:

- Give your attention. Listen carefully to what people are saying, especially children and the elderly. We often tend to dismiss them.
- Give your time. Best gift is the gift of time. We all claim not to have enough time; so giving it means you are giving a very precious gift.
- Give benefit of the doubt. We do disservice to others by jumping to conclusions. We give due respect to others by giving them benefit of the doubt.
- Give a smile. You can brighten a dull day with your smile. You can lift someone's spirits with your sweet smile. Smile, please.
- Give a surprise. Send flowers for no reason. Give a surprise visit. Surprise someone going through hardship with a hearty meal or by cleaning up their home and doing their laundry.
- Give your help. If you are a handyman, help those who need something done around the house but are physically unable to do it. If you are young and healthy, extend a helping hand to the elderly and the physically ill.
- Give financial help. In the present climate your friends and



family members may not have enough to even pay the rent or the mortgage; so don't wait for them to ask. Extend financial help without being asked.

Turn Chore into Pleasure

A new bride called her mother in tears and told her that she didn't want to stay with her husband as he was very mean to her. Her concerned mother asked, "What did he do?" The bride said, "Mother, he uses so many 4-letter words." The mother was shocked and said, "That doesn't sound like him." Her daughter replied, "He keeps using words like 'Cook, Bake, Wash, Iron.'"

You can surely identify with this young lady. Chores do not evoke pleasure; only pain. When you think of a chore, you are likely to think of something you 'have' to do; not something you 'want' to do. Fact is that you are stuck with chores; there is no way to get rid of them. While you can't change the fact that you will have to cook, clean, sweep, mop, do the dishes and tackle the laundry, you can change your attitude about your daily work.

The Bhagavad Geeta says, "Whatever you do, offer it to God." When understood, these simple words can transform the way you look at everything in life. In fact, these words can transform your entire life. Whenever you are engaged in doing a chore, visualize your sweet Lord beside you or in front of you. Think that you are cleaning the house for Him. As you prepare a meal, think that you are cooking for Him. The clothes you are washing belong to Him. Imagine the smile on His face as He shows satisfaction with the way you serve Him.

Following this practice will benefit you in two ways. First benefit is that your chores will no longer be dreary. Second benefit is that while you may be externally washing, cleaning, cooking, sweeping and mopping, internally you will be practicing devotion all day long. ■

Note: You may direct your spiritual questions to me directly at s_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org



VHPA - Executive Board (EB)

Name	Title	Email
Ajay Shah	President	shahajay@gmail.com
Amitabh Mittal	General Secretary	avmittal@vhp-america.org
Tejal Shah	Jt. General Secretary	tshahnj@hotmail.com
Shyam Tiwari	VP Publications	srtiwari@hotmail.com
Vasav Mehta	National Treasurer	vasavmehta@gmail.com
Toral Mehta	Jt. General Secretary	trexmehta@gmail.com
Jai Bansal	VP Education	jaigb0@gmail.com
Rakhi Israni	Legal Counsel	rakhi@exceltest.com
Jayant Daftardar	Support A Child	daftardarj@yahoo.com
Sanjay Kaul		

VHPA - Extended EB with Special Invitees

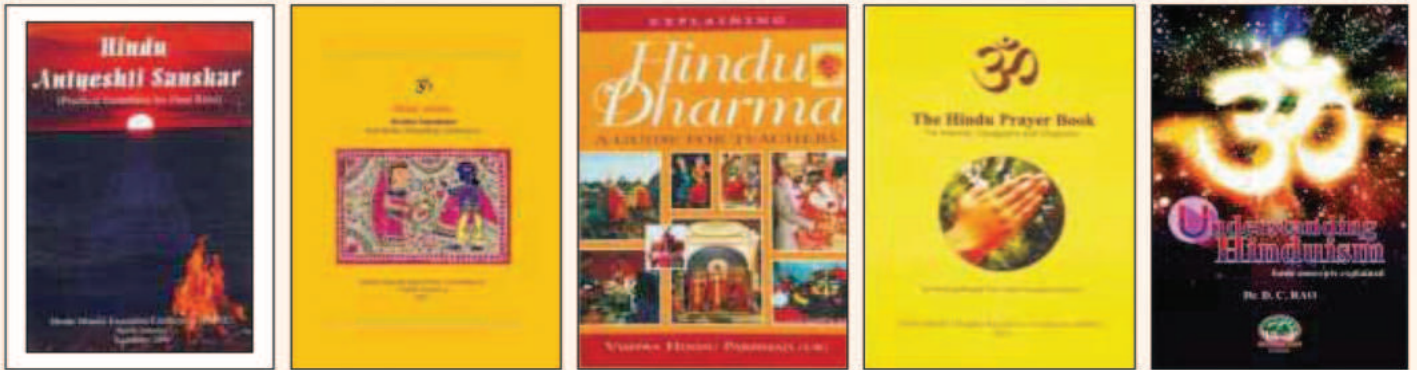
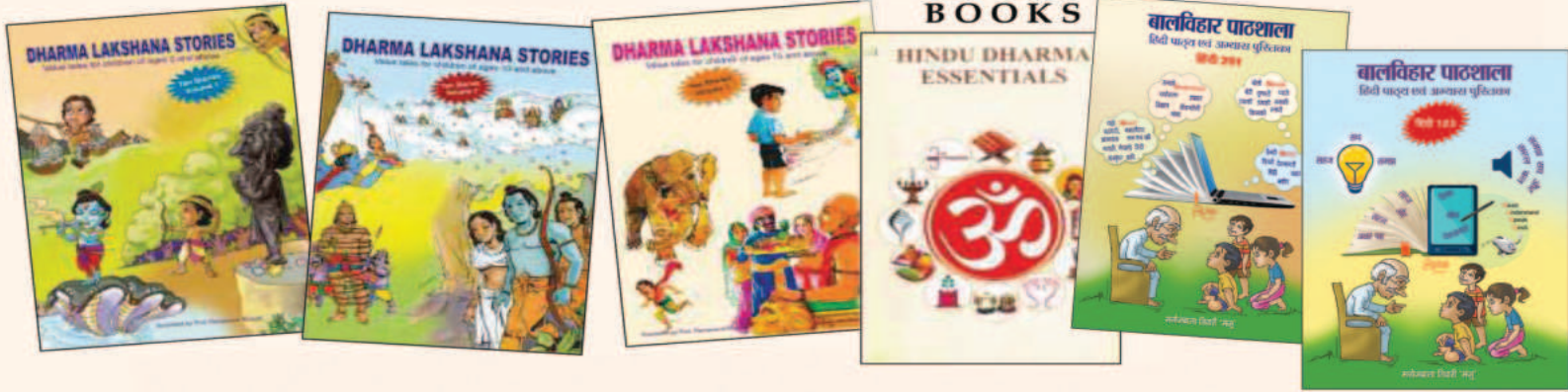
Name	Title	Email
Anit Gupta	Assistant Treasurer	anitgupta@gmail.com
Dhaval Joshipura	VP Membership	djosh58@gmail.com
Manju Tiwari	National Bal Vihar Network	msrtiwari@gmail.com
Sanjay Shah	Director of Financial Planning	shahsanjay@hotmail.com
Sneha Mehta		
Makarand Abhyankar		

ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्माऽमृतम् गमय । ।

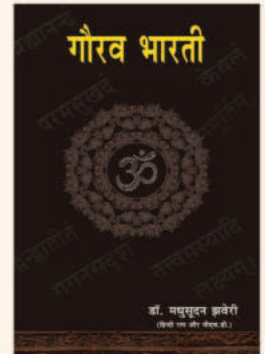
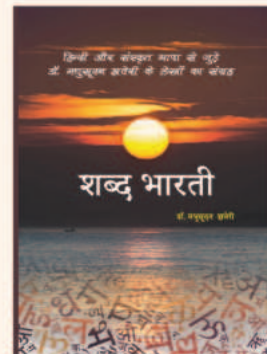
Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

OUR PUBLICATIONS



Hindu Vishwa - a quarterly magazine



Available at:

World Hindu Council of America (VHPA)

National Office: 200 New Bond Street, Sugar Grove, IL 60554-9171

Tel.: 732-744-0851

Email: office@vhp-america.org

Web: www.vhp-america.org



CALENDAR



SUPPORT A CHILD (SAC)

Project of VHPA



A Way to Serve & Connect to Bharat \$250/Year Gift Will Provide
Education | Lodging | Medical Care | Boarding | Samskara to a Child

**Many are Waiting for Your Support
Internship Program for Students from USA**



(Printed in India)

Send Donation to

VHP of America (SAC), P.O.Box 1229, Mason, OH 45040

Email: request.SAC@gmail.com | Phone: 513-953-9580

Web: www.supportachildusa.org

BUILD THE LIFE OF UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN OF BHARAT

An Educational Project of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA)