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HINDU VISHWA

Vishwa Dharma Digest

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क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ॥
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥

- श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 12.5

kleśho 'dhikataras teṣhām avyaktāsakta-chetasām
avyaktā hi gatiḥ duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate ॥

For those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest, the path
of realization is full of tribulations. Worship of the unmanifest is
exceedingly difficult for embodied beings.

- Bhagvad Gita, 12.5

ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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

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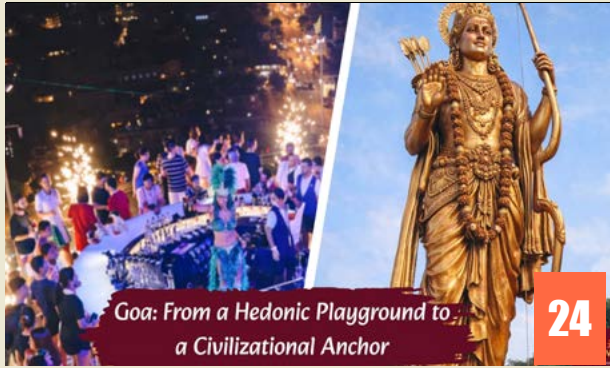
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Standing Firm Against Hinduphobia

In recent months, several developments across the United States have once again brought the issue of Hinduphobia into public discussion. Whether it is the controversy surrounding the Hanuman statue in Texas, the harassment of Hindu public figures because of their religious identity, or the persistent misrepresentation of Hindu traditions in media and academia, these incidents reveal a troubling pattern.

The debate surrounding the Hanuman statue in Texas is instructive. For billions of Hindus worldwide, Hanuman is not merely a cultural icon but a sacred symbol of devotion, courage, and selfless service. Yet the project intended as a place of spiritual inspiration became the target of ridicule, misinformation, and hostility from some quarters. When our sacred symbols are mocked or politicized, it is not simply a disagreement about zoning laws or aesthetics; it reflects a deeper prejudice with the visible presence of Hindu identity in public life. On social media and in public commentary, one could see remarks such as, “Why bring Hindu gods here? This is not American culture,” or “These giant statues don’t belong in our country.”

Similarly troubling is the harassment faced by Hindu political candidates who have stepped forward to serve in public office. Hindu candidates have faced insinuations such as, “Where does their loyalty lie?” In our nation, candidates should be evaluated on their ideas, qualifications, and commitment to public service not judged or worse vilified because they practice their Hindu dharma openly. Unfortunately, Hindu candidates have been subjected to stereotypes, and motivated attacks because of our dharmic heritage.

This trend raises an important question: why does the expression of Hindu identity provoke suspicion or

hostility in spaces that otherwise celebrate diversity? The answer lies partly in a broader climate where religious bigotry and intolerance is increasing. When supremacist ideas take hold, ignorance thrives and can easily become prejudice.

Hindu civilization has long taught the values of mutual respect, pluralism, and intellectual openness. The ancient Sanskrit maxim:

“आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः”

Aano bhadraah kratavo yantu vishwatah

—“Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions.”

(Rig Veda 1.89.1)

This profound statement encapsulates the Hindu worldview: a willingness to welcome ideas from all corners while remaining rooted in dharma. It is precisely this spirit that Hindus have brought to the United States.

As Hindus participate more actively in civic life as public servants, and elected officials, it becomes essential to confront Hindudvesha with clarity. The path forward requires vigilance, education, and engagement. Hindus must continue to share the depth and beauty of our traditions with neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens. At the same time, institutions whether it is media, academia, and political organizations must commit themselves to intellectual honesty when discussing Hindu traditions. The rising Hindu presence in public life is not a threat but a testament to the vitality of America’s openness to new ideas. Upholding those would means that Hindus can practice their faith, and participate in civic life with dignity and respect while enhancing the wellbeing of the American society. ■



VHPA AND HINDU AMERICA

A 55-Year Journey of Cultural Continuity – Part III

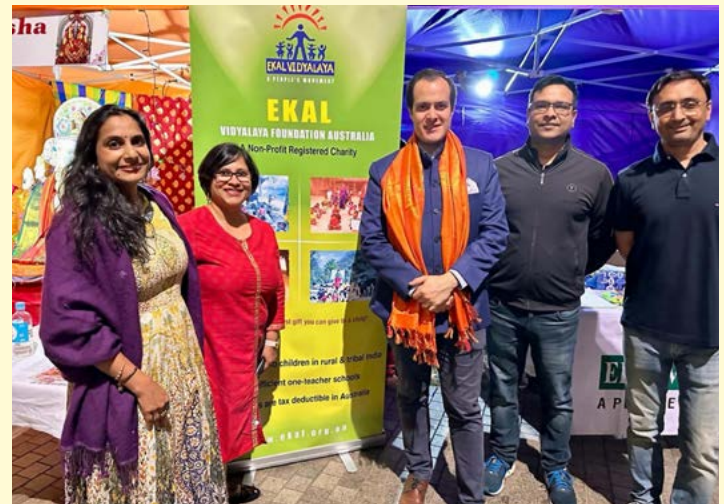
● By Jai G. Bansal, VP of Education and Prachar, VHPA Abstract

VHPA as Incubator for Leaders and Organizations

Since its inception, VHPA has played a vital role in developing and nurturing future leaders and organizations dedicated to advancing the Hindu community. By cultivating an environment that encourages dialogue, mentorship, and mission-driven growth, it empowers individuals to lead by example and make a lasting impact. Through initiatives centered on learning, acceptance, and leadership development, VHPA equips leaders to strengthen the Hindu-American community while preserving its core values. Prominent organizations like Ekal Vidyalaya, Hindu University of America, and Hindu Student Council owe their beginnings to VHPA's supportive efforts. These initiatives play a pivotal role in sustaining and enriching the community's cultural and social fabric, creating a legacy that benefits future generations. The following section provides insights into these significant organizations, exploring their origins and contributions.

Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation

The Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF) traces its roots to the visionary efforts of Shri Madanlal Agarwala, a philanthropist from Bihar, who sought to uplift tribal communities in the region during the 1980s. His transformative journey began when he asked local residents how he could help improve their lives. Their poignant response "If you could educate our children and make them literate like you, we would be highly obliged"—sparked the idea of a literacy movement that would eventually become a global phenomenon. This noble vision was bolstered by the support of Sh. Ashok Singhal, a towering leader of



Vishwa Hindu Parishad Bharat, whose leadership proved instrumental in nurturing the project during its formative years.

With Ashok Singhal ji's guidance, VHPA took this concept and integrated it into its broader mission of serving the underserved. As an organization deeply committed to cultural preservation and social welfare, VHPA provided a robust platform for the development of what came to be known as the "One-Teacher School" project.

By the late 1980s, the "One-Teacher School" project had firmly established itself within the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA). Recognizing the need for an independent platform to foster its growth, the project transitioned into an autonomous, tax-exempt organization. In 1999, it was renamed to Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF). This transformation was guided by VHPA's leadership, rooted in a deep ethos of service and commitment to societal upliftment. Their vision and support were instrumental in launching EVF as a standalone entity with a singular mission to empower India's rural and tribal communities.



Ekal Vidyalaya found inspiration in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, who famously emphasized that a nation's progress is directly proportional to the education and intelligence of its people. Adopting this principle, EVF dedicated itself to bringing education to the doorsteps of underserved and remote communities. Its innovative "One-Teacher School" model, designed to maximize impact with minimal resources, provided literacy to groups of 35-40 children for just one dollar a day. These schools bridged the gap for communities without access to conventional infrastructure, while addressing broader socio-economic challenges.

VHPA's support and its strong network in the Indian diaspora played a critical role in scaling Ekal's operations. Indian Americans, driven by a desire to give back to their homeland, embraced the project wholeheartedly. Fundraising events, including concerts, galas, and youth-led initiatives, became effective tools to generate resources and raise awareness about Ekal's mission. This partnership catalyzed Ekal's growth, turning it into a transformative force for rural education and development.

By the end of 2024, Ekal had established over 78,000 schools across

India, serving more than 2 million children annually. Over its 35-year journey, the foundation has provided literacy to 10 million children, expanded healthcare access to 855,000 individuals, and vocationally trained 17,400 women.

As the needs of rural communities evolved, so did Ekal's programs. Digital literacy became a key focus, bridging the technological divide in remote areas. Initiatives like "Ekal-on-Wheels," featuring mobile vans equipped with computers, provided digital training to thousands of youths. The use of solar-powered transmission towers and tablets further enhanced the reach and quality of education. These efforts earned Ekal the "Digital Trailblazer Award" from Hewlett Packard and India Today in 2016, recognizing its pioneering role in rural digital education.

Healthcare emerged as another cornerstone of Ekal's mission. Supported by the Health Foundation for Rural India (HFRI), Ekal introduced mobile eye clinics, anemia eradication programs, and other health initiatives that significantly improved the quality of life for underserved populations. Additionally, Ekal's integrated village development programs promoted

water conservation, organic farming, and cottage industries, empowering rural families to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization undertook a comprehensive campaign to support rural communities by distributing food packets, facilitating vaccinations, and providing accurate information about the virus. Similarly, following the devastating earthquake in Nepal, Ekal mobilized resources to deliver medical aid, shelter, and food to those affected. These efforts highlighted Ekal's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies.

Ekal's impact extends beyond India, establishing itself as a global grassroots movement with chapters in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. These chapters work tirelessly to advocate for Ekal's mission and raise funds, ensuring the movement's sustainability and growth. Despite its extensive operations, Ekal maintains an impressive overhead of only 10%, ensuring that the majority of donations directly benefit the communities it serves.

The foundation's achievements have been widely recognized. In 2019, Ekal received the prestigious "Mahatma Gandhi Peace Prize," India's highest honor for social organizations. This award, conferred by the Indian President and Prime Minister, acknowledged Ekal's contributions to empowering rural communities and promoting gender equality. The honor reaffirmed Ekal's alignment with Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj.

Ekal's roots in VHPA remain central to its ethos and mission. The values of service, dedication, and sacrifice instilled during its formative years continue to guide its operations. The guidance and vision



of VHPA leaders were instrumental in shaping Ekal into a transformative movement that empowers millions.

Looking ahead, Ekal remains steadfast in its commitment to education, healthcare, and sustainable development. By empowering rural communities to break the cycle of poverty and achieve self-reliance, Ekal is not only fulfilling Swami Vivekananda's vision but also creating a brighter future for India's villages.

Hindu University of America

"Multitude of serious and sincere seekers of truth are knocking at our doors. We cannot disappoint them, keeping our doors closed. We will have to open our doors and accord a hearty welcome." These visionary words of Swami Tilak (1929–1984) encapsulated his aspiration for the proper representation of Sanatana Dharma in Western academia. Swami Tilak's vision inspired the establishment of a Hindu University in America, but unfortunately, he did not live to see his dream realized. His untimely passing in a car accident in Spain in 1984 left a void in the effort to establish such an institution, but his ideals endured in the minds of like-minded leaders.

Five years after Swami Tilak's passing, the dream took a definitive shape. In 1989, four prominent leaders—Dr. Deen Dayal Khandelwal, Shri Abhinav Dwivedi, Dr. Mahesh Mehta, and Dr. Ram Prakash Agarwal—came together to found the Hindu University of America (HUA) in Florida as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All four founders were key members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), and their commitment to the ideals of Sanatana Dharma and education formed the foundation of this institution. Dr. Mahesh Mehta, a critical figure in VHPA's Education Committee, played an especially pivotal role in this effort.

The vision of the founders was realized incrementally. It took four years of rigorous effort to secure official authorization from the State of Florida to function as a degree-granting university. In 1993, HUA received authorization to operate as a religious institution, exempt from governmental oversight, through a letter issued by the Commission for Independent Education (CIE), Florida Department of Education. This milestone allowed HUA to formally position itself as a center for the academic study of Hinduism and Sanatana Dharma.

Initially, HUA functioned by organizing events and seminars rather than offering formal classes. However, the acquisition of a 9-acre campus in Orlando, Florida, in 2001 marked a turning point. This significant development was made possible by the generosity of Brahma Ratan Agarwal,



the university's principal benefactor, for over two decades. The campus expanded further in 2002 with the donation of an additional 2.5 acres of land by Edith and Robert Grimm. With a permanent base established, HUA began offering regular classes and introduced a range of academic programs.

In 2003, Professor Kuldip C. Gupta, a distinguished academic from the University of Colorado, took over as the president of HUA. Leaving behind a successful career in electrical engineering, he brought stability, focus, and growth to the institution during its formative years. Under his leadership, HUA saw steady growth in its faculty and student population. Tragically, Professor Gupta passed away unexpectedly in 2007, leaving the university at a crossroads.

Despite efforts to identify suitable leadership and secure the necessary resources, HUA faced challenges in finding the right configuration to propel it forward. The situation remained uncertain until 2018, when a rejuvenation effort began to take shape under the guidance of Dharma Civilization Foundation, a Los Angeles-based non-profit deeply invested in promoting the academic study of Hinduism. This effort brought together Hindu leaders and academics committed to revitalizing HUA, steering it towards becoming a modern online university led by Shri Kalyan Viswanathan.

The late Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam and convener of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, had been a strong proponent of HUA's potential. He emphasized the need for a formal academic institution dedicated to the authentic study of Hindu texts and traditions. Swami Dayananda Saraswati remarked, "The systematic study of the timeless wisdom in Hindu Dharma's core texts, in a formal academic setting, is vitally important. The promotion of the authentic



interpretation of the texts is critical for ensuring that misrepresentations and erroneous understanding do not become authoritative.” His vision underscored the importance of HUA as an institution modeled after historic centers of learning like Nalanda and Takshashila.

The consistent support of VHPA, with its committed members and leadership, has been instrumental in HUA’s journey. From its inception to its current status as an online university, HUA has remained a flagship institution in the Hindu ecosystem. Its programs cater to a global audience, offering an academic platform for the study of Sanatana Dharma and its enduring wisdom.

HUA today stands as a testament to the vision of its founders, the generosity of its benefactors, and the collective dedication of those who believed in its mission. As it continues to evolve, it carries forward the ideals of Swami Tilak, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and its pioneering leaders, fostering the authentic transmission of Hindu knowledge and culture in the modern world.

Hindu Students Council

The Hindu Students Council (HSC) traces its origins back to 1984, emerging from a need to unite Hindu students in the United States under a common platform. At that time, there were approximately 8,000 Hindu students in the country, a mix of international students pursuing higher education and children of immigrants who had arrived following changes to U.S. immigration laws in 1965. Unlike other faith-based student organizations that existed nationally, such as those for Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim students, Hindu students lacked a centralized organization. Recognizing this gap, a proposal was made at a Hindu conference organized by a prominent diaspora organization to establish a student group focused on Hindu identity and community building.

The idea resonated with the conference organizers, who had a history of engaging youth through initiatives like cultural summer camps, youth conferences, and educational programs. Establishing a student organization was a natural next step to foster community and spiritual awareness among college-aged Hindus. With support from the organizers, plans for a "Hindu Students Federation" were initiated, marking the early steps toward the creation of HSC.

The concept gained further clarity in 1987 when a strategy was outlined during a governing council meeting of the diaspora organization. The same year, the first Hindu college student conference was organized in Atlanta, bringing together 22 students from 11 universities. This conference laid the groundwork for what would eventually



become HSC. Over the next few years, the organization began to solidify its structure and goals, focusing on nurturing Hindu identity and addressing the unique challenges faced by Hindu students in the U.S.

By 1990, HSC had hosted its first national camp in New Jersey, attracting 35 students from across the country. These camps quickly became an integral part of HSC’s activities. They provided students with opportunities to engage with Hindu philosophy, history, and culture while creating a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose. The organization also introduced programs to celebrate Hindu festivals on campuses, counter misinformation and Hinduphobia, and advocate for environmental consciousness rooted in Hindu principles.

HSC’s influence began to extend beyond the U.S., inspiring similar organizations in other countries. Students from the United Kingdom, for instance, attended HSC’s annual camps and later established the National Hindu Students Federation (NHSF) in the UK. Likewise, groups in Canada, South Africa, and other nations followed suit, creating a global network of Hindu student organizations connected through shared values and objectives.

In the early 1990s, HSC co-hosted a Global Youth Conference in Washington, D.C., as part of a larger event commemorating the centenary of Swami Vivekananda’s speech at the Parliament of World Religions. Attended by 2,400 students, the conference underscored the growing reach and significance of HSC in uniting Hindu youth. Throughout the 1990s, HSC also undertook cultural and patriotic initiatives, such as celebrating the 50th anniversary of India’s independence in 1997.

The new millennium saw HSC evolve into an independent nonprofit organization, further expanding its reach and capabilities. In 2003, the organization hosted the Global Dharma Conference, which drew 2,000



attendees from around the world. The event, co-sponsored by various Hindu youth groups, highlighted HSC's ability to bring together diverse organizations under a shared mission. The conference served as a platform to discuss dharma, address global challenges, and strengthen ties among Hindu youth.

Today, HSC operates several dozen chapters across universities and has expanded its efforts to high schools, engaging a younger audience in understanding and celebrating their cultural and spiritual heritage. The organization's programs continue to emphasize the importance of Hindu values, the celebration of festivals, and the promotion of awareness about challenges such as Hinduphobia. HSC also fosters leadership among its members, many of whom have gone on to establish or lead other Hindu advocacy and community organizations.

A guiding vision for HSC was articulated in the mid-1990s, emphasizing the exploration and expression of Hindu dharma, recognition and confrontation of anti-Hindu narratives, alignment with supportive groups, and the creation of a global network of inspired students. This vision also included cultivating selfless service, spiritual growth through yoga, and a commitment to ethical living. Decades later, these principles remain at the core of HSC's mission, shaping the organization's programs and inspiring its members.

The impact of HSC extends far beyond its programs and events. It has nurtured a generation of leaders who continue to contribute to the global Hindu community. By fostering awareness, unity, and leadership among Hindu youth, HSC has created a foundation for continued growth and influence. Its role as a bridge between tradition and modernity



ensures that Hindu students remain connected to their roots while actively participating in contemporary global conversations.

As HSC looks to the future, it remains committed to its founding ideals. With a growing network of chapters and an expanding reach into high schools, the organization is poised to inspire new generations of Hindu students. Its emphasis on cultural pride, spiritual growth, and community service ensures that it will continue to resonate with youth across the globe for years to come.

VHPA and Advocacy

Early Hindu immigrants to the U.S. faced hostility with headlines like "Hindu Hoards Invading the State." While figures like Swami Vivekananda introduced Hindu philosophy to elites, mainstream perceptions remained distorted. Misrepresentation often escalated to violence, as seen in 1987 when Navroz Mody was murdered by a gang targeting Indian immigrants.

Hostility towards Hindus is not a recent phenomenon; its origins can be traced back to India's 1,000-year colonial history. Colonizers

systematically sought to undermine Hindu culture and values by misrepresenting and demeaning Hindu symbols, deities, and traditions, often stripping them of their sacred significance. In India, sacred imagery was inappropriately commercialized, such as the use of Lord Ganesha to advertise Mangalore Ganesh Beedi, a tobacco product. Similarly, in the West, Hindu culture was trivialized in films like *The Party* (1970s Hollywood) and *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (Bollywood). This prolonged cultural distortion contributed to a widespread desensitization among Hindus, allowing misrepresentations and stereotypes—such as depictions of Hindus as cow worshipers, snake charmers, or exotic curiosities—to become deeply ingrained in popular perception.

At an early stage in its establishment, the VHPA recognized the pressing need to address the increasing hostility and misrepresentation of Hindu culture and symbols, along with their impact on the Hindu American community. In response, the organization undertook a concerted effort to counter these challenges effectively. With the advent of digital platforms



in the 1990s, VHPA leveraged the internet's potential by launching Hindunet, which is considered to be the world's first Hindu website. This pioneering initiative sought to unite and engage the global Hindu community, facilitating dialogue, raising awareness, and promoting solidarity in the preservation and defense of Hindu traditions and values. Hindunet quickly grew into a thriving virtual community, attracting over 200,000 daily visitors. Building on this momentum, VHPA established American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) in 1997 to confront the increasing misuse of Hindu symbols, icons, and cultural elements.

AHAD's inaugural campaign targeted Sony Music's Nine Lives album, which featured a distorted image of Lord Krishna. Following organized protests and extensive outreach, Sony replaced the album cover within weeks. This success set the tone for AHAD's future initiatives. The organization led campaigns against a Chicago bar that misused Hindu themes, halted the sale of slippers and toilet seats featuring Hindu deities, and convinced Warner Brothers to remove an inappropriately used Bhagavad Gita shloka from Eyes Wide Shut. AHAD also countered CNN's Believer series, which falsely implied that cannibalism was an accepted Hindu practice.

AHAD categorizes offenders into three groups: those acting out of ignorance, addressed through education; cases of commercial exploitation, such as an Australian ad showing Lord Ganesha eating lamb, which AHAD successfully protested; and malicious actors, including academics and media distorting Hindu traditions, exemplified by the Dismantling Global Hindutva conference and Kali's Child. Further, AHAD collaborated with Jewish organizations to co-publish educational materials differentiating the sacred swastika from the Nazi Hakenkreuz. The organization also raised awareness about the sanctity of cows and the cultural significance of the bindi, contributing to the protection of Hindu children from bullying and fostering greater cultural understanding.

Addressing Anti-Hindu Bias

AHAD's awareness campaigns and strategic interventions have proven effective in curbing the misuse of Hindu symbols in commercial products. However, over the past decade, hostility towards Hindus has evolved into more pervasive and aggressive forms. Hindus increasingly encounter bias, prejudice, and misrepresentation across various spheres, including educational institutions, workplaces, media, academia, and public life. Disturbingly, such negativity is often tolerated, excused, or even encouraged in spaces ranging from scholarly discourse

to local communities. Actions and rhetoric that would typically be deemed discriminatory or unacceptable when directed at other communities are frequently overlooked when aimed at Hindus. Paradoxically, as the Hindu voice has gained prominence on the global stage in recent years, expressions of bias against Hindus and their traditions have also intensified.

In response to this growing wave of misinformation and prejudice targeting the Hindu American community, the VHPA introduced several initiatives in 2020. Among them are 'HinduPACT' and 'Stop Hindudvesha,' aimed at



addressing these challenges. HinduPACT, an acronym for 'Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective USA,' is a multifaceted initiative designed to "identify and influence issues of interest to Hindus at all levels, train Hindus for grassroots advocacy, and create internship opportunities for Hindu youth." The initiative comprises several interrelated components, including:

Hindu Lounge, a weekly live call-in program discussing contemporary Hindu issues in America.

CHINGARI (The Coalition for Hindu Girls and Their Rights), which raises global awareness about the atrocities faced by Hindu girls, particularly in Pakistan.

HinduVote, an online guide providing Hindu voters in the U.S. with resources to evaluate candidates from a Hindu perspective and make informed electoral decisions.

Additionally, pre-existing advocacy initiatives such as HinduNet and AHAD have been integrated into the HinduPACT framework, consolidating efforts to combat bias and promote Hindu interests effectively.

While HinduPACT was established as an advocacy initiative, the 'Stop Hindudvesha' program was specifically designed to educate the broader Hindu community about the increasing negativity surrounding their identity and traditions. The initiative commenced with a series of



webinars that explored how the colonial-era efforts to distort the Hindu civilizational narrative have evolved into contemporary anti-Hindu rhetoric. Although commonly referred to as Hinduphobia, the program deliberately adopted the term ‘Hindudvesha,’ a Sanskrit expression that conveys a systematic aversion and hostility towards Hindu traditions and values, aimed at undermining the richness of Hindu heritage.

The ‘Stop Hindudvesha’ initiative rapidly expanded to encompass the publication of well-researched articles, interviews with subject matter experts, and the organization of large-scale conferences in both online and in-person formats. Notably, in 2021, it hosted a seven-day online conference under the theme ‘Hindu Dharma, Hindutva, and Hindudvesha,’ followed by a one-day international conference in New Delhi, India, in 2023, titled ‘Understanding Hindudvesha in the Globalizing World.’

Within a relatively short span of five years, the initiative has developed an extensive repository of knowledge, comprising over 500 articles, hundreds of videos, audiobooks, and opinion pieces. ‘Stop Hindudvesha’ aims to position itself as a premier platform for research and discourse on the subject, offering comprehensive insights into the evolving challenges faced by the Hindu community globally.

Balancing Tradition and Advocacy

Despite its numerous educational and advocacy initiatives over the years, VHPA has maintained a cautious approach towards deep involvement in direct advocacy efforts. The organization primarily perceives its role as one centered on cultural development (Sanskar), service (Seva), raising awareness (Prachar), and networking (Sampark), deliberately choosing to focus on these areas while consciously stepping back from active political engagement. As a result, VHPA has intentionally relinquished the



advocacy space to other organizations that have since taken up the mantle of representing Hindu interests in the public sphere.

This deliberate approach is reflected in the emergence of several leading Hindu advocacy organizations in the U.S., including the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), and HinduAction—all of which have roots in VHPA. Notably, a founding member of HAF was formerly a prominent figure in the Hindu Students Council (HSC), a VHPA initiative, while key leaders of CoHNA also trace their origins to HSC. These organizations were established largely because VHPA chose to prioritize its core mission of cultural and educational initiatives rather than actively pursuing direct advocacy efforts.

HinduAction, in particular, emerged from VHPA’s HinduPACT initiative after ideological constraints within VHPA appeared to limit its operational flexibility. Similarly, recognizing the need for HinduPACT to expand beyond its organizational limitations, VHPA made a strategic decision in 2025 to spin off HinduPACT as an independent organization, allowing it the freedom to grow into a more robust and effective advocacy platform. This decision underscores VHPA’s commitment to enabling dedicated advocacy efforts while staying true to its foundational objectives of promoting Hindu culture and values through education and service.

Concluding Remarks

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) has played a pivotal role in the preservation and promotion of Hindu culture and values in the United States for over five decades. Since its establishment in 1970, VHPA





has remained steadfast in its mission to nurture Hindu identity through education (Sanskar), service (Seva), cultural awareness (Prachar), and community networking (Sampark). These foundational pillars have guided the organization's efforts in fostering a strong, cohesive Hindu-American community while encouraging active engagement with the broader society.

Throughout its journey, VHPA has prioritized cultural preservation and education over direct political activism. This deliberate focus has enabled the organization to channel its resources into initiatives that strengthen cultural identity and unity among Hindu Americans. Programs such as Bal Vihars, youth leadership camps, and seva initiatives have not only helped Hindu families stay connected to their heritage but have also empowered the younger generations to take pride in their cultural roots while contributing to American society. VHPA's commitment to seva, reflected in numerous humanitarian projects, has further established it as an organization dedicated to the welfare of society at large.

Despite its many advocacy initiatives, VHPA has consciously chosen to step back from direct advocacy efforts, instead allowing other organizations to fill this space. Over the years, several prominent Hindu advocacy groups in the United States, including the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA), and HinduAction, have emerged from within VHPA's ecosystem. The leadership of these organizations can be traced back to VHPA initiatives such as the Hindu Students Council (HSC), which provided a foundation for young Hindu leaders to engage in advocacy and representation. By focusing on cultural empowerment rather than political engagement, VHPA has enabled these organizations to take on the mantle of advocacy while remaining true to its core mission of education and service.

One notable example of VHPA's strategic approach

is the evolution of HinduPACT, originally launched as a VHPA initiative in 2020 to address growing anti-Hindu sentiment and promote grassroots advocacy. However, recognizing the need for greater operational flexibility and a dedicated focus on advocacy, VHPA made the strategic decision in 2025 to transition HinduPACT into an independent organization. This move reflects VHPA's commitment to enabling specialized initiatives to flourish without being constrained by the broader organizational framework. Similarly, HinduAction, which emerged from the HinduPACT initiative, gained independence after VHPA's ideological boundaries were perceived to limit its scope.

As VHPA looks to the future, it remains committed to its founding vision of fostering a dynamic and vibrant Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the idea that the world is one family. The organization's focus on cultural enrichment, community engagement, and youth empowerment continues to resonate with the Hindu-American diaspora, providing a sense of belonging and purpose in an increasingly globalized world.

With a strong legacy of service and cultural preservation, VHPA stands poised to guide the next generation of Hindu Americans, ensuring that Hindu values and traditions are upheld and adapted to contemporary challenges. As it continues to evolve, VHPA remains a beacon of unity, offering a platform for individuals to connect with their heritage while actively contributing to the larger society. ■

धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः

“Dharma protects those who uphold it”

About the Author



Dr. Jai G. Bansal has also been a keen student of India's seminal contributions to the world. He has written extensively on the subject and given talks on international platforms, most recently at the G-20 Interfaith Forum in September 2022. He has also co-authored a highly acclaimed coffee table book titled “Hinduism and America: How Hindu Dharma is Transforming the West.” This work attempts to capture the 250-year history of how Hindu thought has traveled to the West, and how it has been received.

Currently Dr. Bansal is serving as the vice president of education as well as a member of the Executive Board of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America.



The Tulsi Plant

● By Dr. Swapan Samanta

Rooted in Indian cultural symbolism yet universal in its ethical questions, The Tulsi Plant examines how love becomes transactional, devotion erodes under prosperity, and true vision often belongs to those society overlooks.



A standalone short story from the novel "360° VISION" narrated from the perspective of a tulsi plant on a middle-class balcony, the story explores themes of sacrifice, moral blindness, family economics, and quiet witness. When Avinash, the sole earning member of a struggling household, sells his eyesight for twelve crore rupees to secure his family's future, the material transformation that follows stands in stark contrast to his emotional abandonment. As the family prospers, the man who paid the price becomes invisible—mirrored by the withering tulsi plant that once received daily prayers.

Rooted in Indian cultural symbolism yet universal in its ethical questions, The Tulsi Plant examines how love becomes transactional, devotion erodes under prosperity, and true vision often belongs to those society overlooks. The story speaks to contemporary anxieties around economic pressure, care ethics, and the commodification of the human body, while remaining intimate, restrained, and deeply human.

I remember when my leaves were green.

Sumitra would water me every morning, dipping her fingers into

my soil to check if I was thirsty. She would talk to me—like prayers to the gods, but addressed to me. "Tulsi Ma, protect my household," she would say. "Keep my husband healthy, guide my children."

I am no goddess. I am just a plant—in an old clay pot, on a crumbling balcony in Behala. But I can see. I have always seen.

Avinash was the soul of this house.

I knew him by his footsteps—in the evenings when he returned from



office, his shoes growing heavier on the stairs, as if each step was harder than the day before. But on the roof, he would transform. He would stand in the night air, watching Kolkata's lights spread into the distance, and the weight on his shoulders would lift, just a little.

He never watered me—that was Sumitra's job. But sometimes, passing by, he would pause, touch one of my leaves, like greeting an old friend.

"Tulsi," he said once, alone, "did you know I used to write poetry?"

I didn't know. But that night, the light in his eyes—I recognized it. It was the light of memory, of grief for something lost.

The change came slowly, the way yellow creeps into green leaves—first at the edges, then spreading inward. Sumitra's watering became irregular. Sometimes two days late, sometimes three. Her prayers grew shorter, then stopped altogether. She would look toward me but not see me—her eyes elsewhere, where numbers and bank notices circled endlessly.

I would hear them talk—the walls are thin, and in the night's silence, sounds travel.

"Father's medicine prices have gone up."

"Abhijit's loan installment?"

"Ananya's college fees?"



"Where will it come from?"

These questions hung in the air of the house, unanswered, like my withering leaves—still clinging, but lifeless.

I will never forget that night.

Avinash came to the balcony late, when everyone else was asleep. In his hand was a black cloth. He tied it over his eyes.

At first I thought it was a game, some strange nocturnal ritual. But then he began to walk—slowly, hands extended, like a blind man. He bumped into walls, stumbled over chairs, but didn't stop.

He was learning darkness.

He was preparing himself for something I didn't understand then, but I felt a tremor in my roots—as if an earthquake was coming from beneath the soil.

Then one day, he was gone.

He left that morning as he did every day—office bag on shoulder, white shirt, silent. He didn't return that evening. Nor the next day.

When he came back, he could no longer see.

Where his eyes had been, there were white bandages. In his hand was a white cane. In his pocket, a check—for twelve crore rupees.



Sumitra didn't cry. Abhijit and Ananya stayed in their rooms, doors closed. Pranab—Avinash's father—sat by the window, something in his eyes I hadn't seen before: understanding. As if he knew this day would come, just not when.

The money came, and with the money came change.

But this change was not for Avinash.

Sumitra renovated the kitchen—new marble, new cabinets. Abhijit joined a research program, his future bright. Ananya began dreaming of studying in Switzerland.

And Avinash? He sat in a dark room, alone. No one spoke to him. No one held his hand to walk. The people for whom he had sold his eyes had

forgotten him—the way people forget old furniture, a broken clock, a dying plant.

Like me.

Now my leaves are yellow.

Some have fallen, the rest hang on—dried, brittle, trembling in the wind. Sumitra doesn't water me anymore. She's busy—choosing new curtains, deciding on sofa colors. My pot is covered in dust, my soil cracked.

But I can still see.

I see Pranab, who sits alone by the window, a sharpness in his eyes the others lack. He understands what has happened. He knows that this marble countertop, this new television, this dream of Switzerland—everything costs a man's eyes.

I see the street dogs who still come to the roof at night, waiting for Avinash. He used to feed them—scraps of bread, leftover rice, whatever he could save. The dogs knew his footsteps, his scent. Now they come and wait, but he doesn't come anymore.

I see Karim—the old beggar who lives on the street corner, on his cardboard bed. Avinash used to feed him too, quietly, telling no one. Now Karim waits and waits, not understanding why his friend no longer comes.



And I see the Laddu Gopal.

The small brass statue, sitting in the prayer room. Sumitra doesn't adorn him now, doesn't light lamps before him. Dust has gathered on the statue—only his eyes still shine, still watching.

We both see—he and I. Two silent witnesses, two forgotten sentinels.

He sees from inside the house. I see from outside.

Both of us see how love loses to money, how family becomes a transaction, how a man sells himself for those he loves—and they exchange that love for marble countertops.

Last night, Avinash came to the balcony again.

He couldn't see me—he can't see anything now. But he searched for me. Hand extended, fingers touching air, he searched.

When his finger touched my leaf—that dried, dying leaf—he stopped.

"Tulsi," he said, very softly. "You're dying too, aren't you?"

I couldn't answer. I'm just a plant.

But he seemed to hear my answer. He smiled—a small, broken smile.

"We're both the same," he said. "Both of us—worth caring for as long as we're useful, then worth forgetting."

He stood for a long time, his finger on my leaf. Then he turned back, slowly, touching walls, into the darkness.

I don't know how much longer I will live.

My roots are drying, my stem turning brown. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps the day after, Sumitra will throw me

away—pot and all, with the garbage. She'll buy a new plant, maybe plastic, that needs no care.

But before I die, I want to say one thing.

I have seen a man sell himself.

I have seen love turned into transaction.

I have seen those who can see become blind, and the one who lost his sight see most clearly.

In this Kolkata, in this year 2030, eyes cost twelve crore rupees. But the cost of seeing? No one is willing to pay that.

This morning, the sun rose.

Light fell on my yellow leaves, warm, golden. Avinash will never see that light—not ever.

But I will see for him.

As long as I have even one leaf left, as long as I have even a little life, I will see—for him, in his place, in his memory.

Because that is what Tulsi does—bear witness. Stay sacred. Remember.

Even when everyone else forgets. ■

About the Author

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Life, Without the Hashtag

● By Sarika Jaswani

The stories we tell and love to create become cages of our own making—so familiar and well-worn that we forget we ever had the power to step outside them.

Last year, like clockwork, I spent my birthday at the zoo. Each year, there's something new to take in—an almost osmotic kind of learning, where insights seep in quietly as I wander.

I've noticed that animals don't seem to carry a concept of a cage the way we do. What they might miss, though, is the thrill of the hunt or the blunting of the instinctual drive to build a habitat far from predators.

And then there's us—standing on the other side of the enclosure, technically free on the ride of life. The stories we create—and love to tell—are our own kind of roller coaster. We line up our stories, eager for the rush and the thrill. We build them for the climb, the suspense, the sudden drops. We fasten ourselves in, craving the rush of height and speed, the sharp turns that make us feel alive. Yet even as we seek that surge of adrenaline, part of us looks forward to stepping off—sometimes even wishing we didn't have to get on at all.

I have pet birds. I watched their



life unfold in a small cage that slowly became a universe of instincts, seasons, and quiet lessons. Three survived — two females and one male. Life, it seemed, wanted to multiply. Given the opportunity, it did what life has always done: it expanded.

But expansion was not peaceful.

The two females fought over the nest — fiercely, instinctively —

to the point that I had to remove it altogether. Territory. Survival. Continuation. There was no moral argument, no emotional debate. Just raw impulse moving through small, feathered bodies.

When one of the females eventually died of age, something shifted. I put the nest back. The surviving female, even with an injured foot from that earlier fight, laid eight eggs.



It was hard on her. I could see the strain. But there was no drama in her story. No visible grieving rituals. No collapse into despair over the one who was gone. No existential questioning of fairness. Life continued its rhythm.

Watching them changed something in me.

The Stories We Add

We do not just live in the world — we live in stories about the world.

From childhood fairy tales to social media narratives, from cultural myths to personal memories, stories quietly shape our perspectives. They decide what we call success, what we fear, what we admire, and even what we believe we deserve. Stories are not harmless entertainment; they are architecture. They build the invisible rooms inside which our minds reside.

If a story says productivity equals worth, we worship busyness.

If a story says thinness equals discipline, we glorify deprivation.

If a story says success must be visible, we chase applause over peace.

We rarely question the narrative. We simply inhabit it
Humans rarely allow events to remain events.

We live in narratives.

Where the bird simply responds, we interpret. Where nature moves, we attach meaning. We build entire inner worlds around loss, ambition, competition, survival. Our capacity for storytelling is powerful — it gives us art, culture, empathy — but it also reshapes reality into something heavier than it sometimes needs to be.

Stories shape our perspectives so completely that we begin confusing them for truth.

A fight becomes betrayal.

A death becomes tragedy in cosmic terms.

A struggle becomes personal injustice.

But in the cage, I saw something different. Conflict happened. Loss happened. Life went on.

Not cold. Not cruel. Just rhythmic.

Life Wants to Continue

The birds did not hold ideology about reproduction. They did not attend seminars on parenting. They did not debate readiness. When conditions aligned, life expressed itself.

That same impulse runs through us.

Yet when it comes to our own bodies, we complicate the simplest instincts. Food, rest, hunger — these become arenas of control and identity. A diet becomes a declaration. A personal choice becomes a movement. Soon, skipping a meal cannot simply be listening to your body; it must become intermittent fasting, structured, timed, branded.

Nobody tells us that you can sometimes not eat and sometimes eat more — without building a philosophy around it.

But once named, it trends. And trends demand performance.

And as always, there are outliers. Some take the structure to extremes. Restriction turns rigid. Control becomes obsession. The pendulum swings — sometimes toward cycles of overeating or patterns like bulimia, where the body and mind fall into conflict instead of cooperation.

The body was once instinctive, like the birds.

Now it is managed like a project.

We are not struggling with food as much as we are struggling with the story of food.

Nature Does Not Trend

Observe a tree.

It does not fast for aesthetics.

It does not overconsume to compensate.

It does not compare its growth to the tree beside it.



Plants respond to seasons. Animals respond to hunger. They neither moralize nor market their behaviors. A lion does not create a philosophy around its feeding schedule. A bird does not shame itself for resting.

Nature simply participates.

There is an intelligence in that simplicity. A quiet trust.

The oak tree does not try to become a pine. The river does not attempt to impress the ocean. Life expresses itself fully without self-advertisement.

Perhaps we could learn to just be — not as a performance, not as a brand, but as a state of alignment.

Learning to “Just Be”

Nature does not create drama around what is natural. Sun just shines.

The surviving female bird did not perform resilience. She did not narrate strength. She simply continued.

Plants grow toward light without motivational quotes. Animals rest without guilt. They engage fully in survival and reproduction, yet they do not construct identity from it.

There is an intelligence in that simplicity — a kind of grounded spirituality that predates language.

Perhaps to “just be” is not laziness or indifference. It is participation without over-interpretation.

Spirituality/Religion Is Not Immune to Trends

Even spirituality, which promises liberation from worldly patterns, becomes a subject to ponder.

Meditation becomes optimization. Fasting becomes purity. Silence becomes aesthetic. Ancient teachings become content streams.

Meditation apps. Manifestation formulas. Aesthetic altars curated for photographs. Ancient wisdom reduced to captions.

Spirituality, too, becomes content. There is nothing wrong with structure or practice. But when spirituality becomes another identity to wear — “I am evolved,” “I am conscious,” “I am awakened” — we subtly re-enter the same cycle. Ego repackages itself in softer language.

Even detachment becomes something to show off.

The essence gets lost in presentation.

We turn inward practices outward for validation.

Looking at the Finger, Forgetting the Moon

There is a Zen saying: When a finger points at the moon, the fool looks at the finger.

We live in an age of fingers.

Influencers. Gurus. Brands. Experts. Systems.



We debate the messenger, defend the teacher, criticize the method — and forget to look at what was being pointed to.

The moon is still there. Quiet. Luminous. Unconcerned with our arguments.

We forget to look up.

We become fascinated with pointers — techniques, personalities, rituals — instead of the simple experience they were meant to reveal.

We forget to look up at the moon because we are studying the finger pointing to it. Teachers, techniques, rituals — they are pointers. Useful, yes. Necessary, sometimes. But not the destination.

Essence vs. Idol

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna calls the Gita the essence of the Vedas.

Essence is not commentary.

It is not ritual.

It is not performance.

Essence is what remains when the excess is burned away.

If life itself is one great Vedic havan — a sacred offering — then perhaps the core teaching is this: you are not the ultimate doer. Action happens through you. Birth and death happen. Conflict happens. Continuation happens.



But we often fixate on Krishna — the blue-skinned deity, the divine personality, the iconography — instead of digesting what he is pointing toward.

We look at the speaker.
We analyze the battlefield.
We debate interpretation.

Yet the essence whispers: act, but do not cling. Participate, but do not claim ownership. Offer, but do not grip.

The birds lived this without scripture.

Life moved through them. Not because of them.

To understand that — is to feel light

The Drama We Can Release

Stories shape us. But we can choose which stories to keep.

Nature already knows how to do this. The tree does not need a trend to grow. The river does not need validation to flow.

There is — Just continuity.

This does not mean humans should suppress emotion. Our depth of feeling is part of our beauty. But perhaps we can examine the layers we



add — the unnecessary dramatization, the identity we build around every rise and fall.

Maybe wisdom is not becoming less human, but becoming less entangled in the stories that exhaust us.

We can grieve without constructing tragedy as destiny.

We can eat without building

ideology.

We can practice spirituality without turning it into status.

We can look at the moon instead of endlessly analyzing the finger.

Returning to Simplicity

“Your birds showed you something profound”: life insists. Quietly. Persistently. Without commentary.

And perhaps the essence — whether of nature, the Gita, or our own breath — is simply this:

Participate fully.

Release the drama.

Let life move.

Perhaps wisdom is not about adding more — more rules, more labels, more identities — but about subtracting the unnecessary narrative.

Underneath all the trends, all the fads, all the spiritual branding, something simple remains:

Life happening.

Breath moving.

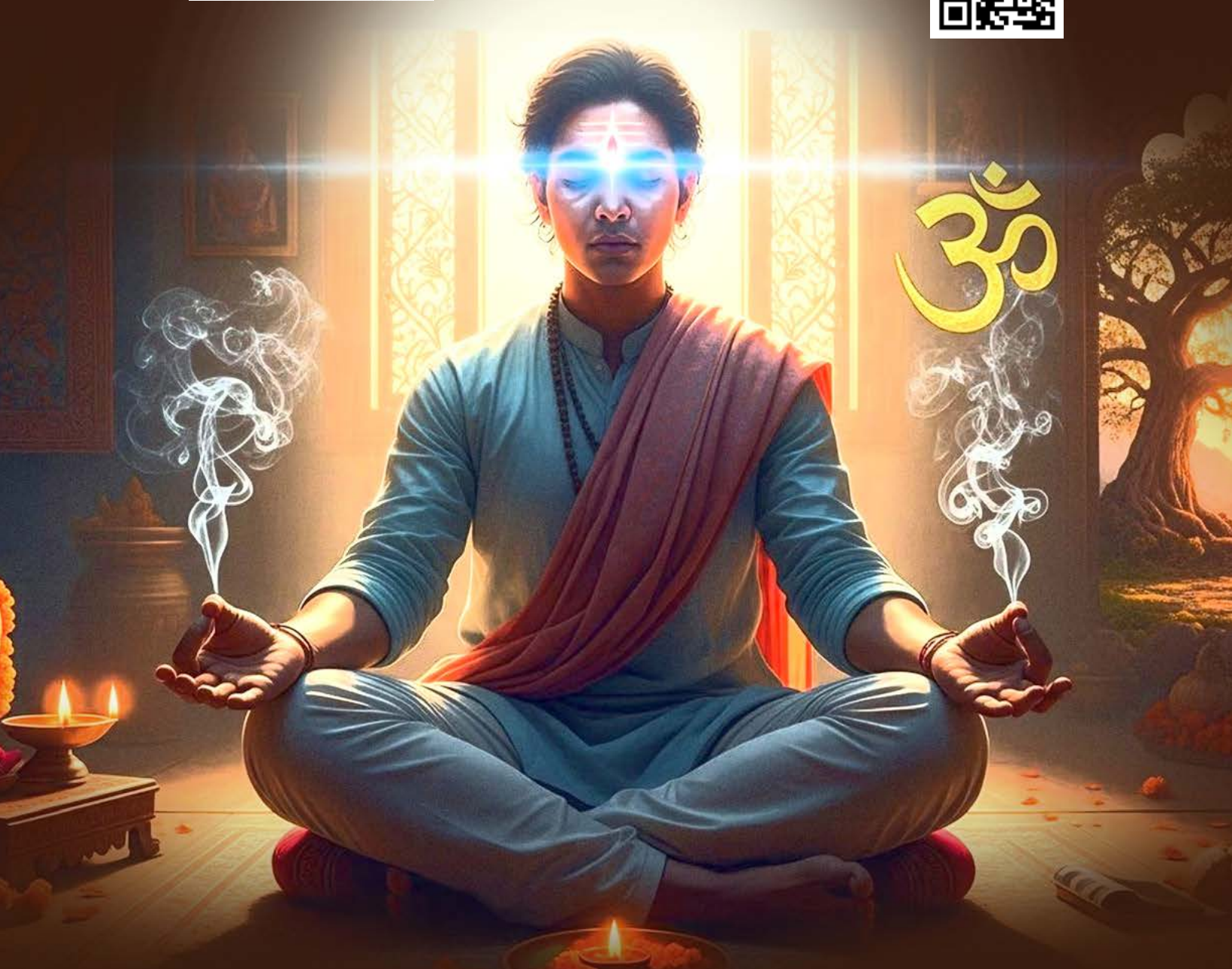
The sacred is ordinary.

And maybe the essence — whether of the Vedas, the Gita, or existence itself — is not something to analyze endlessly, but something to quietly live. ■



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.



Why Do We Worship Omkara (ॐकार)?

● By Dr. Bharat C. Patel

What is ॐकार, omkara? And why should one worship ॐकार, omkara? Upaniṣad (उपनिषद्) has given Upāsanāḥ (उपासनाः) of which the primary Upāsanā (उपासना) is of ॐकार, omkara, generally chanted in association with a given Mantra (मन्त्र). ॐ श्री राम जय राम जय जय राम, om śrī rāma jaya rāma jaya jaya rāma, or ॐ नमः शिवाय, om namaḥ śivāya, or

ॐ श्री कृष्ण शरणं मम, om śrī kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama. Every Mantra (मन्त्र) begins with ॐ, om. We Indians have grown up in a culture where ॐ, om, is present whenever you meet a Svāmī (स्वामी) or go to an Āśrama (आश्रम). ॐकार, omkara, is always going on when you do Mantrajapa (मन्त्रजप). Some people even do Japa (जप) or do Mālā (माला), chanting ॐ, om, ॐ, om, ॐ, om. It is common,



but then people rarely know what it is. ॐ, om, the ॐकार, omkāra can be looked at in a threefold way. It is derived from the root अच्, av, to protect, रक्षणे, rakṣaṇe, for protection. Av (अच्) also means blessings. ॐकार, omkāra, means that which protects, that which blesses; so grammatically, ॐकार, omkāra, means Īśvara (ईश्वर). You can transcend the word and think of Īśvara (ईश्वर), the protector who blesses you. There is another way to look at ॐकार, omkāra. It can be looked at as कर्तृ, kartṛ, in the sense of कर्ता, kartā, doer. ॐकार, omkāra, means one who creates, one who protects, and one who blesses, and that is Īśvara (ईश्वर).

Phonetically, it also implies Īśvara (ईश्वर). How? Look at the words Nāma (नाम) and Nāmī (नामी). Nāma (नाम) means a word. Nāmī (नामी) means that which is revealed by the word. In other words, the word and the object are inseparable. It is just a sound when you utter a word, Nāma (नाम), or say something. But the corresponding object will certainly come to your mind. You cannot remain without that object. When someone says “Car,” an object car will come to your mind. You are listening phonetically, but the object car is revealed in your mind. Is it possible that when someone says, “Car,” nothing comes to your mind? It never happens unless there is some meaningless sound. If someone says “USA,” the whole country comes to mind. If someone says “India,” the whole country comes to mind. Or, if someone says “Mother,” the person, the mother, comes to mind. The name and the corresponding object are “as though” inseparable. Mahākavi Kālidāsa (महाकवि कालिदास) in his Raghuvamśa (रघुवंश) in Maṅgalācaraṇa (मङ्गलाचरण) says, “वागर्थविव संपृक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये, जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ, vāgarthāviva sampṛktau vāgarthapratipattaye, jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatīparamēśvarau. I do Namaskāra (नमस्कार) to the parents of this world, Pārvatī (पार्वती) and Parameśvara Śiva (परमेश्वर शिव). How are they? Śiva (शिव) and Pārvatī (पार्वती) are united; they



are one, the Ardhanārīśvara (अर्धनारीश्वर). How are they united? How are they non-separate? Like Vāgarthāviva (वागर्थविव); like Vāk (वाक्) and Artha (अर्थ), meaning like word and its meaning. Anything someone says, the corresponding object comes to mind; it is inseparable from the statement. So also Śiva (शिव) and Pārvatī (पार्वती), who are the parents of the Jagat (जगत), are inseparable, and I offer my salutations. For what? Vāgarthapratipattaye (वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये), to know the Śāstra (शास्त्र) for Jñāna (ज्ञान).

Īśvara (ईश्वर) is all-pervasive. Īśvara (ईश्वर) is the cause (Kāraṇam, कारणम्) for creation (Utpatti, उत्पत्ति), sustentation (Sthiti, स्थिति), and dissolution (Laya, लय). The word that implies all-pervasiveness and the ability to create, sustain, and dissolve is ॐ, om. It is a sound symbol. How? The sound ॐ, om, consists of three letters: अ (a), उ (u), and म् (m). The अ (a) is the most natural; the expression is effortless, and the most naturally expressed sound. There may not be a corresponding alphabet in a given language, but still, anyone can open their mouth and create the sound of अ (a). There is a reason why English pronunciation differs from that of Indians. In the Devanāgarī (देवनागरी) script, we have thirteen vowels, अ, आ, इ, ई, उ, ऊ, ए, ऐ, ओ, औ, ऋ, ॠ, and ऌ. The vowels

are either Hrasva (ह्रस्व, short) or Dirgha (दिर्घ, long), usually referring to the duration of the vowel sounds in a word. Vowels like अ, इ, उ, ए, ओ, ऋ, ॠ are known as and pronounced as Hrasva (ह्रस्व) or simply shorter. Vowels like आ, ई, ऊ, ऐ, औ, ॠ are known as and pronounced as Dirgha (दिर्घ) or longer. English has only five vowels: a, e, i, o, and u. So when there is “a” in a word, Westerners are used to pronouncing the word with the sound of “a.” They cannot know whether it is अ (a), आ (ā), or ए (e). The last letter of the ॐकार, omkāra, is म् (m); it is pronounced with a closed mouth. The importance of letters अ (a), अकार, akāra, and म् (m), मकार, makāra, is seen in the fact that when a baby first learns to speak, it first utters म (ma), मा (mā), अम्मा (ammā). It is natural. Both अ (a) and म् (m) are natural. All the other vowels are nothing but variations of अकार, akāra, including उकार, ukāra. So when you pronounce ॐ, om, between अ (a) and म् (m), the अकार, akāra, reflects or symbolizes all the vowels, and the मकार, makāra, symbolizes all the consonants. Since the combination of vowels and consonants forms words, the word ॐ, om, includes all the words. Reiterating, the single-syllable word ॐ, om, includes all the words. All the nouns are included in the word ॐ, om. Nāma (नाम) and Nāmī (नामी) are non-separate; the noun and its



corresponding word are non-separate, so the ॐकार, omkāra, indicates the Viśvarūpa (विश्वरूप), the all-pervasiveness of Īśvara (ईश्वर). ॐकार, omkāra, is a sound syllable indicating Īśvara (ईश्वर).

And Śāstra (शास्त्र) also does this Adhyāropa (अध्यारोप) that includes the transcendental nature of Īśvara (ईश्वर). It expresses the three Mātrāḥ (मात्राः), अ (a), उ (u), and म् (m) as the three Avasthāḥ (अवस्थाः), the three Mātrāḥ (मात्राः) as the three Śārīrāṇi (शरीराणि), and the three Mātrāḥ (मात्राः) as the three expressions of Īśvara (ईश्वर): Īśvara (ईश्वर), Hiranyagarbha (हिरण्यगर्भ), and Virāṭ (विराट). So, when we say that everything has come from ॐकार, omkāra, it implies that ॐकार, omkāra, is a symbol of Īśvara (ईश्वर), both phonetically and grammatically, and from the standpoint of Śāstra (शास्त्र) as well. There are certain Adhyāropāḥ (अध्यारोपाः), even by Śāstra (शास्त्र), that are there in our psyche; it is natural, like on Dhanatrayodaśī (धनत्रयोदशी), we do Lakṣmīpūjana (लक्ष्मीपूजा). Any coin, gold, silver, or any metal is a symbol of Lakṣmī (लक्ष्मी). That is Adhyāropa (अध्यारोप).

Or on Daśaharā (दशहरा), we do Śāstrapūjā (शास्त्रपूजा), a simple weapon is enough to do Śāstrapūjā (शास्त्रपूजा). Nowadays, weapons such as drones and missiles are controlled digitally, but still, we do sword Pūjā (पूजा). Śāstra (शास्त्र) does a deliberate loading of the three Avasthāḥ (अवस्थाः) on ॐकार, omkāra. There is a deliberate loading of three Śārīrāṇi (शरीराणि) on ॐकार, omkāra, just as we have certain forms on which we load Īśvara (ईश्वर).

When you say ॐ, om, it is सर्वरूप परमात्मा, sarvarūpa paramātmā, the Īśvara (ईश्वर) in all forms.

When Arjuna (अर्जुन) asks Bhagavāna Śrī Kṛṣṇa (भगवान् श्री कृष्ण) what are your glories, Bhagavāna (भगवान्) says, “नान्तोऽस्ति मम दिव्यानां विभूतीनां परन्तप, nānto'sti mama divyānām vibhūtīnām parantapa.” Hey, Arjuna (अर्जुन)! My divine glories are endless. In the 11th Chapter, Viśvarūpa Darśana (विश्वरूप दर्शन), Bhagavāna (भगवान्) reveals the all-inclusive form. That all-inclusive word is ॐ, om. When you say ॐ, om, it means विश्वरूप ईश्वर, viśvarūpa īśvara. When you say ॐ, om, that is हिरण्यगर्भरूप ईश्वर, hiraṇyagarbhārūpa īśvara, whatever form you want to see.

Whenever we chant a Mantra (मन्त्र) like “ॐ नमः शिवाय, om namaḥ śivāya,” you start with ॐ, om. When you say, “नमः शिवाय, namaḥ śivāya,” it signifies my salutation or my Praṇāma (प्रणाम) to Mahādeva Śiva (महादेव शिव). Mahādeva Śiva (महादेव शिव) is a particular form, when you say Śiva (शिव), “तिनेत्रं त्रिशूलधारी जटाजूटधारी, trinetra triśūladhārī jaṭājūṭadhārī,” that particular form will come in the mind. But that is a limited form, with two hands, two feet, meditating in Kailāsa (कैलास), space-wise limited, action-wise limited, and so many other limitations. However, to indicate that the limitless appears as limited, the mind needs the support of a form to understand, hold on, and connect to that limitless. That is because the mind has limitations, as it cannot function without

forms. Therefore, Śiva (शिव) is there, but what is Śiva (शिव)? ॐ, om. It means limitless, all-pervasive, unconditioned, any which way, time-wise, space-wise, and objectivity-wise; in no way is it limited, देश काल वस्तु परिच्छेद शुन्य, deśa kāla vastu pariccheda śunya. The limitlessness of Īśvara (ईश्वर) is revealed by ॐ, om. Anything limitless, anything that is free from any conditioning, has to be formless. If it has form, then it is limited. So ॐकार, omkāra, reveals formless Īśvara (ईश्वर). And, ॐकार, omkāra, reveals Jagadkāraṇam (जगद्कारणम्), Utpattisthitilayakāraṇam (उत्पत्तिस्थितिलयकारणम्), that is Īśvara (ईश्वर). ॐकार, omkāra, reveals both. Since it reveals the limitlessness of Īśvara (ईश्वर), you always start with ॐ, om. You will find ॐ, om, associated with every Mantra (मन्त्र) and chanted initially, like the शान्ति मन्त्राः, śānti mantrāḥ, such as ॐ सह नाववतु, सह नौ भुनक्तु, om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu or ॐ भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवाः, om bhadraṁ karṇebhiḥ śṛṇuyāma devāḥ. So the ॐकार, omkāra, reveals what? “इदं सर्वं ब्रह्मन्, idaṁ sarvaṁ

brahman.” Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) that is ॐकार, omkāra. And, Śruti (श्रुति) does Adhyāropa (अध्यारोप) in the Māṇḍukyopaniṣad (माण्डुक्योपनिषद्) such as “अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म, ayam ātmā brahma,” or “अयम् आत्मा चतुष्पात्, ayam ātmā catuspāt.”

To gain knowledge of anything, you require a mind that is ready for knowledge and mental preparedness. Mental preparedness is in terms of Śuddhi (शुद्धि) and Ekāgratā (एकाग्रता), purity and single-pointedness of the mind. It is gained through Upāsanāḥ (उपासनाः), Japa (जप) of various

Mantrāḥ (मन्त्राः), Pūjā (पूजा), Yātrā (यात्रा), Tapas (तपस), Ityādi (इत्यादि). Śāstra (शास्त्र) has given us this: one can do Upāsanā (उपासना) with ॐकार, omkāra. But how should that be? It should be such that in ॐकार, omkāra, there is Īśvarabuddhi (ईश्वरबुद्धि). When you chant ॐ, om, there is awareness of Īśvara (ईश्वर). When you chant “ॐ श्री कृष्ण शरणं मम, om śrī kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama,” Bhagavāna Śrī Kṛṣṇa (भगवान् श्री कृष्ण) is in the mind. When you chant “ॐ नमः शिवाय, om namaḥ śivāya,” Mahādeva Śiva (महादेव शिव) is in the mind. When you chant simple ॐ, om, that is formless Īśvara (ईश्वर), limitless Īśvara (ईश्वर), उत्पत्तिस्थितिलयकर्ता ईश्वर, utpattisthitilayakartā īśvara, that Īśvara (ईश्वर) who is the being of everything, one must have that Buddhi (बुद्धि), that understanding. If one chants ॐकार, omkāra with that Bhāva (भाव) then it gives अन्तः शुद्धि, antaḥ śuddhi. Any Mantrajapa (मन्त्रजप), or even any Pūjā (पूजा), Bhakti (भक्ति), or Yātrā (यात्रा), can give you अन्तः शुद्धि, antaḥ śuddhi, if it is done with Īśvarabhāva (ईश्वरभाव). You may do Japa (जप), but your mind is on your job, on the stock market loss you incurred, or any other problem in your life; your tongue is uttering the words, but your Bhāva (भाव) is in your job, the stock market, or some pain. That doesn't give Śuddhi (शुद्धि). Śuddhi (शुद्धि) can come only when the Japa (जप) is done with Īśvarabhāva (ईश्वरभाव). Similarly, ॐकार, omkāra-chanting done with Īśvarabhāva (ईश्वरभाव) will give अन्तः शुद्धि, antaḥ śuddhi, purity of the mind. And, if you



look at ॐकार, omkāra, as formless Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), अमल ॐकार, amātra omkāra, it leads to knowledge. So it is a Pratika (प्रतिक) for सगुण उपासना, saguṇa upāsanā, and a Pratika (प्रतिक) to understand Īśvara (ईश्वर) also.

You have to remember that Brahman (ब्रह्मन्) is the Lakṣya (लक्ष्य) of ॐकार, omkāra. Simple sound doesn't enlighten you. Śruti (श्रुति) says, ॐ इति एवं ध्यायथ, om iti evaṃ dhyāyatha. By Dhyāna (ध्यान), let this be, what? तमसः परस्तात्, tamasaḥ parastāt. Cross over ignorance. Simple chanting of ॐकार, omkāra, doesn't let you cross ignorance. They say to meditate on Nādaḥ (नाद), because after Māyā (माया), the first thing born is Ākāśaḥ (आकाशः), तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः, tasmādvā etasmādātmana ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ. The Guṇa (गुण) of Ākāśaḥ (आकाशः) is sound. Śabda (शब्द) is Guṇa (गुण) of Ākāśaḥ (आकाशः). The first thing is Nāda (नाद), and therefore, Nādaḥ (नाद). ओंकारश्चाथ शब्दश्च द्वाविमौ ब्रह्मणः पुरा, कण्ठं भित्वा विनिर्यातौ तस्मान्माङ्गलिकावुभौ, omkāraścātha śabdaśca dvāvīmau brahmaṇaḥ purā, kaṇṭhaṃ bhivā viniryātau tasmānmāṅgalikāvubhau. When Brahmājī (ब्रह्माजी) was born, the first thing he said was ॐ, om. So ॐ, om, sound is auspicious. That is why you begin your activities with the utterance of ॐ, om. Even in Gītājī (गीताजी), it is said, “ॐ तत्सदिति निर्देशः, om tatsaditi nirdeśaḥ.” There is a Nirdeśa (निर्देश), it is implied. How is it implied? For that, you have to study from a teacher and then meditate. ॐ इति, om iti, that Iti (इति) is important. Look at ॐ, om, as Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). You have to look at ॐ, om, as Ātmā (आत्मा). Which Ātmā (आत्मा)? All-pervasive Ātmā (आत्मा), everything is woven in whom. You have to look at Śāligrāma (शालीग्राम) as Viṣṇu (विष्णु) and Viṣṇu (विष्णु) as Īśvara (ईश्वर), or Śivaliṅga (शिवलिङ्ग) as Īśvara (ईश्वर). This is deliberate Adhyāsa (अध्यास). You have to look at the form and appreciate what it is. You have to study. Simply saying, “अहं ब्रह्मास्मि, ahaṃ brahmāsmi,” the person becomes more emotional to Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). The person becomes more subjective. You have to be objective. First, you understand Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). That is Vairāgya (वैराग्य). So Śravaṇa (श्रवण), Manana (मनन), and Nididhyāsana (निदिध्यासन) is necessary. Then, you do meditation.

You meditate upon ॐकार, omkāra, to understand the self. You should look up to ॐकार, omkāra, as the manifestation of self. How do you say so? That is to be learned. That is why you have to study Śāstra (शास्त्र). How ॐकार, omkāra, is the Lakṣyārtha (लक्ष्यार्थ) of self? When you meditate upon ॐकार, omkāra, you create Bhagavadbuddhi (भगवद्बुद्धि), "as though." When a symbol or an idol is given, particularly if you are born in India, from childhood, there is Bhagavadbuddhi (भगवद्बुद्धि) in Rāma (राम), Kṛṣṇa (कृष्ण), Viṣṇu (विष्णु), Śiva (शिव), or Hanumāna (हनुमान). If the person has not traveled and doesn't know, he may not know it. But we impute Bhagavadbuddhi (भगवद्बुद्धि); we look upon Rāma (राम) as Bhagavāna (भगवान). We look upon Kṛṣṇa (कृष्ण) as Bhagavāna (भगवान). We look upon Viṣṇu (विष्णु), Śiva (शिव), or Hanumāna (हनुमान) as Bhagavāna (भगवान). That is called deliberate Adhyāsa

(अध्यास). That form that is created is not God. We create the form of a given God because the mind needs to connect God to a given form. Unless there is a form, the mind cannot connect to Īśvara (ईश्वर). That is why different forms are provided for Īśvara (ईश्वर). That is the beauty of our culture. We start looking at the forms as Īśvara (ईश्वर) only. Similarly, you look at ॐकार, omkāra, "as though" Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), that is the self, not separate from the self. For that, one needs to understand the symbol ॐकार, omkāra, and its Lakṣyam (लक्ष्यम्). It is not independent; it is a Lakṣyam (लक्ष्यम्) that you must discover. You have to learn the Lakṣyārtha (लक्ष्यार्थ) of ॐकार, omkāra. You have to understand what is ॐकार, omkāra, त्रिमल ॐकार, trimātra omkāra, and अमल ॐकार, amātra omkāra. अमल ॐकार, amātra omkāra, reveals the self-consciousness. Figuratively, for our understanding of Upāsanā (उपासना), the Sthūlaśarīra (स्थूलशरीर) is Sthānam (स्थानम्) for the Ātmā (आत्मा), the physical heart is understood as the Sthānam (स्थानम्) of the Ātmā (आत्मा), and you meditate on the Ātmā (आत्मा) with the help of ॐकार, omkāra. The Prakṛtātmā (प्रकृतात्मा), the obtaing Ātmā (आत्मा) is Jīva (जीव). Simply chanting ॐकार, omkāra, on the Ātmā (आत्मा) doesn't help. You have to understand which Ātmā (आत्मा)? यस्मिन् द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्षमोतं मनः सह प्राणैश्च सर्वैः, yasmin dyauḥ pṛthivī cāntarikṣamotaṃ manaḥ saha prāṇaiśca sarvaiḥ. The one in which everything is woven "as though." तद् सत्यं तद् अमृतं, tad satyaṃ tad amṛtaṃ, that which is Satyaṃ (सत्यं), that which is Amṛtaṃ (अमृतं). That Ātmā (आत्मा) is Antaḥkaraṇam (अन्तःकरणम्). तम् ध्यायथ ॐ, tam dhyāyatha om. By simply chanting ॐ, om, ॐ, om, ॐ, om, nothing will happen. It is just a sound. It may help you quiet your mind for a moment, but not always. To meditate on ॐकार, omkāra, you need to study from a teacher. That ॐकार, omkāra, is a symbol. ॐ इति एक अक्षरं ब्रह्म, om iti eka akṣaraṃ brahma, it is for Upāsanā (उपासना). It is a symbol of Saguṇabrahman (सगुणब्रह्मन्) as well as the Nirguṇabrahman (निर्गुणब्रह्मन्). अमल ॐकार, amātra omkāra, is the symbol of Nirguṇabrahman (निर्गुणब्रह्मन्). One needs to understand the Lakṣyārtha (लक्ष्यार्थ). That means Ātmā (आत्मा) is Īśvara (ईश्वर). You meditate, understanding that Ātmā (आत्मा) is Nirguṇabrahman (निर्गुणब्रह्मन्). Then it makes some sense, simply chanting ॐ, om, ॐ, om, ॐ, om, doesn't give any Phala (फल), except some concentration and some purity. ■

About the Author

Dr. Bharat C. Patel has published two books 1) Intent of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita – Path to Self-Realization, and 2) Essence of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita - with Compound Separation (पदच्छेद, Padaccheda) and Concordance (अन्वय, Anvaya). These books were displayed at the World Book Fair in Delhi, India (February 25 to March 5, 2023). They are available on Amazon worldwide.



Goa's Hindu Revival: Reclaiming a Civilization Buried Under Centuries of Colonial Rule

• By Rati Agnihotri

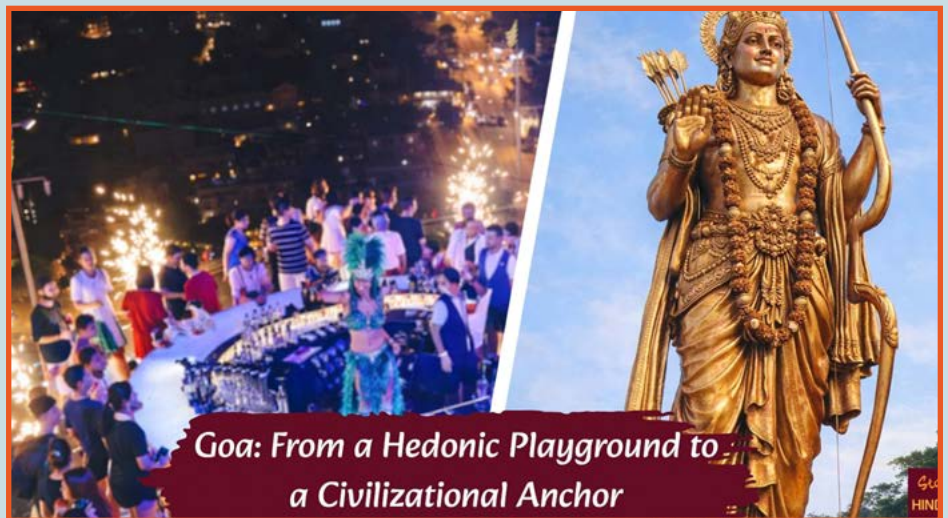
To the world, Goa is sold as India's playground: beaches, rave parties, drugs, alcohol, and a carefully cultivated Western aesthetic. It is framed as a hyper-liberal exception within India, proudly detached from its civilizational roots. What this narrative erases is that Goa's history did not begin with Portuguese conquest. It possessed a rich Hindu civilizational life long before colonial rule, one that was systematically dismantled rather than organically replaced.

Behind Goa's tourist image lies a suppressed Hindu civilization now reclaiming space through temple restoration, revived festivals, and historical reckoning with colonial violence, forced conversions, and the enduring legacy of the Goan Inquisition.

● *The land of churches and beaches is at the threshold of a civilizational makeover, with the drug and party culture losing its allure and the hitherto concealed Hindu heritage of Goa making its presence felt.*

● *The unveiling of Bhagwan Ram's statue in Goa in November 2025 carries deep symbolic significance amid the near-erasure of the state's Hindu heritage. The brutality of Portuguese rule, compounded by post-independence civilizational apathy, led to the systematic destruction of Goa's Sanatani roots.*

● *For the past couple of years, the Goa government has been promoting temple tourism in the state and restoring and reconstructing*



Hindu temples destroyed during the Portuguese invasion.

● *Even though Goa is slowly but decisively embracing its Hindu roots, the conspicuous absence of the Goa Inquisition – a pinnacle of Hindu persecution – from mainstream public discourse exemplifies the complexity of this endeavour.*

When a society continues to define itself through the cultural residue of its former colonizers decades after political rule has ended,

it signals not continuity but decay. Over time, this decay hardens into civilizational amnesia, where an imposed identity is internalized and presented as authentic inheritance. In its most troubling form, this becomes a cultural Stockholm syndrome.

Goa is a textbook case.

To the world, Goa is sold as India's playground: beaches, rave parties, drugs, alcohol, and a carefully



cultivated Western aesthetic. It is framed as a hyper-liberal exception within India, proudly detached from its civilizational roots. What this narrative erases is that Goa's history did not begin with Portuguese conquest. It possessed a rich Hindu civilizational life long before colonial rule, one that was systematically dismantled rather than organically replaced.

The Portuguese period, now romanticized through churches and architectural nostalgia, was marked by coercion and brutality. The Goan Inquisition imposed draconian laws, criminalized indigenous religious practices, and subjected Hindus to sustained persecution[1]. This was not cultural exchange but cultural destruction. Yet for decades, Goa's global appeal rested on a sanitized colonial memory, where violence was repackaged as heritage and erasure as charm.

That narrative is finally weakening.

Over the past decade, Goa has begun shedding its colonial after-image. For perhaps the first time since Liberation, there is public recognition of the state's suppressed Hindu identity. Government initiatives to promote temple tourism and develop pilgrimage circuits reflect a deeper shift in self-perception. The party-and-drug monoculture that once defined Goa's image is losing its exclusivity. In its place, an older and more rooted Goa is resurfacing.

This change is not merely regional. It mirrors a broader civilizational reawakening across Bharat, where suppressed histories are being reclaimed and cultural confidence is returning. Goa's transformation is not a rejection of openness or modernity. It is a correction—one that restores



memory, dignity, and continuity to a land long compelled to forget itself.

Spotlight on Goa's Hindu Heritage

When the Indian Prime Minister Modi unveiled a 77-foot-tall bronze statue of Bhagwan Ram at South Goa's Shree Samsthan Gokarn Jeevottam Matha in November 2025, it created cognitive dissonance for those accustomed to seeing Goa primarily as a nightlife and beach-hopping destination. One of the tallest statues of Bhagwan Ram in the world, the Goa statue was designed by sculptor Ram Sutar, best known for creating the Statue of Unity in Gujarat.

Among the country's oldest monastic institutions, the Matha holds a special place within the Gaud Saraswat Brahmin community and has long served as an important Vaishnava spiritual seat. The Matha's premises were established nearly 370 years ago, giving it deep historical and religious significance. The unveiling of the Bhagwan Ram statue coincided with the 550th anniversary of the Matha tradition[2] [3] [4].

Along with the unveiling of the statue, Prime Minister Modi also

inaugurated a Ramayana Theme Park Garden developed on the Matha premises. He further released a special commemorative postal stamp and coin to mark the occasion. [5]

The unveiling of Bhagwan Ram's statue in Goa carries deep symbolic significance amid the near erasure of the state's Hindu heritage. The violence of the Portuguese invasion, compounded by the civilizational indifference of post-independence governments toward Goa's Hindu past, resulted in the systematic destruction and marginalization of its Sanatani roots.

The Christianization of Goa under Portuguese rule stands as one of the darkest chapters in India's history. It was marked by the large-scale destruction of temples, the use of violence to enforce conversions, and the imposition of draconian bans on the public practice of Hindu rituals and traditions[6]. The Goan Inquisition, initiated in the 16th century, led to the torture and killing of thousands of Indians on charges such as blasphemy against Christianity, idolatry, witchcraft, and necromancy. This machinery of persecution continued well into the 17th and 18th centuries[7].



Against a landscape dominated by churches, cathedrals, and other symbols of Portuguese oppression—now routinely marketed as Goa’s “cultural legacy”—the state’s Hindu origins remained largely concealed. However, India’s ongoing civilizational and cultural resurgence has begun to shift this narrative, bringing Goa’s Vedic roots back into focus.

Stories long excluded from the mainstream account of Goa are now being revisited. Among them is the story of Bhagwan Parshuram, a revered figure in Bharat’s Dharmic tradition. Often referred to as the “Father of Goa,” Parshuram is believed to have played a central role in the creation of the Konkan region, which includes present-day Goa. According to tradition, he created the Sahyadri range and then shot an arrow into the western seas, causing the waters to recede and **reveal the land that became Goa.**[8] [9]

Ancient texts refer to Goa by several names, including Gopakapattana, Gomanchala, Gopakapuri, Gopakapattam, Govem, Govapuri, and Gomantak. According to Dharmic tradition, after creating the landmass, Bhagwan Parshuram invited Brahmin communities to settle in the region and perform Vedic rituals. Over time, these Brahmins came to be known as the Saraswat Brahmins, who went on to contribute significantly to Goa’s cultural and civilizational fabric [10].

In June 2023, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant unveiled the ‘Gomantbhumii Janak Parshuram’ statue in Panaji, formally recognizing and honoring the central place of Bhagwan Parshuram in Goa’s civilizational history[11].

Bhagwan Parshuram also has several temples dedicated to him in Goa, including the Parshuram Temple in Painguinim. Representing the ideals of justice, discipline, and unwavering commitment to Dharma or righteousness, his association with the land of Goa forms an integral part of its Dharmic history and cultural identity[12].

Another important expression of Goa’s Hindu heritage is Shigmotsav, a vibrant spring festival widely known for its

colorful processions and folk traditions. Rooted in the state’s Hindu past, Shigmotsav reflects Goa’s ancient agrarian and cultural rhythms. In recent years, the festival has witnessed a revival, aided by sustained government efforts to promote cultural heritage beyond the narrow frame of beach tourism.

The 2025 celebrations, held from March 15 to March 29, wove an evocative tapestry of dance, music, temple rituals, and a wide range of street performances, offering a glimpse into Goa’s traditional roots. Primarily an agrarian festival, Shigmotsav marks the end of the farming season, allowing communities to honor local deities and celebrate through traditional folk music, dance, and collective festivity[13].

The festival also features depictions of scenes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana through an eclectic blend of folk dances, intricately designed floats, and traditional street-style performances. Shigmotsav is celebrated in two distinct forms. Dhakto Shigmo, typically observed in Goan villages, focuses on preserving the festival’s Hindu roots. Traditional temple rituals are presented in their original form, and folk performances adhere closely to their authentic styles and rhythms. This version is known for its intimate, community-centered character, with a strong emphasis on the distinctiveness of temple traditions.

Vhadlo Shigmo, by contrast, is the grander version of the festival, celebrated in cities such as Mapusa, Panaji, Margao, and Vasco. Here, the emphasis shifts toward scale and spectacle, with elaborate processions, vibrant floats, and a carnival-like atmosphere designed to engage larger audiences while retaining the festival’s cultural essence[14].

Temple Tourism Gets a Boost

While temple tourism is witnessing an unprecedented surge across India, Goa’s public image continues to be shaped by familiar stereotypes of historic churches, beach shacks, and nightlife. The idea of tourists visiting Goa to perform pooja at a temple still appears incongruous with the hyper-Westernized image that has long dominated the mainstream narrative.

That image, however, has begun to shift over the past few years. Goa is in the midst of a quiet rebranding, with increasing attention being directed toward its Dharmic heritage. The state government has stepped up efforts to promote temple tourism, signaling a broader attempt to rebalance how Goa is seen, both within India and abroad.

In June 2023, the Goa government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Temple Connect, an organization focused on the development and revival of the temple ecosystem. According to State Tourism Minister



Rohan Khaunte, the partnership aims to enhance Goa's tourism potential by integrating its temples into a Global Circuit. Under this collaboration, temples in urgent need of preservation and restoration will be jointly identified, and targeted initiatives will be undertaken to ensure their long-term maintenance, development, and accessibility[15].

Under the MoU, the government is focusing on improving infrastructure around temples, including accessibility, visitor amenities, signage, and parking facilities. The agreement also outlines a roadmap for conducting specialized training programmes and workshops for temple priests and other stakeholders within the temple ecosystem. These initiatives will focus on communication skills, heritage conservation, and hospitality, with the aim of strengthening and professionalizing temple tourism[16].

In June 2025, Goa Tourism launched the "Ekadasha Teertha Yatra," a pilgrimage circuit comprising 11 iconic temples that reflect the state's rich Dharmic and civilizational legacy. As part of the Yatra, tourists are expected to visit approximately 4 temples per day, allowing the entire circuit to be completed in 2 to 3

days. The circuit includes several historically significant temples, such as the Shri Mahalasa Narayani Temple in Mardol, North Goa; the Sri Manguesh Temple in Mangeshi, North Goa; the Sri Shantadurga Temple in Fatorpa, South Goa; and the Mahadev Temple at Tambdi Surla, South Goa[17] [18].

In an interview with Gomantak Times Digital, Director of the Goa Tourism Department, Kedar Naik, emphasized that the temple tourism initiative will neither interfere with the Dharmic essence of the temples nor dilute the sanctity of their rituals and traditions. He noted that visitors would be educated about local customs, appropriate conduct, and attire through trained guides, informational signage, and curated materials.

Naik also highlighted that the initiative aims to promote both domestic and international tourism through participation in spiritual tourism expos, increased visibility on spiritual travel platforms, and content partnerships with travel influencers. As part of these efforts, a group of influencers from Uzbekistan recently visited the Shri Mangesh Temple in Mangueshi, Ponda.

The Ekadasha Teertha Yatra will also include a range of initiatives to

showcase Goa's folk arts and local culture. These include heritage storytelling sessions as well as dedicated spaces for local artisans to display and promote traditional crafts, ensuring that cultural engagement extends beyond temple visits alone[19].

Positioning Goa as a temple tourism destination marks a significant step toward redefining its civilizational narrative. For decades, the state has been primarily associated with churches that commemorate some of the most brutal figures of missionary history, including St. Francis Xavier, whose role in enforcing conversions through torture and violence was central to the establishment of the Goan Inquisition[20]. Yet these churches continue to be celebrated across Goa as part of its "historical legacy," with the missionary enterprise routinely glorified while the large-scale violence inflicted on the indigenous Hindu population is glossed over or ignored[21].

Against this backdrop, the push to promote Dharmic and temple tourism signals the emergence of a new narrative. This shift may not directly confront or dismantle the entrenched glorification of the Portuguese legacy, but it performs a quieter and arguably more consequential task: it restores visibility to Goa's Hindu past. By foregrounding temples, pilgrimages, and living traditions, the state is beginning to re-anchor its identity in a civilizational history that long predates colonial intrusion and has endured despite systematic erasure.

In May 2025, the Chief Minister of Goa, Pramod Sawant, described the land as a "yog bhumi" rather than a "bhog bhumi." Addressing a gathering of over 14,000 people at the Sanatan Rashtra Shankhnad Mahotsav, he said that Goa is not merely a land of sand, sun, and beaches, but also



home to some of the most beautiful and clean temples. He further spoke about the involvement of local communities in sustaining the state's temple infrastructure, emphasizing that local committees and villages are responsible for managing temples, and that every village traditionally worships its own local deities[22].

Destruction of Goa's Hindu Heritage – A Conveniently Concealed Truth

Despite India's broader civilizational and cultural resurgence, the erasure of Goa's Hindu heritage has received relatively little attention. When discussions turn to the revival of ancient Dharmic sites, Goa rarely features in the public imagination. This is largely because the state's culture has long been presented almost exclusively through the colonial Portuguese lens, leaving scant space in mainstream media and public discourse for engagement with Goa's suppressed Hindu past.

Yet Goa's Hindu heritage extends far deeper than commonly acknowledged, reaching back to prehistoric times. Archaeological discoveries have established Acheulean occupation from the Lower Paleolithic era in the Western Ghats, underscoring the antiquity of human presence in the region. Evidence from the Paleolithic period has been found across several parts of Goa, including rock art engravings on laterite platforms and granite boulders, as well as stone tools such as axes, choppers, and petroglyphs dating back nearly 10,000 years[23].

Goa has also been home to several prominent Hindu rulers, as evidenced by historical records and archaeological findings. Written accounts date back to the 3rd century BCE, when Goa formed part of Chandragupta Maurya's expansive empire. In subsequent periods, the region came under the rule of the Satavahana dynasty, followed by the Bhojas, Chalukyas, Shilaharas, and the Kadambas. Under Kadamba rule, Goa emerged as an important center of trade and commerce, and both Hindu Dharma and Jainism

flourished during this period. [24]

The period of Kadamba rule, spanning roughly from 1000 to 1400 CE, saw a revival of local Hindu culture, with numerous temples constructed across the Goan heartland. Among the Puranas, the Skandapurana offers one of the most detailed narratives of Goa's Hindu past, particularly recounting the migration of Saraswat Brahmins from North-East India to the region. The text also names several deities worshipped by the Gauda Saraswat Brahmins who became integral to Goa's religious landscape, including Śantadurgā, Mahālaksmī, Mangeśa, Saptakotīśvara, and Nageśa. These deities are still venerated in temples across Goa to this day[25].

During Portuguese rule, Goa's Hindu heritage was systematically devastated. The large-scale destruction of Hindu temples, images, and shrines was accompanied by their deliberate replacement with Christian monuments and iconography[26]. Owing to the absence of comprehensive records and the scarcity of surviving reference material, it is difficult to determine the exact number of temples that were destroyed or replaced by churches. Nevertheless, when fragments of evidence from various sources are pieced together, a clearer and more plausible picture of this widespread erasure begins to emerge:

“A deep well in the St. Cajetan Church (completed in 1661 and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site), points to the existence of Hindu temples in Old Goa. It is believed that Archbishop Aleixio de Menezes constructed the Holy Trinity Church on the ruins of a Shiva temple. In its neighbourhood exists a pushkar to fulfil the water requirements of the now-missing temple. According to a copper plate inscription belonging to Tribhuvanamalla of 1107 CE, there was a Brahmapuri colony for Brahmins on the outskirts of present-day Old Goa, where Shiva was worshipped as Goveshwar. The Brahmin families lived near a temple of Devi Sarasvati.” (From a write-up published by the Centre for Indic Studies, Indus University, Ahmedabad). [27]

Restoration of Temples Destroyed During the Portuguese Invasion

In March 2022, the Goa government allocated ₹200 million in its budget for the restoration and reconstruction of temples and other Dharmic sites destroyed during the Portuguese invasion[28]. This first-of-its-kind initiative carries strong symbolic significance against the backdrop of decades of whitewashing the violence and brutality of Portuguese rule in Goa. It marks a clear shift in narrative, with the state government formally acknowledging the



historical trauma associated with the so-called Portuguese legacy and taking a step toward correcting a long-standing colonial distortion.

An Expert Committee was constituted in 2023 to examine representations seeking the reconstruction or restoration of temples destroyed during Portuguese rule. The committee's report, which is available online, assesses more than 20 Dharmic sites submitted for consideration. These assessments are based on the presence of structural remnants, relics, and architectural features indicating the possible existence of temples at these locations. Following a detailed evaluation, the committee issued site-specific recommendations, either proposing that a site be notified as protected by the Goa government's Department of Archaeology or that its archaeological potential be **further explored by the department**[29].

The report states that more than 1,000 Hindu temples were destroyed during the Portuguese invasion and the Goa Inquisition. It also puts forward the following recommendations:

- The construction of a Smarak-Devalaya, or temple memorial, to re-establish deities whose original sites were usurped under colonial rule.
- The establishment of a temple museum dedicated to showcasing Goa's ancient temple heritage.
- The translation of select Portuguese records into English to facilitate deeper research into the destruction of temples during Portuguese rule in Goa.
- The formulation of schemes to support major and minor research projects, encouraging scholars and researchers to study and document **Goa's temple heritage**[30].

Wrapping Up

The ongoing resurgence of Goa's Hindu heritage has invited a predictable narrative backlash from a familiar ecosystem[31] [32] [33]. Stock accusations of alleged

right-wing appropriation of Goa's culture and claims of "Hindutva" politics encroaching upon the state's supposed "Portuguese legacy" have once again surfaced.

More broadly, Bharat's civilizational and cultural resurgence has consistently been framed through a similar discursive lens by the left-liberal establishment. Goa, however, presents a more layered challenge. Even as efforts are underway to reclaim its Dharmic heritage, the colonial narrative of an overriding "Portuguese legacy" continues to dominate mainstream discourse. The near-complete absence of serious engagement with the Goa Inquisition—one of the most severe episodes of Hindu persecution—from public discussion underscores this imbalance and highlights the unresolved tension at the heart of Goa's civilizational reckoning. ■

Source: <https://stophindudvesha.org/goas-hindu-revival-reclaiming-a-civilization-buried-under-centuries-of-colonial-rule/>

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Let's Talk About Democracy

• By Maria Wirth

I was born into a democracy in Germany and heard from childhood that democracy is OF COURSE the best form of government. “Of the people – by the people – for the people” – what more could we want! Luckily media informed us whenever “democracy is in danger” and when we need to “save democracy” or bring the gift of democracy to other countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya....

Then, a few weeks ago, the founder of Vitasta Publishing asked me to be on a panel for the book release of “Democracy with Dharma” by Salvatore Babones. For the first time, I reflected on democracy a little deeper, and came to unexpected conclusions.

Salvatore Babones argued that Indian democracy is looked down upon by international observers as greatly flawed, but actually, India is matching the parameters of a democracy rather well. He basically complimented India that she is a ‘good girl’ in the club of democratic countries, unlike Russia or China, and he gave the concept of dharma a role in it.

My first conclusion was that for any society, Dharma is far more important than democracy. If the society and its leaders follow dharma, it’s a good society. If they don’t follow dharma, it’s bad. Fortunately, dharma is still followed in India, at least to a greater extent than in the West, in spite of diverse attempts to draw Indians away from a dharmic lifestyle.

One such attempt can be seen in the concept of democracy itself: Democracy basically means constant confrontation rather than cooperation. We are told that a ‘healthy democracy’ needs a strong opposition. Yet a strong opposition means, that almost half of the voters did not vote for the ruling party and are unhappy with the government. They feel that they ‘lost’.

What makes it worse is that the opposition leaders now need to keep their voters unhappy with the government and make some of those, who voted for the government, also unhappy, so that they have a chance to win the next election.



So instead of unifying the nation, a ‘healthy democracy’ is the blueprint for dividing it.

Further, money plays a huge role. Elections are expensive. Much of this money comes from big donors. Those donors expect favors. Usually, they want more back than what they had ‘invested’. Even an honest leader would feel pressure to “return the kindness.” This can shift decisions away from the public good toward private interests. And what about dishonest, adharmic leaders?



In most democracies, leaders are rarely moral figures. They are surrounded by lobbyists, secrets, and temptations. This makes them vulnerable. The Jeffrey Epstein files exposed how politicians (and not only politicians) can be blackmailed or bought, and make democracy basically a joke.

Another point: a huge amount of energy and money is wasted on persuading the electorate that the government policies are good or bad respectively and to give the government another term or to change it. Certain groups, based on religion, language, region, or class, are promised sops because of the number of votes they carry. Policies are shaped not by what is best for the country, but by what wins the next election. Naturally, the temptation is there to throw numerically small groups under the bus, as losing their support won't matter. This leads to heartburn in society. Injustice is never a good idea.

Another problem is that many citizens are simply not interested in politics. Many don't vote at all – in democracies like USA or India, every third person of the electorate – and others who do vote, are swayed by friends or relatives.

On top of that, media houses shape opinions by choosing what to highlight and what to hide. Yet are

they free to choose or are the media owners giving the direction? So, in practice, the “voice of the people” is heavily engineered. And one should ask for whose benefit?

Democracy also often prevents leaders to take tough, but in the long run good steps, like cutting subsidies or removing reservations, because they fear losing the next election. And even if a leader dares to take tough measures, his decisions get stuck in courts, protests, and committees. In times of crisis, this delay can be costly.

I noticed another strange, but significant point. Before WW1 most countries had monarchies. The brutal assassination of the Czar and his family during the Bolshevik revolution in Russia was the start of abolishing monarchies worldwide in favour of democratic republics. The German emperor was forced to abdicate in 1918. Now, in 2026, according to Google only some 7 true monarchies exist, like Saudi Arabia, Oman, or Brunei.

How is it possible that in a short span of time, the whole world divested their kings of their power and got rid of their century old, time-proven system of governance? Some countries kept the king or queen as a figure heads; others deposed them outright. Naturally, this must have been orchestrated by those at the very top of the power structure in the

world – possibly with the help of the two world wars??

So, the question is: was democracy pushed on the nations of the world, because it is easier to corrupt and blackmail newly elected, unexperienced leaders, than it is to corrupt and blackmail established royalty? And because democracy is also ideal to divide the citizenry and make them fight each other and not look up towards those at the very top who try to control all of humanity? Are the divisions between right and left, castes, ethnicities and religions deliberately heightened with fake news and even riots by the deep state, by paying activists? Did not the CIA support (or create) even ISIS and Al-Qaida?

It is unbelievable but, powerful men at the top of the pyramid also conduct abhorrent rituals, the worst of them involving torturing and murdering children – to please satanic powers.

It's a dark world. According to the Indian Puranas, it is the rule of Kali Purush, where Dharma is tottering on only one leg. But there seems to be a positive change coming. Never before, had so much of those dark machinations come to light. Never before had common people access to what those so-called elites are really up to. The Epstein files play a big role in this. We should be interested in what is coming out and take it seriously. Especially Indians should not make again the mistake from the past centuries – in believing nice-sounding words from foreign invaders, when the intentions behind those words were malicious and their methods satanic.

India is still a relatively bright spot in the world precisely because of Dharma. Wikileaks had disclosed, that PM Modi is not only not corrupt but is also perceived as incorruptible.



Yet this doesn't guarantee that all powerful persons, who have influence on policies in the government, follow dharma and cannot be corrupted or blackmailed. Attempts are surely on to compromise influential persons.

The Mahabharata gives excellent advice how a country should be ruled, when Bhishma explains Rajdharma to Yudhisthira. Ram Rajya scores high over modern, secular democracies – a dharmic, independent ruler who has trustworthy, intelligent advisors and puts the security and welfare of his people above his own welfare. Bhishma gives one more important advice: the Raja needs to worship the Devas (greater powers than humans whose benevolence is needed).

In contrast, 'secular democracies' have explicitly no place for the Divine. Science is meant to replace religion. We, the common people, should focus only on the material realm and forget our divine roots. Yuval Noah Harari, the famous Israeli historian and regular participant at the WEF, wants us to consider belief in God as ridiculous.

Yet our overlords (the global financial cabal) seem to take the invisible realm very seriously and take the help of demonic powers – to gain immeasurable riches and power. There are several whistle-blowers who spoke up, especially against the trafficking of children for sexual abuse, for their blood and for Satanic sacrifice. Several of those whistle blowers died under mysterious circumstances soon after speaking up. Some are fortunately still alive, like the Dutchman Ronald Bernard.

Bernard got into top financial asset management because he had no problem to put his conscience in deep freeze. His main goal was to make as much money as he could. He attended Satanic rituals 'for fun' and was amused by the naked women present, he said. But the breaking point came for him, when he was invited for a sort of upgrade. He was promised unimaginable riches, if he joins in sacrificing – children... This was the breaking point for him. ■

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 Ardhha 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.

If you like my writing, consider getting my books: *(Both books are also on Kindle)*

Title: "Why Hindu Dharma is under attack by Muslims, Christians and the Left" 2025, Rs 311

Link: <https://www.amazon.in/dp/8119670655>

Title: "Thank you India – a German woman's journey to the wisdom of yoga" 2018, Rs 349

Link: <https://garudalife.in/thank-you-india-by-maria-wirth>

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Source: <https://mariawirth.com/lets-talk-about-democracy-and-epstein-files/>



Bhagvad Geeta for Children 8

From a series of talks by Sanjay Mehta, transcribed and
compiled by **Jaya Asthana**

Chapter 3 (contd): Karma Yog

To re-cap:

Bhagwan says Gyan and Karma are not different, they are two sides of the same coin. But knowledge is not one or the other, it is both Gyan and Karma together. Karma is an activity where there is a doer involved, there is also the result involved. The problem is that when I am the doer, ego comes into play, and that binds us. The ego that gets in the way is Ahankar.

But even after knowing all this, Arjun is still not convinced. He asks Bhagwan, “You gave me the gyan,

but now tell me, why should I fight? Since I am not the body, I am the Atman, why should I fight? I can just sit on the mountain and meditate.”

Shloke 36:

*atha kena prayukto 'yam papam charati purushah
anichchhann api varshneya balad iva niyojitah*

Arjun said, now impelled by what, Krishna, dos this man commit sin even involuntarily, as though driven by force?



**Shloke 37:**

*kama esha krodha esha rajo-guna-samudbhavah
mahashano maha-papma viddhyenam iha vairinam*

It is desire begotten of the element of Rajas, which appears as wrath; nay, it is insatiable and grossly wicked. Know this to be the enemy in this case.

Arjun said, now I understand Karma, I understand Gyan, but what compels me to do the wrong action (adharma?)

Bhagwan says the problem is Kama (desire). That is the enemy sitting inside me, which forces me to do things.

Arjun was running away because he had a desire inside him. Out of love and respect and for his grandfather, his Guru, his relatives, he didn't want to fight with them, even though he knew they were wrong, they were siding with Adharma.

Just to illustrate: The teacher gives all the students in her class a piece of candy. She asks them to go to any corner of school. If there is nobody sitting there, she says they can eat the candy. When the students come back, all the students ate the candy, but one boy came back with the candy. Teacher asked why he didn't eat his candy, could he not find a quiet corner? He said, "there were plenty of corners, but in all the corners, Myself was watching me."

Even when you think there is nobody watching, you are never alone. Your conscience is always with you.

Try this experiment at home: Keep your favorite candy in your room, look at it every day, but don't eat it. See how strong your desire is. ■





Self-Doubt: A Powerful Barrier to Self-Realization

● By Dr. A. V. (Sheenu) Srinivasan

Ancient Hindu sages discovered a fundamental truth and declared it in a famous aphorism: तत्त्वमसि (tatvamasi); तत् त्वं असि tat twam asi i.e. You are That. Thou art That.

Thousands of articles and books that have since tried to elaborate on the aphorism because the words “You” and “That” do not mean what we normally associate with these words. The word “You” does not refer to your body or mind. It refers, according to the sages to a much more sophisticated, not easily recognized or understood, entity known as atman, i.e. the individual soul. And the word That refers to परमात्मन् paramatman, the Supreme soul, i.e. Brahman. This belief led further to the assertion: अहं ब्रह्मास्मि aham brahmasmi; I am Brahman. My soul is Brahman, a part of the Supreme Soul. I am that soul, not my body or mind. Advaita Vedanta philosophy makes no distinction between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. The divinity is in us.

That each living being is the same divinity is a very difficult concept to accept! We doubt that we can be that. Our concept of God is that God is almighty, powerful, kind, cruel, compassionate, protective, and a whole lot of extraordinary attributes that simply won't fit our view of us. This view is firmly ingrained in our minds. There appears to be no way towards accepting the fundamental truth.

That there is a soul, distinct from the body and mind, in each being, is the basic understanding in Hinduism. That the soul “in its very essence is free, unbounded, holy, pure and perfect” is a stronger interpretation that Hindus have been told and lived with over centuries. (See Swami Vivekananda, Parliament of Religions, 19th September, 1893).

The Hindu therefore is urged to believe he is spirit and the Bhagavad-Gita describes soul thus:

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः नचैनं क्लेदयंत्यापो नशोशयति मारुतः (2.23) nainam chindanti shasrani nainam dahati



pavaka; nacainam kledayantyapo nashoshayati maruta: Him the sword cannot pierce, him the fire cannot burn, him the water cannot wet, him the air cannot dry.

Such a powerful entity indeed residing in each and every being is beyond our belief.

But this genderless, formless, perfect entity in each of us should naturally have let each of us feel divine and see absolutely no differences whatsoever between individuals and every other being on earth. In such a great scenario there should be no conflict, no jealousy, no complex, nothing except perfect peace and tranquility. That would indeed be heaven on earth. Clearly that is not the case. Perhaps this may have been so in the Krita Yuga but a gradual decline in vision and values has led to the mess we are in today. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata demonstrate that decline.

But how did this happen? Why wouldn't everyone not feel the divine in themselves and everyone else? Why did we settle for this low, much, much lower status as mere humans far, far less than what we are meant to be? This is the complex puzzle that bothered Swami Vivekananda who commented thus: “How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect? How can the perfect become the quasi-perfect; how can the pure, the absolute, change even a microscopic particle of its nature?” (ibid). He simply concluded that the Hindu is brave enough to



confess “I do not know”. I am not sure if a century later we have a rational explanation to this puzzle.

The most annoying problem humanity has with this idea of divinity within each of us is that it is hardly credible. It is as if we are afraid to acknowledge this truth and its consequences. We each have a personal concept of godhead and we harbor a fear of God. How can you accept one you revere/fear as yourself? Would we not prefer to keep God up there, way up there, revere the concept and believe that God, if worshipped through elaborate rituals, praised and feared, will protect us? This excuse leads us to the hesitation and total inability to accept the truth. This fear, among hundreds of fears that haunt us day in and day out, is the supreme fear that prevents us from enjoying the Supreme within each of us.

But the issue, I believe, is more complicated, because the assertion अहं ब्रह्मास्मि aham brahmasmi is misleading, not factual. The implication, in my opinion, is that I am potentially Brahman but most definitely not so until I qualify to be so. The entirety of Hindu philosophy led by the Bhagavad Gita at the very top, is full of a variety of paths that can lead to that status. The claim therefore merely expresses the ultimate Hindu goal we can strive towards. As it turns out the efforts are nearly impossible for most. Let me elaborate:

The ancient sages noted certain indisputable facts about life on this planet which I believe almost every middle-aged person would recognize. Life cycle of beings on this earth consists of birth, growth, decay and death. No exceptions. Every living being has an expiration date which is totally unknown. During this lifetime one does experience joy, sorrow, gains, losses, disease, fame, shame, ... We have succeeded in making life so complicated and controversial that thousands of generations have accepted this mixture, aphorisms and scriptural mandates notwithstanding.

Strangely enough I have seen in my village, the so – called shudras address the statue of the village goddess at the temple as if they are talking to a person, even arguing and questioning why on earth she did not grant the village what they had prayed for even after they offered a live animal sacrifice as is the practice! Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa told Swami Vivekananda that he had seen goddess Kali and asked Vivekananda to go into the sanctum himself and do the same! And in the morning prayer, the Venkatesha Suprabhatam, in the opening stanza shown below, the devotee pleads

“

Lord Rama, tiger among men, the beloved of Kausalya, wake up as the sun is about to rise in the eastern sky and do your daily duty!

”

कौसल्या सुप्रजा राम पूर्वा संध्या प्रवर्तते
उत्तिष्ठ नर शार्दूला कर्तव्यं दैवमान्हिकं

Kausalya supraja rama purva sandhya pravartate
Uttishta nara shardula kartavyam daivamanhikam

Lord Rama, tiger among men, the beloved of Kausalya, wake up as the sun is about to rise in the eastern sky and do your daily duty!

Here we are treating Rama not unlike the way we might treat a son. And reminding him that he, Rama, has to do his duty like anyone else!

Notwithstanding such examples we tend to treat gods as up there and far away!

The other concern we have in accepting the fundamental truth of divinity within us is the impact of accepting that truth. That fundamental truth immediately destroys the differences we see in each other: our looks, our skin color, gender, station in life, geography, language, likes and dislikes in food, culture and a whole variety of attributes that “normally” define each of us. We all grow up looking at differences, noting how some of my neighbors dislike some food items that I love, wear clothes so different than mine, cannot speak as many languages as I can, like songs that I don’t care to listen to, do not read books that I do and many such things that emphasize how better (or worse) I am from them. Differences overwhelm us and we accept them as normal. Commonality and connectivity aspect of life never had a chance!

An exception: There are moments when the feeling that we are all connected and are one and the same surges with such force that gives us some hope. This is especially so when a tragedy occurs. We remember the reaction



throughout the civilized world after 9/11 when millions felt connected and prayed for the victims of the tragedy. Similar reactions are seen whenever there is a school shooting, for example, when people rush to the scene of the tragedy and put flowers and hold candle vigils. The victims may or may not in any way connected to these folks but the feeling of connectivity and commonality overcomes the otherwise normal life. This is the unmistakable answer to the question posed by the German Philosopher Schopenhauer: How is it possible, that suffering that is neither my own nor of my concern, should immediately affect me as though it were my own, and with such force that it moves me to action? The answer is the Brahman in each being.

I recall a joke where someone saw God and asked “Who are you?” and God responded: You!” Jokes more often than not reveal the truth. This one most certainly does!

What could possibly eradicate that self doubt and make us believe so intensely in that fundamental truth and devote our lives to accomplish that divine status and see life on this planet as a heaven on earth? Hinduism insists on अद्येह, the here and now, and the hereafter is the outcome of the quality of the here and now.

That the path to that truth is simply overwhelming requiring enormous constraints and sacrifice is illustrated in the following parable I composed long ago (see my book *Hinduism for Dummies*, Second Edition, p 168, Wiley, 2025):

You’re climbing some rock-cut steps to an ancient temple on a hill. But this temple is not to a deity. It has no priests. It has no bells to ring, and you do not bring any offerings beyond your self in body and spirit. As you climb, at each step, one after another, you discard a dogma.

You reject ritualistic approaches. You sweat through the futility of pride and vanity and settle for humility. You seek satisfaction beyond pleasure of the senses -- something deeper. As you climb higher and higher, you recognize that ignorance of your real nature is the source of all problems, so your goal is to destroy ignorance. Another step up and you realize that you do not need to abandon anything but simply remain detached! As the ancient Hindus said, real knowledge and infinite joy are yours, and they didn’t mince words. And with the next step, you realize that simply believing is not enough; you must experience it yourself – your self. One more step, and you rise above mere intellect and stand on the threshold of a mystic experience with your heart and intuition tuned to that experience. Experience and experience only counts here on this hill. The sanctum sanctorum—the holiest of holy places—at this temple contains Bliss. Yes, bliss. That is what the ancient Hindus considered worth living (dying?) for. Your interest is nothing but spiritual illumination. You have entered the temple of the Upanishads. You have reached the source of joy. Now you can begin your earnest inquiry into the ultimate Truth.

Note that with each step in the parable above we reject and discard a weakness to become strong – a true step towards happiness. At the end of this process of rejections we are blissful and fully qualified to attain moksha upon passing. This is the Hindu way.

So the Hindu assertion of divinity within you is valid but it simply is not automatic. It requires efforts, extraordinary efforts, nearly impossible steps, to reach that status. The potential is there. The choice is yours! ■

About the Author

Dr. A. V. (Sheenu) Srinivasan is the author of many publications, including the books *Vedic Wedding: Origins, Tradition, and Practice* (which received a National Best Book Award in 2007), *A Hindu Primer: Yaksha Prashna* (which won a Benjamin Franklin Award in 2016), and *Hinduism for Dummies*, Second edition). His papers on a variety of Hinduism related topics have appeared in *Vedanta Kesari*, *Prabuddha Bharata*, *Quest*; *Journal of the Theosophical Society of America*, *Hindu Vishva*, *Bhavan’s Journal* and *Tattva Loka*. The publishers include Periplus Line, LLC, Wiley Publishers, Penguin Random House; New Delhi, Cambridge University Press and Vision Books, New Delhi.

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Spirituality and Leadership, From the Past to the Present to the Future

● By David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)

*Editor's note: David Frawley's keynote address at India Ideas 2014
Conclave Goa, India*

The Call for a New Rishi Vision

The dominant model of spiritual leadership in the history of India, from ancient to modern times, is that of the Rishi, the seer of universal truth.

The ancient Vedic rishis like Vasishtha and Vishvamitra are credited with establishing the dharmic foundation for Indian culture (Bharatiya Sanskriti) over five thousand years ago, on both spiritual and mundane levels.

Great Rishis have come periodically over the centuries in India, up to recent times such as Sri Aurobindo, Ramana

Maharshi and Swami Vivekananda, to maintain a deep level of guidance for this sacred land of Bharat.

Today, in a new twenty-first century, and complex high tech global era, we above all need a new group of modern Rishis with a vision both rooted in the ancient Rishi wisdom but capable of unfolding a new future that has its own new potentials as well.

The Rishi is first of all the enlightened Yogi and meditative sage, with access to the cosmic mind, who develops for humanity the paths to Self-realization and universal consciousness that is the true and highest goal of human life.

Yet the Rishi is also one who creates culture in the broadest and highest sense of the term (bhuta-krit, loka-krit). The Rishi envisions a dharmic culture relative to the organization of society, the economy, science, art, literature and medicine. But he or she does so from a state of higher consciousness, not merely from the standpoint of the human intellect or ego, or according to any particular social or political theory or bias.

The Rishi is linked to the cosmic mind and is not limited to the human brain for his knowledge, which is not secondhand information but direct wisdom from the universe itself. The cosmic mind thinks in terms of organic wholes and existential powers, recognizing an integral and comprehensive reality in which a unity of consciousness in the universe sustains innumerable diverse processes from subatomic to supragalactic levels in a mutually supportive and interdependent network of forces.



#IICGoa

With Yogini Shambhavi & celebrated author
Amish Tripathi



With BJP Gen Secy Ram Madhav (Left) and Congresswoman
Tulsi Gabard (Center)

The Rishi mind is different from the ordinary human intellect that is caught up in duality, division, analysis, limited views and contradictory opinions. The human intellect tends to propose mechanical solutions to human problems that can damage the very fabric of life, much as we saw in the last century dominated by such trends as consumerism, socialism, fascism and communism, which have all been found to be wanting.

The Rishi mind will bring about lasting solutions for human problems that are in harmony with all of nature and with the universe as a whole – that arise organically from within us with love and wisdom and are not imposed artificially from the outside by force.

The role of the Rishi is not simply to inform but also to inspire – to awaken and motivate all beings to a higher purpose and eternal goal. That energy of inspiration is one of

the key factors that we need today, particularly for the youth. It is not enough to have a good agenda and to follow it correctly. A deeper feeling and intuition are necessary that can adapt enduring principles to the ever-transformative movement of life.

True inspiration is also a higher aspiration – a calling for us to search out our highest potential as spiritual beings. This inner aspiration motivates us to continually expand our awareness, breaking down old constructs in favor of vaster and more adaptable formulations.

A new Rishi order must be capable of using the best in science, technology, the media and communication realms– the main factors in our global society today. But the Rishi will use these tools of technology for a higher idealism and self-transcendence – not merely for ordinary purposes of profit or enjoyment.

The Rishi gives the call to a new sacrifice or Yajna, a new way of service in which we learn to offer our individual lives for the manifestation of a higher awareness for all humanity. The Rishi honors the sacred order of life and brings the sacred into all that we do.

The Eternal Rishi Teachings

A new Rishi order will bring about the revival and modernization of the ancient Rishi teachings. These include the many branches of Yoga, Vedanta, Ayurveda, Jyotish, Vastu and all the Vedic sciences.

Vedanta promotes a higher Self-realization and Self-knowledge that is the essence of all true knowledge. Without knowing oneself, no other knowledge is effective and will ultimately lead to division and conflict. Yet true Self-knowledge is not a knowledge of body or mind but of the consciousness that dwells behind them and beyond time and space.

Yoga in the classical sense facilitates the integral development of body, mind and consciousness through asana, pranayama, mantra and meditation, so that we can access all our higher potentials in a comprehensive manner. It is the foundation for Vedanta.

The Rishi as a great Yogi will bring the vastness of the Yogic vision into all aspects of human action, thought and awareness. He or she will make all culture into a practice of Yoga or integration with the whole.

Ayurveda teaches us the healing and well-being of body and mind through natural methods of diet,



exercise, herbs and massage. It not only addresses disease but promotes longevity and rejuvenation to help unfold our greater creativity and awareness.

All children and adults should learn the fundamentals of Yoga, Ayurveda and Vedanta. This is the root dharmic knowledge of India's great heritage and relevant to the entire world, particularly in this age of globalization in which we need to understand life as a whole.

Jyotish or Vedic astrology provides an understanding of the secrets of time and karma that rule over our lives, so that our actions are aligned with the universal movement and reflect its efficacy and power.



With Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (left)

“
The Rishi speaks the language of mantra, which enables us to focus our minds in concise patterns of sound, light, and energy that can extract the essence of truth from all that we see. Sanskrit can help us develop the deeper awareness to solve all the problems of life according to a cosmic vision.

Vastu gives an understanding of the powers of subtle directional influences, so that we remain in harmony with the energy currents in our natural environment and can create a sacred space in which to live.

Through Jyotish and Vastu we can understand time and space not only from an outer level but also within our own minds and hearts.

These Vedic sciences and disciplines have tremendous practical value for everyone and are universal in their knowledge. They should be given more attention worldwide.

In addition, the Rishi would restore Sanskrit as a universal language of mantra underlying and carrying the deeper knowledge, useful for modern science and psychology as well as for deeper meditational teachings.

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Types of New Rishis

The Rishi political leader promotes a vision of global harmony, honoring all human beings as part of a single family, rooted in the greater family of the whole of life and all of existence.

The Rishi business leader promotes a vision of abundance as the natural right of all beings. India should follow the economics of Lakshmi, not those of scarcity. Abundance for all should be the aim, not simply wealth for a few.

The Rishi artist envisions a deep refinement of expression, using the tools of sound, color, form and light in order to elevate the mind and heart, not simply to stimulate or to entertain.



The Rishi scientist will uncover the unitary field consciousness behind the universe and reveal its unlimited creative powers and profound laws, whether in physics, biology, astronomy or medicine.

The Rishi educator will educate the whole human being, which is as universal soul carrying the powers of infinity and eternity for life, mind and consciousness.

The Rishi will also serve as a living example to follow. The Rishi is the supreme karma yogi who understands the highest truth and works to embody it in a creative manner for the benefit of all.

It is not we as separate individuals who can guide humanity to a better world. We must awaken the rishi vision, the inner Self or Atman of the Upanishads, the universal presence within the heart in order to propel us to our higher goal with certainty and with grace.

The Rishi ideal is indeed daunting to achieve, which may seem beyond our current capacities, but that ideal should propel us to reach for what is highest and not be content with ordinary goals. The Rishi potential exists within each one of us.

Conclusion

I am reminded of a verse from the Rigveda here: “The

Rishis found the secret light, with the mantras of truth, they generated the Dawn.”

May we awaken to a new dawn and a new renaissance at both spiritual and cultural levels, honoring not only the outer physical sciences but also the inner science of consciousness.

The Rishi Vision embodied in the Gayatri mantra from the great Rishi Vishvamitra has guided Bharat in the past and can do so to for the future.

Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayat.

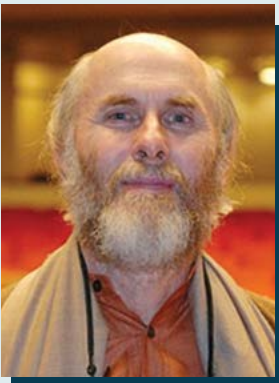
May we meditate upon the supreme transformative light of the divine solar creative power that it may awaken our intelligence.

May that inner sun of universal truth and pure consciousness arise within us. May all our thoughts become mantras full of light!

May this India Ideas Conclave help inaugurate a new Rishi vision for all of India and for the entire world. ■

Om Nama Paramarishibhyah!
Reverence to the Supreme Seers!
Om Sri Veda Purushaya Namah!

About the Authors



Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri) is a Vedacharya and one of the leading exponents of Vedic knowledge in an interdisciplinary approach worldwide. The American Institute of Vedic Studies serves as a vehicle for his work, offering on-line access to go along with his many published writings.

His work is highly esteemed by numerous students and followers as well as by many organizations worldwide – he was awarded India’s prestigious Padma Bhushan award in 2015 for his distinguished service to the nation! He also has a National Eminence Award from the South India Education Society (SIES)

With a D. Litt (the highest possible degree in Yoga & Vedic sciences) from SVYASA and a second D.Litt from Ram Manohar Lohia University, Dr Frawley’s commitment to education shines through with online courses available at the American Institute of Vedic Studies on top of over 50 extensively published books sold the world over.

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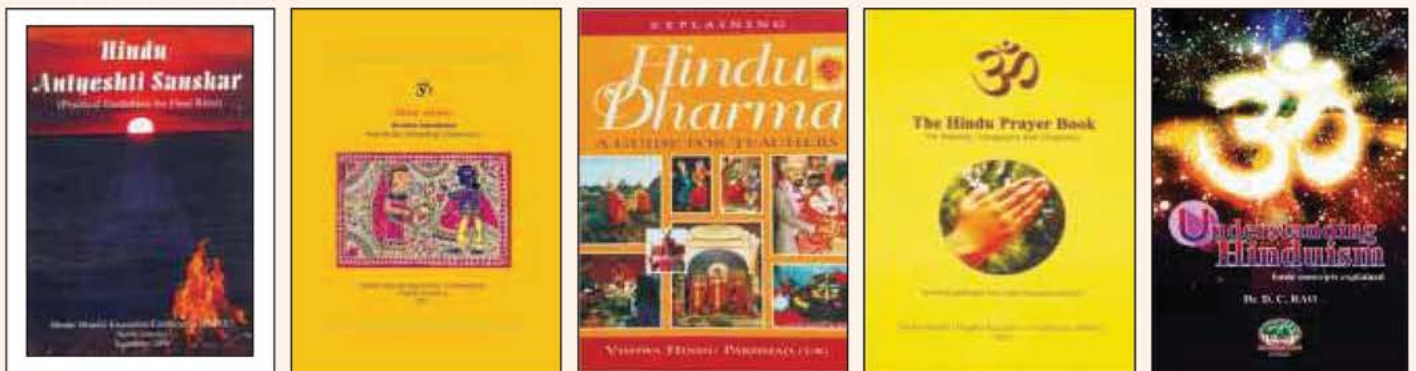
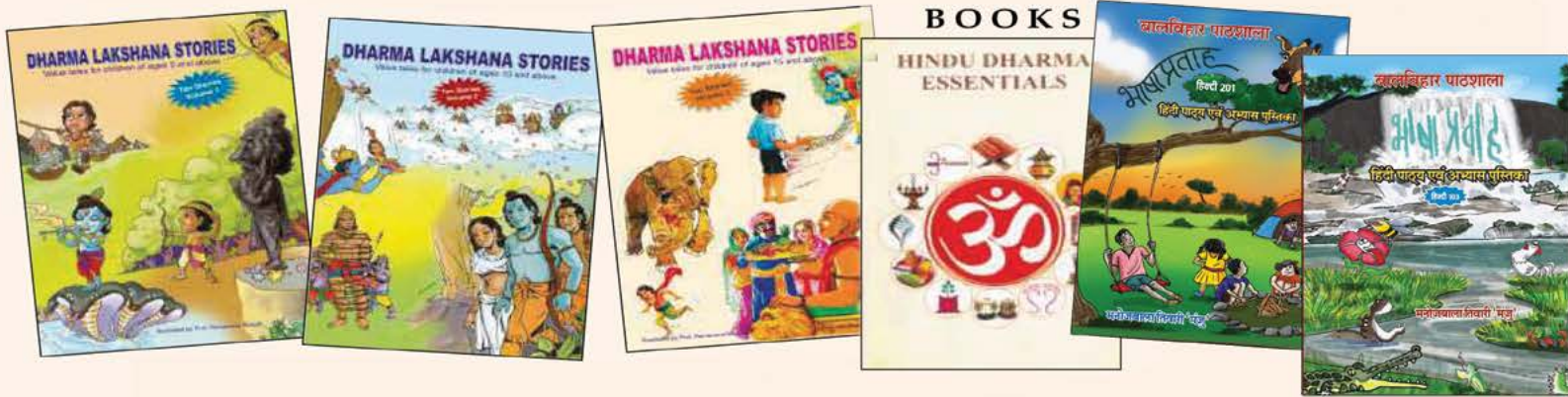
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ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्माऽमृतम् गमय ।।

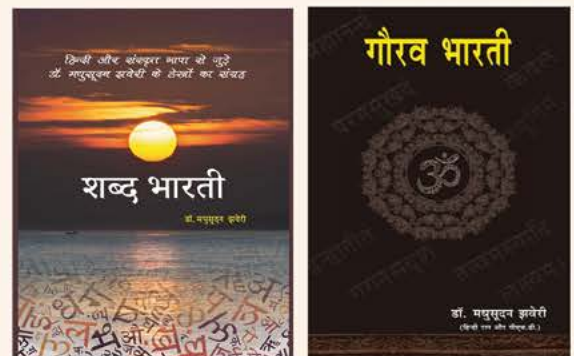
Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

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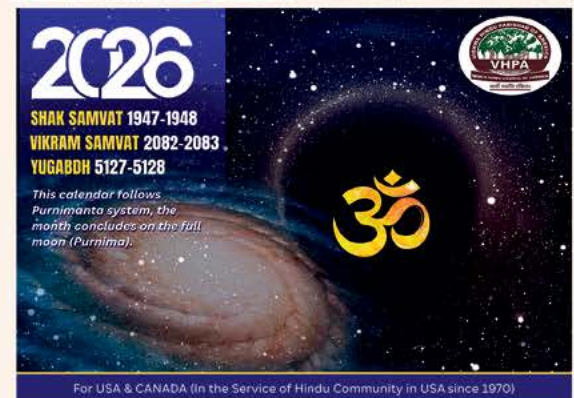


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