

HINDU MANDIRS

Should be Halls of Learning

Besides being the Altars of Worship

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The Mandirs have to play a significant role in the growth of the Hindu community in terms of its capacity to uphold Hindu Dharma... We need to make Temples not just a center of rituals & congregation but lighthouses of philosophy & knowledge, which are the basis of Hindu Dharma... Creating an environment where the youth understand, appreciate and love their Hindu culture is a crucial need today, as is uniting all Hindu temples under one umbrella... (p. 16 & 17)

GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF HINDU TEMPLES IN INDIA

is robbing the Temples of their Cultural & Religious Vitality.

We wish to urge Hindus all over the world to educate themselves on this crucial issue that affects their religious freedom, and to act to correct this situation... (p. 7)

— *Swami Dayananda Saraswati*

In India one of the key challenges Hindus face is Governmental control of & interference in the management of temples, which is robbing temples of their cultural and religious vitality. The funds contributed by ordinary Hindus out of their simple religious devotion are being diverted by the Governments for various purposes, without the consent and knowledge of the donors. The temples themselves are being deprived of funds for their upkeep and maintenance. Services to devotees and pilgrims, who often travel long distances, are suffering. The arts and culture promoted by temples are on the decline. Some of the money is also being used for anti-Hindu activities... (p. 7)

THE REVERSE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HINDUS & THEIR INSTITUTIONS BY A SUPPOSEDLY SECULAR GOVERNMENT CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE ANY MORE

— *Forum for Religious Freedom*

The time has come to secure for the majority Hindus of India the same secular rights and religious freedom that the followers of all minority religions already enjoy. After India's independence, the exclusive way that only Hindu organizations are targeted, controlled and usurped by the so-called secular government of India is a blatant violation of the concept of secularism and the religious rights and freedoms of Hindus. The diversion of the

wealth of Hindu Temples by the States in the first place, and their use to fund non-Hindu purposes, is a flagrant travesty of the principle of separation of religion and state. Currently the 'Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha' in India is pioneering a movement to challenge the constitutional validity of the HRCE Act and its derivatives, and to prevent further government incursions into Hindu religious affairs. Through the FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, incorporated as a US non-profit organization, efforts are under way to support the Acharya Sabha with the financial resources needed to mount a legal challenge to overturn the HRCE Act, and to take other measures to prevent further annexation by the States of our religious infrastructure. The viability of Hinduism rests in the health and vitality of our temples... (p. 7)

A WORD ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

Originally brought out in the context of the recently held second Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), this booklet is reprinted with a new title to reflect the main thrust of Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's keynote address to the members of the HMEC, prefixing some additional material, for a wider circulation. The addenda are:

The edited transcript of Pujya Swamiji's keynote speech at the second HMEC (Aug. 10-12, 2007, New Jersey) -- it is presented under the title "**Hindu Mandirs should be halls of learning besides being the altars of worship**" (p. 5);

"**Tirupathi Declaration & It's Background**" as briefly dwelt upon by Pujya Swamiji at the HMEC (p. 7);

Excerpts from Pujya Swamiji's writings wherein he pinpoints how the '**Government control of the Hindu Temples in India is robbing the Temples of their cultural & religious vitality**' (p. 11);

In a significant white paper, the 'FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM' (FRF) documents and touchingly narrates the tales of the terrible fate of Hindu Temples under the control of the so-called secular government of India. A few excerpts are prefixed with the caption '**The Reverse Discrimination against Hindus & their Institutions by the so-called Secular Government of India cannot be allowed to continue any more**' (p. 11), before presenting the condensed version of the report: '**Government control of Hindu Temples in India: A blatant violation of secularism and religious freedom**' (p. 12), carefully and painstakingly prepared by the devoted members of the FRF;

The diversion of the wealth of Hindu Temples by the States in the first place, and their use to fund non-Hindu purposes, is a flagrant travesty of the principle of separation of religion and state. 70% (Rs. 50.00 Crores) of Hindu Temples' money is diverted for Muslim Madarasas and Haj by the Indian Government. "**Hindu Temple Revenues Diverted for Haj Subsidy & Madarasas in Karnataka**" (p. 17), is just a sample from one state of India;

An important excerpt from the writing of Swami Dayanandaji highlighting the '**Need to examine our understanding of religious freedom**' (p. 16);

An article highlighting the '**Multi-faceted role of a Hindu Mandir**' (p. 8); a list of '**What every Hindu ought to do**' (p. 10); '**What does it mean to be a Hindu?**' -- in the words of Swami Dayanandaji (p. 10).

Also presented are: A brief report about the HMEC (p. 2); a list of Hindu Mandirs and orgs

which participated at the HMEC (p. 3) as well as a list of orgs who sponsored the event (p. 4).

The original booklet titled, '**Sustaining Dharma through Mandirs**', commences at page 19 wherein it's thought provoking 'Contents' are given.

Our thanks are due to the FRF, a US-based non-profit religious and charitable organization formed this year by a broad coalition of social, religious and academic leaders (see back cover page 40 for more details), for taking initiative to sponsor the reprint of this booklet in the cause of our Dharma. Also, we thankfully acknowledge the neat & elegant execution of the production of this booklet by Sri Bidyut Sarker, Proprietor, NY Digital Copy Center, 204 East 11th Street, NY, NY 10003 (<http://www.nycc.com/>).

If this offering, would help stimulate further reflection and deliberation on the subject, it will have been fruitful.

Jyotirmayananda

Saylorsburg, PA,
Sept. 28, 2007.

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HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE – 2007

Addressing the temple executives from across the USA, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, (Founder, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam), who was the keynote speaker, emphasized that the Hindu Mandirs should be halls of learning for the Hindu youth besides being the altars of worship.

At the second Hindu Mandir Executives Conference (HMEC), Hindu Mandir executives collectively deliberated on the evolving social, religious, cultural and spiritual needs of 2.5 million strong, confident, diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community. The conference had some parallel sessions for the youth representing temples from across the nation.

Hindu Mandir (Temple) Executives representing 97 temples and Hindu Organizations from more than 25 states of US and Canada and Caribbean converged in Edison, NJ, to attend the second HMEC, from August 10, 2007 through August 12, 2007. They traveled from as far as British Columbia in Canada, Hawaii, California, Florida, and the heartland of America, with a mission to nourish, protect and sustain Hindu Dharma in America.

This very successful HMEC-2007 follows the first ever such Conference of Executives of Hindu Mandirs held in Atlanta, GA, in June 2006, which was attended by representatives of 57 temples from all over North America.

The executives represented a wide cross-section of the Hindu community. These attendees

who numbered over 200, were physicians, scientists, businesspersons, homemakers, engineers, etc. besides being temple executives with deep commitment to fulfilling the spiritual and social needs of Hindu-American community. The group was diverse in terms of age, race, generation, as well as national origin. A 29 year old Mandir President represented the Hindu Youth at the Conference.

In the concluding session of the Conference, the delegates agreed on a series of action items and passed the following resolutions unanimously for consideration of their temple's boards:

Resolution 1:

We, the Hindu Mandirs of America --

Commend the US Congress in general and Senator Harry Reid in particular for taking the courageous act of inviting Shri Rajen Zed to perform the invocation for Senate session with a Hindu Prayer.

We will work together, and work with public institutions to enhance the presence of Hindu traditions in public sphere.

Resolution 2:

We, the Hindu Mandirs of America --

Will work together and with US Governmental agencies to ensure that the upcoming eligibility criteria for issuance of R1 Visa by US authorities Hindu "religious workers" does not adversely impact the operations and effectiveness of Hindu Mandirs.

Resolution 3:

We, the Hindu Mandirs of America --

Agree to adopt and promote within the US school system the Hindu Dharma supplement published by *Hinduism Today*.^{*} An action committee shall be constituted to enhance the dissemination and sustenance of this effort.

^{*}<http://hinduismtoday.com/education/>

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LIST OF HINDU MANDIRS & ORGS WHO PARTICIPATED AT HMEC

The following is a list of organizations who participated in the Second Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference, 2007. Below that is another list of orgs who sponsored the event:

1	Hindu Association of North West Arkansas	Bentonville	AR
2	HCCC (Shiva Vishnu Temple)	Livermore	CA
3	Yogeesh Ashram	Riverside	CA
4	CT Valley Hindu Temple Society	Middletown	CT
5	Association of United Hindu & Jain Temples	Washington	DC
6	Hindu Temple of Florida	Tampa	FL

7	Sanatan Dharam Mandir	Tampa	FL
8	Hindu Temple of Atlanta	Riverdale	GA
9	Hindu Temple Society of Augusta	Augusta	GA
10	Sanatan Mandir of Atlanta	Smyrna	GA
11	Shree Umiya Mataji Mandir	Macon	GA
12	Hinduism Today	Kappa	HI
13	Kadavul Temple	Kapaa	HI
14	Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of Iowa	Madrid	IA
15	Hindu Temple of Central Indiana	Indianapolis	IN
16	Datta Yoga Center	Baton Rouge	LA
17	Hindu Samaj of Baton Rouge	Baton Rouge	LA
18	The Hindu Vedic Society Of Baton Rouge	Baton Rouge	LA
19	Om Temple, Om Center	N. Billerica	MA
20	Sadhu Vaswani Center of New England	Dracut	MA
21	Satsang Center	Goffstown	MA
22	Sri Lakshmi Temple	Ashland	MA
23	Greater Baltimore Temple, inc.	Finksburg	MD
24	Shri Mangal Mandir	Silver Spring	MD
25	Bharatiya Temple	Troy	MI
26	Hindu Temple of St. Louis	St. Louis	MO
27	Sarswati Mandiram	Epping	NH
28	Ananda Mandir	Somerset	NJ
29	Arsha Bodha Center	Somerset	NJ
30	Dakshineshwar Ramakrishna Sangha Adyapeeth	Somerset	NJ
31	Durga Mandir	Kendall Park	NJ
32	Govinda Sanskar Kendra	Jersey City	NJ
33	Hindu American Temple and Cultural Center	Morganville	NJ
34	Hindu Jain Temple	Pomona	NJ
35	Hindu Samaj Inc	Mahwah	NJ
36	Hindu Temple and Cultural Society (Balaji Temple)	Bridgewater	NJ
37	India Cultural Hindu Temple (Gandhi Mandir)	Wayne	NJ
38	India Temple Association	Berlin	NJ
39	OM Temple	Bellville	NJ
40	Sadhu Vaswani Center	Closter	NJ
41	Shree Dwarikadheesh Mandir	Parlin	NJ
42	Shri Krishna Vrundavana	Edison	NJ
43	Shri Sanatan Mandir	Parsippany	NJ
44	Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (S.S.S.M.)	Secaucus	NJ
45	Swaminaryan World Organization	Jersey City	NJ
46	Taranga	Maplewood	NJ
47	Ved Mandir	Milltown	NJ
48	Arya Samaj of New York, Inc.	Jamaica	NY
49	Buddhist Vihara	Staten Island	NY
50	Fourm For Religious Freedom	Staten Island	NY
51	Gita Mandir	Elmhurst	NY

52	Hindu Center	Flushing	NY	97	VASA Temple	Burnaby, BC	CANADA
53	Hindu Temple	Loudonville	NY	98	Voice of the Vedas Cultural Sabha, Inc.	Richmond Hill, ONT	CANADA
54	Hindu Temple & Cultural Society of Western New York	Getzville	NY	99	Yogeesha Ashram	CA	USA
55	Shiva Mandir and Cultural Center	East Elmhurst	NY	HMEC 2007 SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS			
56	Satnarayan Mandir	Elmhurst	NY	1	Arsha Bodha Center	Somerset	NJ
57	Sikh Association of Staten Island, Inc.	Staten Island	NY	2	Arsha Vidya Gurukulam	Saylorsburg	PA
58	Sri Ranganatha Temple	Pomona	NY	3	BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir		USA
59	Vaishnav Temple of New York	Hollis	NY	4	Brahman Samaj of North America, NJ Chapter	Belle Mead	USA
60	Bharatiya Hindu Temple	Powell	OH	5	Forum For Religious Freedom (FRF)	Staten Island	NY
61	Arsha Vidya Gurukulam	Saylorsburg	PA	6	Gayatri Parivar of Northeast America		USA
62	Bharatiya Temple and Bharatiya Cultural Center	Montgomeryville	PA	7	Govinda Sanskar Kendra	Jersey City	NJ
63	Hindu Temple Society, Allentown	Allentown	PA	8	Hindu American Temple and Cultural Center	Morganville	NJ
64	Samarpana Hindu Temple	Philadelphia	PA	9	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh		USA
65	Sri Venkateswara Temple	Pittsburgh	PA	10	Hindu Temple and Cultural Society (Balaji Temple)	Bridgewater	NJ
66	The Hindu Jain Temple	Monroeville	PA	11	Hindu Temple of Atlanta	Riverdale	GA
67	Vraj (pmvs)	Schuykill Haven	PA	12	Hindu Temple of Florida	Tampa	FL
68	Sri Ganesha Temple	Nashville	TN	13	Hindu Temple Society, Allentown	Allentown	PA
69	Barsana Dham	Austin	TX	14	India Cultural Hindu Temple (Gandhi Mandir)	Wayne	NJ
70	Dallas FW Hindu Temple	Garland	TX	15	India Temple Association	Berlin	NJ
71	Hindu Temple of Central Texas	Temple	TX	16	ISKCON		USA
72	Hindu Temple of San Antonio	Helotes	TX	17	Prem Prakash Mandir	Staten Island	NY
73	Hindu Temple of the Woodlands	Woodlands	TX	18	Sadhu Vaswani Center	Closter	NJ
74	Sri Meenakshi Temple society	Pearland	TX	19	Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha of the W.I. Inc. (Shiva Mandir)	East Elmhurst	NY
75	Durga Temple	Fairfax Station	VA	20	Sanskriti Parivar, USA		USA
76	Rajdhani Mandir	Chantilly	VA	21	Sant Shri Asaramji Ashram		USA
77	All World Gayatri Parivar		USA	22	Sarswati Mandiram	Epping	NH
78	Art of Living Foundation		USA	23	Shree Dwarakadheesh Mandir	Parlin	NJ
79	BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir		USA	24	Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (S.S.S.M.)	Secaucus	NJ
80	Bhaktivedanta Trust International		USA	25	Sikh Association of Staten Island, Inc.	Staten Island	NY
81	Bharat Sevashram Sangh of North America		USA	26	Sri Ganesha Temple	Nashville	TN
82	Chimaya Mission		USA	27	Sri Ranganatha Temple	Pomona	NY
83	Gayatri Parivar of Northeast America		USA	28	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America		USA
84	Hindu Students Council		USA	29	Vraj (pmvs)		PA
85	Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh		USA	30	Yogi Divine Society		USA
86	Hindu University of America		USA	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"><p style="text-align: center;">GROWTH OF MANDIRS IN THE U.S.A. SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST ONE...</p><p>After Swami Paramananda established the Vedanta Center in Boston in 1910 (<i>the first Hindu Mandir in the U.S.A.</i>), several Hindu temples were gradually established and now there are more than 700 Mandirs in N. America. Of these, U.S.A. has over 400 Mandirs, the remaining being in Canada. New York has the largest number of Mandirs – 85. California comes second with 55 Mandirs. More than 70 of Hindu Mandirs are visited by more than 3000-5000 families each week (p. 22).</p><p style="text-align: center;">A List of Temples by State & General Information about each Temple in the USA is online at: http://www.pluralism.org/resources/map/index.php</p></div>			
87	India Heritage Research Fund		USA				
88	ISKCON		USA				
89	JAINA		USA				
90	Sanskriti Parivar, USA		USA				
91	Sant Shri Asharamji Ashram		USA				
92	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America		USA				
93	Yogi Divine Society		USA				
94	Hamilton Hindu Samaj, Hmailton, ON	Hamilton, ONT	CANADA				
95	Lakshmi Narayan Mandir	Surrey, BC	CANADA				
96	Radha Krishna Mandir	Cambridge, ON	CANADA				

HINDU MANDIRS SHOULD BE HALLS OF LEARNING BESIDES BEING THE ALTARS OF WORSHIP

– Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Addressing the temple executives from across the USA, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who was the keynote speaker, emphasized that the Hindu Mandirs should be halls of learning for the Hindu youth besides being the altars of worship. The following is the edited transcript of his speech at the second Hindu Mandir Executives Conference, Aug. 10-12, 2007, New Jersey:

Namaste.

This is really a good morning, because I see some really responsible people gathered under one roof for one cause, the cause of preserving and promoting Hindu Dharma, for which there is no beginning we can think of.

Hindu Dharma itself is a war veteran. It has faced a lot of challenges in its history, if there is a history for it. These challenges were highly concerted and powered by the throne, the army; the intrinsic hostility in the commitment to their own religious traditions. And it has survived; survived so well that I am here to talk to you, and you are here to listen to me. It doesn't need any other proof. Away from India, in a country like this, I am able to talk to you. That is because of its intrinsic worth. It has not survived because of us. It has survived, more often than not, in spite of us.

The Hindus are famous for their complacency, famous for their indifference when it comes to protection of Dharma. Because of a certain intrinsic strength of the Dharma, the Hindus are not really able to think that there can be a danger to it.

Every Hindu has something in him, in her, which makes the person think that the Dharma is invincible, like Bhishma. Being invincible, Bhishma had to be asked by the Pandavas, 'How do we kill you?'—and Bhishma told them how. That is the height of Dharma. The Pandavas knew that if they went and asked him how to destroy him, Bhishma would tell them. And he did; he smiled and told them: 'There is only one way. Put a *napumsaka* in front of Arjuna so that I won't be able to fight him.' That was, Shikhandi, and thus, his own vow that he would not kill a eunuch or a woman brought an end to him.

Dasaratha gave his word to Kaykeyi in a private moment. A blank check should never be given, but he gave her one and she encashed it. All he had to say was, 'When did I promise you?' That's all. There is no court of appeal—he is the court of appeal. But he didn't do that, because he could not go against his own words. That is Dharma. He was incapable of going against his own word. He was

incapable. He cried, he pleaded, and in the end he gave up his life, but he could not go against his word. That is our Dharma.

This is Dharma, but we have something more in our tradition. We have a vision, a live tradition, that does not say that there is one God. This concept of one God has destroyed our humanity and continues to destroy it. 'There is only one God. Don't worship other Gods.' How am I to understand this? If there is only one God, how can you worship any other God? The Hindu tradition does not claim that there is 'one God'. It has not only a vision but a methodology to unfold the vision to another person, a *parampara*, a teaching *parampara* that reveals that there is only God. We don't say that there is one God. We say that there is *only* God; you have to prove that there is something other than God, the responsibility is with you. And there is a live tradition to make you see this, exactly like you can be made to see any other equation. Thus, we have a view and way of life. Worship of Isvara is a part of our way of life. Therefore, temples, as altars of worship, form a significant part of the cultural, religious and spiritual life of a Hindu.

A temple is unlike a church or a mosque. The church belongs to a parish, which has a priest in charge of the parish and a congregation. Once a week people come together there for worship, so it is a place of assembly, of congregation, and collective prayer. And they have some ritual also. A mosque is also a place for collective prayer. Once a week they all assemble for that.

A temple is not an equivalent. It is an altar of worship. Only the Hindu tradition can have that. Indigenous cultures all had it, and they lost it. In Europe it was there, and it was destroyed, because God is formless. But he needs to occupy a place, so he is in heaven. But he is formless, and this formless God is male; they are definite about it. This is the problem. We don't need a God if everything is formless. The miracle is that there is a form. Form is a miracle.

You wear a shirt. You think that it is an object. There is a word 'shirt' and there is an object 'shirt'. This is what we think. Our *rishis* don't think like that; the Veda does not think like that. Show me the 'shirt'. Where is the 'shirt'? Why, when I think of a 'shirt', do I have to think of a 'fabric'? How is it that I cannot imagine a 'shirt' without thinking of some 'fabric'? If 'shirt' is an object, if it exists on its own, then I should be able to think about it. How is it that I am not able to think about it on its own. Why should I think of 'fabric' when I think of 'shirt'? And if you search for the shirt, and if you bet on its existence, you will lose your 'shirt'. There is no shirt; there is only fabric. The weight of the shirt is the weight of fabric, the whole of

the shirt is fabric. Fabric can be in any form, and for that form you have a name, 'shirt' – 'T shirt', '*dhoti*', '*vastram*', '*anga vastram*'. It is just a word; you can't dismiss it, but it doesn't exist in the sense that you can't accommodate it as an independent, existent object. It is in between—that is the magic of creation. All that is there is form, which is nothing but name, and each form lends itself to so many forms, to so many names, *naamni naamani*. 'Body' is a word and it has a form. But if you look into it, my God, it is a bunch of cells, each of which again reduces itself to names. And every name again reduces itself to names. That is the miracle of *sristi*.

So only when there is a form do you require God. And if they cannot have a form for an altar of worship, they are the losers. We don't worship idols. In Swami Jyotirmayananda's small booklet there is a very good article about this. Nobody worships an idol. You confront questions like this all the time: 'Why do you worship idols?' Nobody says *idoley namah*, but *Shivaya namah*, *bhagavathe namah*. You worship *bhagavaan*. The monotheists know this very well, but they don't want to acknowledge it, because then they can't conduct their business. You can have a wrong belief, and you can correct that, but if the presentation of your belief is a vicious thing, you have to protect yourself from that. That is what it is. It is easy to criticize another's belief.

A temple is an altar of worship and therefore people come at different times, during the day, offer their worship, and go. In Tirupathi you can stand before Balaji for only half a minute. You wait in the queue for *darshan* and it takes only one or two minutes. That is the *darshan*. It is over. The man has been waiting for that for one day in the queue, and there are fellows standing there just to push you, *jurgandi, jurgandi*, 'keep moving'. If that is the *Bhagavad naama* he would get *moksha*. It is *darshan* because it is an altar of worship.

That was fine in those days, when you were secure about Hindu Dharma. These days you have to add to your temple a hall of congregation for prayer, not a community hall. If you want to have a community hall you can add another hall. But you need to have a hall of congregation for collective prayer. This is very important. Every temple has to evolve a certain simple form of collective prayer, and provide an explanation of it. If you don't know, please read and find out so that you have a proper understanding of the meanings. It is collective prayer that is needed. The priest doing *puja* etc. is fine, but that is not enough. These days that alone won't work in preserving our Dharma because there is no participation.

If you want your children to come back to the temple, please find out the meanings of all these forms and prayers. There are people here who have been running temples in this country for more than twenty years, whose children, when they were young, went to the temples along with their parents. Now they are in college, or perhaps working. Do they come voluntarily to the temples? They don't, I know it very well. And their children will not. How will they come, when their parents don't go? Right in your lifetime you have seen this; you have to acknowledge it. Why? Because there is no participation. They have to participate, and for that there should be a collective prayer and the meaning of it should be made known. For every word the meaning must be there, it must be simple, a few lines, not something elaborate. They should be able to come and pray and leave. The altar is there and the prayer is collective.

Every Hindu has to have a certain minimum knowledge. He should know, at least, that the world is not created by God for man's consumption. There are some who say that God created man in his own image. First they say that God is formless, and then they contend that He created man in His own image. If that is so, I should be a formless spirit. And they also say that world was created for man's consumption. The whole attitude, the system of economy, is evolved on the basis of this thinking that the world is there for your consumption—given by God, for you to consume and destroy. This we refuse to accept; Hindus refuse to accept. It is not meant for your consumption.

If the world is meant for consumption, I become a world for you, because you are looking at me, and therefore, I am your object. I refuse to be for your consumption. And it is meant for man's consumption, so women are included in that world. That is why they don't have a place anywhere. We have a woman as the president of India, and we are proud of it.

But in this monotheistic viewpoint, the world created by God for consumption includes women, because it is meant for man. Animals, also, don't have souls and that is why they can be eaten—whether they are cows, or anything from a frog onwards, anything that crawls, anything that swims, anything that walks. They would eat the one who talks, also, if there were no criminal court. That is not our thinking. Minimum knowledge is knowledge that this *jagat*, world, which includes my body, my mind, is *sristi*, intelligently put together. The whole thing is called *jagat*, which has no equivalent in English because it includes your body-mind- sense complex. And this entire *jagat* is Ishwara.

Therefore, this entire *jagat* is looked upon reverentially, from the last man in a remote

village. You can't ask him where God is. He will understand that you are from the U.S.A. In India that is a wrong question to ask. "Where is God?", as though you have already decided that He is not here. On what basis? This is minimum knowledge, which every villager has in India, we have to teach our children. In fact, you have to teach yourself first.

We always talk about our children as if we are O.K. If we are O.K., our children will be O.K. The problem is with ourselves. We have to be clear, and therefore, every temple should be a hall of learning, a hall of prayer. And we have so much to teach. The Hindu tradition is not just found in a temple. In Punjab there is no temple. They were all razed to the ground by the Moghuls, but still, they maintain the culture through their prayers, through the books. They began worshipping the books. In the Arya Samaj they worship the Vedas, and therefore, altars of worship are not idols, but books. Why is that possible? What is the meaning of it? If there is *only* God, why are there many altars? We must be able to explain all this. What is the meaning of the ritual? We must be able to explain that. What are the rituals of passage? That is very important in every religion. We have rituals of passage, like *namakaranam*, *gyatesthi*, *upanayanam*, *aksharabhyasam*, *vivaha*. About all these we should have some knowledge of what they are all about. The priests must be able to explain all this.

We must have informed priests. I have been saying that the Hindu University should conduct courses for this. But the Hindu University should first come out of trailers; it is a shame. I went there thinking that there is a Hindu University. They asked me to come for a talk, and I went there and saw trailers. Hindus must put their heads down. They call it Hindu University and they operate in two trailers. We Hindus don't have anything? It is not that the Hindus do not have money; they don't seem to have the organisation, the right person. They should be able to provide all that, and not hand it over to somebody else who may have his own personal agenda. They should have a plan first, and then approach the Hindus and get the resources.

I have been telling people to join the Hindu University and make it a reality. Therefore it is very important that we have a full fledged course conducted there, and give masters and bachelor degrees, and create informed assistant and chief priests. Like this we must have two levels. That is all we require. They will know *mantras*, they will know the meaning, they will be able to explain everything. Priest craft is not temple rites alone; they should be able to perform all the rituals of

passage. We can create a clean syllabus and teach them all this.

Then the minimum knowledge should also include knowledge of karma. The law of karma is not fatalism. It makes you responsible for what you are; you don't blame God or any other force for what you are. If in this *janma* or birth you have not done anything worthwhile to enjoy what you have, or you have not done anything wrong that would account for the lot you suffer, then you assume responsibility for it by understanding that you might have done something before, in a previous life. Therefore you take responsibility for what you are. A very positive thing is this law of karma. Like this, there are a few minimum things that we have to teach. *Avatara-vada*, for instance; we have to really teach them what *avatara* is. It is very important because that is what Rama is, that is what Krishna is, that is what Hinduism is. That means we first have to learn about what an *avatara* is. So with these words I wish you all a good weekend of deliberation and right conclusions. Thank you all.

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After delivering his keynote address at the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), Swami Dayananda Saraswati briefly dwelt upon the background for the "Tirupati Declaration":

TIRUPATHI DECLARATION

(July 15, 2006)

& IT'S BACKGROUND

"We Hindus assembled here declare that we do not support, directly or indirectly, any group, institution, religion, media, or political force, which preaches, practices or works against Hindu Dharma in this country.

"We appeal to all the Hindus in this country and elsewhere to subscribe to and support this declaration, the Tirupathi Declaration.

"We want all the Hindu religious endowments to be managed by Hindu bodies, and not by the government. We want the secular government to release all religious endowments from its hold."

What was the background for the 'Tirupathi Declaration'? There was a Governmental Order during the British Raj in 1930, when Tirupathi was in Madras Presidency. The order was issued settling a land dispute. The order was that two of the seven hills belonged to Lord Venkateshwara. In India we have properties in the name of the deities of the temples. So these two hills belonged to Lord Venkateswara. That is all. There is no mention that the other five hills don't

belong to Venkateswara. This was the mischief done by the British Revenue Officers. Now citing this, the present Government was planning to give the other five hills to the Panchayat, so that they can grant permission for a church in one of the hills. Initially, the church wanted a piece of land on the hill where the temple is; they were denied because a lot of protest was there. So they conspired to segregate the seven hills into two and five on the basis of the old G.O., so that they can achieve what they wanted.

Venkateswara is also called the Lord of the seven hills -- *sapta girishwarah, ezumaliyaan, edugontalawadu* -- all of you should be knowing that.

There was propaganda by distribution of literature, the conversion literature, to the people standing in queue for *darshan*. Think of that. The principal of the Padmavati College was a Christian. The Vice Chancellor of the Venkateswara University was again a Christian. Is it a coincidence?

At Tirupathi we had a meeting of people who work for the Hindu Dharma -- many Sadhus were there; Pejavar Swami and I were also there. We said enough is enough. We declared that we the Hindus assembled there do not support directly or indirectly any group or institution or a religion or any political force who works against the Hindu Dharma in this country; that we want all Hindu temples and other Hindu religious endowments to be released from the hold of State Governments. We appealed to the Hindus all over the world to join this declaration -- the "Tirupathi Declaration." This was distributed all over Andhra Pradesh. Afterwards they called us. They appointed a new chairman and we discussed with him and insisted that there should be a new GO declaring that all the seven hills belong to Sri Venkateswara.

Recently a new GO was issued saying that all the seven hills belong to Sri Venkateswara. Not only that; it also said that there should be no preaching anywhere in the vicinity any place of worship/prayer of any given religion.

This temple control is power; therefore we have to free the temples from the stranglehold of these State governments. We have already prepared a bill to move in Madhya Pradesh. They prepared a bill with too much governmental interference. So I said, we don't want that, and they are redrafting the bill, and we have come to know that they will move the bill in the winter session in Madhya Pradesh. Once that is enacted, legislated, we have a model, with which we can go to other States.

The Acharya Sabha had also initiated the court case against the Sethu Samudram Project.

MULTI-FACETED ROLE OF A HINDU MANDIR

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Introduction

Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Dharma emphasizes that the ultimate goal of human life journey is to seek and realize the Omnipresent and Omniscient Bramhan, the source of happiness and bliss. However this ultimate goal is achieved through pure mind with efforts such as pursuit of spiritual knowledge, development of true devotion, selfless service, refinement of mind through culture, etc. This journey is successfully accomplished by achieving the four-fold objectives of our life namely *Dharma* (Righteous knowledge), *Artha* (Rightly earned money), *Kama* (Righteous desires) and *Moksha* (Bliss). In this journey a *Devaalaya* (or *Mandir*) has many important roles. In the Vedic scriptures, *Agamas*, it is said "*deho devaalayaha proktaha dehi devo niranjanaha*" which means that *Devaalaya* represents the body of a living human being with God as the Indweller.

The analogous correspondence of the various parts of the *Devaalaya* to a human being as it provides spiritual insight. The *Gopura* at the main entrance represents the feet, the prayer hall represents the heart, the entrance to sanctum sanctorum represents the neck, the sanctum sanctorum itself represents the head and the walkway around the temple represents the hands. The walking from outside world to the inside of a *Devaalaya* represents that a seeker is getting into meditation to dwell upon God within. The various activities such as worship, educational, cultural and service ought to help the seeker-devotee to be able to develop a meditative mind. Then the seeker devotee with meditative mind can travel within through the path of yoga (and mediation) to realize God within. Thus we see that our *rishis* gave us the *devaalaya* to be used as a laboratory for our spiritual development. *Devaalaya* is a very special place that plays a multi-faceted role in the spiritual development of any seeker. However, for Hindus it is essential as it is recommended that one should live in place where there is a temple near to visit often. A brief account of the various roles that a *devaalaya* has in a Hindu's life is presented and also how a Hindu can use a *devaalaya* as a multi-faceted resource is discussed.

Devaalaya as a place for worship (*Poojaalaya*)

Devaalaya as a place of worship that provides a seeker through devotion both practical and experiential way to subjectively connect to the

God through a medium called *Vigraha*. The term *Vigraha* means that which specially captures the mind of a devotee. The postures of the *vigrahas* are based on the yogic visions of the sages. These *vigrahas* are sculpted, sanctified and worshipped based on the *Agamas* and meditating on them will help the devotee to advance in spiritual path. In a *devaalaya* we see that all the five senses namely listening to mantras, offering of flowers, seeing the *vigraha*, drinking the holy water and smell of incense can be used by a devotee to focus the mind on the worship of the God. The subjective relationship between the devotee and God through worship is very important in the spiritual development. The sixteen offerings used in a worship of God namely (1) Invoking God into *Vigraha*, (2) Offering a seat, (3) Washing feet, (4) Washing hands, (5) Water for sipping, (6) Sacred bath, (7) Sacred cloth, (8) Sacred thread, (9) Sandal paste, (10) flowers, (11) Incense, (12) Waving an oil lamp, (13) Food, (14) Betel leaves and coconut, (15) Waving of a camphor light, (16) Clockwise circumambulation and Prostration. Thus we see that *pooja* can be seen as analogous to treating one's respected and beloved guest. In addition to going to a *devaalaya*, every Hindu needs to have at home a special room with altar with *vigraha* to do *pooja*. A *pooja* at home or a *devaalaya* is a synthesis of devotion, knowledge and action that provides tranquility. In the words of yogi-seer Sriranga Sadguru of Ashtanga Yoga Vijnana Mandiram, Mysore, India, "the worship of Deities with rituals at home or *devaalaya* should be carried out with child-like loving mind by the devotees as little children play with joy using their toys as medium"

Devaalaya as a place for education (Vidyaalaya)

The spiritual, philosophical and religious aspects of Sanatana Dharma are based on experiences of our *rishis*. They did not speculate. They provided knowledge behind various practical aspects. The yoga with all its different forms provided the practical basis. Thus it is very important that *devaalaya* becomes the resource for knowledge. In addition to the ritualistic worship simultaneous efforts should be made to give the knowledge behind the rituals. Either through the trained priests or knowledgeable volunteers, educational talks should be given to devotees during the rituals. Time should be allotted to answer questions and answers. Concepts such as the four hands of the *vigraha* representing the blessing of four-fold objectives namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* and the inseparable nature of masculine and feminine principles being worshipped as *deva* and *devi*, etc

should be told. Classes should be held regularly to explain the meaning of the *mantras* chanted. In addition, regular classes are to be conducted to study scriptures such as *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Upanishads*, etc. In addition to the year-round classes, additional programs such as workshops, guest lectures, camps, etc are essential to educate both youngsters and adults. One of the reasons for youngsters not coming in large numbers to temples is due to lack of educational programs and youth related activities.

Devaalaya as a place for cultural arts (Kalaalaya)

The music, dance, painting, etc form the vibrant part of Sanatana *Dharma*. It is well known that the seekers through music and dance have realized God. In the time of festivals celebrated at the *devaalaya* special cultural programs including educational aspects should be arranged. Various themes corresponding to the festivals such as Shivaratri, Ramanavami, Krishna Janmashtami etc should be presented as dance-dramas so that the youngsters can understand and appreciate better. Cultural fairs need to be arranged in which classical art forms are to be emphasized.

Devaalaya as a place for service (Sevaalaya)

Volunteers form the core work group of a *devaalaya*. Any work done in the *devaalaya* in the areas such as worship, education, crowd management, fund raising, facility maintenance etc can be seen as a service. However specific programs for serving the community such as free health fairs, counseling for students and adults, senior citizen oriented activities, outreach to hospitals and nursing homes, feeding the poor, etc. need to be carried out regularly.

Concluding Remarks

Thus we see that a *devaalaya* is a place where all facets of Sanatana Dharma namely *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Karma* (service) come together. The management of a *devaalaya* which is also made up of volunteers is to make sure that all the above four aspects are equally emphasized. One way to ensure equal emphasis is by requiring that all trustees or directors of the board has to be involved in one of the four areas namely worship, education, culture and service. It is important that the management board truly work towards making the volunteers in all areas feel that their services are contributing to the *devaalaya*. All these areas need to be budgeted properly. It is to be remembered that *devaalaya* provides an opportunity for all volunteers including trustees and directors to get rid of their ego and make progress in their spiritual development through serving the common cause namely the God.

WHAT EVERY HINDU OUGHT TO DO (An Agenda for Hindus)

By Dr. M.G. Prasad

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Spiritual:

1. Memorize few verses from Bhagavad-Gita
2. Focus and understand few verses from Bhagavad-Gita's
3. Collect important Hindu books (scriptures) to have own library.
4. Learn and practice at the least few yoga-postures.
5. Carry out discussions related to Hinduism with other Hindu friends.
6. Carry out discussions about Hinduism related topics with family members.
7. If you are parent and have young children, tell them the stories of great Hindus in all fields.
8. Understand and educate others about the important basics of Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma.
9. Obtain sufficient depth and breadth about the various Hindu scriptures from Vedas philosophies.
10. Participate in the meetings and programs arranged during the visit of Hindu scholars.

Religious:

1. Do prayer daily in the prayer room or specially allotted space at home.
2. Learn, perform and teach simple (at least) Pooja at home to children and grandchildren
3. Visit Hindu temple regularly and during festivals
4. Read about other religions and know the differences between Hinduism and them.

Cultural:

1. Celebrate Hindu festivals at home and invite friends.
2. Represent Hindu culture in the work environment.
3. Practice and educate others about some of the important cultural aspects of Hinduism.
4. Support the organizations working for the correct representation of Hinduism in school text books and other materials.
5. Watch with family, the videos of the Hindu themes (such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Chankya, etc) and discuss with family members.
6. Participate in the community celebrations of Hindu festivals.
7. Learn and/or Support classical and folk music and dance.

Social:

1. Contribute donation (to your best) to Hindu organizations
2. Offer volunteer services (to your best ability) to Hindu organizations.
3. Participate as a Hindu representative in inter-faith forums.

4. Understand and support the Hinduism related issues in national and international affairs.
5. Support the cause of correct representation of Hinduism in media.
6. Obtain a good understanding of the contributions Hinduism to science and technology from ancient to present.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HINDU?

By Swami Dayananda Saraswati

(in answer to a question during the Satsang at AVG, Saylorsburg, PA)

To be a Hindu is: Love truth, look upon the world as Ishwara. All forms of prayer are valid. You are responsible for your action, for your lot. You can change your destiny. You have a free will. God is not love, God is everything. He is in the form of order. He is not partial to anybody. God is not judgmental; so don't make God, also, judgmental. Don't say there will be judgment day and God will sit in judgment and send you to Hell. God is not judgmental. He doesn't make judgment. You ask for it; you get it. You get it or you had it, both.

Atma nitya suddhah. This is one step further. You can invoke the Lord in any form, in any language. There is a big spectrum. Being a Hindu is all these. Finally, the Veda is a means of knowledge in the areas which I cannot objectify. Certain areas are very useful to me. Certain things that are told by the Veda are very useful to me. And the one thing is the main thing. That is, you are the whole; you are the reality. This is not going to be improved upon by anybody. This is final. You are the whole and you can't become better than whole. Therefore, nobody is going to improve this. So, it has the last word. One who recognizes that is a Hindu. Even if you don't recognize it, if you say everything is Iswara or everything is Iswara's, that interpretation, also, we have got. Everything belongs to Iswara or everything is Iswara, both are there. I'm talking final. All this we will allow. All these are allowed because you can invoke Iswara in many ways. It's okay; you'll get some result. We accept that. Finally, if you want, you are the only reality. That makes you a Hindu. If you miss it in this life, you'll get a chance again. Until you solve this problem, you'll be reborn, don't worry. So, that makes you a Hindu.

There are a lot of things. In fact, all these mean being a Hindu. But anything irrational is not acceptable. Anything above reason, you can believe if you are interested in it. If somebody says above reason it is, and if you are interested in it, you can believe in it, you can follow, because

you cannot dismiss it. Like a heaven. You can't dismiss it; you can't prove it. It's okay. But if somebody says that is the answer that is irrational. We can dismiss it. That is not the answer. Any trip is not an answer. A trip is a trip. You can't promote tourism and call it a religion.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTROL IS ROBBING THE HINDU TEMPLES OF THEIR CULTURAL & RELIGIOUS VITALITY

By Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Convener, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha

In India one of the key challenges Hindus face is Governmental control of and interference in the management of temples, which is robbing temples of their cultural and religious vitality. The funds contributed by ordinary Hindus out of their simple religious devotion are being diverted by the Governments for various purposes, without the consent and knowledge of the donors. The temples themselves are being deprived of funds for their upkeep and maintenance. Services to devotees and pilgrims, who often travel long distances, are suffering. The arts and culture promoted by temples are on the decline. Some of the money is also being used for anti-Hindu activities.

We wish to urge Hindus all over the world to educate themselves on this crucial issue that affects their religious freedom, and to act to correct this situation. We urge them to extend all support to the aims and objectives of the Forum for Religious Freedom (FRF). We are especially delighted to know that among the goals of this organisation is the promotion of the separation of religion and state, a very important issue to ensure the religious freedom. On behalf of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, we are pleased to extend our blessings to the FRF which has been formed as a charitable and religious organisation devoted to the service of Hindu Dharma and all religious traditions committed to preserving religious mores and cultural diversity.

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THE REVERSE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HINDUS & THEIR INSTITUTIONS BY THE SO-CALLED SECULAR GOVERNMENT OF INDIA CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE ANY MORE...

The Forum for Religious Freedom (FRF) documents & touchingly narrates (in a comprehensive white paper, a condensed version of which is presented in page 12) the tales of the terrible fate of Hindu Temples

under the control of the so-called secular government of India. The following are a few excerpts:

It can be multiplied a thousand fold, and the collapse of the Hindu religious infrastructure in India as a direct result of government control and interference can be documented in painful detail, but it is more important at this point to pay attention to the even more ominous threats of assault that are now on the horizon. The outpouring of contributions to temples by millions of Hindus is seen as a huge cash flow opportunity by politicians of all stripes all around India. Many other outrageous proposals of the same kind abound across many states of India.

The Hindu community, after decades of apathy, disunity, and sporadic court fights to secure their rights to practice their religion without government control, has now belatedly woken up to address these fresh assaults. Local leaders have formed coalitions to take matters to court to prevent new takeovers and the sales of temple properties. The existence of the HRCE Act makes it an uphill legal battle to challenge and overturn the government's stranglehold over Hindu temples and their assets. Recent court victories in Karnataka and Rajasthan are encouraging in this regard.

Most of the mainstream media in India, especially the English TV and press, have a covert or overt anti-Hindu position, and stories of government atrocities against Hindu Temples rarely make it into the news pages.

The collusion between missionary and rabidly communal forces and political parties hostile to Hindus in India, such as the Communists and the Congress Party, have further complicated the equation of elements that work against the religious freedom of Hindus.

Even as Hindu awareness grows, and the call for action mounts, the media and political parties are quick to slap on a Hindutva or fundamentalist label to discredit these grassroots efforts of Hindus to claim the same basic religious rights as Indian Christians and Muslims.

After India's independence, the exclusive way that only Hindu organizations are so targeted is a blatant violation of the concept of secularism and the religious rights and freedoms of Hindus. If Hindu temples need better management, the communities which support them should form the independent bodies to manage them. If the traditional administrations of our temples need revamping for modern times, such reforms and reorganization should be led by practicing Hindus and their leaders, and not by outsiders from the government or non-Hindu constituencies.

The diversion of the wealth of Hindu temples by the States in the first place, and their use to fund non-Hindu purposes, is a flagrant travesty of the principle of separation of religion and state. Government officials looking to take over and exploit yet more Hindu temples should instead consider appropriating some non-Hindu religious organizations first, to restore some balance and equality to their strange brand of secularism. If they dare not do so, they should immediately cease and desist from controlling Hindu institutions and liquidating their assets, even if there be misguided statutes that are in place that give them the legal right to do so. And full reparations should be made to all the temples that have been devastated over the decades through a combination of the HRCE Act and various land reforms that have selectively annexed only Hindu properties in so many States.

A major breakthrough towards obtaining the freedom of Hindu Temples from government control has been made with the establishment of THE HINDU DHARMA ACHARYA SABHA in 2003. The convener of the Sabha, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, emphasized the need for Hindu Religious Leaders to have one common, united voice to speak for Hindus and their institutions. 125 Hindu religious leaders -- *Peethadipatis, Mathadipatis, Jeers, Acharyas, and Mahamandaleshwars* -- representing major traditions of Hindu Dharma from all parts of India have since come together under this platform to free temples and other Hindu institutions from the clutches of the so-called secular government. THE TIRUPATI DECLARATION OF 2006, spearheaded by the Acharya Sabha, was an effective voice to prevent various TTD malpractices and imminent anti-Hindu moves.

Currently the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha is pioneering a movement to challenge the constitutional validity of the HRCE Act and its derivatives, and to prevent further government incursions into Hindu religious affairs. Through the FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM (FRF), incorporated as a US non-profit organization, efforts are under way to support the Acharya Sabha with the financial resources needed to mount a legal challenge to overturn the HRCE Act, and to take other measures to prevent further annexation by the states of our religious infrastructure. The viability of Hinduism rests in the health and vitality of our temples. All Hindus should consider it their *dharma* – their duty and responsibility – to make sure that this important mission of the Acharya Sabha is properly funded towards accomplishing this crucial objective.

The reverse discrimination against Hindus and our institutions by a supposedly secular government cannot be allowed to continue any more. The time has come to secure for the majority Hindus of India the same secular rights and religious freedom that the followers of all minority religions already enjoy.

* * *

GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF HINDU TEMPLES IN INDIA -- A Blatant Violation of Secularism & Religious Freedom

Compiled by:
The Forum for Religious Freedom

Both India and America are secular democracies in the sense that both have constitutions that prohibit the government from establishing a state religion or interfering with religious organizations. But there the similarity ends. While America more or less scrupulously adheres to the separation of church and state, in India the picture is dramatically different.

Not too many Indians are aware that even though India is officially a secular democracy, state governments in India can take over Hindu temples and their properties, can appoint the people who will run temple committees and operations, and can take away *hundi* collections and other donations from temples and use them even for non-Hindu purposes. *And they have been doing this for almost six decades now all over India.* Such government interference does not occur with churches or mosques or gurudwaras or other places of worship of non-Hindu faiths. They are left alone by the government, and are allowed to own and operate their institutions autonomously, without state interference. In secular India, with an 83% majority of her citizens being Hindus, Hindu temples are singled out for government control and management. A comparable analogy would be if the secular US government were to exercise full control over the finances and collection plates of Christian churches and dictate who could be ordained as a priest or minister, and dictate the hiring and firing of Church elders. That India's state governments routinely indulge in such practices with regard to Hindu temples, but not with the institutions of other religions, is a telling commentary on the state of religious freedom and secularism in India today.

Status of Hindu Temples

This astounding fact of a supposedly secular government operating, selling the assets of, distributing the collections of, and in other ways imposing state control – often with appointees who are non-Hindu, and even anti-Hindu, bureaucrats or politicians – over Hindu temples, is directly responsible for the pathetic condition of many Hindu temples in India. Many magnificent, old temple buildings are deteriorating; and even the daily cleaning of the precincts is often neglected. Some temples don't even have oil for their lamps because the paltry rupees the government promised when it took over the temple seldom come on time, and priests on miserly salaries are reduced to appalling poverty and asking for money from devotees. These are all too common sights at many Hindu temples today.

While there are many causes for the problems faced by temples, chief among them is the misappropriation of temples' lands and monies during the last century, starting even before our Independence. For instance, the British government in collusion with local leaders in Orissa took over the properties of the famed Puri Jagannath temple in 1878. Continuing the stance of the British regime and its proxies towards the appropriation and looting of Hindu temples, Indian politicians after Independence in 1947 concocted the fatally flawed, and the blatantly anti-secular, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act (HRCE Act) in 1951 to "provincialise the administration of Hindu Religious Institutions." Under its aegis, the HRCE Act variously amended and often challenged by Hindu groups over the years, the state governments have taken over thousands of temples, generally under the pretext of preventing "mismanagement" by Hindus. In other words, *Hindus, and only Hindus, are considered not capable of managing their places of worship without government oversight.*

Thousands of small and medium temples, in addition to nationally and historically important temples such as Jagannath in Puri, Tirupati, Kashi Vishwanath, Vaishno Devi, Shirdi, Guruvayoor, Chamundi Devi, Dattapeeth, Kali Mandir of Patiala, Amarnath, Badrinath, and Kedarnath, *are already under government control, and have been so, for decades, in many cases.*

Examples and Effects of Government Interference

The devastation caused to Hindu temples and other institutions, as a direct result and consequence of the HRCE Act, can be illustrated by a few examples:

1. The famous SIDDHI VINAYAK TEMPLE in Mumbai was "nationalized", i.e. the state

government took over its previously independent board of trustees, in 1981. Various political and government appointees have siphoned off crores of rupees out of the temple's coffers. Some of this money is given out as 'donations' -- of Rs. 50 lakhs or more -- to other non-profit institutions, selected on the basis of political connections. These organizations may not serve Hinduism or Hindu devotees at all. Such donations continued even after the Bombay High Court issued a prohibitory order stopping them. During 2004-2005 alone, seven crore rupees were paid out to such beneficiaries out of the temple's inflow. The government-appointed trustees of this temple also spent over Rs. 24 lakhs of the temple's money in two days on a lavish marketing event held at a seven star hotel to discuss how to promote temples as tourist attractions! In other words, the hard-earned money that devotees offer out of love and a sense of duty to a Hindu religious institution, is being used not for the benefit of the Hindu community, or to promote Hindu religious activities, but for other purposes.

2. In 2002, from the 2,07,000 TEMPLES IN KARNATAKA the government took in revenues of Rs. 72 crores, returned Rs. 10 crores for temple maintenance, and granted Rs. 50 crores for *madrasas*, and Rs. 10 crores for churches. The fundamental question to be asked is: Why is money from Hindu temples disappearing into government accounts in the first place, to be distributed to other third party interests, be it non-Hindu or otherwise? Why did only six crores make it back to the temples that generated the Rs. 72 crores? An estimated 50,000 temples have shut down during the last five years in the State of Karnataka alone due to lack of resources. How can this happen when there is a surplus Rs. 66 crores of Hindu temple money in the hands of that State Government?

3. Under the openly Christian evangelical regime of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. Samuel Rajsekar Reddy, the TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASWOM (TTD) authority, which is controlled by his state, frontal assaults have been made on the very hills of the beloved temple of Lord Balaji in Tirupati. In March 2006, the government demolished a centuries-old, 1000 pillar *mantapam* in the Tirumala complex. *The state government has not denied the charge that 85% percent of revenues from the TTD, which collects over Rs. 3,100 crores every year as the richest temple in India, are transferred to the state exchequer.* The non-temple use of this colossal amount of money is not fully accounted for by the government. Temple watchdog groups have alleged that *the government has allocated Rs. 7.6 crores of TTD money towards*

repairs and renovations of mosques and churches in a recent year. JRG Wealth Management Limited, a Christian owned organization, was given a lucrative contract to procure materials for the prasadam that is given to temple devotees. On January 21, the Chief Minister announced the sponsorship, using TTD money, of a hockey tournament in his parents' name. An attempt to take over five of the seven hills that belong to Lord Venkateswara, according to legal deeds, and hand them to Christian institutions, was thwarted last year only when Hindu religious leaders, under the aegis of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha united to lodge strong, and unprecedented, protests. TTD wealth is being distributed as gold bars "for the poor", with no transparency as to who the "poor" are who will get the temple's riches. There are plans to build a ropeway to the hills to make it a more appealing commercial tourist attraction. While owing the TTD Rs. 1,500 crores already from various earlier proceeds, the government is trying to take away another Rs 500 crores from TTD for state irrigation projects! There have been allegations of TTD appointees being non-Hindus, but these are hard to verify since many Hindus who convert to other religions keep their original names for various benefits. TTD's medical and educational institutions have also been turned into centers for proselytization by Christian missionaries.

4. Elsewhere in ANDHRA PRADESH, out of 420,028 acres owned by temples in Vishakhapatnam, Kakinada, Guntur, Kurnool, Warangal, and Hyderabad, 60,843 acres were allowed to be occupied illegally by professional land grabbers. The state government, the inheritor of the responsibility under the HRCE Act to prevent such actions, did nothing to prevent these incursions, even though it has a staff of over 77,000 people (paid from a 15% charge on temple revenues) to look after temple interests. In August 2005, the state decided to sell 100,000 acres of the SRI NARASIMHA SWAMY TEMPLE in Simhachalam and other nearby temples. On March 14, 2006, the government auctioned 3,000 acres of temple lands in East Godavari district. Proceeds from these sales rarely reach the temples, which have to depend on the same government for doles to light their lamps and pay their priests. 884 acres of endowment lands of the famous SRI RAMA TEMPLE at Bhadrachalam have been allocated to Christian institutions by the current government. In Simhachalam, 300 acres belonging to the temple have been allocated for churches and convent schools, who even exercise an illegal authority to stop devotees from visiting the temple atop the hill! There is also an attempt afoot to take over the 500 year old Chilkur Balaji temple.

5. In Sabarimala, the forested hill with the famous TEMPLE OF LORD AYYAPPA in Kerala, 2,500 acres of temple property have been sold by the Communist government controlled Travancore Devasvom Board to a non-Hindu group. Even though this Board gets about Rs. 250 crores every year in income, it is almost bankrupt today, after years of government diversion of funds. Rs 24 crores from the Guruvayoor Devasvom have been spent on a drinking water project in ten nearby panchayats, which include 40 churches and mosques. Some of these non-Hindu places of worship have larger revenues than the Devasvom, but none of them have been asked to pay towards the project, even though their members will be beneficiaries.

6. In BIHAR, GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER THE TEMPLES through its Hindu Endowments department has resulted, according to the Religious Trust Administrator, in the loss of temple properties worth Rs. 2000 crores.

More Government Control on the Horizon

While these tales of the terrible fate of Hindu temples under government control can be multiplied a thousand fold, and the collapse of the Hindu religious infrastructure as a direct result of government control can be documented in painful detail, it is more important at this point to pay attention to the even more ominous threats of assault that are now on the horizon.

The MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT, literally bankrupt due to profligacy (including an Indian Enron scandal of mammoth proportions) and bad economic policies, is moving forward with a bill that would enable it to take over the 4.5 lakh Hindu temples in the state. The outpouring of contributions to temples by millions of Hindus is seen as a huge cash flow opportunity by politicians of all stripes all around India. IN KERALA, THE COMMUNIST STATE GOVERNMENT has promulgated an ordinance on February 4, 2007 to disband the Travancore and Cochin Autonomous Devasvom Boards (TCDB) and usurp their already limited independent authority over 1800 Hindu temples. IN ORISSA, THE NDA STATE GOVERNMENT is on its way to sell some 70,000 acres of Jagannath temple endowment lands due to a financial crunch brought about by its own mismanagement of the temple's assets. THE BJP GOVERNMENT IN RAJASTHAN is planning to auction off temples and transfer their control to the highest bidders, even if they are from the other religions. Under the 'Apna Dham, Apna Kam, Apna Nam' scheme, a 30-year lease would be signed between the state government and private bidders on a

Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis, similar to national highway construction projects! Many other outrageous proposals of the same kind abound across many states.

Response from the Hindu Community

The Hindu community, after decades of apathy, disunity, and sporadic court fights to secure their rights to practice their religion without government control, has now belatedly woken up to address these fresh assaults. Local leaders have formed coalitions to take matters to court to prevent new takeovers and the sales of temple properties. The existence of the HRCE Act makes it an uphill legal battle to challenge and overturn the government's stranglehold over Hindu temples and their assets. Recent court victories in Karnataka and Rajasthan are encouraging in this regard.

Online petitions and signature campaigns, often led by NRI Hindus who seem to be more aware and concerned about this issue than Hindus in India, have become a standard tool of the newly awakened Hindu community. *Most of the mainstream media in India, especially the English TV and press, have a covert or overt anti-Hindu position, and stories of government atrocities against Hindu temples rarely make it into the news pages. Appeals often have to be made to the President of India himself for relief from open aggression against Hindu interests by state and district level government authorities. The collusion between missionary and communal forces and political parties hostile to Hindus, such as the communists and the Congress party, have further complicated the equation of elements that work against the religious freedom of Hindus. Thanks to blogs, websites, bulletin boards, and email forums that have recently sprung up, awareness about these issues is now starting to proliferate. Even as Hindu awareness grows, and the call for action mounts, the media and political parties are quick to slap on a Hindutva or fundamentalist label to discredit these grassroots efforts of Hindus to claim the same basic religious rights as Indian Christians and Muslims.*

The attack on Hindu temples is an attack on the body and soul of Hinduism, because temples are the sacred and sanctified places where most Hindus practice their faith. Others may not understand our ways of worship, but to the practicing Hindu all deities represent the One Supreme Reality and Being in diverse ways and forms that make the divine accessible to all levels of religious and spiritual temperaments. The images of our gods and goddesses are not just

stone or metal idols. They are profound symbols and splendid representations of the One in its many manifestations, they are holy reminders of the divine being everywhere, they are aids to meditation and worship, and they are also ceremonially sanctified centers of spiritual energy and divine grace. Our priests should not be reduced to the status of government servants who have to depend on miserly and measly salaries from the state that has usurped their traditional means of sustenance, and who are thereby forced to demand money, sometimes so aggressively, from devotees. Our Acharyas should not be sidelined to being helpless observers even as the institutions they are vested with leading are being reduced to insolvency.

The Way Forward

Through the millennia, Hindus have found in their temples succor for all their religious and spiritual needs, and vital sense of community with their fellow devotees. The sanctity of temples is diluted by turning them into commercial tourist attractions, their integrity as Hindu institutions is compromised when non-Hindus, or anti-Hinduism elements, are allowed to run them, and their very survival is threatened when the money of devotees is taken away by government appointees or politicians and diverted to fund external causes.

Even if there had been some rationale for the HRCE Act to improve the administration of Hindu temples in the early days after India's independence, the exclusive way that only Hindu organizations are so targeted is a blatant violation of the concept of secularism and the religious rights and freedoms of Hindus. If Hindu temples are mismanaged or corrupt, as often alleged to justify their takeover, the sad record of Indian state governments with regard to governance and corruption in general, and their sorry record with the temples they already control in particular, hardly makes them a better candidate to look after the welfare of yet more temples! *If Hindu temples need better management, the communities which support them should form the independent bodies to do so. If the traditional administrations of our temples need revamping for modern times, such reforms and reorganization should be led by practicing Hindus and their leaders, and not by outsiders from the government or non-Hindu constituencies.*

The diversion of the wealth of Hindu temples by the States in the first place, and their use to fund non-Hindu purposes, is a flagrant travesty of the principle of separation of religion and state. Government officials looking to take over and exploit yet more Hindu temples should instead

consider appropriating some non-Hindu religious organizations first, to restore some balance and equality to their strange brand of secularism. If they dare not do so, they should immediately cease and desist from controlling Hindu institutions and liquidating their assets, even if there be misguided statutes that are in place that give them the legal right to do so. And full reparations should be made to all the temples that have been devastated over the decades through a combination of the HRCE Act and various land reforms that have selectively annexed only Hindu properties in so many states.

A major breakthrough towards obtaining the freedom of Hindu temples from government control has been made with the establishment of THE HINDU DHARMA ACHARYA SABHA in 2003. The convener of the meeting, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, emphasized the need for Hindu religious leaders to have one common, united voice to speak for Hindus and their institutions. 125 Hindu religious leaders -- *Peethadipatis, Mathadipatis, Jeers, Acharyas, and Mahamandaleshwars* -- representing major traditions of Hinduism from all parts of India have since come together under this platform to free temples and other Hindu institutions from the clutches of the government. THE TIRUPATI DECLARATION OF 2006, spearheaded by the Sabha, was an effective voice to prevent various TTD malpractices and imminent anti-Hindu moves.

Currently the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha is pioneering a movement to challenge the constitutional validity of the HRCE Act and its derivatives, and to prevent further government incursions into Hindu religious affairs. Through the FORUM FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM (FRF), incorporated as a US non-profit organization, efforts are under way to support the Acharya Sabha with the financial resources needed to mount a legal challenge to overturn the HRCE Act, and to take other measures to prevent further annexation by the states of our religious infrastructure. The viability of Hinduism rests in the health and vitality of our temples. All Hindus should consider it their dharma – their duty and responsibility – to make sure that this important mission of the Acharya Sabha is properly funded towards accomplishing this crucial objective.

The reverse discrimination against Hindus and our institutions by a supposedly secular government cannot be allowed to continue any more. The time has come to secure for the majority Hindus of India the same secular rights and religious freedom that the followers of all minority religions already enjoy.

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- <http://www.haindavakeralam.org>
- <http://vivekajyoti.blogspot.com>

* * *

NEED TO EXAMINE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

By Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Religious freedom includes not just the right to choose, practice and propagate one's religion, but the very important right to have those freedoms protected from an unsolicited attempt, especially a coercive attempt, to supplant one's religion. And this may involve implementing protective measures. While the right of propagation applies equally to all religions, in India, where the historically non-aggressive, pluralistic tradition is confronted by an aggressive, proselytizing religion with a highly organized, well-funded (including foreign funding) network that is established in political and educational institutions as well as the media, the equality "is like giving wolves and sheep the 'equal' liberty to eat one another." It is necessary, therefore, to examine our understanding of religious freedom,

and include in it the freedom not to have one's religion targeted for destruction. And we need to examine, understand, and see the wisdom in the conversion bills. If there had been such bills in the Americas 400 years ago, today we would have a living Native American culture, instead of a broken people withering away on reservations, trying to piece together fragments of lost traditions. For Hindus in India today, the story of the Native Americans is a cautionary tale.

(Excerpted from: 'In the Name of Religious Freedom', By Swami Dayananda Saraswati, 'Daily Pioneer', March 2, 2007)

* * *

HINDU TEMPLE REVENUES DIVERTED FOR HAJ SUBSIDY & MADARASAS IN KARNATAKA

By Anjali Patel
www.indiacause.com

Highlights

1. 70% (Rs. 50.00 Crores) of Hindu Temples' money is diverted for Muslim Madarasas and Haj by Indian Government.

2. 5,000 Temples in Karnataka to be closed down due to lack of funding and maintenance.

3. During Kumbh Mela in Nasik each Hindu was forced to pay Rs.25 to Rs.50 for a dip in the holy water. Congress, BJP and Shiv Sena said nothing about this (while giving money to Muslims and Christians).

4. Today, if a Hindu or Sikh wishes to visit holy places in Kailash Mansarovar or Gurudwara in Pakistan, leave alone subsidiary, they are forced to shell out large amount of money to visit their holy places (while Islam enjoys massive 70% share of Hindus hard earned money to visit Haj in Saudi Arabia)

Details

The Congress Government of Karnataka has made another breakthrough in appeasing the Minority Communities in Karnataka. The Government passed a bill in the assembly that all private owned temples and the temple comprising of trustees in Karnataka must pay minimum tax to the Government every year. Failing to which, the authorized people of the temple would be liable and or would be prosecuted. This law is being passed in order to generate income for the development of Madarasas and provide subsidies to Haj Pilgrims in Karnataka.

Earlier to this the Government was collecting the entire income from all the Government Controlled temples in the state.

Statement of Temple Collections & Utilization 1997-2002.

(Data received from the Revenue section of Tourism & Temples, Govt of Karnataka).

Figures in Crores.

Year	Temple Nos	Temple Revenue	Temple Expenses	Madrassa, Haj	% of Revenue	Church	Others	Others Description
1997	2,64,000	52.3	17.3	9.3	18	3.0	22.8	Rural,women development.
1998	2,67,073	58.3	16.5	14.3	25	5.0	22.6	Health Rural.
1999	2,67,000	67.3	15.0	27.0	41	8.0	17.3	N.A.
2000	2,62,038	69.9	13.7	35.0	50	8.0	13.2	Haj Victims
2001	2,54,038	71.6	11.5	45.0	63	10.0	5.1	N.A.
2002	2,51,012	72.0	10.0	50.0	69	10.0	2.0	N.A.
Total		391.4	84.0	180.6	20.7	44.0	83.0	
\$Mill		87.0	18.7	40.1		9.8	18.4	

\$ are in Million Dollars exchange rate Rs 45 to a dollar.

It looks like the Congress Government of Karnataka is more concerned about the Madarasas and the Haj Committee, but it has turned a blind eye at the fate of 2.5 lakh Hindu Temples in Karnataka, which is actually under their direct control. If the Government continues its neglect towards the maintenance and development of these temples for other few years, we will not be surprised to see that over 50,000 Temples will be forced to close down in next five years.

Karnatka is the 4th State in India of having highest number of temples; out of which large number require immediate financial aid.

In regard to this, we made a visit to few ancient temples in Karnataka. We felt very sad seeing the pathetic conditions of the poorly maintained temples by the Government. We had spoken to a few temples Uttaradhikaris and priest in Government owned temple. Each and everyone expressed their displeasure

and at the attitude of the Government. They say that they are not receiving any financial aid for day-to-day maintenance of the temple. They even said that they were employed on salary basis, which they are not receiving regularly. Some priests told us that they have not received salaries for over 6 months period and they are surviving only on collections donated by the devotees by the in the "Aarti" plate.

In view of the coming Lok Sabha elections, the Government would like to appease their precious vote bank by even taxing the individual owned temples in Karnataka to generate more money for Madarasas development and Haj Subsidy. It is unfortunate that even the opposition party like the BJP, which has come to power at the center on the Hindutva platform, has remained quite in his matter. Today if a Hindu or Sikh wishes to visit our holy place in Kailash Mansarovar or the holy Gurudwara in Pakistan, leave alone subsidy, they are forced to shell out large amount of money to visit their holy shrines.

Few days back, during the Kumbh Mela in Nasik, each Hindu was forced to pay Rs.25/- to Rs.50/- to have a dip in the holy sangam. In Maharashtra, too there is a Congress Government and it is the same silent opposition BJP and Shiv Sena.

Is anybody seriously concerned about this? The Hindus and their temples have no source of income from anywhere. They are forced to generate all the finance in India itself. But it is not the same in the case of Muslim and Christians. The Muslims received aid from many Muslim countries in various forms and the Christians receive bountiful grants in the form of charities from their Christian Brothers in Vatican City, Europe, and America, Australia etc.

To further appease their precious vote bank what has the Governments in store for Hindus in the future? Tomorrow they may collect taxes Hindus, if Hindus want to survive in Hindustan.

RECEIPT OF FOREIGN CONTRIBUTIONS 2005 2006, GOVT. OF INDIA, HOME MINISTRY REPORT

http://www.esamskriti.com/html/essay_index.asp?cat=926&subcat=925&cname=fora_report

According to a report from the Home Ministry site, during this year Rs 7877 crs was received India by way of foreign donations. Tamil Nadu (Rs 1,610 crs) was the highest recipient followed by Delhi (Rs 1,556 crs) and Andhra Pradesh Rs 1,011 crs. Largest donor countries were U.S.A. Rs 2,426 crs, UK Rs 1,180 crs and Germany Rs 1,062 crs. The list of foreign donors is topped by Gospel Fellowship Trust USA, India Rs 229 crs, Gospel for Asia Rs 137 crs and Plan International Rs 111 crs. Largest recipient were World Vision Tamil Nadu Rs 256 crs, Caritas India Rs 193 crs, Rural Development Trust Andhra Pradesh Rs 127 crs.

Please note: India's population is 80% Hindu, barely 3% is Christian yet the largest donors are Christian countries. As a state Tamil Nadu received largest donations. Is it not ironical that the state has reported an increase in conversions to Christianity, is a missionary target.

Andhra Pradesh has a Protestant Chief Minister. The name YSR Reddy will not fool anyone.

The largest recipients of aid are Christian organizations.

Why are the U.S.A, Germany and U.K. so concerned about the poor in India? Am sure there are lakhs of poor people in their country too. Do these Christian organization donors donate such large amounts to Muslim countries like Pakistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia as well is a moot point.

These numbers do not give money received by Muslim organizations from Saudia Arabia etc. It is believed that some of this money comes through the 'hawala' route.

SUSTAINING DHARMA THROUGH MANDIRS

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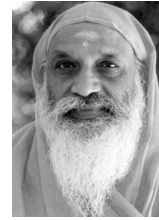
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August 6, 2007.

BENEDICTION

Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda has again produced a meaningful book on the occasion of the meet of the Executives of the Mandirs in North America.

He has presented in the book a number of messages and articles which are very important for all those people who are engaged in the promotion of Hindu Dharma.

The Mandirs have mainly been altars of worship for Hindus in the past. These days, they also need to serve as halls of learning, and centres for the promotion of Hindu togetherness.

This booklet definitely highlights these points very well.

I congratulate Sri Swami Jyotirmayananda for this valuable contribution.

With best wishes and love.

Yours,

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 'HMEC'

<http://mandirsangam.vhp-america.org/>

'The Mandirs have to play a significant role in the growth of the Hindu community in terms of its capacity to uphold Hindu Dharma.... We need to make Temples not just a center of rituals and congregation but lighthouses of philosophy and knowledge, which are the basis of Hindu Dharma.... Creating an environment where the youth understand, appreciate and love their Hindu culture is a crucial need today, as is uniting all Hindu temples under one umbrella'.

In the context of the second Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), Aug. 10-12, 2007, NJ, this booklet, comprising two parts, seeks to highlight some of the salient features of the theme of the conference, *Part One* being the main article. The thought-provoking writings gathered from various sources and presented in *Part Two* reflect views and observations, reinforcing and ratifying the message of this booklet.

Benediction for the HMEC received from Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Swami Chidananda Saraswati are prefixed to the booklet, and the above quoted lines from their messages congratulating the Conference and highlighting the greatness of Hindu Dharma, assume special significance in the context.

Since the establishment of the first Hindu Mandir in Boston in 1910, there are now more than 700 Mandirs in North America, and it is heartening that there is very encouraging participation in the effort at networking them under the auspices of the HMEC, which is also dedicated to the sustaining of Dharma through Mandirs, community service and inculcation of the eternal values among the youth in the U.S.A.

If this offering, graciously blessed by Pujya Swami Dayanandaji, would help stimulate further reflection and deliberation on the subject, it will have been fruitful.

Special thanks are due to Srikant, author-publisher, Integral Books (www.integralbooks.com), well known for the prominent book, *Power in Temples -- A Modern Perspective*, for his thought-provoking Foreword, and to the learned authors of the selected writings appended. Also, to Sri Shaswat, Managing Director, Butala Emporium, Inc., NY, www.indousplaza.com, dedicated to "Keeping Tradition Alive", our grateful thanks are due for his gesture of sponsoring this booklet in the cause of our Dharma.

Jyotirmayananda

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www.vivekanandagospel.org
New York, August 2, 2007.

MESSAGE

For the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference

- **The Mandirs have to play a significant role in the growth of the Hindu community**

I am happy to learn that you are convening a Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference again.

These are the days we need networking. We have to grow together. It is not enough we survive -- we have to plan for our growth. The Mandirs have to play a significant role in the growth of the Hindu community in terms of its capacity to uphold Hindu Dharma.

My prayers for the success of the Conference.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

www.arshavidya.org

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- **We need to make Temples lighthouses of philosophy & knowledge**

I congratulate all the members of Hindu community for coming together to communicate the true essence of Hinduism to the world. I would like to emphasize some key points about Hinduism, the oldest religion of the planet.

Hinduism believes that all forms of worship reach the One Divinity. As all rivers merge into a single ocean, any type of worship reaches the same cosmic intelligence.

Hinduism is not polytheism but believes in one God, one Divinity. The One is represented by many names and forms.

Hinduism is not about idol worship. Idols are used to represent the inexpressible. They are a symbol or medium to worship the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient Divinity.

Divinity is the material cause of the universe ('*upadhana karana*'). Hinduism believes that the whole creation is made of five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether. Honoring nature, caring for the environment is part and parcel of the Hindu tradition.

Caste discrimination is not sanctioned by the Hindu religion. Every Hindu should be educated to the fact that many of the sacred texts were written by the Dalits.

Vedas and Vedanta philosophy is the essence of Hinduism. It is the closest religion to science. Today's youth need to be educated on these principles.

We need to make Temples not just a center of rituals and congregation but lighthouses of philosophy and knowledge, which are the basis of Hinduism.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

www.artofliving.org

- **Creating an environment where the youth love their Hindu culture is a crucial need today, as is uniting all Hindu Temples under one umbrella**

*A temple is not a building.
It is the abode of the Lord.*

A temple's strength is not in its bricks.

Its fortitude comes from the dedication of its members.

A temple is not held together by plaster and mud.

Its glue is the piety and devotion of the community.

A temple is not simply a place we visit.

It should be the axis around which our lives revolve.

I am glad to know about the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference from August 10-12 in New Jersey. This is a divine and auspicious occasion.

You are already achieving and providing so much for the Hindu community through your individual Mandirs. I am impressed by your commitment and dedication to God, culture and the community.

Even birds can build homes for themselves, but to build a home for God, an abode of the Lord, takes true dedication and piety. That is what a temple is: a real home of God. This will serve not only as a temple of worship, but by God's grace, it will also serve as a temple of education, a temple of culture, a temple of unity and a temple of *sanskaras*.

However, by coming together and working together to ensure that programs are implemented within the temples and also between/amongst the temples for the youth you will certainly bring even greater benefit to all the Hindus living in the USA.

Creating an environment where the youth understand, appreciate and love their Hindu culture is a crucial need today, as is uniting all Hindu temples under one umbrella. When we are all united in the name of Sanatana Dharma we can truly bring the message of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood to the world. I am pleased to see the way you are all coming forward to fulfill these needs.

Swami Chidananda Saraswati

www.parmarth.com

Your efforts for the sustenance of Hindu Dharma and for the Protection of our Nation are incomparable and beyond the scope of imagination.

All the members and volunteers of the Yogi Divine Society are with you, shoulder to shoulder, for the service and protection of our religion.

You have initiated a Great *Yajna* for keeping our culture and civilization alive and thriving.

We, all your children, are with you now and will always be with you.

Sadhu Hariprasad ji

Yogi Divine Society, Springfield, USA.

Some years ago, while facing a critical phase of life, though very much skeptical, I was sitting quietly on the veranda of the *koothambalam*, the hall of performing arts, of the famous temple of Lord Krishna in Guruvayoor, seeking whether a temple can really give solace to the dispirited, as claimed.

A pleasant looking middle-aged man with a beaming face came and sat beside me. He pointed to his left leg and said, "I come from Bombay. This leg had to be amputated and a date was fixed in a reputed hospital. My wife could not bear the idea. A devotee of Guruvayoorappan, she earnestly prayed Him to heal me. As the date for the operation neared, there appeared some signs of a change for the better. We went to the doctor. After examination, with incredibility writ large on his face he told us, 'Your Guruvayoorappan has healed you. This is nothing short of a miracle.'"

How I can reconcile my rational and scientific outlook with such incidents, I wondered. However, some such experiences of others and myself inspired further enquiry and exploration maintaining the rational temper, which, of course, helped me to expand the range of reasoning. Eventually, this equipped me to write the book, *Power in Temples: A Modern Perspective*.

Whatever be one's status in life, one has to keep on facing problems. At the stage of man, the evolution of life assumes a character of conscious striving towards perfection and the problems, both material and spiritual, are natural challenges that help reinforce this movement. The overcoming even of a material problem can turn out to be a step towards spiritual refinement as there is no unsurpassable partition between the mundane and the spiritual.

Those who are immersed in the spiritual quest as well as the common people engaged in the day-to-day affairs of life often seek the divine help to overcome the obstacles they face. By thus invoking the divine dimensions within, they are reinforcing themselves spiritually. From the Divine Grace they thus experienced, if they draw inspiration to cultivate a universal vision they are indeed in the path of spiritual perfection.

The ancient sages of India have conceived effective means for this communion and spiritual expansion. Among them an important means is *jnana-maarga* – the way of super intellectual analysis and inquiry, and the other is *bhakti-maarga* – the ego-effacing surrender to the Divine. Both these paths call for earnest practice.

Worship in temples is a practical means for the communion which blends both the paths of

jnaana and *bhakthi*. It helps the *Jnani's* ego pliable enough to receive the divine grace essential to imbibe the liberating wisdom and helps the *Bhakta* to acquire smoothly the same transcendental and liberating wisdom.

Those ancient explorers who devised temples as the practical means for spiritual evolution can be termed as super scientists. Surprisingly, I came across the following observation about India's sages in the book *Dialectical Materialism* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, pp 339-340) by Prof. Alexander Spirkin, an eminent scientist and a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences of the erstwhile Soviet Union: "The sages of India ...knew much that even today is beyond the ken of the European scientific thought or that it ignores, often trying to conceal its helplessness by asserting that oriental wisdom is mere mysticism.... Does it not go to show an astonishingly high level of culture that should arouse our admiration, gratitude and desire to study?"

Temples are not irrational structures, as some believe. For a layman a nuclear reactor may appear as a mere structure. To the one who explores into the deeper facts and subtle principles involved in temples, their marvelous significance and efficacy will be revealed. As Prof. Spirkin observes, there are great fields of ancient wisdom that call for study and rediscovery, which offers for the young generation a vast field for research.

I am glad that the booklet by Swami Jyotirmayananda Puri presents in a nutshell the salient features of temples and temple worship which will prove to be very useful to inspire further study and exploration of the super-science involved in the institution of temples and temple worship.

Srikant

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"As the Physicist, i.e., as a man who has devoted his life to the most matter of fact branch of science, namely the investigation of matter....and after my research into the atom I say this to you: there is no such thing as matter per se! All matter originated from and consists of force which sets the atomic particles in oscillation and concentrates them into solar systems of the atom. But as there is neither intelligence nor an internal force in the universe we must assume a conscious intelligent spirit behind the force. This spirit is the basic principle of all matter."

-- **Max Planck** (*the eminent physicist who revolutionized modern physics with his quantum theory*).

SUSTAINING DHARMA THROUGH MANDIRS

Part One

THE ROLE OF MANDIRS IN SUSTAINING HINDU DHARMA IN NORTH AMERICA

Need for promoting a better understanding of the Hindu traditions -- Convincing information about the significance of temple worship -- Modern man tends to be influenced by misleading views -- How the Hindu temple differs from the churches or mosques -- Science of invoking the Divine power in a temple -- Temple as a vibrant center of Divine Power -- Knowledge of the subtle energy aspects of the human body -- Both the *saguna* and *nirguna* forms of worship are complimentary -- A science in the background of temple worship -- The rationale in the invocation of the Divine in Mandirs -- Mandirs for cultural and spiritual evolution and all-round progress -- Significant role of Mandirs in upholding the Hindu Dharma -- Important part of Mandirs in motivating the younger generation -- Growth of Mandirs in the USA since the establishment of the first one -- Anchoring of the Hindu children in Hindu tradition & the growth of Hindu Dharma in America -- Need to blend modernity with the vision of the Hindu scriptures - - HMEC dedicated to the sustenance of Hindu Dharma through Mandirs.

Need for promoting a better understanding of the Hindu traditions

Temple worship, a very important aspect of India's cultural heritage, is often subjected to many misinterpretations. Efforts to evoke rethinking among the skeptics and materialists who undermine temple worship, is a need of our times. In the absence of such efforts, there spread many views, which easily mislead impressionable young minds and also people who are inquisitive about Hindu Dharma, but do not find information to explore sufficiently deep into its principles. Of course, the misleading campaigns will not have much impact on those who have already acquired a deep understanding of Hindu spirituality. For them there is no dearth of books to nurture further their knowledge and wisdom from different angles of approach. But there are thousands of educated Hindus and non-Hindus, who are confounded with doubts about the Hindu culture. In the dearth of information and clues that satisfy their intellectual quest, the materially oriented intelligentsia and some fanatic religionists mislead them.

Unless this large section is sufficiently supplied with knowledge that is oriented to link their intellectual bent with the deeper facts of knowledge and wisdom of the ancient explorers of Truth, the prevailing ignorance about our

heritage will continue to block any effort to promote a better understanding of the Hindu traditions. The Mandirs can render much service in this educative field.

Convincing information about the significance of temple worship

In this context I would like to quote the following observation of Sri A. Radhakrishnan, writer and intellectual, who gives some directional points which the Mandirs should seriously consider:

“There is an urgent need for a clear projection and true assimilation of the Hindu ideals. Barring a few who have taken to the spiritual path with all seriousness, the rest are either ignorant of the fundamentals of our Dharma or are deplorably lackadaisical in their approach. The rather mechanically observed rituals and ceremonies on several occasions without any clue as to their true purport and significance do not help either. No wonder, the ill-informed followers unwittingly fall a prey to the machinations of self-proclaimed agnostics and decry all Hindu religious practices. Such people really don't know what they are running down and ridiculing, much less what they stand to gain by earnestly observing those rituals and ceremonies. Any attempt to remedy this situation should strike at the roots.

“Mandirs should impart sound knowledge about these rituals and ceremonies and their rationale, and clearly explain the meaning of various *mantras* chanted on the occasion, their significance, etc. Language should not be a barrier since Sanskrit usages can be properly and accurately rendered into English or any other language familiar to the seeker. One should come out from the cloister and educate the seekers properly. And in doing so, it is essential to link the performance and the objectives of the hoary rituals and practices to the theories and principles of modern science so as to render them logical and intelligible to the modern man. The seemingly wide gap between old-world postulates and recent directives should be narrowed down or eliminated so as to prevent doubting Thomases raising irrelevant queries and issues. The knowledge imparted should be perfect and unambiguous. No doubt, a clear presentation of the Dharma will appeal to the Hindus as well as non-Hindus, all alike, because basically Hinduism contemplates an ideal, all-inclusive way of life for mankind and not a set of unverifiable doctrines and dogmas, and unalterable religious edicts for a section of them. With a view to drive home this aspect of our Dharma it would be advisable to hold effective interactive sessions with the

followers of other faiths as well. But before attempting such a step the Hindus themselves must be adequately equipped. Hence it is essential that they should be well-informed and adequately trained. Mandirs of yore used to render yeomen service in this regard. There is no reason why those of the present day also can't achieve similar results. Instruction calls for capable instructors and the Mandirs cannot afford to ignore this aspect.”

For such an effective instruction, the Mandirs should first promote a better understanding through convincing information about the significance and relevance of temple worship in human life.

Modern man tends to be influenced by misleading views

The modern man endowed though with a scientific bent of mind, intellectual upbringing and a technological background, not infrequently tends to be influenced by misleading views and is often pestered with needless doubts and skepticism. Vested quarters like the materialists and dogmatic religionists, are hell bent on propagating distorted versions of the great Hindu Dharma. It is possible to counter such campaigns if we take appropriate and effective intellectual measures. There is no dearth of logical wisdom and intellectual ideas in the Hindu culture to convince the modern mind of the scientific temper underlying the spiritual concepts and worship practices.

How the Hindu temple differs from the churches or mosques

It is an unfortunate fact that many temple devotees themselves are not sufficiently aware of how the Hindu temples differ from the Christian churches or the mosques of the Muslims. Churches and mosques do not have any deeper significance than mere halls for mass prayer. On the other hand temples are vibrant centers of Divine energy. Even intelligent Hindus often fail to appreciate this vital distinguishing feature. In the words of Sri S. Gurumurthy, renowned columnist, “The Hindus should not enter the temple mentally comparing the temple with churches which are mass assembly and prayer halls. There are subtle forces which operate through the deities installed in the temple, the *mantras* regularly chanted and the appropriate rituals daily conducted there. So temples are a different phenomenon altogether. This psychological shift is needed for the Hindus not to suffer a complex when they compare the temples with churches which are designed and aimed for altogether different objects. This may also help to differentiate the practices of Christianity and Sanatana Dharma. But in the US the temples also serve more intense social

purposes and therefore there is bound to be some confusion about the concept of temples as they are in India and those in the US.”

Science of invoking the Divine power in a temple

There is a well-coordinated science of invoking and installing the divine power in a Deity in the temple. This spiritual technology is based on the Vedantic knowledge of the manifestation of the phenomenal universe and the human life from *Brahman*, the Supreme Reality. When one makes an in-depth study of the steps of this technology of installing Divine power in temples, one will be marveled at the analytical wisdom and the holistic perspective of the ancient sages.

Temple as a vibrant center of Divine Power

The *murti* of a Deity in a temple is a dynamic source of spiritual power. There is an efficacious science of *mantras* and the rituals for the installation of power in the *murti* of a Deity by invoking the spiritual power from the infinite source, *Brahman*. A Deity with certain special powers will have a suitable symbolic form that represents these divine aspects. The relevant *mantras* and rituals are used for invoking the special spiritual powers represented by a particular form. Invoking and installing spiritual power in a *murti* is a very engaging and illuminating subject for study.

In this context, it is relevant to quote the following observation of Srikanth, the author of the well-known book *Power in Temples: A Modern Perspective**, “According to the highly explorative science of Hindu Dharma, *Brahman*, the Supreme Reality and the source of all phenomenal manifestations, is at once personal and impersonal. In our deepest dimension, we are that timeless source as revealed by the Upanishads: ‘*tat tvam asi*’ – ‘That Thou Art’. By worshipping the Reality in its personalized aspect, the worshipper gradually moves closer to the Reality. This liberates one from the limitations of one’s imperfect personality and one comes in contact with the all-powerful Divinity. This is an expansion which liberates us from the worries and pains of our limited existence, reinforces us physically, mentally and spiritually and brings to life the Divine Bliss (*ananda*) that transcends the experiences of our ordinary senses. We can even achieve supreme emancipation, as basically we are that timeless Supreme Divine.

“Hindu philosophy asserts that everything in the universe is the manifestation of the One

Supreme Source. Today, modern science also asserts that all the phenomena in Nature are the manifestations of a universal capacity, which is referred to as energy; but science is yet to get a deeper understanding of the fundamental nature of this mysterious basic factor called energy, which manifests as the innumerable phenomena. According to Vedanta, *Brahman* is at once Intelligence and Energy. We tend to consider a block of stone or metal as inert and lifeless. But today’s science knows that there are tremendously moving energy fields within them that are in a sort of web-like relationship with the whole universe. Hindu philosophy compliments this view of science by highlighting the fact that the stone and everything else are the manifestations of *Paraa-shakthi*, the transcendental supreme Energy of *Brahman*, which is at once Energy and Intelligence.”

It is based on the deepest understanding of the phases of the manifestation of the universe from the supreme *Brahman*, and the phenomenon of human life and its higher possibilities the concept of temples and the installation of power in temples were evolved. As a consequence of the application of this spiritual technology, a temple is transformed into a vibrant center of Divine Power, with which the worshipper can establish communion. The atmosphere maintained in a temple through regular, appropriate rites and rituals facilitates this communion.

Knowledge of the subtle energy aspects of the human body

Here, the Yoga-Vedanta knowledge of the subtle energy aspects of the human body are also taken into due consideration. It is to be specially noted that the yogic perspective gives prime importance to the cerebro-spinal system. The interconnection between the subtle energy centers of the human body and the centers of the spiritual energy aspects installed in the temples are highlighted in the science of temple structure. As one explores this science, one gets convinced how drastically the Hindu temple differs from the churches or mosques, which are only prayer halls. The applied science of installation of power makes a Mandir a vibrant dynamo of spiritual Energy, from which the worshipper can charge himself with life-reinforcing Divine Power.

The installation of a *murti* following certain rituals and ceremonies involves elaborate performance. Every step of the procedure, every act of gesture, every article used for the purpose, and every *mantra* chanted are based on well coordinated principles of the laws of manifestation of the universe from the One Reality.

*This book, which has gone into six editions, is published by Integral Books (www.integralbooks.com), Anandashram PO, Kanhangad, Kerala-671 531, India.

The Deity is a personal representation of some aspects of the divine powers of *Brahman*. The seat stone (*peetham*) of the Deity represents *Brahman* and the form of the Deity installed symbolizes the special spiritual powers of *Brahman*.

The worship of personalized Deities, who represent certain powers of *Brahman* have a special practical significance. The worship of Deities in a temple is a practical science* of spirituality.

Both the *saguna* and *nirguna* forms of worship are complimentary

Worship of personalized Deities is a part of the advanced spiritual practice designed by the science of Vedanta for a communion with the divine aspects of transcendental Supreme Reality. This is known as *saguna* form of worship – worship of the Divine with certain attributes. Worshipping the Divine without attributes is known as *nirguna* form of worship. As the Vedanta takes Reality in its totality, it views *Brahman* in its both aspects -- attributeless and with attributes. The manifested universe with forms and names is an expression of the attributes latent in *Brahman* and therefore it is easier for humanity to worship Reality with attributes to establish communion with the Supreme *Brahman*, which is both attributeless and with attributes. This principle is the basis of the worship of Deities in temples. Meanwhile, the worshipper can also conceive the Deity as *Brahman* without attributes. The great sages highlight both the *saguna* and *nirguna* forms of worship as complimentary. This apparently opposite but complementary aspect of certain phenomena even in Nature is not unfamiliar to modern science.

Science in the background of temple worship

Energy vibrations and forms are two important aspects of the phenomenal universe. The world of forms is the gross expression of energy. Both these aspects are used in invoking the spiritual power and for communion with the Divine. The energy vibrations are employed in the form of suitable *mantras* and the form aspect as the Deities. Thus, there is a well-coordinated science in the background of temple worship and it is the bounden duty of Mandirs to make the modern world sufficiently aware of this fact. This is very necessary to counter effectively the fallacious and malicious ideas spread by vested interests against this highly rational form of

Hindu spiritual practice for the communion with Divinity and spiritual expansion.

The rationale in the invocation of the Divine in Mandirs

Certainly, those who visit Mandirs and offer their devout worship will experience its sublime benefits by way of reduction in tensions, reinforcement of the inner faculties, and the salutary effects in the material and spiritual dimensions of life. Along with this, if they get themselves familiar with the rationale and the principles involved in the invocation of the Divine in Mandirs, it will go a long way in deepening their faith and enhancing their quest through matured understanding and mellowed wisdom.

Mandirs for cultural and spiritual evolution and all-round progress

Only when man comes in communion with his inner Self, the Divinity within, he can find freedom from such maladies that affect his body-mind-sense complex. Hindu philosophy offers the know-how to achieve this communion and freedom. The Mandirs are founded on a practical science that helps establish this reinforcing contact with the Divine. With a deeper understanding of this fact, the youth in the U.S.A. can make the best use of the Mandirs for their cultural and spiritual evolution and all-round progress, thereby benefiting them and enriching others who come in contact with them.

Significant role of Mandirs in upholding the Hindu Dharma

The Mandirs in U.S.A. are duty-bound to promote a better understanding of the Hindu Dharma, especially among the younger generation, who must become aware of the rationale of their rich cultural heritage with a modern perspective. In this context, a network of all the Mandirs in the U.S.A. can make a coordinated effort to render the much-needed service. Let us all co-operate wholeheartedly to take an effective step in this direction, which is the crying need of the hour. As Pujya Swami Dayanandaji reminds us. “These are the days we need networking. We have to grow together. It is not enough we survive – we have to plan for our growth. The Mandirs have to play a significant role in the growth of the Hindu community in terms of its capacity to uphold the Hindu Dharma.”

Important part of Mandirs in motivating the younger generation

Much of this super-scientific wisdom of the Hindu heritage is couched in symbolic and esoteric representations and anecdotes, the most intelligent means adopted by the ancient explorers of Truth, so that the knowledge can

*This science is discussed in detail in the above mentioned book, ‘Power in Temples: A Modern Perspective.’

survive and percolate through generations and can be rediscovered in any age by way of proper study, guided research and introspection. The Mandirs, particularly in the U.S.A. have a great part to play in inspiring and motivating the younger generation, particularly the young and budding scholars, to dive deep into these treasures of our hoary wisdom, which, in fact, is the precious heritage of the whole mankind.

Growth of Mandirs in the U.S.A. since the establishment of the first one

After Swami Paramananda established Vedanta Center in Boston in 1910, the first Hindu Mandir in the U.S.A., several Hindu temples were gradually established and now there are more than 700 Mandirs in N. America. Of these, U.S.A. has over 400 Mandirs, the remaining being in Canada. New York has the largest number of Mandirs – 85. California comes second with 55 Mandirs. More than 70 of Hindu Mandirs are visited by more than 3000-5000 families each week.

Anchoring of the Hindu children in Hindu tradition & the growth of Hindu Dharma in America

The growth of Hindu Dharma in America critically depends on the extent to which the Hindu children remain anchored in their timeless traditions. Ensuring this will require collective thought and action. The Mandir Executives' Conference will be an avenue where this important question will be deliberated upon, and strategies developed will help in achieving this cherished goal, in a collective setting. Hindus have to work together so that their children can enjoy the same fruits of Dharma which have nourished them so far.

Need to blend modernity with the vision of the Hindu scriptures

In this context the following views of Sri Bansi Pandit, well-known author on Hindu Dharma (<http://sanatana-dharma.tripod.com/>), residing at Glen Ellyn, IL, provides a line of thought the salient features of which may be taken into consideration:

“Educated Hindus need a demythologized and less ritualistic Hindu Dharma to blend modernity with the vision of the Veda, Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures. In addition to normal activities, temples need to raise funds to support various institutions such as universities, yoga and meditation centers, senior citizen centers, and hospitals. Such institutions would be the symbol and model of the modern Hindu Dharma. Additionally, temples need to get actively involved in establishing harmonious and respectful relations with American public in their

local communities. This could be done by occasionally inviting them to our temple festivals, helping the local charities (food for the poor, soup kitchens, etc.) and working actively with the Council of the World Parliament of Religions to improve inter-community relations”.

Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) dedicated to the sustenance of Hindu Dharma through Mandirs

In the context of the second HMEC (August 10-12, 2007, Edison, New Jersey), let us recapitulate our mission:

The HMEC has to focus on inculcating the eternal values of our Dharma among the devotees and through them disseminate those values to the entire society. Being an annual initiative for the development of network among the Executives of all Hindu Mandirs of America, the HMEC has to evolve a clear vision of the role of Mandirs in sustaining Dharma in America. In due course, the sincere and sustained efforts of the HMEC are bound to go a long way in:

- ❖ Fostering the eternal values of our Dharma and guiding the society towards the ideal of '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*';

- ❖ Getting the Hindu community rooted in its traditions and enriching the American society; providing guidelines for collective thought and action to ensure children and the youth to nourish their life drawing inspiration from the timeless traditions of Hindu Dharma;

- ❖ Making the Mandirs play an important role in guiding children to grow up learning about their duties, and collectively developing effective approaches to help sustain Dharma in North America;

- ❖ Equipping the Mandirs to serve and lead the Hindu-American community, dedicating themselves to community *Seva* that is fundamental to Hindu Dharma, and taking leadership in organizing community service activities in their respective local areas;

- ❖ Networking all Mandirs and different Hindu organizations in the U.S.A., and meeting the ever-changing cultural and spiritual needs in North America;

- ❖ Motivating the Mandirs in America to help meet the educational needs of Hindu children and youth so that they can develop into confident Hindu-American citizens, and

- ❖ Getting the gross distortions about Hindu Dharma removed from the school text books in the US, and ensuring these to provide a correct perspective of its culture and traditions as soon as possible.

“We dedicate ourselves to the Common Good of Hindu Community Worldwide”

THE FIRST HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE (2006)

– A BRIEF REPORT

Representing 57 temples from more than 20 states
-- Representing a wide cross section of the Hindu
Community -- Deliberating on the needs of diverse
and vibrant Hindu-American community --
Fostering unity in diversity -- Dedicating to
community *Seva* -- Meeting the educational needs
of Hindu children -- Zero Tolerance for
Desecration of Hindu Mandirs.

Representing 57 temples from more than 20 states

Hindu Mandir (Temple) executives representing 57 temples from more than 20 states of US, Canada and Caribbean Islands converged in Atlanta to attend the first ever Hindu Mandir Executive conference (HMEC), from June 23rd through June 25th. They traveled from as far as British Columbia in Canada, Hawaii, California, Florida, and the heartland of America, with a mission to nourish, protect and sustain Hindu Dharma in America.

Representing a wide cross section of the Hindu Community

The executives represented a wide cross-section of the Hindu community from a young second-generation Mandir president from Augusta, Georgia, to an elderly lady representing a Hindu Mandir in North Carolina. These attendees, who numbered over 110, included physicians, scientists, businesspersons, homemakers, and engineers who, in addition, are temple executives with a deep commitment to fulfilling the spiritual and social needs of Hindu-American community. The group was diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, generation and national origin as well.

Deliberating on the needs of diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community

During the conference Mandir executives deliberated on the evolving social, religious, cultural and spiritual needs of a 2.5 million strong diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community. In the concluding session of the conference, the delegates unanimously passed the following resolutions for further consideration by their temple's boards:

Fostering unity in diversity

We, the Hindu Mandirs of Americas, hereby declare that all Hindus stand as one regardless of the *panthas* (path), *sampradaya* (tradition), or

country of origin. We are all members of one proud Hindu family, which is one billion strong. All Mandirs stand united as one, even though our specific traditions may not be identical, and our spiritual paths are diverse. We, hereby, resolve solemnly to dedicate ourselves to the common good of Hindu community worldwide.

Dedicating to community *Seva*

By declaring this solidarity with the international Hindu family we resolve to dedicate ourselves to community *Seva* (service) that is fundamental to our Dharma. The Hindu Mandirs of Americas, hereby resolve, that all the Mandirs in Americas will celebrate annually a common day of volunteer service, called the Hindu *Seva* Divas whereby all Hindu Mandirs will take leadership role in organizing community service activities in their respective local areas. The Hindu *Seva* Divas shall be held on the first weekend in October every year.

Meeting the educational needs of Hindu children

As Hindu Mandirs in Americas, we resolve to help meeting the educational needs of our children and youth so that they develop into confident Hindu-American citizens. In this regard, we the Hindu Mandirs in Americas, gravely note the serious deficiencies and gross distortions in school textbooks in the US about Hinduism, its culture and traditions resulting in embarrassment, discrimination and other social problems for our youth. We, hereby, resolve to take leadership role in our respective school districts in getting these distortions in textbooks about Hinduism corrected as soon as possible.

Zero Tolerance for Desecration of Hindu Mandirs

Hindu Mandirs' Executives of Americas strongly condemn targeted vandalism (hate crime), wanton destruction and desecration of Hindu Mandirs anywhere in the world. The Hindu Mandirs shall not remain quiet in view of increasing frequency of targeted attacks on Hindu Mandirs throughout the world. We shall oppose, by all lawful means, such malicious acts of vandalism and intolerance directed against any Hindu Mandir.

“This is the second year of Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC). Vis-à-vis 2006, HMEC has clearly grown in significant terms. Within two years of its existence, the idea of Conference has certainly spread far and wide amongst the Mandir community. But then the conference is not an end in itself. It has to serve a higher purpose. The conference is the first step of a serial process aimed at engaging our youth more effectively with Hindu values, develop a credible national leadership for Hindus, and enhance the efficiency of Mandirs. These are the needs of the Hindu American.”

SUSTAINING DHARMA THROUGH MANDIRS

Part Two

A FEW SELECT VIEWS & OBSERVATIONS

-1-

A HINDU VIEW OF "GOD"

<http://www.hinduvoice.co.uk/Issues/16/God.htm>

God, the Ultimate Spiritual Reality -- Accepting an abundance of formulations of Truth -- Different feminine aspects of the Divine -- Various paths through which the aspirant can achieve perception of the truth

God, the Ultimate Spiritual Reality

God is the word most often used in Western thought to describe the Supreme Being or spiritual reality behind the universe. The term "God" is originally a Germanic word and relates to the idea of the good, what is supremely beneficial in life. "God" in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic sense stands for the Creator, who is generally conceived of as a male figure who resides in heaven.

Sanatana Dharma teaches that there is an ultimate spiritual reality that may be called God, but that this reality transcends all names, forms and actions. Its highest truth is one of monism -- not that there is only One God, but that there is in the Ultimate Reality nothing but God, who includes all creation within a greater Being. Such a Divine Being is not merely the creator, but includes the creation itself, as well as the uncreated which transcends time, space and causation, as pure consciousness, called the *Brahman* or Absolute. All creatures and all the universe are within the divine. Our soul is intimately related with God and can experience God in consciousness. All creation consists of merely the surface waves, on an infinite sea of consciousness. While we can call this ultimate spiritual reality "God", one should realise that it is not the same as God of monotheistic beliefs, which is in fact closer to an aspect of the Divine that Hindus call Ishwar or Lord.

Accepting an abundance of formulations of Truth

Human beings through history have formulated many different names and forms for the Divine. Just as we have and accept many names and forms for other things, whether it is food, or types of art, so too in religion a similar (great) diversity has been created.

The main western religions have said that only the names and forms with which they choose to

refer to God are valid, but those that appear to worship another God, or a multiplicity of Divinities, must be false or unholy.

As a universal tradition, Hinduism accepts an abundance of formulations of Truth. There is only One Truth or Reality, but this reality cannot be limited to a particular set of names or a particular form. Though it is One, it is also universal, not an exclusive formulation. It is an inclusive, not an exclusive Oneness, which could be called God, but which transcends all names, including the word God itself. The different Gods and Goddesses of Hindus represent various functions of this Supreme Divinity. Having many names for one thing is not necessarily a sign of ignorance of its' real nature -- on the contrary it may indicate an intimate knowledge of it.

For example, Eskimos have no less than forty-eight different names for snow! This is not because they do not know snow or are confused about it, but because they know snow intimately in its different variations.

The many different deities of Hinduism reflect such an intimate realisation of the Divine on various levels, which non-experiential belief orientated religions seldom even approach.

Different feminine aspects of the Divine

Hinduism contains many feminine forms of the Divine like Kali, Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. These represent different feminine aspects of the Divine. For example, Lakshmi portrays the nourishing energy and Sarasvati the creative, while Durga is the Divine Mother in her protective role. The Divine cannot be limited to something simply masculine. As a universal tradition, Hinduism recognises that the Divine contains both masculine and feminine attributes. Each masculine name or form of the divine has a feminine counterpart, in which the feminine is usually addressed first, such as Sita-Rama, Uma-Mahesh or Lakshmi-Narayan. Without giving proper honour to the feminine qualities, a religion must be incomplete and one-sided. If the feminine qualities of the divine were recognised, some of the evils which have occurred in the name of God would not have happened. The world must once again honour the feminine aspects of the Divine to restore wholeness, completeness and universality.

Various paths through which the aspirant can achieve perception of the truth

Without direct perception of something, our theories and beliefs remain only that -- theories and beliefs. Unless a religion provides some way that we can experience the truths of which it speaks, we must accept that we have no real proof of it.

Hinduism, like the religions of ancient Greece and China, provided various paths through which the aspirant can achieve perception of the truth, not as second hand knowledge or mere book knowledge, but as one's own intimate experience.

Hinduism has never held the belief that only a select few individuals, such as a prophet, can ever achieve direct consciousness and communion with the divine, and that people must forever follow the dictates of such a person, but that any individual can do so, and eventually every individual will do so.

However Hinduism does value the teachings and advice of men and women who have already achieved this. The paths that are detailed to help an individual achieve this great goal are called yogas.

* * *

-2-

PUJAS, CEREMONIES & RITUALS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

<http://www.hinduvoice.co.uk/issues/16/ceremonies.htm>

Sitting through lengthy *pujas*, ceremonies & *kathas* -- No effort made to communicate the meaning -- Dodgy Pandits are far from uncommon -- The ceremonies themselves have deep and profound meanings -- Boredom sometimes accompanied with an uneasy feeling -- Meaning of the Religious ceremonies should be explained to the audience in a way that they can understand and relate to -- Most Hindus are curious and want to learn about Hinduism -- Shaping the way our religion is communicated and put across -- An excellent example in the context

Sitting through lengthy *pujas*, ceremonies & *kathas*

One of the most boring times I can recall from my childhood is when I had to sit through lengthy *pujas*, ceremonies and *kathas*. This is not at all to say that I had no faith in my religion. Far from it, I have always been a devout Hindu in my own way. The boredom from lengthy religious ceremonies is inevitable, and virtually every young Hindu I have known, has felt the same way.

No effort made to communicate the meaning

The reason is simple; most of us cannot understand what is going on, and no effort is made by the priest or priestess to communicate the meanings. So the whole experience ends up negative. Most Hindus make an effort to try and follow the process, or to concentrate on God in our own way. But as the minutes turn into hours it becomes more and more difficult.

Dodgy Pandits are far from uncommon

The problem is compounded by the behaviour of some of the priests. Many ask for massive

amounts of cash. It sometimes seems as if they themselves don't really know what they are doing but are just taking all of us for a ride and getting paid in the process. This may sound a bit harsh, and of course there are many pandits who are not like this. But many Hindus I have spoken to have related similar bad experiences, leading me to suspect that such dodgy pandits are far from uncommon.

The ceremonies themselves have deep and profound meanings

Fortunately for me, I knew other aspects of Hinduism which were simpler and more practical, and therefore no matter if I found it boring to sit through religious ceremonies, and that sometimes the behaviour of the priests was off-putting, it never effected the way I related to Hinduism as a whole. Quite to the contrary, I knew that Hinduism was great and pure, and that these ceremonies themselves had deep and profound meanings -- but that the problem was that we were not being explained anything about these meanings.

Boredom sometimes accompanied with an uneasy feeling

Imagine what many young Hindus who do not know much about Hinduism feel when they sit through such ceremonies. Their boredom is sometimes accompanied with an uneasy feeling. "Is this really what Hinduism is all about? If so, then I cannot relate to Hinduism at all." To many, being forced to sit through lengthy *pujas* and *kathas* that they don't understand serves to make them feel estranged from Hinduism itself.

Meaning of the Religious ceremonies should be explained to the audience in a way that they can understand and relate to

What is the solution? I think that is of utmost importance that all Hindu religious ceremonies should have sections explained to the audience in a way that they can understand and relate to. In this way, the ceremonies can actually engage young audiences and instill understanding in them. In Britain, this will inevitably mean having some English commentary accompanying the Sanskrit component. It has to be acknowledged that no spiritual benefit can occur to a crowd of people sitting listening to a priest chanting unless the people have a feeling of devotion and concentration towards what is being chanted or spoken by the priest. And this feeling can only come about through understanding. And understanding, in this context, can only come about through some degree of explanation, in English.

Most Hindus are curious and want to learn about Hinduism

If this change is incorporated, I think we will find that young Hindus will be much more positive towards attending religious functions and ceremonies. In my experience, most Hindus are curious and want to learn about Hinduism, but do not have the avenues to satisfy their search. If ceremonies, *pujas*, *kathas* etc were conducted in the right way, people would look forward to them as a way to really learn something about their religion.

Shaping the way our religion is communicated and put across

All Hindu ceremonies in Britain should follow this kind of model, including those associated with the major junctures in life, such as birth, marriage and death. It would provide a huge service to our religion and community. All Hindus need to work to create a system where this can become the reality. Hindu organisations should provide funds to support such work. And more young Hindus should involve themselves in shaping the way our religion is communicated and put across.

An excellent example in the context

A young doctor, Milan Shah, provides an excellent example of this work. From his own learning Milan acquired the skills and knowledge to conduct *pujas*. He has performed simplified *pujas*, for festivals such as Shivratri, at many London universities. He incorporates commentary and explanation for each of the steps, and even a little (tasteful) humour along the way. There is also a take-home leaflet for everyone, with explanations and other stuff. The result is that almost everyone leaves the *puja* commenting about how excellent it was and that they have never been to anything quite like it. Most attendants also said that they would love to go to future *pujas* conducted by Milan. People genuinely feel refreshed and relaxed after the *puja* is over, and hence the spiritual benefit is much greater than sitting in boredom, which let's face it, never does anybody any good.

"In whatever way men adore Me, in the same way they find Me; various are the ways of men, but in the end all come to Me."

-- Lord Krishna (in the *Bhagavad Gita*)

"The distinction between the liberated, the aspirant and the bound subsists only so long as this Elixir of Experience is unknown to one. The enjoyer and the enjoyed, the seer and the seen, are merged in the non-dual, which is invisible. The devotee has become God, the Goal has become God, the Goal has become the path; this indeed is solitude in the universe."

-- Sant Jnaneshwar

HINDU VIEW OF THE WORLD & IT'S PROFOUND PHILOSOPHICAL VISION FOR A DEEPER ECOLOGICAL APPROACH*

-- HINDU DEVOTIONAL ATTITUDE IS A RECOGNITION OF THE DIVINE REALITY WITHIN ALL THINGS

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For Biblical traditions nature based religions are unholy -- There is no separation between the Divine and the world of nature -- The Divine working behind the forms of nature as their inner spirit -- The Yogi can discern the same supreme Reality in everything -- This Vedic vision of unity is the basis for an ecological approach -- In western religions worship is limited to God and his human representatives -- God is looked upon in anthropomorphic terms -- Sacred places are defined primarily in terms of nature -- Sacred nature of a place does not depend upon human activity -- The Divine not just in human terms but also in terms of nature -- Recognition of the Divine reality within all things -- Hindus honor all Divine forms and also recognize the formless Divine -- The Earth is sacred as the manifestation of the Divine Mother -- Ritual worship works with the forces of nature to bring a higher consciousness and energy into the world -- The rationale of Hindu *pujas*, special prayers and *mantras* -- Rationale of Hindu *yajnas* or fire rituals -- Rituals harmonize the human being with the nature and the higher levels of the universe -- Ecological Value of Hindu Rituals and *Mantras* -- Need for Hindus to Restore their Ecological Awareness

- **Hindus can honor the Divine not only in the human form but in all the forms of nature. This Hindu devotional attitude is not mere primitive idolatry as the western religions would like to project. It is not a worship of nature externally. It is a recognition of the Divine reality within all things. It is important that western thinkers examine the Hindu view of the world and its profound philosophy of Vedanta which sees the unity of all beings in the Self. Vedanta can provide a spiritual and philosophical vision for a deeper ecological approach that we so desperately need to save our natural environment.**

The Hindu approach to ecology requires that we first understand how Hindu Dharma views the

* 'Hinduism, Religion of the Sacred Environment', By David Frawley, <http://www.hinduvoice.co.uk/Issues/17/Nature.htm>

world of nature, which is very different than that of the predominant western religions.

For Biblical traditions nature based religions are unholy

Western religious thought based upon Biblical traditions regards nature as something created by God. If nature is sacred, it is so as God's creation. This is the basis of the approach to ecology in western religious traditions. They ask us to protect nature as God's creation, but do not afford nature any sanctity of its own. However, they are generally suspicious of nature Gods and regard worshipping the Earth itself as a form of idolatry. That is why they have historically rejected nature based or pagan religions as unholy, including Hinduism.

There is no separation between the Divine and the world of nature

The Hindu view of nature is based upon the Vedas, Upanishads and Vedanta and their philosophical views, as well as Hindu devotional and ritualistic practices. According to Hindu thought, there is no separation between the Divine and the world of nature. They are the two aspects of the same reality. The cosmic reality is one like the ocean. Nature or the manifest world is like the waves on the surface of the sea. *Brahman* or the unmanifest Absolute is like the depths of the sea. But it is all water, all the same single ocean.

The Divine working behind the forms of nature as their inner spirit

Ultimately for the Hindu as the Upanishads say, "Everything is *Brahman*," *sarvam khalvidam brahma*. This does not mean that the informed Hindu mindlessly worships the forces of nature on an outer level out of superstition and fear. The Hindu perceives a Divine and sacred presence working behind the forms of nature as their inner spirit, which is the real object of their adoration.

The Yogi can discern the same supreme Reality in everything

The sacred presence of *Brahman*, or the Supreme Divine Reality, is there in God, what is called *Ishvara* or the cosmic lord in Hindu thought. Yet it is also present in the soul or reincarnating entity, what is called the *Jiva* as our higher Self. And, it is present in the world of nature, *Jagat*. God, soul and the world are aspects of One Reality, but not in a limited way. Each shares the entirety of the underlying Reality. Each is sacred and holds the same deeper nature of Being, Consciousness and Bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). The Hindu Yogi can discern the same supreme Reality in the human being, a snake, a

particle of dust or a distant star, as well as beyond all time and space!

This Vedic vision of unity is the basis for an ecological approach

This Vedic vision of unity is the basis for an ecological approach in which we can honor the entire universe as part of our own higher Self. It takes us beyond the duality of God and the creation. God does not create the world out of nothing. The world, God and the soul are inherent aspects of the same Eternal Being. We need not protect nature as we would an inferior creature. We can honor nature as our own greater life and expression.

In western religions worship is limited to God and his human representatives

In western religions there are many sacred places. However, these holy sites are defined mainly in human terms, even if they occur in a beautiful natural setting. A place is sacred in western religions because some prophet, savior or saint visited there or communicated to God from that location. The place is not itself sacred according to its natural power alone. In western religions one may visit or admire beautiful places in nature, honoring them as Gods' creation, but one does not worship or honor the place itself as a manifestation of Divinity. Such more important worship is limited to God and his human representatives.

God is looked upon in anthropomorphic terms

God similarly is looked upon in anthropomorphic terms, as a glorified human being, mainly as a father. It is considered sacrilegious to look at the Divine in the form of an animal, plant or force of nature.

Sacred places are defined primarily in terms of nature

In Hindu thought, there are also many sacred sites. But these are defined primarily in terms of nature, not human activity. Mt. Kailas is sacred as a mountain, for example, and as the abode of Shiva or the higher consciousness. Indeed all mountains are sacred because they afford us access to the higher realms of meditation.

Sacred nature of a place does not depend upon human activity

The Ganga is sacred as a river. Indeed all rivers are sacred because they nourish and purify not only the body and mind but the inner being. The sacred nature of such places does not depend upon human activity, though it can be enhanced by human activity as ritual, *mantra* and meditation.

The Divine not just in human terms but also in terms of nature

Similarly, Hindu thought defines the Divine not just in human terms but also in terms of nature. The Divine is not only the father, mother, brother, sister, lord and friend, but also takes form as the sacred animals, plants, rocks, planets and stars. Hindu temples contain not only human representations but also deities with animal heads and animal bodies. They contain sacred plants, flowers, rocks, fire and water as well.

Recognition of the Divine reality within all things

This sense of the Divine in all of nature is the reason why Hindus find sacred places everywhere. The Hindus have sacred mountains and hills, sacred rivers and lakes, sacred trees and groves, sacred flowers and grasses. They can honor the Divine not only in the human form but in all the forms of nature. This Hindu devotional attitude is not mere primitive idolatry as the western religions would like to project. It is not a worship of nature externally. It is a recognition of the Divine reality within all things.

Hindus honor all Divine forms and also recognize the formless Divine

Hindus honor all the forms of the Divine but also recognize the formless Divine even beyond the Creator, extending to the Absolute. Vedanta teaches us that this Absolute or *Brahman* is the being, self and soul of everything animate and inanimate. It says our very Self is the entire universe and the entire universe dwells within us. To honor nature is to honor ourselves. To honor ourselves, one should honor all of nature.

The Earth is sacred as the manifestation of the Divine Mother

For the Hindus the Earth is sacred as the very manifestation of the Divine Mother. She is *Bhumi Devi*, the Earth Goddess. One of the reasons that Hindus honor cows is that the cow represents the energies and qualities of the Earth, selfless caring, sharing and the providing of nourishment to all. Hindu prayers are done at the rising of the Sun, at noon and at sunset, honoring the Divine light that comes to us through the Sun. Nature is always included in the Hindu approach. Even the great Hindu Yogis retire into nature to pursue their practices, taking refuge in the Himalayas and other mountains and wilderness areas where there is a more direct contact with the Divine.

Ritual worship works with the forces of nature to bring a higher consciousness and energy into the world

Hindu ritual worship works with the forces of nature to bring a higher consciousness and energy into the world. Hindu rituals are part of a comprehensive spiritual science designed to connect us to higher planes of consciousness and

creativity. Hindu rituals form probably the most sophisticated ritualistic approach in the world, allowing us to link up with the inner forces of nature in a systematic manner.

The rationale of Hindu *pujas*, special prayers and *mantras*

Hindu *pujas* do this with special prayers and *mantras*, and offerings of subtle sensory essences like flowers, incense, ghee flames, special water or food and fragrant oils. This is designed to allow the *prana* or the Spirit of the Deity to enter into the form for worship, whether it is a statue or a natural object, so that the powers of the higher planes and worlds can have a place to bless us here on Earth.

Rationale of Hindu *yajnas* or fire rituals

Hindu *yajnas* or fire rituals offer special substances into a specially consecrated sacred fire like special wood, resins, ghee, grains and seeds for the fire to transform into higher vibrations for the benefit of all. Hindu scriptures explain these rituals in great detail including special methods of performance and special times and places to do them. No one with an open mind can experience these rituals and not feel elevated.

Rituals harmonize the human being with the nature and the higher levels of the universe

Hindu rituals are designed to harmonize the human being with the world of nature and the higher levels of the universe. The Hindu worship of nature is part of a greater yogic science of accessing all the healing and transformative powers of the greater Conscious Universe of body, mind and spirit. Indeed traditional Yoga practices begin with such rituals.

The Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scriptures, pray for peace from the Earth, Atmosphere, Heaven, Mountains, Rivers, Sun, Moon and Stars, from the entire universe. They see peace as a universal reality, not the result of human activity, not just a truce between warring armies. They show us how to access that universal peace that transcends all boundaries and limited identities.

Vedic *mantras* are composed in special cosmic sounds that connect us to the cosmic mind and the Divine creative energies at work in the universe. Chanting such *mantras* is one of the most powerful things we can do not only to uplift ourselves but to uplift the planet. Vedic *mantras* are part of a sophisticated Yoga of sound, which can help us and our world on many levels.

Ecological Value of Hindu Rituals and *Mantras*

It is important that we bring Hindu rituals and *mantras* to all countries, particularly to their sites of natural beauty in order to bring the Divine powers back into the world. These rituals are part

WE MUST NEVER USE THE DEROGATORY TERM "IDOL" TO DESCRIBE OUR *MURTIS**

WE MUST BEGIN TO CALL OUR RELIGION
BY ITS TRUE NAME: SANATANA DHARMA

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of a universal science that is helpful for everyone and is particularly crucial in this ecological era, where we are damaging the very fabric of life. We must purify and reenergize the sacred sites in nature, through rituals, *mantra* and meditation.

There are many such special sacred places on Earth. These are defined by their natural power more so than any human presence. We must learn to recognize these places and go to them to honor the cosmic being, opening up to them as centers of transformation to restore the natural order that we are violating.

Hinduism has a practical yogic ecology of linking us to the greater universe. If we bring Hindu practices into the modern world, we can not only heal the planet and heal ourselves; we can fulfill our highest goal as a species, the liberation of consciousness into the infinite.

Many indigenous cultures and the old pagan traditions of Europe have a similar understanding of all nature as sacred, and recognize the special sacred places in their environment. This is the basis of ancient sacred sites like Stonehenge and the rituals that went at such places. These traditions also need to be honored and their practices revived.

Need for Hindus to Restore their Ecological Awareness

Many modern Hindus have forgotten their traditional sacred approach to nature. This is particularly obvious in India where nature is often degraded and polluted. Under the compulsions caused by overpopulation, lack of education and the need to develop the economy, nature in India everywhere is suffering. Even Hindu temples are not being kept up with proper dignity and respect. In India, the government has taken over many temples and uses them to make money, giving little back to beautify the temple or even keep them clean.

Outside of India, many Hindus have lost their ecological vision as well. They are used to the urban life and often don't move beyond the cities. It is important that Hindus reclaim the ecological vision inherent in their religion. This means bringing nature back into their lives, not only through rituals, *mantras* and meditation but pilgrimage to the sacred sites in nature like Kailas, Gangotri, Vaishnodevi and many others, not only in India but all over the world.

It is also important that western thinkers examine the Hindu view of the world and its profound philosophy of Vedanta which sees the unity of all beings in the Self. Vedanta can provide a spiritual and philosophical vision for a deeper ecological approach that we so desperately need to save our natural environment.

The most philosophically profound and conceptually beautiful name for our religion -- The full philosophical implications of the term's meaning -- The concept of eternity denotes something quite different from the standard Western notion -- The connotative meaning of "*dharma*" -- Sanatana Dharma is the true name of our religion -- Our religion is Sanatana Dharma -- The derogatory term 'Idol' -- It is a word that is purely negative in meaning -- We foolishly call our sacred images "idols" -- Is Sanatana Dharma Predicated upon Lies? -- Two radically distinct camps: Myth and History -- Non-Judeo-Christian cultures are falsely portrayed as being archaic, primitive, and not worthy of serious scholarly study -- Only the "history" of Western man is a worthy enough subject for liberal arts study, philosophical consideration, and serious intellectual analysis? -- The supposed myths of the *Shastras* seem to have the incorrigible habit of consistently allowing themselves to be proven factual -- The term "mythology" is used as a weapon to delegitimizing the world-view of Sanatana Dharma, as well as the Hindu way of life -- If we don't have the determination to describe our own religion in legitimate and positive terms, how can we expect anyone else to? -- Let us be in agreement that these Sacred Stories of Sanatana Dharma must never again be degraded by terming them "myth" -- Instances of the victims adopting the polemic terminology of their oppressors -- We must reclaim our heritage

- **The term "idol" has been repeatedly used by purported scholars of Sanatana Dharma (both Euro-American, as well as Indian scholars) in their study of our religion. Even more disturbing, however, is the fact that the derogatory term "idol" has been continuously and unthinkingly used by even religious Hindus, as well as by supposedly intelligent Hindu leaders, to this very day. I urge both scholars of Hindu Studies, as well as everyday practitioners of Sanatana Dharma, to refrain from using the derogatory term "idol" and to instead use**

*Excerpted from: "Word as Weapon: The Misuse of Terminology in the Study of Hinduism" by Dr. Frank Gaetano Morales:
<http://www.dharmacentral.com/articles.htm>

one of the more culturally sensitive, and more academically accurate terms such as *murti* that are used by the tradition itself.

- The term “Sanatana Dharma” more accurately communicates the axiomatic metaphysical nature of this concept than do the less meaningful and concocted terms “Hindu/ Hinduism”. It is understandable that the terms “Hindu/Hinduism” will continue to be used periodically as a matter of convenience. After all, it takes time, coupled with continuous education, for people to break themselves of a two hundred year old habit. For the sake of accuracy, as well as to uphold the dignity, beauty and grandeur of our ancient and sacred religion, however, we must always do our utmost to use the much more meaningful, linguistically correct and beautiful name Sanatana Dharma when referring to our religion. Our religion is Sanatana Dharma.

The most philosophically profound and conceptually beautiful name for our religion

The actual term that the Vedic tradition uses to refer to itself is “Dharma”. The word Dharma is found repeatedly throughout the entire corpus of the Vedic scriptures, from the *Rg Veda* to the *Bhagavad Gita*. There is almost no scripture in the entirety of Hinduism where one will not come across the word Dharma as the preeminent name of the religion in question. Sometimes the word Dharma is used by itself; at other times it is used in conjunction with other qualifying words, such as “Vaidika Dharma” (Vedic Dharma), “Vishva Dharma” (Global Dharma), or “Sanatana Dharma” (the Eternal Dharma). The diversity of adjectival emphasis will vary in accordance with the precise context in which the word is used. Of these terms, the name “Sanatana Dharma” has been the most widely used name of this ancient religion, and is used as far back at the *Rg Veda*, the very earliest scripture of Hinduism, and the earliest written text known to humanity. It is also the most philosophically profound and conceptually beautiful name for our religion.

The full philosophical implications of the term’s meaning

While many have no doubt encountered the term “Sanatana Dharma” before, not every follower of Sanatana Dharma is necessarily as familiar with the full philosophical implications of the term’s meaning. Thus it is necessary to explicate the term’s full meaning in depth. The Sanskrit word “*sanatana*” is the easier of the words to translate into non-Sanskrit languages. It denotes that which always is, that which has neither beginning nor end, that which is eternal in its very essence. The concept of eternity that the word “*sanatana*” is trying to convey is a

radically different concept than is ordinarily understood in the Western Abrahamic religions. When the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam employ the concept of eternity, it usually means that *x* thing, having come into being, will never come to an end. In other words, “eternal” for the Abrahamic religions, usually refers only to the future. A more accurate term for this Abrahamic concept is thus “everlasting”, rather than “eternal” proper.

The concept of eternity denotes something quite different from the standard Western notion

In Sanatana Dharma, however, the concept of eternity denotes something quite different from the standard Western notion. In this more expansive and bi-directional model, the concept of *sanatana* extends not only into the infinite recesses of the future, but into the past as well. By referring to something as “*sanatana*”, the idea is that not only will it never come to an end, but it has always had necessary existence. Thus, God (*Brahman*), the individual self (*atman*), prime materiality (*jagat* or *prakriti*), Truth (*satya*), the *Veda* (Truth rendered into literary form), and Dharma itself -- all have necessary existence. They always have been -- and they shall always be.

The connotative meaning of “*dharma*”

Unlike the word “*sanatana*”, the term “*dharma*” is a term that can be properly rendered into the English language only with the greatest of difficulty. This is the case because there is no one corresponding English term that fully renders both the denotative and the connotative meanings of the term with maximal sufficiency. Rather than merely communicating a nominal subject for which there can be an easy word for word equivalency, *dharma* is communicating a metaphysical concept. The denotative meaning of “*dharma*” straightforwardly designates an essential attribute of *x* object -- an attribute whose absence renders the object devoid of either rational meaning or existential significance. A thing’s *dharma* is what constitutes the thing’s very essence, without which, the very concept of the thing would be rendered meaningless. To illustrate the full meaning of this term, we can use the following examples: It is the *dharma* of water to be wet. Without the essential attribute (*dharma*) of wetness, the concept and existential fact of water loses all meaning. Likewise, it is the *dharma* of fire to be hot, the *dharma* of space to be expansive, etc. The denotative meaning of *dharma* is easy enough to comprehend. It is, however, when we come to the connotative meaning of the term “*dharma*” that we then leave

the more microcosmic concerns of *Vaisesika* categoriology behind, and then enter the realm of the overtly philosophical.

Sanatana Dharma is the true name of our religion

For, according to the Vedic tradition itself, the very empirical cosmos in which we find ourselves currently situated also has its own inherent *dharma*, its essential attributive nature, without which the universe becomes meaningless. In this more macro-cosmological sense, the term "*dharma*" is designed to communicate the view that there is an underlying structure of natural law that is inherent in the very intrinsic constitution of Being itself. The Vedic world-view sees the universe as a place that has inherent meaning, purpose and an intelligent design underlying its physical principles and laws. The world is here for a purpose – God's purpose. The word Dharma, in this more important philosophical sense, refers to those underlying natural principles that are inherent in the very structure of reality, and that have their origin in God. Dharma is Natural Law. Thus, if we needed to render the entire term "Sanatana Dharma" into English, we can cautiously translate it as "The Eternal Natural Way". Sanatana Dharma is the true name of our religion.

Our religion is Sanatana Dharma

The term "Sanatana Dharma" more accurately communicates the axiomatic metaphysical nature of this concept than do the less meaningful and concocted terms "Hindu/Hinduism". Thus, when the terms "Hindu/Hinduism" are repeatedly used by both Euro-American and Indian scholars, as well as by actual followers of this eternal spiritual tradition, we fall very far short from fully communicating the metaphysical, ethical and ontological components of the world-view of Sanatana Dharma. The former term – i.e., "Hinduism" -- is a word mistakenly created to describe a culture in a purely ethnic, national and social context. The latter – "Sanatana Dharma" -- is describing an illustrious science of Being in a purely philosophical -- and therefore highly rational, and inherently beautiful -- sense. It is understandable that the terms "Hindu/Hinduism" will continue to be used periodically as a matter of convenience. After all, it takes time, coupled with continuous education, for people to break themselves of a two hundred year old habit. For the sake of accuracy, as well as to uphold the dignity, beauty and grandeur of our ancient and sacred religion, however, we must always do our utmost to use the much more meaningful, linguistically correct and beautiful

name Sanatana Dharma when referring to our religion. Our religion is Sanatana Dharma.

The derogatory term 'Idol'

Several more specific terms have been misemployed in the history of the study of Sanatana Dharma. The first of these more specialized polemically charged words is the term "idol". This word has been repeatedly used by purported scholars of Sanatana Dharma (both Euro-American, as well as Indian scholars) in their study of our religion. Even more disturbing, however, is the fact that the derogatory term "idol" has been continuously and unthinkingly used by even religious Hindus, as well as by supposedly intelligent Hindu leaders, to this very day. At least once a month, for example, I get notices from various Hindu temples inviting me to "idol" installations, *pujas* to the "idol", etc.

It is a word that is purely negative in meaning.

The term "idol" is not an innocently neutral term meant only to signify the objective reality of a religious statue or some other focal point used as a means of meditation upon the Divine. In actuality, it is a term that is historically and theologically devoid of any positive connotations. It is a word that is purely negative in meaning. First arising from a purely Christian/Islamic religious and cultural context, the theologically derived terms "Idol/Idolatry" were quite clearly designed by the creators of the Abrahamic religions to signify the misguided worship of the graven images of fictitious gods. *By its very definition, the word "idol" means an image of a false god.* In the Old Testament, idol worshippers are repeatedly condemned to death. In the Koran, the worshippers of idols are relegated to the category of the demonic. This theological baggage attendant upon the word "idol" was later naturally imported into the nascent field of Indology by the 18th and 19th century European founders of modern Vedic studies. Thus, over time, what originated as a purely religious term, specifically meant to designate a false practice and erroneous theological view, progressed to being accepted as an academic term meant to describe the practices and views of a "foreign" religion. In turn, tragically, the greater Hindu community has itself now unknowingly embraced this term as a legitimate word meant to convey one of the most sacred and integral mechanisms of Hindu worship.

We foolishly call our sacred images "idols"

Unfortunately, when a Christian theologian, a Muslim cleric, or a colonialist-tempered scholar is using the term "idol", they are interpreting the specific religious phenomenon of *murti-puja* in a radically different manner than is the typical Hindu worshipper. For the Christian and Muslim,

murti-puja is nothing more than the demonic worship of abominable graven images. For the atheist academician, it is merely an instance of primitive superstition, worthy of no more consideration than any other intriguing object of anthropological study. Consequently, each and every time we foolishly call our sacred images “idols”, we are actually insulting the divinities we are claiming to worship, and proclaiming to the world that we are worshipping false gods.

For those scholars who have allowed themselves to develop a more sophisticated and objective understanding of the phenomenon of *murti-puja* – that is one that arises from a Hindu, and thus an insider, perspective – it becomes rather apparent that the practice that is occurring via the process of *murti-puja* (or what is sometimes called *archa-puja*) is something radically distinct from the stereotyped image of idol worship that is dishonestly painted by rabidly iconoclastic ideologies. Followers of Sanatana Dharma are not blindly worshipping false idols, but are using divine images whose forms have been revealed via the non-mediated intuitive perception of the Absolute experienced by the *rishis* (the enlightened saints and sages of Sanatana Dharma). Moreover, such images are used primarily as focal points designed as aids to meditative awareness. *Archa-puja* is not a superstition, a form of primitive magical fetishism, or a concocted form of worship, but rather a tried and tested soteriological and meditative device. This being the case, I urge both scholars of Hindu Studies, as well as everyday practitioners of Sanatana Dharma, to refrain from using the derogatory term “idol” and to instead use one of the more culturally sensitive, and more academically accurate terms that are used by the tradition itself. Such terms include: *murti*, *archa*, etc. Take your pick.

Is Sanatana Dharma Predicated upon Lies?

The word “myth” is used to describe the sacred stories of Sanatana Dharma. The related terms “myth”, “mythology”, “mythological”, etc., have had an interesting history and a very pointed polemic use in Euro-American discourse on Sanatana Dharma. That the terms are rife with very negative connotations is doubted by very few. The way the terms are used today both within academia, as well as by the general public, is to denote something that is untrue, false, a lie, “primitive” (i.e., not Euro-American). Several months ago, during a visit to the dentist's office, I saw a pamphlet on the table called “*The Myths About Sexually Transmitted Diseases*”. The ultimate question that all Hindus need to ask

ourselves is: is it really of any intellectual necessity that such a powerfully negative term as “myth” also be associated with the sacred stories, teachings and history of Sanatana Dharma?

Two radically distinct camps: Myth and History

Polemically speaking, one culture's “myth” is another culture's sacred history...and visa versa. The academic field of the study of “mythological” literature was founded by 18th century European Classicists who took their simplistic misconceptions about their own Greco-Roman, pre-Christian religious and cultural heritage, and attempted to then graft these misconceptions onto all contemporary non-Christian cultures -- including that of India. These founders of “mythology” studies -- including such individuals as Sir George Grey, Rudolph Otto and Karl Kerényi -- were convinced, as is unarguably evident in their writings, that the entire realm of religious story could be clearly demarcated into two radically distinct camps: Myth and History.

Non-Judeo-Christian cultures are falsely portrayed as being archaic, primitive, and not worthy of serious scholarly study

The first category is “Myth” proper, that is: the “primitive” stories about gods, goddesses, spirits, demons, magic and mysticism, etc. found throughout all of the indigenous, pre-Christian, and non-Biblical cultures of the world. Such stories are all considered to be certainly no more than the ignorant “pre-scientific” attempts of primitive peoples (*their* words, not mine) to come to terms with and explain such frightening mysteries as natural weather phenomena (the stereotypical scenario offered by these atheistic scholars is that the inexplicable spectacle of lightning and thunder left our ancestors trembling in worshipful fear!). The study of such woefully mythologically ridden cultures was then relegated by these supposed mythology authorities to the nascent fields of anthropology, folk-lore studies, ethnic studies, and art history studies. The “myths” of all non-Judeo-Christian cultures were thus falsely portrayed as being archaic, primitive, and not worthy of serious scholarly study.

Only the “history” of Western man is a worthy enough subject for liberal arts study, philosophical consideration, and serious intellectual analysis?

The second category that religious stories were placed in was termed “History”, that is: Biblical literature and all supposedly factual accounts of events preceding such literature to be found throughout the history of Europe and the post-Columbian Americas. Whereas stories about Rama as the Dharma-*raja* (Dharmic King) of Ayodhya were considered quaint heroic myths,

for example, stories of Moses parting the Red Sea were accepted as being thoroughly historical – this, though there is more archeological and textual evidence for the former than for the latter being actual historical facts. In order to study these supposed historical facts about Judeo-Christian culture, Euro-American scholars employed a very different battery of academic disciplines entirely, including philosophical, ethical, literary, psychological, etc. The only overlapping exception to this biased division of study is the field of philology, which was employed to research both the glorious history of Europe, as well as the primitive utterings of the *Rg Veda*. Apparently, only the “history” of Western man is a worthy enough subject for liberal arts study, philosophical consideration, and serious intellectual analysis.

The supposed myths of the *Shastras* seem to have the incorrigible habit of consistently allowing themselves to be proven factual

There is the wonderful saying that we have all encountered that assures us that “history” is written by the victors. Consequently, the mostly improvable stories of the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark, Abraham, Moses, the Judges, David, etc. are unquestioningly accepted by most European historians -- and tragically by many Indian historians! -- as being incontrovertible and established fact. This, even though the evidence for these supposed historical facts are in many cases no stronger, or even less so, than the evidence supporting the historicity of the ancient stories of Sanatana Dharma. What these Western scholars and their Westernized Indian counterparts called the “mythical” Sarasvati River, for example, was later discovered to be a concrete geological fact in our century by no less empirical evidence than satellite photography. Krishna's “mythological” city of Dwaraka was, likewise, impertinently discovered off the coast of Gujarat about three decades ago (anyone out there have a crane?). The supposed myths of the *Shastras* seem to have the incorrigible habit of consistently allowing themselves to be proven factual.

The term “mythology” is used as a weapon to delegitimizing the world-view of Sanatana Dharma, as well as the Hindu way of life

Despite these hard geological and archeological facts, the histories of the *Puranas* and *Itihasas* are -- unlike the stories of the Bible - - summarily relegated by modern Euro-American scholars to the misty realm of myth. Or more bluntly: to the realm of primitive fables. If we would venture to speculate that what has brought this stark double standard about has been

nothing less than European xenophobia and intellectual colonialism, coupled with a very strong element of Hindu inferiority complex, we would not be far from the mark. The terms “myth”, “mythology”, “mythological”, etc., have been used as a powerful weapon for decades in order to delegitimizing the world-view of Sanatana Dharma, as well as the Hindu and Indian way of life.

If we don't have the determination to describe our own religion in legitimate and positive terms, how can we expect anyone else to?

Whether such unscholarly use of these otherwise legitimate terms will be allowed to continue as a weapon against the sacred stories of Vedic culture, or whether the use of such terms will be relegated to the same dust-bin of other such derogatory terms, is up to the will of the global Hindu community. We ourselves, as Hindus, need to stop using derogatory terms to describe the beliefs and elements of our religion. Such terms as “myth” should be absolutely anathema to every sincere and self-respecting Hindu when speaking about the sacred stories of Sanatana Dharma. If we ourselves don't have the determination to describe our own religion in legitimate and positive terms, how can we expect anyone else to?

Let us be in agreement that these Sacred Stories of Sanatana Dharma must never again be degraded by terming them “myth”

As a more positive alternative to these terms, I propose that scholars who study the religions of South Asia approach their purported object of research in a similar manner as do scholars who study many other formally oppressed non-Christian cultures (such as those who study Native American tribes). In these fields the religious stories of the subjects under study are often referred to by the more culturally sensitive term “Sacred Stories”. I propose that we scholars of Hindu Studies owe the Hindu world no less respect. We need to begin referring to the stories of the Hindu scriptures as Sacred Stories, or *divya katha* in Sanskrit. We can later, as informed persons, debate over the actual meaning of these stories -- whether they are literal history - - *which in many cases they very clearly are* -- or are meant to be taken allegorically or metaphorically. Let us all, in any case be in agreement that these Sacred Stories of Sanatana Dharma must never again be degraded by terming them “myth”.

Instances of the victims adopting the polemic terminology of their oppressors

The perennial use of politically surcharged words to stifle the aspirations of a people, to

deflect the actual meaning of an action or concept, and to otherwise keep a people subservient to the dominant cultural mainstream is nothing new. Additionally, it is not new that the very people who have been the direct victims of such propangandistic terminology will inevitably come to adopt such terms in self-referential ways. We have the case of the Ethiopian Jews, for example, who for hundreds of years were termed “Falashas” – an incredibly derogatory term in the Ethiopian language -- by those who persecuted them. After hundreds of years of such persistent persecution, sadly, the Jews of Ethiopia even began to refer to themselves as the “Falasha” community. If a people are called inferior for long enough a period of time, eventually that population group will start to call themselves inferior as well. Such instances of the victims adopting the polemic terminology of their oppressors has been witnessed repeatedly over the long course of human history – among the Jews, Native Americans, European Pagans, and Gypsies (Romani). Now the Hindu community has joined their ranks.

We must reclaim our heritage

Consequently, the use of inaccurate, and often consciously and maliciously distorted, terminology has been a double-edged source of oppressive discourse. Such terms have been made use of by an intellectually lethargic tradition of South Asian scholars who view the religion of Sanatana Dharma, not as the noble living tradition that it is, but as their personal academic plaything. On the other hand, Hindus themselves have then blindly accepted these non-indigenous and inaccurate terms, and unknowingly adopted them as their own. Thus, while the bulk of the blame must be placed squarely on the shoulders of the oppressors, the victims too need to free themselves of a colonialist-induced mentality of inferiority and acceptance of their oppression. It is my fervent hope that we followers of Sanatana Dharma will stop using the terminology of our antagonists to describe our religion. We must begin to call our religion by its true name: Sanatana Dharma. We must never use the words “idol” and “mythology” to describe our *murtis* and sacred stories again. We must reclaim our heritage. Such positive change might come about slowly, one person at a time. Every revolution, however, begins with thoroughly grasping the power of the word.

**THE PITFALLS OF CALLING HINDUISM
A “WAY OF LIFE” ONLY**

By Prof. B. N. Hebbar

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Hinduism, a way of life & not a religion? -- Religion, philosophy and way of life: These three are not mutually exclusive categories -- Hinduism has all the elements that characterize a religion

Hinduism, a way of life & not a religion?

It became hip and fashionable among some Hindus a few decades ago to say that Hinduism is just a way of life and not a religion. And this has been parroted by many without thinking, ever since. Unfortunately, religions that do not wish Hinduism well have used this to its detriment by saying: “So, Hinduism is a way of life. This means you Hindus don’t have a religion. Your religion then can be our religion. Why don’t you adopt ours as your own? You may keep your way of life.”

Religion, philosophy and way of life: These three are not mutually exclusive categories

It is thus important for Hindus to insist that Hinduism is a religion, philosophy and way of life all rolled into one. These three are not mutually exclusive categories. A tradition can be all three at once as it is in the case of Taoism [Dao-de Jiao as the Chinese call it] in China and Shintoism [Kami-no-michi as the Japanese call it] in Japan. Usually, nationally based religions tend to be all three at once than the missionary religions.

Hinduism has all the elements that characterize a religion

Why are some Hindus hesitant to call Hinduism as a religion when it has all the elements that characterize a religion? Let’s check each of these characteristics:

1. Deities [Hinduism has them]
2. Piety and worship [Hinduism has them]
3. Scriptures [Hinduism has them]
4. Doctrines [Hinduism has them]
5. Sacred space: sanctified places of worship and pilgrimage. [Hinduism has them]
6. Sacred time: feasts and fasts [Hinduism has them]
7. Sacred persons: priests and monastics [Hinduism has them]
8. Liturgy and prayer [Hinduism has them]

9. Sacraments: sanctification of the important stages of life [Hinduism has them]
10. Miracles and mysticism [Hinduism has them]
11. Rituals [Hinduism has them]
12. Code of ethics [Hinduism has them]
13. Contemplative practices [Hinduism has them]
14. Humanism [Hinduism has it]
15. Concept of salvation [Hinduism has it]

Over and above these, is the cultural part. And it is this cultural part that makes Hinduism more than a religion. It also becomes a way of life. One does not exclude the other. Hindus should celebrate their faith as all three [religion, philosophy and way of life] rolled into one as Taoists and Shintoists have done in China and Japan respectively over the centuries.

* * *

-6-

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HINDUS & GROWING PROSPERITY OF INDIANS IN THE US

Subhash Paradkar

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The three elements of Religion -- Quick Review of 3 elements of Hindu Dharma -- We are marching forward

The three elements of Religion

Any religion has three parts: Philosophy, Festivities, and Rituals.

During my 40 years in the U.S., I have seen lack of knowledge and class room training to Hindus as part of growing.

Since 1965, most Indians came here for better financial opportunity in a foreign land, and many adapted day-to-day habits to assimilate in western culture.

My generation started building temples, and many organizations like VHP started inviting Swamis, then started the Vedanta Missions and the Hare Krishna temples. Many baby boomers after WW II from all over the world were attracted to no-materialistic living styles, vegetarian food, and studying about alternative medicine (Ayurveda) and Yoga exercises.

Many native Christians felt threatened with these free and simplistic living styles. Indians here started celebrating many Hindu festivals at home, in rented halls or at temples. It did bring

Hindus together and all three elements of religion stated above are being followed.

In India, there were reforms in Hindu temples and breaking down of barriers of caste system, yet people are treated in not so humane manner and world's attention focused on converting lower caste Hindus, and resistance to Hindu rituals as a part of resistance to Brahmin control and treatment. Media and Internet challenged many practices of Hindus, RSS, VHP, and the Islamic culture flourished in India with appeasement by politicians for vote banks of non-Hindus and Harijans. BJP rose from 10 Members in the Parliament to 150 in ten years.

In 1984, Indira Gandhi's demise created Sikhs going across the border to get terrorist training and separation movement in Punjab (Khalistan) and Kashmir and 7 eastern states took hold. RSS, VHP and BJP made significant transformation in Hindu practices, and they made significant stride towards free economy and market place. This is the history and I was part of this history. I served as security director to protect many Indian dignitaries.

Ram Mandir was a strategy put forward to unite Hindus and Pak had cross-border terrorism as a part of destabilizing Indian government and killing Hindus in Border States of Gujarat, Kashmir and Punjab.

Sep 11, 2001 was an eye opener about the fundamentalist thinking. So, we have come a long way in the last 40 years and now, we are going to celebrate the 60th Independence Day, all over the world.

Global landscape is changing for acceptance of Hindu philosophy: Meditation, *Pranayam* and Yoga are now part of Western and European culture. Art of Living organization is now in 152 countries, and Baba Ramdeo has a website. People understand *Chyavanprash* and *Panch Karmas*.

Spirituality as an essential part of life is now an acceptable norm being preached by people of all faiths, and that we all came from the same Source -- 'One World Family' (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) is now understood by US Congress, and Progressive Islamic World and intelligent people and businessmen are involved in Globalization.

30% of world's IT people come from India. 20% engineers, scientists and doctors are from India. India is now 12th largest economy, and second fastest growing economy in the world.

India is now changing school curriculum to teach Yoga and Meditation. I am working with 20 schools in India's villages on Lions Club pilot program in cooperation with the 'Art of Living' to

train and develop children with *Surya Namaskar, Pranayam, Yoga and Meditation*.

National Committees are formed to look at primary school education and IT is being used to educate village parents, teachers and students. We will see the fruits of our labor in 2025.

We can retain ancient Vedic wisdom and still increase per capita income with less negative influence of the Islamic and Western cultures.

Indian film industry and media and profit motives are there, but you can see Vedic knowledge available on Zee TV and TV Asia, and internet. So, we are winning slowly in this complex world of 6.5 Billion people. Partly because our philosophy is on sound ground, and if we endeavour to balance our body, mind and soul and material wealth, we will be the 4th largest economy among the 200 nations by 2025.

Quick Review of 3 elements of Hindu Dharma

(1) Philosophy that has origin in the 3 Vedas, followed by the Upanishads, Ramayana, Geeta and Puranas are now translated in many languages in the form of stories, analogy that is easily understood by young people raised in the US and India as well as for baby boomer generation like myself.

(2) Festivities have two parts: Some are observed at National level such as Diwali, Dasara, Janmaasthmi, Rama Navami, Shivaratri, Navaratri that show up on Hindu calendar, now available from VHP, and back home in various languages, or on-line. Others are performed at regional level such as Kaurava Chowth in Punjab and Gudi Padava in Maharashtra. Ethnic communities from India try to retain this wherever possible.

(3) Rituals also have regional bias. National level *Pujas, Havans* have similar significance in all regions and languages. *Satyanarayan Puja, Nava Graha Shanti, Vastu Shanti*, all *sanskaras* are performed all over India and the world by Hindu families. Since there were no books and websites available, the burden was on parents, and 'Hinduism is a way of life' was easy answer. The next generation wants logical and scientific reasoning for everything we do. Therefore, parents now have a responsibility not to measure success of their children in terms of material possessions and degrees alone but by living a happy life; stress less, pill less, and in harmony with nature. In olden days, being a quiet and humble person was considered a pussy cat and passive. Now, it is considered a wisdom and healthy life style.

We are marching forward

(4) I came here (USA) in 1968, from freedom fighting, Hindu traditional family associated with Temples, Ashrams, RSS, VHP and BJP in that order so, we had home and social environment that influenced our children to experience Indian culture and Hindu philosophy, festivities, and rituals. I used to teach all the three elements of Hinduism in Balvihars (VHP, Temples, Chinmaya Mission and local schools). For centuries, India had poor transportation and communication among states and villages. Rigid caste system, influx of foreign religions for almost 750 years, 500 dialects, 800 castes, 23 languages, poverty and illiteracy in 8 million villages have made it a challenge to train and develop younger generation. However, now body-mind-soul connection is taught in Health clubs (*Kundalini Yoga*) and every neighborhood. Art of Living org teaches *Yoga Vasishta* in 152 countries with *Pranayam, Yoga and Meditation*. Advaita philosophy is now being preached at the United Nations to have the "One World Family" concept of Hinduism. We assimilated all regions in India, and world is now understanding the "stress free and healthy life styles". Our strength lies in our Vedic wisdom.

(5) Since Sept 11, 2001, Moslems are killing Moslems, and people of all other religions in many countries. Theocratic state like Pakistan is near bankrupt since 1999, and the words, "terrorist -- Islamic fundamentalist -- suicide bombers -- violence, destruction of places of worship" are now linked. Moderate world citizens are now challenging three religions which have caused more killings in the last 40 years: Moslems, Christians and Jews. Hinduism is the mother of all religions and the Universal Consciousness is the source of all.

Our complex religion has survived and flourished because our source has no beginning or end.

* * *

Hinduism has to show that its plurality and all-encompassing acceptance are not signs of disparateness or disunity...

-- Swami Dayananda Saraswati

OUR REAL STRENGTH LIES IN THE TEMPLES

ON HAVING A SPECIFIC MISSION FOR THE SECOND HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES CONFERENCE

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(A Hindu resident of Atlanta, the author makes an open-minded & intelligent approach from a broader perspective, and insists on having a specific mission for the Second Hindu Mandir Executives Conference)

- **Let's approach the matter with a management oriented strategy for the reinforcement of the Hindu Dharma.**
- **Let the process of uniting begin in New Jersey at the forthcoming Temple Conference.**

Glad to know about the forthcoming Mandir Conference in New Jersey. Atlanta was a good beginning in this direction last year. Keep up the good work and the mission.

Our real strength lies in the Temples. They are the real nodes for rallying round! Unfortunately, we have not been, however, able to transform those Temple energies into promoting the right spirit of Hinduism, but only the ritual variety...which though important, does not really translate into effective defense against denigrations about Hinduism.

Always keep the focus on the next generation and their ground realities. Do we ask our next generation to adopt Hinduism in toto or do we adapt the principles of Hinduism for the next generation?

So, let us pass a resolution to request every temple outside of India to have a position of an 'Advocacy Director/Officer' with the specific job to:

- a. Liaise with other Advocacy Directors of other Temples and create a coalition.
- b. Liaise with Hindu organizations that may not have a temple base, e.g., VHP, HAF, HICAD, etc.
- c. Liaise with Hindu University.
- d. Liaise with WAVES.
- e. Liaise with NCERT in India.
- f. Liaise with NRI scholars as well as Indologists of Hinduism/Sanskrit/Indian/Vedic Studies.
- g. Liaise with National organizations such as NFIA, IAFPE, AIA, AAPI, AAHOA.
- h. Liaise with major Hindu spiritual leaders in India and elsewhere.
- i. Set-up a task force to study the strength and weaknesses of Hinduism.
- j. Set-up a Study group to use the media, Bollywood effectively to spread Hinduism.

- k. Set up a task force to help our next generation to resist conversion to any other religion.
- l. Any other activity to defend and effectively spread Hinduism

Unless and until we create this coalition, we will not succeed effectively. The Temple organization Presidents and Temple Priests are too busy managing the day-to-day operations of the Temple along with earning their daily bread...

The Advocacy Directors' job should be very specific and not necessarily engaged internally with temple operations, but externally to liaise with other temple Advocacy Directors.

Let's approach this matter with a management oriented strategy for the reinforcement of the Hindu faith and the progress of the NRI community and its assimilation into the mainstream of the adopted land. One day, God willing, the same Advocacy Directors will also make a difference back in India for the cause of unity amongst all Hindu Temples in India.

Let the process of uniting begin in New Jersey at the forthcoming Temple Conference.

* * *

THE RATIONALE IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE INSTITUTION OF TEMPLES

Images -- The very personification of the Divine

We all know that God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. As such, it is difficult for us to approach Him unless He assumes a human form. So He has assumed for our sake a saguna swarupa. He is worshipped in thousands of temples all over India in particular forms and images. In these temples the Supreme Lord is worshipped in the form of an image. So these images are not merely, as you see, made of metal or stone. They are the very personifications of the Divine; full of splendour, power and joy...So the images in the temples are not lifeless and formless, but full of Chaitanya, full of Divine radiance and power. This life and radiance is infused in the image through the faith and devotion that follows out towards Him out of the hearts of the devotees. It is the faith of millions that makes the Lord manifest in that image...You know, when ever you are worshipping the image of God, you look upon the image as the very manifestation of Divinity...God in the temple is the concrete expression of the universal Truth or Reality.

Worship--The essential step for spiritual evolution

Saguna form of worship is an essential step for our spiritual evolution. The personal form of God is easy to be concentrated upon, easy of darshan

and easy of having a relationship with. He becomes our father, mother and master and ourselves His children and servants. In this kind of relationship with Him we are able to increase our devotion to Him from day to day, until His grace comes to us and purifies us, and He accepts us as His true, loving and confiding children. He becomes our sure, unfailing, protector and helper. He becomes, as some saints have described Him, our adamant armour. Because, you feel His presence everywhere and are sure you are protected by Him in every way and in all situations. So God now is, for you, at once personal and impersonal, divine protector, father, mother, friend and helper

Divine Name for spiritual perfection

When you go to temples, of course, you feel the presence of God there, because you are before the image of God; but Ramdas appeals to you that even when you are outside the temple you should keep your mind ever intone with Him, by singing to yourself the glorious, all-powerful, sweet and holy name of God...By uttering the name of God, gradually we become the very manifestation of God. This is the height to which the repetition of the Name and worship of God lead you. God is so gracious and kind that He converts His devotees into His own likeness. This supreme state of complete liberation and oneness with God, the impersonal, can be achieved through worship. By His grace the devotee reaches spiritual perfection.

-- SWAMI RAMDAS (www.anandashram.org)

The concrete and the Abstract

By worshipping the concrete, one acquires the ability to perceive the abstract. If a *ladoo* which has been formed into a round shape characterizes the form of God with attributes, the very same *ladoo*, crushed and amorphous, may be taken to be God's attributeless form.

-- SRI GONDAVALEKAR MAHARAJ

Image-Worship among the Iconoclasts

All over the world you will find images in some form or other. With some, it is in the form of a man, which is the best form. If I wanted to worship an image I would rather have it in the form of a man than of an animal, or building, or any other form.

One sect thinks a certain form is the right sort of image, and another thinks it is bad. The Christian thinks that when God came in the form of a dove it was all right, but if He comes in the form of a fish, as the Hindus say, it is very wrong and superstitious. The Jews think if an idol be made in the form of a chest with two angels sitting on it, and a book on it, it is all right, but if it is in the form of a man or a woman, it is awful.

The Mohammedans think that when they pray, if they try to form a mental image of the temple with the *Kaaba*, the black stone in it, and turn towards the west, it is all right, but if you form the image in the shape of a church it is idolatry.

This is the defect of image-worship. Yet all these seem to be necessary stages.

-- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

POWER IN TEMPLES -- A MODERN PERSPECTIVE

This is a book that is sure to inspire the devout, impress the scientist and kindle rethinking in the materialist. The book argues, reasonably well, that there is a well-coordinated system of knowledge behind the institution of Mandirs and Mandir worship, and that this elaborate knowledge system accounts for the subtleties of the universe and the man-universe relationship. The book very lucidly presents principals of this aspect of timeless Hindu culture. Its author, whose erudition is clearly apparent, very cogently analyzes the deeper significance of Hindu Mandirs, and how they help us evolve to higher stages existence. Every reader will never look at the Mandirs in the same way after he/she has read the book.

• Author: Srikant • Pages 240 • Illustrations: Color 53, B&W 47 • Availability: www.integralbooks.com

India's cultural and spiritual heritage dates back to millennia. It was from the great *Rishis* of yore, the explorers of every aspect of human life and the universe, the spiritual light of Sanatana Dharma emanated. The wealth of their knowledge and wisdom is a precious treasure of the whole mankind. Today, the world is in such a critical juncture that for the very survival of humanity we have to rediscover the great facts of this universal heritage and thus equip ourselves to be guided by that luminous wisdom.

In this booklet, Swami Jyotirmayananda Puri makes a special effort to bring to light some of the salient features of temples and temple worship. Although many of us go to temples and worship the Deities, only a few of us are adequately aware of the profound principles involved in the concept of temple worship, which is a very important part of India's spiritual heritage. It is time that people should be well informed about the rationale in the background of the institution of temples. This booklet will certainly inspire us to make an in-depth study of this great science of communion with the Divine we inherit from the *Rishis* of yore. Such brief presentation of the facts will inculcate a new awareness in the people of the new millennium and today when many a misleading propaganda is being unleashed by vested interests this becomes very relevant. The thought-provoking articles of the eminent intellectuals appended reinforce and ratify the message of this booklet. It is time that all should become familiar with the greater facts of Hindu Dharma, and the subject of this booklet will attract the attention of readers and inspires them for deeper study.

Shaswat

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LINKS ON HINDU TEMPLE GOVERNANCE

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/religious-freedom/links/Temple_Governance_001172318023/

Revenues from Temple Funds Diverted for Haj Subsidy & Madarassas In Karnataka

http://www.ivarta.com/columns/OL_031029.htm

Why must Temple collections be controlled by Indian Government?

http://www.esamskriti.com/html/new_essay_page.asp?cat_name=why&cid=1084&sid=177

Campaign for autonomy of temples, pluralism & development

<http://www.bharatjagran.com/>

Save Temples Campaign: Hindu Temples in Danger

<http://www.hindujagruti.org/activities/campaigns/religious/save-temples/>

Save Hindu Temples: Global Hindu Heritage Foundation

http://www.vhp-america.org/dynamic_includes/downloads/The%20Plight%20of%20Hindu%20Temples%20in%20Bharat.pdf

<http://www.savetemples.org>

The Threat Against Hindu Temples and Vedic Culture in India

http://www.stephen-knapp.com/threat_against_hindu_temples_and_vedic_culture_in_india.htm

A Secular State Has to Protect Every Religion including Hinduism

-- Interview with Swami Dayananda Saraswati

<http://www.newstodaynet.com/swami/0608ss2.htm>

Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha: United Voice of Hinduism

<http://www.acharyasabha.org>

Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha Conference 2005 in Mumbai

http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/2006/4-6/30-33_acharya.shtml

Exploitation Of Temples -- Is This The Beginning Of Denying

Freedom Of Worship To India's Religious Majority? :

An Open Letter to the Chief Minister of Karnataka

<http://pseudosecularism.blogspot.com/2003/09/exploitation-of-temples-is-this.html>

Exploitation of Hindu Temples

<http://pseudosecularism.blogspot.com/search/label/Exploitation%20of%20Temples>

High Court strikes down Act on Temples:

Karnataka High Court ruling in Sep 2006

<http://pseudosecularism.blogspot.com/2006/09/hc-strikes-down-act-on-temples.html>

Indian Governments Hard on Hindus, their Temples,

Soft on all Others

<http://pseudosecularism.blogspot.com/2006/04/indian-governments-hard-on-hindus.html>

Religion and Legitimation of Power in South Asia:

Edited By Bardwell L. Smith

http://books.google.com/books?id=x2Jzn_LuLasC&pg=RA2-PA110&pg=RA2-PA110&ots=oHYt7arzCt&sig=rBVYaL.YOHleep5Sp0wTkhpkn4vc#PRA2-PA75,M1

Tirupati Declaration Adopted,

Deadline Set For Rectifying Distortions

<http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=141&page=34>

Wakfs, Temples and Sachar

<http://www.socialcause.org/getarticlefromdb.php?id=306>

Swami Jyotirmayananda Puri hails from South Kanara, Karnataka, India; had his school and college studies at the Mangalore Ramakrishna Mission Students Home; got the *mantra diksha* in 1966 while serving in a firm in Madras, from Swami Vireswarananda, the Tenth President of the Ramakrishna Order; joined the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, in 1973; and after *seva*, took to monastic life independently in 1976.

His magnum opus chronicles the important events in the life and times of Swami Vivekananda, and highlights his mission and the message to the world. The first edition of this book (986 pages) was published in 1986, and its fifth edition, entitled '*Vivekananda -- His Gospel of Man-making*' was released at New York in the context of the UN Millennium World Peace Summit 2000. It is available as an e-book on CD-ROM, with an audio-visual presentation titled '*Swami Vivekananda -- The Great Hindu Monk of India and His Lasting Spiritual Legacy to Humanity*'.

Swami Jyotirmayananda has been visiting the U.S.A., since 1993, and has attended the 'Parliament of Religions', Chicago (1993); 'Global Vision 2000', Washington (1993); 'UN Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders', New York (2000); 'Vedanta in the Third Millennium' Conference, Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago (2001); the 'Vishwa Dharma Prasaar Yatra' (2001), Chicago; & the Fourth Biennial Conference of the World Association of Vedic Studies (WAVES), University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, MA, (2002), where he presented a paper on 'India's Spirituality and its World-wide Impact'. In early July 2004, he participated in the 'Konkani Sammelan' at Los Angeles, and also in the Fifth WAVES Conference, University of Maryland, Shady Grove Campus, Maryland, where he presented a paper on 'India's Intellectual Traditions in Contemporary Global Context'.

He was one of the Program Coordinators of the Dharma Summit (<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/2005/8/17.shtml>) convened by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and held at the Rutgers University, New Jersey (Aug. 13-15, 2005); and a Coordination Committee Member, Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha Second Convention, Mumbai (October 16, 17 & 18). He participated in the Sixth WAVES Conference on 'Vedic Ideas for Global Harmony & Peace in Modern Context', held from July 8-10, 2006, at the main campus of the University of Houston in Houston, Texas, where he chaired two sessions, and presented two papers, which are online at www.vivekanandagospel.org -- the web page mainly dealing with his publication and other activities, while the blogspot <http://vivekajyoti.blogspot.com> is a resource on various issues concerning the Hindu society. He can be reached at swamijyoti@vivekanandagospel.org

Some of the works available online:

Arise, Awake! A Call to safeguard Dharma

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/AwakeArise.pdf>

Be better informed about India and Her culture

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/India&herCulture.pdf>

Relevance of Hindu Dharma for the Modern World

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/RelevanceofHinduDharma.pdf>

Renaissance of Hindu Dharma in the New Millennium

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/RenaissanceofHinduDharma.pdf>

a) India's Spirituality & its World Impact

b) India's Intellectual Traditions in Contemporary Global Context

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/wavesconference.htm>

Realizing the Vision of Swami Vivekananda -- The Great Acharya

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/renaissance.htm>

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/acharyasabha.htm>

Shaping the Future of Dharma in North America

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/dharmasummit.htm>

Swami Vivekananda: The Great Hindu Monk of India,

& His Lasting Spiritual Legacy to Humanity

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/presentation.htm>

'Man-making is my mission of life': Swami Vivekananda

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/prologue.htm>

Swami Dayananda Saraswati on issues facing the Hindu Society

<http://www.vivekanandagospel.org/issues.htm>

FRF SUPPORTS AUTONOMY OF HINDU TEMPLES FROM GOVERNMENT CONTROL

‘Forum for Religious Freedom’ (FRF) supports the separation of religion and state and advocates pluralism worldwide. FRF draws its inspiration and respect for all religious traditions from the pluralistic ethos of Hinduism and other Dharma traditions. FRF is endorsed by the ‘Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha’ (<http://www.acharyasabha.org>), the apex, non-denominational, unifying body that provides leadership, guidance and a collective voice for the Hindus. The objectives of FRF are:

(a) To protect and promote the religious rights of non-aggressive religious traditions.

(b) In accordance with the spirit of separation of religion and state, facilitate the governance of temples and institutions of Hinduism and other Dharma traditions, free from government influence and interference.

- *Research and support for autonomy of Hindu Temples from government control in India and work for the modification of Hindu Religious Endowments Act -- a key Human Rights issue for Hindus worldwide.*
- *Develop Hindu Identity Seminar Kit for Temples here and abroad -- Minimum Knowledge for being a Hindu.*
- *Develop portal devoted to Hindu Temple operational and governance issues.*

(c) Preserve, protect, and promote oral and written scriptural, religious and other knowledge traditions of Hinduism and other Dharma traditions, as well as the cultural and religious heritage of Hindu temples.

(d) Working with other Dharmic groups, challenge discrimination and defamation against Hinduism and other Dharma traditions, through legal, media, and public awareness, and

(e) Mobilize and disburse financial and other resources for the objectives listed above.

[FRF is a 501 (c) non-profit religious and charitable organization that was formed in 2007 by a broad coalition of social, religious and academic leaders. FRF is a non-sectarian, non-partisan organization, and it is not affiliated with any political party]

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