12th Annual Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference
Sustaining Dharma through Mandirs

September 15-17, 2017
HINDU TEMPLE OF CENTRAL INDIANA

THEME
Hindu Temples and Institutions: Challenges of the 21st Century
Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc.
(World Hindu Council of America)
thanks the Host Organizations and Mandirs
for their Hospitality in Hosting
Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference 2017

HOSTS
Hindu Temple of Central Indiana
Indianapolis BAPS—Food Sponsor
Hindu Temple of Dayton, OH
Bhartiya Hindu Temple of Columbus, OH
Sri Venkateswara Temple, Pittsburgh
Sri Siva Vishnu Temple, DC-MD
Gayatri Chetna Center, NJ
Hindu Society of North East, Jacksonville, FL
Hindu Temple of Florida, Tampa
Hindu Temple of the Woodlands, TX
Nithyanandeshwara Hindu Temple
Ganesh Temple of Nashville, TN

CO-HOSTS
Hindu Temple of Greater Cincinnati, OH
Gayatri Gyan Mandir, Chicago
Maharasthra Mittra Mandal, Chicago
VHPA, Chicago
Manav Seva Mandir, IL
Shree Jalaram Mandir, IL
Bharatiya Temple, Detroit
Hindu Society of Minnesota
Shri Yoga Vedanta Aashram, NJ
Durga Temple, VA
Hindu Jain Temple, Pittsburgh
Arsha Vidya Pitham, PA
Hindu Center of Charlotte, NC
Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA
Sanskruti Parivar, USA
Regional HMEC of Southern California
Hindu Temple of Quebec
Gayatri Pariwar Yugnirman Canada
Divine Int’l Youth Association (DIYA), Canada
HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES’ CONFERENCE
September 15 - 17, 2017
Indianapolis, IN

Editorial Board
Dr. Surendra Nath Pandey, Editor-in-Chief
Dr. Shyam Narayan Shukla
Dr. Bhartendu Srivastava
Smt. Madhu Bhargava

HMEC
Serving Mandirs of North America and the Caribbean
http://myhmec.com

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America, Inc.
E-mail: vhpa.office@gmail.com Ph: 732-744-0851
Web: http://www.vhp-america.org

Note: In Mandir Vani and HMEC activities and discussions, the use of the term Mandir, Hindu or Hinduism is in very broad sense that includes all religions, places and spiritual organizations of the philosophies that have their roots in Bhārat (India).

Disclaimer: Views expressed in Mandir Vani are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the organizers of HMEC. They are meant to contribute to the understanding and enhancement of Sanatan Dharma, and generate awareness about the needs of the Hindu society as viewed by the authors.
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From the Editor’s Desk

The Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference is being held this year in the mid-American state of Indiana, after eleven years of successful conventions held in various parts of the United States, Canada and the Caribbean. The increasing participation by the Mandirs and Dharmic organizations is an indication of the value HMEC brings to the Dharmic institutions on this side of the Atlantic. Over the years, HMEC has gradually and steadily grown to a much larger organization that provides valuable service to Mandirs, Dharmic organizations and individuals. The convention has brought Mandirs and Dharmic organizations together by providing a venue for social interaction, networking and strengthening of shared common interests. HMEC is certainly helping in Sustaining Dharma through Mandirs.

Mandir Vani, the souvenir magazine to commemorate the HMEC, has been published every year with contributions from scholars and devotees of Sanātan Dharma, and financial support from individuals and organizations. We appreciate their generous support to defray the cost of publication and the conference. We have acknowledged in the form of messages and advertisements from the sponsors, while some chose to remain anonymous, since only return they wish for their generosity is to derive the pleasure of seeing this publication in hands of our members.

In this edition, our readers will find articles on a variety of topics related to Dharma, Mandirs, traditions and families. Our readers will find the two articles on interfaith marriages very informative and quite timely, especially for the Indian diasporas that must meet the challenges that families face in the adopted land. An article on women priests is very progressive and timely idea that should help us expand and diversify the Dharmic pool of priests. Contributions from our Youth has been quite remarkable. (For our purpose, generally we use the term Youth for those under 30). HMEC has been successful in motivating youth engagement in planning and support for the success of the conference. The youth engagement in HMEC and Mandir activities ensures continued sustenance and expansion of Sanātan Dharma in this land where we are a small minority.

May Sanātan Dharma guide our path!

Surendra Nath Pandey
# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## FRIDAY  September 15, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 0 Fri</th>
<th>Session 1 Fri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Inaugural Session - Challenges of the 21st Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 PM</td>
<td>Pre Conference Workshop: Vedic Wisdom and Modern Science</td>
<td>Keya Bhatt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Meal</td>
<td>Samskrita Bharati of Indianapolis, Entertainment by Aks &amp; Lakshmi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session 0 Fri:

1. **Pre Conference Workshop: Vedic Wisdom and Modern Science**
   - Samskrita Bharati of Indianapolis

**FRIDAY  September 15, 2017**

Session 1 Fri:

1. **Inaugural Session - Challenges of the 21st Century**
   - Keya Bhatt

Every good action is only increased many fold with blessings and gratitude. We will open the conference with Vedic Mantras and Diya lighting by hosts of the HMEC 2017. Welcome address by the organizing hosts will be followed by invited talks and inaugural addresses.

- **1.1 Bhavgeet - Ish Hame Deta Hai**
  - Local Indy Hosts

- **1.2 Invocation Through Vedic Mantras**
  - Local Priests

- **1.3 Deep Prajwalan**
  - All Co-Host Temples

- **1.4 Blessings & HMEC Vision**
  - Swamini Svatmavidyanandaji

- **1.5 Welcome from Indianapolis Host Team**
  - Vijay Reddy

- **1.6 Hindu Activism: A Driver of Our Future, Hopes and Dreams**
  - Raman Khanna

- **1.7 Inaugural Address: Challenges of the 21st Century**
  - Swami Pratyagbodhanandaji

- **1.8 Program Agenda Overview**
  - Ami Patel

- **1.90 Ashirvachan**
  - TBD

- **1.10 Instructions**
  - Arun Jain

- **1.11 9:00 PM**
  - Optional Documentary --Temple Makers
  - SR Marri

  - Q/A with the Filmmaker
  - Michael Husain

## SATURDAY PRE-LUNCH PROGRAM

**SATURDAY September 16, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Sadhana</th>
<th>Yoga &amp; Meditation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 AM</td>
<td>Dhyan - Meditation</td>
<td>Pierre Couvillion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>Yogi Devaraj</td>
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</table>

**Meal  7:00 AM**

**Session 2 Sat  8:00 AM - 9:00 AM**

**Temple & Institutions of the Future, Fulfilling Our Hopes and Needs**

- **2.1 Hindu Dharma for the Next Generation**
  - Swamini Svatmavidyanandaji

- **2.2 Temples as Centers for Healing of Body, Mind, and Soul**
  - Robert Arnett
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 AM - 10:00 AM</td>
<td>Youth, Young Adult Engagement</td>
<td>Hindu Dharma's Position on Social Justice Issues</td>
<td>Bramachari Suryanarayananji</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Temple Internship/Employment as a Means for Engagement</td>
<td>Ravi Jaishankar</td>
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<td>Chinmaya Yuva Kendra Program</td>
<td>Kaushik Joshi</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Interfaith Marriages: Summary of 12 years of Research</td>
<td>Dilip Amin</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break</td>
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<td>Relaxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 AM - 10:30 AM</td>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Seva As An Inter-Generational Bridge</td>
<td>Preya Dave</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Encouraging volunteerism: Recognition programs for youth and adults</td>
<td>Anita Gupta</td>
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<td>Seva Diwas - Seva in America programs</td>
<td>Vallabha Tantry</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Hindu Family Support Services</td>
<td>Nainan Desai</td>
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<td>International Seva Projects</td>
<td>Divya Selvakumar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 PM - 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Session 6A</td>
<td>Temple Conceptualization, Construction, Operations and Management</td>
<td>Anil Bajpai</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Temple Construction East Meets West</td>
<td>Sathya Thulasiraman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 6A</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Presenter</td>
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<td>21st Century Temple Communications</td>
<td>Rhagava Ayyagari</td>
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<td>Project Akshaya Vata - Final Stop for Hindu Life</td>
<td>Venkat Subramanian</td>
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<td>Apps for Temple Management &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>Ravee Dudhur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 6B</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM - 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Young, Youth Education Program and Curriculum</td>
<td>Vishal Agarwal</td>
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<tr>
<td>6B.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinmaya Mission Bal Vihar Program</td>
<td>Devendra Trivedi</td>
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<td>6B.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digitizing Hindu Education Programs</td>
<td>Bhakti Mehta</td>
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<tr>
<td>6B.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges and Opportunities in Hindu Education</td>
<td>Vasu Murthy</td>
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<td>6B.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents Worship Day</td>
<td>Venkat Aravala</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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<th>Session 6C</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM - 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Seniors: Current Issues &amp; Challenges and Resolutions</td>
<td>Kumar Dave</td>
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<tr>
<td>6C.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Physical Well Being</td>
<td>Vipin Kalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>6C.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial well being and Retirement planning</td>
<td>Surendra Pandey</td>
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<tr>
<td>6C.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging seniors into temple programs</td>
<td>Inderjit Saini</td>
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<tr>
<td>6C.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging seniors into temple programs</td>
<td>Vinod Gupta</td>
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<td>6C.5</td>
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<td>Panel Discussion: Social Security, Medicare, Living Will</td>
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<th>Session 6D</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM - 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Youth Session: Hinduism, Social Challenges and Other Questions of Today</td>
<td>Ankush Modi, Shama Mehta</td>
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<td>6D.1</td>
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<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 7A</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:30 PM - 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Women's Role in Temple Life and Leadership</td>
<td>Shama Mehta</td>
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<td>7A.1</td>
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<td>Workshop</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 7B</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:30 PM - 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Dealing with the Media</td>
<td>Fred Stella</td>
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<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<th>Session 7C</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:30 PM - 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Swadeshi Indology and its Relevance to the Hindu Temples in the US</td>
<td>Sant Gupta, Ravi Joshi</td>
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<td>7C.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:30 PM - 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Youth Session: Shaastras/Spiritual Content Distribution for Millenials Workshop</td>
<td>Preya Dave, Parth Parihar, Aditya Lingampally</td>
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<td>7D.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<th>Meal</th>
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<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:45 PM - 4:15 PM</td>
<td>Afternoon Tea and Snacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 8A</td>
<td>4:15 PM - 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Developing Common and Simplified Temple Resources</td>
<td>Chandra Reddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>8A.1</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 8B</td>
<td>4:15 PM - 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Temple By Laws and the Legal Implications</td>
<td>Vijay Reddy, Ramu Yeleti, Jatin Shah</td>
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<tr>
<td>8B.1</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 8C</td>
<td>4:15 PM - 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Hindu Executive Leadership Development</td>
<td>Madhu Sharma, Sri Mukthananda</td>
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<td>8C.1</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 8D</td>
<td>4:15 PM - 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Youth Session: Digital Guide for Mandirs Workshop</td>
<td>Bhakti Modi, Sohini Sricar HMEC Interns: Shivani Bajpai, Amruth Bairavasundaram</td>
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<td>8D.1</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30 PM – 6:00 PM</td>
<td>Free time - Networking</td>
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**SATURDAY EVENING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 9</th>
<th>6:00 PM - 10:00 PM</th>
<th>Gala Dinner Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00-6:30 PM</td>
<td>Bus Transfer to HTCI</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:30-6:45 PM</td>
<td>Welcome by HTCI</td>
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<td>6:45-7:00 PM</td>
<td>Aarti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meal</td>
<td>7:00-7:55 PM</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:55 PM – 9:30 PM</td>
<td>Entertainment Program</td>
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<td>Kshitija Dube</td>
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<td>7:55 PM</td>
<td>Invocation</td>
<td>Varuna Dhanabal</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Welcome by HTCI Chairman</td>
<td>Anil Bajpai</td>
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<td>8:05 PM</td>
<td>Welcome by HTCI President</td>
<td>Jay Pandey</td>
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<td>8:10 PM</td>
<td>Indiana Sec. of State Welcome</td>
<td>Sec. of State Connie Lawson</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:15 PM</td>
<td>Sanatana Dharma Scholarship</td>
<td>Sanjay Mehta</td>
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<td>8:25 PM</td>
<td>Indianapolis Mayor Welcome</td>
<td>Mayor Joe Hogsett</td>
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<td>8:30-9:00 PM</td>
<td>Bhajans by Aks &amp; Lakshmi</td>
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<td>9:00-9:30 PM</td>
<td>Bhajans by Anita Lerche</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 PM</td>
<td>Bus Transfer to Hotel</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 PM</td>
<td>Arrive Hotel</td>
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**SUNDAY MORNING PROGRAM**

**SUNDAY September 17, 2017**

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<tr>
<th>Sadhana</th>
<th>6:00 AM</th>
<th>Yoga &amp; Meditation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhyan - Meditation</td>
<td>Pierre Couvillion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>Dr. Yogi Devaraj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meal</td>
<td>7:00 AM</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 10</th>
<th>Sun 8:00 AM - 9:00 AM</th>
<th>Hindu Activism</th>
<th>Darshan Soni</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Political engagement for promoting Hindu interests outside of India</td>
<td></td>
<td>Raja Krishnamoorthi, US Congressman</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
<td>Speaking with One Voice</td>
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<td>Padma Kuppa</td>
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| Meal | 12:15 PM | Lunch |

End of HMEC 2017

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

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

September 15, 2017

Namaste HMEC Delegates

It is a privilege to welcome you to the 12th Hindu Mandir executives’ Conference (HMEC) in Indianapolis. The community response to HMEC conferences has been tremendous. From the first conference in Atlanta in 2006, it has grown to be the largest annual conference for Hindu Institutions and Temples in North America. This ten-year long journey is the result of persistence and commitment of the HMEC guiding team and the team of volunteers from host Mandirs across North America and the Caribbean. Only through their effort, Hindu priests, scholars, sadhus, professors, youth and other intellectuals actively participate in the HMEC conferences to discuss and provide guidance and interpretation of the Hindu philosophical thought.

Mandirs in Americas and other countries outside India must once again become the centers of teaching and learning of Hindu philosophy, traditions, culture and art. The Mandir leaders who seek to transform the role of mandirs into such broader institutions face numerous challenges. The HMEC continues to provide a platform for the mandir executives to share their knowledge and best practices and to build on each other’s experiences in order to grow as a community. The conferees explore avenues of expanding institutional roles in meeting the everchanging needs of Hindus and to ensure the sustainability of Dharma by enhancing the role of Hindu youth.

Our conference theme this year is “Hindu Temples and Institutions: Challenges of the 21st Century.”

Hindu temples and institutions are facing challenges around the globe as technology and social changes affect traditional beliefs and practices. The 12th annual HMEC conference will enable Hindu leaders to look at these trends affecting their institutions and rise to the challenges presented by the digital age in the areas of temple management, religious programs, youth engagement, serving the seniors and the society.

The Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference (HMEC) journey has resulted in a strong network of Mandirs in North America. It has been successful in engaging the Hindu youth organizations such as Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY) and Hindu Students Council (HSC) in the conferences and participate in the mandir management. Going forward, there are immense possibilities to build incredible programs on the foundation of this network. This year the Indianapolis mandirs have shouldered the responsibility of hosting the 12th HMEC. This shows a sign of great unity with an eagerness to serve the community in a noble way. We sincerely thank all of them for being wonderful hosts and demonstrating a way to unite for sustenance of Hindu Dharma.

Abhaya Asthana
Dear HMEC Delegates:

On behalf of the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana (HTCI) and all Hoosiers, I am pleased to welcome all of the delegates and attendees of the 12th Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference. This annual conference is the most important meeting of Temple executives, board members, devotees, and Swamis in the United States. The need for unity has never been greater than it is today and hopefully, during this conference, we can tackle the issues that face Temples across the country and create a dialogue that will raise all of our fortunes.

The theme for this year’s conference is Challenges of the 21st Century. As a relatively young temple, this is an issue for which the HTCI has sought answers. We are hoping that we can gain the knowledge and guidance of our sister Temples and that we may be able to help those organizations that may benefit from our experience as well. Most importantly, conferences such as these strengthen the bonds of Hindus across the country and create a platform for all of us to speak in one singular voice.

Over the next few days, the city of Indianapolis will be your home. The HTCI has received incredible support from the leadership of this city and we are thankful to be part of this vibrant community. We have also forged strong relationships with our state and federal officeholders. We are grateful for leadership that recognizes the importance of religious freedom and has done so much to support this conference.

Finally, as is the case with everything we do, we will embrace each other in the spirit of love that only God can provide. We are all brothers and sisters in this common process. All that is good in this world is due to God and this conference will be our way of expressing our gratitude.

Once again, on behalf of the HTCI team, Indianapolis, and Indiana, welcome to the Hoosier State and please enjoy your stay in the Circle City.

Vijayapal Reddy
Convener, HMEC 2017
317-331-0387
Vijayapalr@gmail.com
Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, Board of Trustees, Executive Committee and the volunteers of our majestic Hindu Temple of Central Indiana (HTCI) it is my privilege and honor to welcome you to the beautiful city of Indianapolis. It is with immense pride that we are hosting the 12th Annual Hindu Mandir Executive Conference here at HTCI on September 15-17, 2017.

By joining us through this spiritual and educational weekend, you are continuing to prove your dedication and commitment to maintaining our heritage and preparing the next generation to lead their lives based on our Hindu values. We have crossed many bridges and travelled a tough path together so that our children can learn the values of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam here in America. It makes us all feel proud that our youth are becoming the torch bearers in presenting the essence of Hinduism to the forefront and establishing their traditions in the western society. In fact, this is a valuable journey for all of us. I am thankful to the vision of VHPA and to the commitment of its volunteers to guide us in this direction. With the spirit of being united and impactful in this cause, HMEC is finally coming to the Crossroads of America.

Once again, I would like to avail this opportunity to welcome all of you to our wonderful city. Please have a safe, enjoyable, and fulfilling visit.

May God bless us all.

Sincerely,

Anil Bajpai
Chairman, Board of Trustees HTCI
Indianapolis, IN
A Message from
Paramacharya Sadasivanathaswami, Hawaii

As Hinduism steadily gains strength in Mother India and abroad, HMEC continues to pioneer its presence in America. Only Hari-Hara knows why this small group rose, like pure cow’s cream, to the top, to become arguably the single most effective US-based organization promoting dharma here. Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami sends his choicest blessings from Hawaii, and all of the monks of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery join him in wishing you the most productive days in Indianapolis.

Editor
Hinduism Today

Rudraksha Forest, Kauai
Banyan Tree with statue, Kauai
August 30, 2017
Robbinsville

The Organizers of HMEC*,

Namaste and Jay Swaminarayan,

Congratulations on the wonderful work of organizing the Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference. It gives us great pleasure to know that Hindus in America come together to preserve our common Hindu values and ‘Adhyatmik’ rituals. Our mandirs are an indispensable part of our identity and provide holy space to come together to celebrate our festivals and inspire our next generation to be proud of our faith, traditions and values.

Our Gurus, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, have always taught the value of “samp” or unity. It is truly joyous to see the “samp” of the Hindu community in America. May all those that come to mandirs for prayers attain true shanti and happiness in all facets of life. My sincere prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that all those participating in the Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference and their families be blessed for their noble work.

Heartyest Jai Shree
Swaminarayan from
Sadhu Keshavjivandas

Jai Swaminarayan and blessings from Sadhu Keshavjivandas (Mahant Swami Maharaj)
MESSAGE

Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference: Hindi Temples and Institutions: Challenges of the 21st Century. The name in itself seems reformatory as it not only proposes a new insight to the current effectiveness of the temples but also gives all of us a chance to ponder upon the ancient perspectives on the functioning, utility and purposes of temples. As the theme elaborates itself expressing the purpose of discussions on sustaining dharma through Mandirs, it becomes important for us to clarify the understanding of Dharma and also the uniformity of this understanding.

My Gurudev Acharya Pt. Shriram Sharma Ji established more than 3500 centres which were later on named as ‘Shaktipeeths’. He used to say that temples need to be the place of enlightenment, realization and service. They should be the places for spiritual, emotional and mental empowerment of an individual.

Through his words, the upcoming challenges of the 21st Century were evident. The changing trends of the society have somewhat challenged the roots of the idea that pompous establishments alone are not going to be the medium to attain peace. Temples will have to regain their identity as the places for peacefulness outside and within. Another major challenge is and will be experienced in the future, is the level of integrity of those who contribute their lives & resources to the temples. The Almighty, in all forms accept emotions and integrity as the offerings from the devotees. The idea of a place representing the Almighty can only be the source of virtues that prevail eternally. Temples can only be the source to enrich these virtues and thus will have to practice and promote integrity as the only outcome of any offering made to them. The temples have to be the place for piousness and the monks of the temples have to represent this with their integrity.

It is time when we revisit the purposes of temples and introduce a structure to evaluate their effectiveness. With this conference, I believe, these thoughts would be pondered upon and some required outcomes would occur. I convey my heartfelt wishes for the success of this conference and to all those who would be attending it. Almighty prevails eternally.

Dr. Chinmay Pandya
Pro Vice Chancellor
Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya
Hindu temples have contributed greatly to America’s religious and cultural landscape, particularly over the last few decades, where they can now be found in most major cities of the country.

Hindus represent one of the most vibrant communities in the United States, Hindu-Americans, whose achievements in education, business and social harmony are well-documented and there for all to see.

Hindu temples bring in the wisdom of the great Dharmic and Yogic traditions of India, which have also gained a wide acceptance in the American population today, among all groups of the society, for health, happiness and higher consciousness.

Hindu temples need to expand their educational outreach and develop stronger social connections to expand their work and their presence in the United States. Their benefits and resources are of great value and benefit to all.

We wish the Hindu Mandir Executive’s Conference all success in promoting their great institutions and continuing their outstanding contributions to humanity.

Dr. David Frawley and Yogini Shambhavi Devi
September 16, 2017

Greetings!

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Indianapolis for the 12th Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference.

One of my great joys as mayor has been my relationship with the Indian community of Indianapolis, a vibrant group that has elevated the diversity in our city and our state, which is indeed our greatest strength. I would like to thank the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana for hosting the HMEC in Indianapolis.

While you are in the city, I hope you can take some time to enjoy some of our world class restaurants, visit our museums and memorials, take a stroll along the canal, or simply walk around and explore our wonderful city. You will find that Hoosier hospitality is more than just a phrase here—it is a way of life.

Once again, welcome to our great city, and I wish you all the best for a successful and enjoyable conference.

Warm regards,

Joseph H. Hogsett
Mayor
City of Indianapolis
Welcome,

On behalf of the state of Indiana and Hoosiers of all faiths, I am pleased to welcome you to Indianapolis for the 12th Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Hindu Temple of Central Indiana for hosting this conference.

Indiana is home to countless religious institutions and we are proud to count the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana amongst them. Hindus in Indiana and across this country represent the very best of what it means to be faithful Americans. I have the sincere hope that this conference can continue that mission and further strengthen the bonds between the Hindu Temple and the people it serves.

On behalf of all Hoosiers, I am thrilled to send my best wishes for a successful and memorable 12th HMEC conference and wish you all the best in promoting faith and friendship in our community.

Sincerely,

Eric Holcomb
Governor
September 15, 2017

Dear Friends,

I want to welcome you to the 12th annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference. We are pleased that for the first time the conference is being held in Indianapolis.

As the largest gathering of Hindu Spiritual and Community leaders in the Western Hemisphere, your work to unite communities and to educate and develop young leaders benefits our state and country. Your principle that the world is one family and that all people — regardless of faith or ethnicity — deserve respect is something we can all agree on. We know that when we work together, we can achieve more.

I want to thank the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana for hosting this event. The temple continues to make our communities and Indiana a better place to live. I hope you all enjoy your time in Indianapolis, and I look forward to our continued partnerships, which make a difference in our communities. Thank you for all you do to enrich our state. I wish you the best of luck at this year’s conference.

Sincerely,

Joe Donnelly
United State Senator
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 1, 2017

Hindu Temple of Central Indiana
3350 N. German Church Road
Indianapolis, IN
46235

Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure to congratulate the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana on the successful organization of this year’s Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference. Since its inception in 2005, the HMEC has shared its rich culture with cities across North America and the Caribbean. Participating mandirs benefit greatly from these conferences, further bolstering their communities at home. In hosting this event, the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana is strengthening its relations with mandirs from across the country and bringing the Indian community of central Indiana closer in touch with other faith communities.

I want to thank the Hindu Temple of Central Indiana and all conference participants for actively engaging in interfaith conversations, bringing religious and cultural differences to important conversations in a positive way. I hope that we can all continue to strengthen the American community, drawing not only from our common ideals, but from our diversity as well. Mandirs play an important role in the lives of many, and their participation in a national dialogue on American diversity helps grow the next generation of open-minded leaders and advocates for positive change.

Thank you for your tireless efforts for the good of our community, and I hope for the great success of your 12th annual conference.

Warm regards,

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress
KEEPING THE VEDIC TRADITION AS RELEVANT AS POSSIBLE

**Stephen Knapp**

I find that one of the biggest challenges in the 21st century is to keep people interested enough to continue their participation in Hinduism and the Vedic traditions. This is especially important with the youth. I have met some Indian youth who feel that there is no need for the traditions of Vedic culture because they are not scientifically validated. “They are simply a bunch of superstitions. So, it is better to focus on modern science than ancient traditions.” But they do not understand that just as there are material sciences, there are also spiritual sciences. So how do we keep the interest in Vedic culture alive? I feel that there are several ways to do this.

Firstly, people need to realize that Hinduism and going to temples is not just a bunch of rituals that most people do not understand. The priests and temple managers need to provide a way in which there are full explanations as to what these rituals are, why we do this, and what are the benefits.

Secondly, by investigating the knowledge and viewpoints in the many topics found in Vedic culture we can certainly see that the practice and utilization of this Vedic knowledge can indeed assist us in many ways, even in this 21st century. In regard to all the trouble we presently see in this world, maybe it is time to look at things through a different and deeper spiritual view to find the answers and directions that are so needed. The knowledge and understandings of this great Vedic culture may indeed be what will help us see through the fog of confusion that seems to envelope so much of society.

Thirdly, what we find in Vedic culture are areas of study, progress and expression that are as relevant today for human advancement as they were hundreds or thousands of years ago. India and its Vedic culture has contributed much to the world, such as its music, beautiful forms of art and architecture, martial arts, astronomy, holistic medicine in Ayurveda, and the mathematical system based on the number ten, along with its yoga systems and philosophy.

Fourthly, when we look at the historical developments that came out of Vedic culture, Vedic mathematics is an example of its contribution to world progress. It is an ancient system that continues to play an important part in modern society. Without the advancements in math that had been established by Vedic culture as far back as 2500 BC and passed along to others, such as the Greeks and Romans, we would not have many of the developments and inventions that we enjoy today. The Greek alphabet, for example, was a great hindrance to calculating. The Egyptians also did not have a numerical system suitable for large calculations. For the number 986 they had to use 23 symbols. The Romans also were in want of a system of mathematical calculations. Only after they adopted the Indian system that was called “Arabic numerals” did they find what they needed.

The numeral script from India spread to Arabia through traders and merchants, and from there up into Europe and elsewhere. It became known as the Arabic numerals, yet the Arabians had called them “Indian figures” (Al-Arqan-Al-Hindu) and the system of math was known as hindisat, or the Indian art.

Fifthly, we can look at other Vedic sciences that are still applied and in use today. A well-developed medical system was in existence well before the 1st century A.D. Ayurveda is the Vedic system of holistic medicine.

Jyotish is the Vedic form of astrology, which is an ancient science and is also being accepted and gaining popularity in the West. Vedic Astrology is meant to help the individual better find his or her way through life. It is to assist in discovering one's highest proclivities, personality, character, qualities, and traits, and what may be one’s best direction for a career, and other things. Thus, a person will least likely waste one’s time in unfulfilling activities, professions or pursuits.

Vástu is another Vedic science of architectural and home arrangement. It made its way through the
orient and became known as Feng Shui, which has become popular in the West. However, Vastu is a science that deals with the flow of energy through a house or building for the highest benefits for those living or working there.

Sixthly, we can look at the forms of Vedic artistic expression that was developed years ago, but still have a prominent place in the world today, and holds much appreciation in modern times. Art in the Vedic tradition was never a mere representation of an artist’s imagination. It was always a vehicle to convey higher truths and principles, levels of reality that may exist beyond our sense perception. It was always used to bring us to a higher purpose of existence and awareness. In this way, it was always sacred and beheld the sacred. Still today it is used to allow others to enter into a transcendental experience, such as with its display of pastimes of Krishna, and so on.

Vedic paintings or symbols are unique in that they can deliver the same spiritual energy, vibration and insight that it represents. In other words, through the meditation and devotional mood of the artist, the art becomes a manifestation of the higher reality. In this way, the painting or symbol becomes the doorway to the spiritual essence contained within. They are like windows into the spiritual world.

As with art, dance in India was not merely an expression of an artist’s emotional mindset or imagination, but was meant to be an interpretation or conveyance of higher spiritual principles or pastimes of the Divine. In fact, in the Vedic pantheon Shiva is known as Nataraja, the king of dancers. Shiva’s dance was also not without a more significant purpose. His dance was based on the rhythm of cosmic energy that pervades the universe, and the destruction of the illusory energy by which all souls are given the opportunity for release from the illusion to attain liberation, moksha.

So, as we can see, Vedic culture and its many areas of knowledge and devotional expression are still as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. And humanity can benefit from it by introspection and in spiritual as well as material development as it did in the past.

The power and relevancy of Vedic culture are found in the number of tools it has always provided in order for humanity to reach its fullest potentials, both as individuals who are searching for their own fulfillment and spiritual awakening, and as a society that can function in harmony with nature and cooperation amongst themselves. It is of utmost importance that we are able to convey this to other Hindus and people in general, and do so in order for everyone to understand the value, the depth and the relevance of Vedic culture in this day and age, and to help keep the interest in it alive.

About the author: Stephen Knapp (Sri Nandanandana dasa), initiated by Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, has been involved in temple management for over 40 years. He is presently chairman of the board of the Detroit Krishna temple, the president of the Vedic Friends Association, and the author of over 40 books on various aspects of Vedic culture, and has taken over 20 trips to visit almost every state in India. www.stephen-knapp.com

Detroit, Michigan
E-mail: srinandan@aol.com
Phone: 313-331-3190
HINDU TEMPLES IN USA DIASPORA AND NOTES FROM MY VISIT WITH DR. ALAGAPPAN CHETTIAR**

Akkaraju Sarma, MD, PhD, FFAFP

**Introduction**: One must recognize multiple independent issues and surroundings where Hindu Diaspora and Temple Buildings are considered. I will present my recollections beginning with the leaders that were responsible for the first Temple in NYC, concurrent were Multi Center events in early and late 1970's. The concept of a Ranganatha Temple in Pomona, N.Y., where, thought provoking initial steps were undertaken by committed Jeeyar Swami. The results overall, the Hindu Diaspora in USA is something many can see satisfaction in all that many can try to emulate. My wife and I have been to at least 4-5 inaugural Pranapratishatas and several for follow up events at 6-year time frames. Thus, many Hindu Immigrants in USA have been blessed in that way.

Figure 1 The Church and Sri. Narasimhan, Pittsburgh Venkatewara Temple


**The Prime Leaders**: When looking at Hindu Diaspora, any examination of the "Temple Builders" will be incomplete, if we do not recognize the contributions of few key individuals, foremost will be Dr. Alagappan Chettiar (AC), a United Nations Employee in Economics Division of many years. He was the Founder-Secretary of Hindu Temple Society of North America. After he retired Sri. Alagappan and Smt. Visalakshi lived in N.Y.C. area for many years** with frequent travels back and forth to India. They are Tamilnadu natives. He motivated people and helped to build Temples as well. Besides AC, Dr. C.V. Narasimhan (CVN) was another central person (was with the United Nations as Deputy Secretary General in NYC) gave the movement to gain the foothold of first Hindu Mandir in 1977 in NYC (was the President of Hindu Temple Society of North America). At this time, Cine Actress Smt. Padmini had immigrated to USA joined hands to give the initial impetus. With their joint initial efforts and persistent approach by AC we saw the establishment of Maha Ganapathi Temple in Queens Borough of N.Y.C. (https://nyganeshtemple.org). Rest is history.

Any discussion of Hindu Diaspora, must include a note on this sacred Hindu Temple at their website there is comprehensive history. With the initiation by Dr. Alagappan and his brother Sri. Valliappan I.A.S., then Collector of Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, T.T.D. in Tirumalai/Tirupati provided support to build the Temple and ground breaking was done in June 1976 and Temple had full support of TTD and over the years has become symbolic Tirupati in USA.
Developments in other parts (in USA):

In this look at the beginnings of Hindu Mandirs, one should not forget that there have been many developments Hinduism focused centers in various parts of USA and several started well but due to many issues did not progress rapidly. Some merged with larger organizations. Some select cases in point (there are many others).

**Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: Shankarcharya Pitham in Stroudsburg, PA**

This religious center such started in 1977, initially headed by a person with Jewish Background, embraced Hindu with title Divine Mother Swami Lakshmy Devyashram [status mahamandaleswari] It attracted sizable Hindu followers in contiguous geographic areas. The Pitham covered 34 acres of pristine Pocono Woodland.

Soon it was led by His Holiness Sri Swami Swananndashram for a few years (1977-83). Later Swamiji relocated to Harrisburg was prime leader at the Hindu [HARI] Temple till early 1990's and eventually returned to India for primarily health reasons. The Stroudsburg Pitham initially was recognized by Sri Srinjeri Jagadguru Mahasamstanam, Srinjeri Matha Sarada Pitham and as well as all Jagadgurus. After a period, reduced activities, the area blossomed when the Pitham was taken over by Srinjeri Shankaracharya Order (http://svbfo.org) and here the leadership of another, Dr. Mani (Yegna) Subramanian (YS) is very central. YS, is another prominent person in the development of Hindu Mandirs, guides the Srinjeri Sarada Temple in Stroudsburg (which later acquired by initial Shankaracharya Pitham). YS guided in the constructions of Temples in California and Canada. Now is President of Krishna Temple in Wooleytown, New Jersey (http://www.krishnatemple.org)

**Wappinger Falls, N.Y. Dashavatar Temple: http://hindusamajtemple.com/**

Again in 1977-time period for another example from upstate New York is beginning of The Dasha-Avatar Temple in Wappinger Falls, N.Y., 12590. In its inauguration, support was universal (from India and especially with two Temple Builders in USA)

**Pomona, N.Y.: Ranganatha Temple.**

Yet another phase of Hindu Diaspora, are the antecedents of Lord Ranganatha Temple (Spiritual guidance of Ahobila Mutt in Srirangam in South India) are very important. Temple is in Pomona, Upstate New York (http://www.ranganatha.org). The Temple has been led by Dr. Venkat Kanumalla, a PhD in Medical Physics. He has now renounced Grahastha Ashram, now known as Sri Krishna Desika Jeeyar Swamy (JS). The antecedents Ranganatha Temple are of importance, as JS had Vigrahas in Panchaloha cast in India, kept at home reverentially, hosted a dozen plus Stapathis for years (1987-1999) and when the Ranganatha Temple (2001) was completed had pranapatrishta. Thus, we see the evolution of Hindu religious Diaspora had multiple independent focal points and with the blessings of major religious organizations from India supporting these causes and in the Eastern Sea Board, with the support of leading Temple Builders (who were in NYC).

**My Conversation with Dr. Alagappa Alagappan.**

We had the pleasure of spending a memorable morning with AC on Sunday July 21, 1913. We spent the whole morning with AC and briefly with
Smt. Visalakshi Chettiar. It was my desire to pick his insights to current Hindu Temples in USA and related issues as of 2013. We could well have spent longer time and get to know more of AC’s insights. Some highlights from the conversation and exchange of ideas. AC was very much guided by the spiritual guidance he had from Paramacharya – The Sage of Kanchi. Along with many others, AC earnestly desired to build a place of worship, Swamigal is also referred to as His Holiness (HH)), considered as a divine incarnation in the lineage of Adi Sankara. He is a real "God" among humans. AC’s further observations, to consider the Mandir with three buildings, the Temple be the main focus with two other structures adjacent and one for "Veda Patasala" and a hall for seniors to work for the Temple related programs with residential facilities. Organizationally mandir must have a Board of Trustees and Executive Committee with clearly with no life time administrative positions (thus decrying the status in some temples of New York). Information on Manimandapam is accessible at http://mahaperyava.org.

Summing up: Hindu Diaspora is thriving well in USA. However, the two Temple builders had given a strong start. However, in parallel many independent movements to build Mandirs had taken occurred. The contacts of Dr. Alagappan thru his brother Sri. Vallinathan (IAS) who as then was the collector of Chittoor was instrumental in getting the support of TTD in 1972-time period. That was a landmark step and great decisions followed. Now we have over 350 plus Mandirs in USA, practically in every major city. Now, we have the task of preserving the culture and transmitting the same not only to our children but also to get main stream communities sensitized to our needs.

Acknowledgments: Grateful Acknowledgment to India Abroad (NYC) for publishing many articles over the years on Hindu Diaspora. The Chief Editor of India Abroad (https://www.indiaabroad.com), Sri. Sunil Adam was contacted who indicated that there were few very old archival photos (from 1970’s). The photo of the Church in NYC that became the first Hindu Temple as well as others from India Abroad are grainy, low resolution. My profound thanks to Dr. Surendra Pandey, PhD., for helping with this article.

** Dr. Alagappan Chettiar reached divine abode in NYC on Oct 24, 2014. [see Obit in N.Y. Times].

About the author:
Ellis Island Medal of Honor Recipient (2016), Dr. Akkaraju Sharma came to USA in 1965 as a Graduate Student, Columbia University (NYC.) Following their marriage, Mrs. Akkaraju (nee Dhurjati) Kameswari who is from Guntur in A.P., came to USA in1967. Along with Sri. Suriyananan Subramanian of Skillman, N.J., Mrs. and Dr. Sharma spent the whole morning with Dr. Alagappan Chettiar and briefly with Smt. Visalakshi Chettiar. Contact information:
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WOMEN PRIESTS: THE TIME IS NOW!

Ranjani Saigal

From the beginning of time a great divide seems to have existed in Hindu tradition. While women are considered the very epitome of Bhakti, the priest in the temples are predominantly men. For most Hindus, their first introduction to religion and spirituality often comes from a mother or a grandmother. Most associate all religious actions at home to the woman of the house.

Having studied engineering at IIT, I was quite used to being in the minority at school and later in my career. However when I started officiating as a priest I was quite surprised to note that priesthood and not engineering is one of the most male dominated professions.

My journey into priesthood was rather accidental. I was raised in a very religious Ayyar family. My father was very knowledgeable about Hindu traditions and well versed in Tamil scriptures. However he did not know Sanskrit. I studied Sanskrit in High School and often worked with my father to help him understand Shlokas. Being married to a Punjabi who was raised with very little exposure to Hindu rituals, I became the head of the household on spiritual matters and religious rituals. I always believed it was important to understand the prayers and hence would explain the meaning while I perform the prayers at home and to friends. Slowly I got requests to perform prayers for friends. Although I started leading the Karwa Chauth prayers at a local temple, I never considered myself to be a priest and felt that only a man can be a priest.

By cosmic-karmic coincidence I was asked to perform a wedding. For various reasons I became the only choice for a priest. This led me to seek training. Gayatri Parivar encourages everyone to take on the role of a priest. The leader Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya has done yeomen service to the Hindus by clearly documenting the procedures for the different Sanskars and asking everyone to train in it. As I was training under the New England leaders, Sangeetha and Sanjay Saxena ji, they cautioned me that when I perform the ceremony many may question whether a woman is allowed to be a priest. They asked me to share that Gurudev Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya has given the permission. Ever since, I am also surprised at the number of people who question my ‘woman-priest” status. I also realized how visionary Gurudev was to offer his permission.

The journey has led me to deeply understand the role of priest in the modern context. A priest is no longer just a “Hothara”- a person who chants the mantras but rather a “Purohit” – who works for the betterment of the world. The temple also is no longer just a “Kovil – Home for God” but is also a Hindu community center.

The role of traditional priests at temples in India is often limited to performing the rituals. However, the role of the temple in the US has added dimensions to it, so I submit that seeking a female priest may serve the temples well.

As we look at history, we have evidence of scholarly women like Gargi who obviously was given extensive opportunity to take part in Yagnas. Tamil literature indicates that in ancient times, many temples had women performing priests’ role. Thus, there is nothing inherent in the scriptures that prevents women from becoming priests.

There have been considerable efforts in India to train women to be priests. Considering that in the modern times the head of spiritual activities in a home is often the woman; it makes perfect sense to encourage women to lead community spiritual activities. This would certainly include becoming a priest. Interviews with women in Pune who used women priests indicated that there is a positive feeling about women priests. “I felt very comfortable having a woman priest. I found it easier to talk to them rather than a man” said a respondent.
Priests in American temples who have come from India are trained traditionally. It is a lot of adjustment for them to learn the language and the culture of the country. Often their lack of knowledge of English is a big impediment to them reaching out to the youngsters. Having now learned quite a bit of Poojas and traditions, I also realize that many priests who grew up in priest families have not had extensive training in the Puja Vidhi and often may not be performing the services correctly.

Thus, instead of taking priests from India and training them in American culture why not offer training to Indian Americans, particularly the women and offer them priesthood? This would be especially good for women seeking a second career or for women who are empty-nesters. Already we see many of them involving themselves as volunteers at temples, preparing food, making garlands and doing other services for the temple.

Having a woman priest will send a strong message to Hindu youngsters that women can have spiritual authority, not only at home but in the community as well. As the temple adds on the angle of a community center, a woman priest may succeed in bringing other services, especially for the children who need to become the next set of standard bearers for sustaining Hindu traditions.

Being a priest and performing prayers has been a great joy for me. It has truly transformed me and brought closer to the Divine. I hope women around the country will have the opportunity. I also hope temples will consider hiring women priests for surely its time has come.

About the author: Mrs. Ranjani Saigal is the Executive Director of the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA. A graduate of IIT Bombay, she worked in the field of education technology at MIT and Tufts University. A trained Hindu Priest, she officiates at weddings and leads prayers at temples in the Boston area. A Bharatanatyam teacher, she was recognized by the Governor of Massachusetts for her contributions to the arts. She is the co-founder of an Indian American e-magazine Lokvani.com. She was awarded the India New England Woman of the Year award in 2012 and along with her husband received the Sanskriti Saurabh Samman from VHPA, New England in 2017. Married to Prof. Anil Saigal, she is mother of a wonderful daughter and a son.

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HINDUISM: ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

Hiro Badlani, M.D

“The reason for the immortality of the Vedic religion of Hinduism is that while retaining its spiritual identity, it has been changing its outward form in accordance with the demands of the time; and particularly it is the only religion which has been able to meet the challenges of science, which governs the thought and life of the Modern age.” American philosopher J. B. Pratt

Sanātana Dharma, popularly known as Hinduism is now regarded as the oldest living religion of the world. There are few other pre-historic faiths, which also originated very early in human history, but most have almost disappeared. Hinduism has survived and is practiced by nearly 1 billion followers; now spread in many countries around the globe. Although a few have been converted from other religions into Hinduism, Hindus in other countries outside India are mostly descendants of Hindu parents. Hinduism recognizes the Vedic teachings as its basic principles. However, the roots of this religion go back a long way, in much earlier period.

It is believed that after the development of modern ‘thinking’ brain about 200,000 years ago, human beings started to move out of their place of origin Africa to all various destinations. Four important groups: Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian, and Aryan arrived in the Indian subcontinent. The earliest was the Austro-Asian, which group passed by from Africa on its way to Australia about fifty thousand years ago.

New evidence suggests that the Saraswati and Sindhu (also known as the Indus) rivers originated at the end of the great Ice Age, about 10 thousand years ago. It is believed that the colossal civilization along this verdant belt was more widely spread than the civilizations of Egypt or Greece. The Saraswati River ran parallel to the Sindhu River, about two hundred miles east of it. The huge mass of land between the two great rivers developed as the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization. There are few other names also assigned to this pre-historic civilization like the Indus, Harrapan etc. but many Hindu scholars prefer to call by this name, which covers all the vast area from north to south and from east to west between these two rivers. Names of these two rivers are mentioned repeatedly in the most ancient Hindu scripture, the Rig Veda.

The excavations of the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization (3300–1300 BCE) ---more commonly known as Indus civilization--in 1920 show evidence of the carvings of Shiva in his proto form as Pasupati, the lord of all animal kingdoms, and also in the yoga āsana, or yoga positions. There are also carvings of exuberant feminine deities, which would later be known as various forms of the Mother Goddess, Shakti. The figurines, in meditative poses of the lotus position and standing kayotsarga (relaxation with self-awareness), are very similar to those later adopted by the Buddha and the Tirthankars (humans who achieve enlightenment) of the Jain religion. These carvings are said to point toward the concepts of God as prevalent in that period. This led to an exigent feature of Hinduism: it would always remain centered around God rather than one individual or prophet. These activities of the early prehistoric period are regarded as of the proto-religious nature, which would in course of time heavily influence and contribute toward the formation of more formal religion of Hinduism, and also other three religions Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, which all originated in India and share very considerably their philosophy as well as the teachings.

Although there is evidence of significant spiritual activity in the prehistoric period of the Sindhu-Saraswati civilization, it would be correct to say that the real foundation of Hinduism was laid in the Vedic era. Most authorities consider that the first of these Vedas, the Rig Veda, was revealed around 1500 BCE. It is also considered the earliest scripture in human history. It is believed, however, that these psalms of wisdom were disclosed over many centuries, memorized, and orally conveyed from generation to generation within priestly families, then finally written down in Brahmi script about
a thousand years later. Brahmi is the precursor of the present Devanagari script, the script of today’s Sanskrit and Hindi which developed in the earlier part of first millennium.

Hinduism was not created by one single founder, nor would one single scripture be its sole authority. Also, one single individual did not create the Vedas either. A series of learned sages, the Rishis, sat on the riverbanks, the mountaintops, and in the forests for extended periods of time. Thus, Hinduism was established by many an enlightened soul, spread across millennia. Rishis performed austerities, contemplated, and meditated, seeking solutions for the eternal problems of mankind. They would establish a spiritual union with the divine and be inspired with the revelations from their inner selves. These inspired thoughts and ideas were then passed on from father to son or from teacher to pupil, as Srutis, the revelations.

Different ethnic groups, however, retained much of their original linguistics and folklore, apart from influencing the mainstream Sanskrit. India today has nearly thirty languages and over five hundred dialects in use. Hinduism was born in the cradle of plurality.

Historically, Āryans have been credited with the creation of the Vedas, and the land of their abode was known as Āryāvarta. Literally Ārya, derived from Sanskrit, means “noble.” It is now felt that it only relates to the section of a larger society, which had become more culturally advanced.

One more equally ancient and great civilization was established in the south of India. This became the home of the Dravidian culture, which incorporated Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and other languages of this group. Dravidian culture has its own distinguished history, literature, fine arts, and spiritual heritage. The Dravidian community adopted the emerging Hinduism thought, translating it into its own languages and script. The acceptance of the Vedas as the supreme authority, however, eventually became the melting point of many diverse ethnic cultures toward the formation of what is today known as Hinduism.

The history of Indian civilization begins in the Neolithic cultures dating back to the late eighth millennium B.C. Advancing from the hunter’s life to the agriculture and vegetarianism in India brought about the major cultural pursuits. The stone cutting techniques were modified from hunting tools toward sculpture, which became a great obsession with Indian people in the past and has continued to be an artistic passion even now.

Hinduism—religious philosophy propounded by the conglomeration of ethnically diverse groups—has been compared to a growing banyan tree; spreading its roots on the earth and sprouting up in many directions. In Hindu faith, there are no set parameters and no rigid schedules. Hinduism is a vastly liberal religion. In fact, it openly and fervently encourages and tolerates differences of opinion, use of discretion, and interpretation based on one’s own perceptions. To a very large extent it has retained its open-arm ethos over the millennia. At the same time, there are some strong ethical principles and rituals that characterize this religion. The great Vedas and Upanishads affirm these principles in an organized compilation. Belief in the authority of these ancient scriptures is one of the tenets of Hinduism.

The concept of Hinduism thus has grown out of the merging together and union of many sects and cultures of different origins, joining together with greater freedom to pursue their individual customs, manners, practices, and languages. It is like a mighty ocean of thought, which has risen from the confluence of many small and large, old and new rivers of philosophy and doctrine. The origin of Hinduism however fixedly belongs to India, without contest. Max Muller also confirms, “The Vedic religion was the only one the development of which took place without any extraneous influences.

The Vedas are regarded as literature immortal. The word Veda originates from the root vid, which means “to know.” Regarded as the great truths and passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another, these scriptures attained supreme authority, which remains unchanged even today. The word sruti is evolved from the root shru, which means, “to hear.” It is said that the gods dictated the Vedas, and the sages first heard them internally and then passed them on. The authorship of these earliest scriptures is regarded
as nonhuman (*apauarusya*) in origin. Hindus believe that only the spiritual seers of highest purity (*Rishis*) perceive these inspirational truths, “almost as naturally as fruit is produced from a flower out of the mysterious center.” The Vedas were not written by a single author but by many highly enlightened and virtuous masters. These scriptures attained supreme authority, which is still considered sagacious. Hindu theology, however, soon charted a new direction. The old teachings were respected and revered but subtly changed as the situation and circumstance demanded. Dynamic character became visible, but no force or violence was deployed.

Changes came in succession through the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Shrimad Bhagavatam, and many other Holy writings. Through more such changes, new religions were formed, such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Many new sects, or *sampradāya*, also organized. New ideas percolated, giving the impetus to grow and survive through oncoming challenges. The dynamic character of Hinduism became well established, with a free flow of ideas and philosophies.

The Jain scriptures stress the phenomenon of different points of view—*anekta*—making way for a more restrained and rather non-dogmatic approach to various problems—a crying need for today’s world situation. In our own times, the energetic roar of Swami Vivekananda became the bugle of another major reform movement. He boldly carried the message of his guru Sri Rāmakrishna that all religions are but manifestations of one supreme truth. He reaffirmed that true religion lies in the transformation of our inner being (*antahkaran*), and service of the poor and needy became more valid and relevant than empty, prolonged rituals. He regarded service as the *karma yoga*. Any form of good and useful service rendered with sincerity and unselfishness merits as good karma, and spiritually rewarding. He also taught that religion need not be in the hands of a few learned priests; we all may learn the principles of religion and use these in everyday living. The great swami even proclaimed, “There is nothing like a closed book on Vedantism. Something, which is considered useful to human society, may be adopted at any time.”

Hinduism is a dynamic faith. Even so there are many basic principles and philosophies, which have stood the test of time. Many of these in fact have been acclaimed by modern science as most worthy and beneficial. ‘Consciousness,’ ‘Meditation,’ ‘Yoga,’ ‘Vegetarianism,’ ‘Āyurveda,’ ‘Āhimsā -Non-violence,’ etc. are now accepted by the world society. Its other main concepts like Ātmā -Soul, Avtaran - God-incarnation, *Punar-janma* -Re-incarnation, *Karma* -Actions etc. too are being studied very seriously by the modern discipline with the help of the most advanced technological tools. Other Hindu Thoughts like *Ekam sad vipra bahudhā vadanti*. (The truth or God in one; sages call it by various names), *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the entire world is one family), *Satyameva Jayate* (Truth alone triumphs), *Dayā Dharma kā Mul Hai* (Compassion is the root of religion) etc. have been hailed as highest spiritual principles for mankind. These fundamental ancient values and philosophies have served as the rock foundation through ages. Hinduism is therefore also regarded as the Vedic religion subscribing to *Dharma* philosophy.

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INTERFAITH MARRIAGES ARE PART OF OUR NEW LIFE

Dilip Amin, Ph.D.

In the Western world, the young adults have the opportunity to date individuals from other faiths, especially during their college years. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in North America about a third of the young generation of Dharmics (Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs) marry Abrahamics (Christians, Jews and Muslims). This trend is expected to rise in the years ahead.

There is often a large gap between the expectations of parents and children about the child's choice of a life partner, at least initially. Thus, when an Abrahamic life partner is selected, Dharmic new adults will frequently make decisions without prior advice, guidance, or consultation with their parents and vice versa.

It is safe to say that most youths are not sufficiently knowledgeable about others’ faiths and how they differ from their own faith. Further, parents are often ill equipped to guide their new adults in this critical transition, resulting in irrational arguments between generations.

In the predominantly first-generation immigrant Hindu and Muslim communities, some parents with unmarried children may look smugly at others whose child has an interfaith spouse without realizing that it could happen in their own home a few years down the road.

We need to recognize that interfaith marriages are a matter of chance, regardless of the religious training given in childhood. Parents of interfaith married couples also need to learn to live with a new reality of life.

Parents who have children in interfaith marriages are reluctant to publicly share their experience, resulting in a loss of critical knowledge for the benefit of each community. It is hoped that wealth of knowledge collected at InterfaithShaadi.org about complexities in interfaith marriages will be of value to many communities.

Interfaith marriages are a part of our modern life and we need to learn to be prepared for it. Several interfaith marriage issues need to be addressed such as:

1) What will be the religion of children?
2) An Abrahamic must ask: will they have to be a part of the Hindu worship practice of puja and the display of Hindu Ishvara icons in the home?
3) Will there be expectation of religious conversion of the groom/bride before marriage?
4) A Dharmic must ask: is there any expectation of a religious “label” to be placed on the child(ren) by BBS (Baptism -Christian, Bris -Jewish or Sunat -Islamic)?
   a. What will be the names of children?
   b. Will there be circumcision for religious reason?
5) Which religion will be followed for the funeral rites of the spouse and children by this marriage?

Not all interfaith spouses try to impose their religious beliefs/practices on their counterpart in marriage, but it is critical to find out the facts sooner rather than later. It is also important to recognize that despite all the potential marital pitfalls, a successful and fulfilling inter-religious marriage is possible. One effective way to achieve this is by not imposing one's religious beliefs on the other partner.

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MEERA VERSUS MARGARET: DISCRIMINATION OF OWN TYPE

Dilip Amin, Ph.D.

Interfaith marriages have many issues, but intra or within faith marriages are not without their own issues either. The within faith divorce rates and gravity of problems are also significant. Some of the root causes of problems facing within faith marriages in Eastern culture are unusually high expectations, ingrained social customs, discrimination against women in some cases, and sometimes the paradoxical human nature to discriminate against one’s own type. It is time for an attitude change. In this article, some of the key issues related to within faith marriages of people from Eastern cultures are highlighted using hypothetical names, Meera (Hindu) and Margaret (Western Christian).

As a new fiancée in a Hindu family, Meera may be expected from the start to help her mother-in-law-to-be in the kitchen frying samosas (Indian dumplings) while the same Indian mother-in-law-to-be will be joyous if Margaret just eats the samosas she has fried for her. Any gift from Meera’s parents may not be sufficient to please the Hindu boy’s parents, while the same parents may gladly buy many Indian costumes for Margaret and her entire family at their own expense.

In many cultures, women have traditionally been housewives and have been expected to be responsible for household chores and for maintaining social relationships. In this day and age, the new generation of educated Eastern women are expected to take on additional responsibilities such as earning for the family. Unfortunately, some Eastern men and their families have not fully adapted to the reality of this social change. Meera may work outside the home but when she returns home after work, she is expected to carry out all household chores, including taking care of children and cooking. Her husband may decide to help where he feels appropriate or may just relax. The same Eastern man, if married to Margaret, will gladly take over many household chores including washing dishes.

Eastern parents are not used to seeing men working in the kitchen or folding the laundry. When Eastern parents visit their son in the West, normally they wish to relax during their vacation. When they see their son going into the kitchen to help Meera, the parents will immediately intervene and offer to take over their son’s chores, not Meera’s. The same Eastern parents do not realize that they are much less likely to have a chance of living with Margaret for a significant time during their visit.

The author knows of a case where a Hindu-American girl married a Pakistani after religious conversion to Islam. The (former) Hindu is treated like a queen by Muslim in-laws whenever she visits Pakistan. In contrast, her Muslim sister-in-law from Pakistan gets rude treatment from the same Muslim in-laws in spite of her doing all the daily chores. These Pakistani parents do not realize that the (former) Hindu daughter-in-law, in her mind, underwent a fake-conversion ceremony (shahadah oath) necessary for the Islamic nikaah wedding. The Pakistani parents are still unaware today that this couple also had a Hindu wedding ceremony (prohibited in Islam) and that their Hindu daughter-in-law is performing Ganesh puja every day in America.

When there is a within faith marriage, parents expect to maintain traditions coming from generations. In another example, [1] Bangladeshi Raquib’s Muslim-Muslim engagement is in trouble because of the expectations that he must purchase certain gifts (clothes) of sufficient value for his wife’s parents in Pakistan. While the dowry system is still prevalent in the East, the parents would not even dream of a dowry if the engagement was to Margaret.

It is normal for Eastern parents to micro-analyze a potential fiancé(e) when it is a within faith marriage. For example, a Patel-Hindu contemplating marriage to another Patel-Hindu has to answer if the selected Patel is Kadva or Leuva Patel and whether they are Swaminarayan, Shaivites or Vaishnav. However, the same parents will not know about Margaret beyond the label of German-French.
During the engagement process, the within faith fiancé(e) undergoes strict scrutiny and background checks. Even if there were some un-authenticated information that Meera was flirting with boys in college, it could become a big moral issue. It is a practice in some Muslim communities to display a bloody bed sheet after the honeymoon night as proof of the bride’s virginity and if the new bride does not come through, it could be grounds for a divorce on the first day. Would they follow the same practice if the wife was Margaret?

Many Eastern boys and girls in Western colleges purposely date friends from a different faith. One of the main reasons is that in the early 20’s, within faith dating often escalates to talk of marriage that they have no interest in now. Muslim and Hindu girls will not consider sleeping with a boyfriend of their own faith due to the social stigma; these girls may be less reluctant with a boyfriend from another faith. Likewise, an Eastern boy may start dating Margaret just for the romance but may end up marrying her.

Due to the issues mentioned above, should Eastern boys and girls consider interfaith marriage over within faith marriage? That is certainly not the message here. Interfaith marriages have their own issues. In general, divorce rates in interfaith marriages are higher compared to within faith marriages.[2] Most interfaith issues surface after children reach the ages of 5-13, when it becomes time to decide the children’s “formal” religion.

Cultural issues could also add to complexities at a later age. As an Eastern man enters late middle age (i.e. 50+ years) he would tend to go back to his own roots and may find that there is less of common interest left with the menopausal-Margaret.

Compared to interfaith marriages, the gravity of issues is higher in the early years for within faith married couples. If Meera wishes to be successful in a within faith marriage, she needs to learn to deal sternly with her in-laws. From the start, Meera has to start teaching the Eastern husband about the more contemporary rules of married life. If Meera deals with the issues early on, her marriage may improve over the years. In contrast, many interfaith marriage issues tend to resurface about ten years into the marriage. These religious conflicts may continue even until it is time to perform the final rites.

The time has come for Eastern parents to adapt to the new realities of life. Typically, Hindu parents will always have something to complain about with Meera’s choices, whether she is in an interfaith or within faith marriage. Those parents should be reminded that the situation could potentially be worse if Meera decides to get into a relationship with Margaret!

Parents should know that they don’t “own” their child; rather the child has come into this world through them. If parents start respecting their children like they respect their friends and boss at work, the parent-child relationship will blossom and both will benefit.

The grass is always greener on the other side. Instead of getting stuck on issues in your planned married life, one needs to learn to deal with issues at hand. For example, if a person raised in the Dharmic faith fell in love with a religious person from an Abrahamic faith, the most critical questions to address upfront are the decisions whether or not to convert to the spouse’s religion and what the formal religion of any future children would be. Dharmic couples considering a within faith marriage would be advised to evaluate real compatibility with each other and potential negative influences of in-laws.

Life is never like a rose garden; and even if it is, roses always have thorns. Learn to live and let others live.


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THE CHALLENGES AND CHOICES IN VISITING TEMPLES IN 21ST CENTURY

Chandra Reddy M.D.

It is a great blessing to be born as a Human Being onto this mother Earth. We are born with unique faculties of discrimination and with a choice of action. From the time of birth, the human being is a "wanting person" and seeks external happiness, security and peace. He forgets that he is a spiritual being to begin with and that he is already an accomplished person with total happiness, adequacy and peace within himself. To gain the knowledge to understand that happiness lies within, one must turn to scriptures, temples, and satsang.

THE PURPOSE OF HINDU (SANĀTANA DHARMA) SCRIPTURES

In order to remove these age-old feelings of inadequacy in humankind and to alleviate human suffering, our Indian ancestors, particularly Rishis and Acharyas, gave us various means to gain knowledge. The spiritual scriptures are one of these means to educate and guide towards Self realization. Unfortunately, until recently, the vast volumes of the Hindu scriptures (Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutra, Itihāsas, and Puranas) were written only in the Sanskrit language and available to a few selected groups. Apart from the language disadvantage in transmitting knowledge, the birth of innumerable sects and the divisions within the Hindu Religion created more confusion and frustration. This led individuals away from the Dharmic religion and pushed them towards a more materialistic life.

So where do we find this knowledge? This knowledge and God’s Grace comes only through a Guru. Then where do you find this Guru? Sri Sankarāchārya answered these questions indirectly through this stanza. Saying “Bhaja Govindam” three times indicates three places where one can find a Guru or God. The first place is when at home, either while reading a scripture or worshiping the Ishta Devata (in an altar setup at home). The second place is at the Temple at the feet of consecrated Ishta Devatas. The third place is within you, as He sits in your heart as antharyamin (Paramātmā) and He is available 24/7.

Now a legitimate and intelligent question comes into play. If God is everything and everywhere, why there is a need to go to the Temple?

THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TEMPLES IN 21ST CENTURY

Due to fast paced lives, materialistic attachments, and a decline in traditional oral transmission of spiritual knowledge, today’s generation has a poor understanding about our Temples. As a result, the majority have drifted away and started questioning the concept of God and Its relationship to himself (Jivas-Living beings) and Jagat (the world). They ask questions such as: “Where is God?”, “Who is God?” and “Why is there a God”. However, the right question to ask would be “What is God?”. According to the Vedas there is only God and everything is in Him. What we see on this phenomenal world is only His cosmic play and we are the players playing our role according to our karmic imprints.

In order to visualize and realize Him, they proposed abstract images (pratimās), symbols (Pratikas), and Idols (Murtis) in the form of Deities in the temples through iconography to show us the concrete form of Idealism with a visible God. In addition, in order to bring this abstract knowledge to the common public, the ancestors put that knowledge in the form of stories through Itihāsas like Ramayana, Mahābhārata and Purānas. They then installed those heroes and gods in the temples so that even a child could understand and put those morals into practice in their day to day living.

TEMPLE STRUCTURE IN COMPARISON TO HUMAN BODY

A Temple is a personification of the Human body. Our great sages guided construction of our temples to be in synchrony with the Human body structure. Neither the Human Body created by god nor the Temple made by humans can be built in a hurried or haphazard manner. There must be a
well-planned intelligence and framework to create the perfect structure which has beautiful harmony and rhythm.

Image Source: Hindu Temple vol 1. by Stella Kramrisch

1. Vimana or Shikara (main or maha gopuram): equivalent to Fontanel (Brahmarandra) on the top of head of a human body.
2. Gabha gruham (Main sanatorium): equivalent to human head (operating principle)
4. Artha mandapam (half hall): equivalent to human chest (sustaining principle)
5. Maha mandapam (main hall): equivalent to human abdomen (stomach).
6. Dwaja sthambam (Flag-post): equivalent to human male organ (creative principle).

THE CHOICES IN VISITING A TEMPLE
In addition to poor knowledge about temples, people ask the question “why are there so many different types of temples?”. They remain confused seeing the thousands of ancient and modern temples across the world based upon sectarian belief systems and personal preferences. They forget that temples are the symbol of Hindu culture. Temples are the core of our traditions and they are the focal points for education, art, culture, dance and drama. They are powerful positive energy centers, irrespective of their different designs, location or the type of deities installed and invoked within each temple.

Currently there are more than 1000 temples built in North America based on these traditions. However, in spite of diverse belief systems, they all believe in one ultimate God. "Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha vadanti" (Truth/God is one but the wise call It with various names). All the deities will be installed in most of the temples after a traditional Vigraha, Mantra and Prana prathista through an elaborate ceremony called Kumbabhishekam invoking the divinity in them and creating energy fields around them.

THE CHALLENGES IN GETTING PEOPLE TO VISIT TEMPLE REGULARLY
The main challenge we face is helping people properly understand the tradition and science behind the constructed temples. We should remind and educate people that the Temple should be seen as a link between man and God. Proper knowledge should be imparted about the importance and advantage of doing prayers and meditation at these temples. Properly conducted prayers by an individual or a group with Sraddha (Faith) and Sadhana (devotion/ perseverance) will bring welfare and happiness not only to the individual but also to an entire community on spiritual and material paths. We should be aware that these temples are powerful energy centers which have electromagnetic fields and emit the most powerful spiritual energy. Just as water is present everywhere in the ground, we must tap the water with a particular tool at a particular place for it to quell our thirst. Similarly, even though God is present everywhere, it is through a temple where you can tap into the energy for spiritual enlightenment.

Temples are also centers where you can foster social relationships, harmony and nurture the spirituality into our minds. Temples remind us of our true nature. Just as fire has the innate nature of giving light and warmth, temples and their services allow one to realize that “giving and loving” is also our inbuilt nature. During a visit to the temple and interactions with other devotees, there is a feeling that we all belong to one single family - a "Vasudaiva Kutumbham". Knowing the spiritual science behind a temple and the positive benefits we can obtain by doing so, finding time is important. We should create time to go together to the temple frequently to live life meaningfully.

OM TAT SAT!!!
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TEMPLE AS AN INSTITUTION OF LEARNING

Prof. Vimal Patel

**Prolog:** While enigma of why the universe exists remains, Humanity's best minds from most ancient time on record, in every part of the world, have been trying to unlock the mysteries of the existence of the universe. A body of traditional wisdom about the nature of the universe and humanity has been handed down from teacher to student. This wisdom, in various parts of the world, has taken diverse forms and has been organized and institutionalized as religions and/or Sanskriti or cultures. All these forms, including science, deal with the deepest mysteries of human existence—the nature, origin, and destiny of the universe and of the human spirit or consciousness, the hidden power that lie concealed in humanity. Each of these forms has developed practices and methods by which these powers can be awakened, trained and ideally put to constructive uses for humanity at large. Some cultures have developed exclusive belief systems which divide humanity into believers and non-believers, while others are open and profess evolutionary processes for all-inclusive human development.

**Why and what is Sanātana Dharma?** The most ancient and continuously living tradition among all these different forms is the Sanātana Dharma, commonly known as Hinduism. It is knowledge-based perennial wisdom, dynamic and adaptive to space-time and evolutionary culture. It is the culture of seekers of truth, and has made unparalleled contribution in understanding of the origin of cosmos and mysteries of human existence. Great minds through times from many parts of the world have said many wonderful things about the Culture of Bhārat. For example, Albert Einstein went on to say that 'not a significant scientific step could the modern science take without the mathematical basis from India'. Mark Twain went so far as to say, 'that anything that ever be done either by man or gods has been done in this land'. Arnold Toynbee in his Introduction to 'World Thinkers on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda' wrote, "Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in self-destruction. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way".

While scientists, philosophers and ancient travelers are screaming about this nation/culture, it is for us to imbibe, preserve, and promote it. For Hindu diasporas living in the USA, the temples, most cherished possession of the diasporas must serve as institutions of learning if we are to continue the unique legacy of our Sanātana Dharma—path to discovery of Self-Realization.

**How to make Temple as an Institution of Learning?** Temple is not only a place of worship but also a place where diverse people from all walks of life come together. The architecture, the rituals and the Yagnas that take place at the temple serve as a frame that protect the most important art work called knowledge of Bhāratiya Sanskriti/Sanātana Dharma that has existed from the beginning of time. Thus, temple is a location of learning and should become medium of transmission of knowledge. For example, the temple architecture incorporates number of iconographies and each one of the murties, panels, and murals that we install is like a book and could become a medium of communication—oral, textual, or in the form of fine arts like dance and music.

**What should happen in each temple?** Simply as an outline—the temples should have syllabus based on the Vedic Sanskriti Vidyasthanas or the loci of learning which incorporate all dimensions of human existence. These loci of learning can
happen in a temple context, if temple, as an institution, builds infrastructure and organization with financial and human resources to cater to these loci of learning. This should also include a systematic study of basics of other major religions of the world.

Epilog: The Vedic Sanskriti/Culture has always encouraged inquiry as basic process of our life. One is supposed to be seeking liberation - liberation from one’s ignorance, one’s limitations, one’s compulsive nature to acquire knowledge, to move into enlightenment, and above all to move from compulsiveness to consciousness. Vedic wisdom has discovered the methodology called Yoga, the science of transforming compulsive characteristics that are dominated by Rājasic and Tāmasic Gunas to characteristics dominated by Sātvic Guna with balanced consciousness - the consciousness that is at peace with oneself and the world. This wisdom of learning in the past has been imbibed, preserved, and promoted by Gurus as Institution of learning.

Now, in these rapidly changing times, the temples should be transformed into Institutions of Learning not only for our future generation but also for population at large.

Om Tat Sat.

Author’s note: This article is a result of several discussions on the subject with his Vedic teacher Sree Aswathji of Columbus, Ohio.

About the author: Vimal Patel, a longtime resident of Indianapolis, is a volunteer Professor at Martin University in Indianapolis. He also serves as Vibhag Sangh Chalak (Elder Statesman of Hindu Service Organization called Hindu Swayam Sevak) for States of Indiana and Kentucky, and serves on the Board of Directors for Center for Interfaith Cooperation in Indianapolis.
ENSURING THE SUSTENANCE OF HINDU DHARMA – MAKE IT SIMPLE

Dileep Thatte

The key element to sustain Hinduism in North America is to ensure that the next generation of Hindus feel as strongly about keeping their religious heritage as the current generation who migrated from India and other countries. Our generation very often became and/or remained Hindus because we accepted what we were told by the family in which we were raised. Our younger generation, raised in this country, have been exposed to, and have access to a lot more information through the internet, social media, etc. Anecdotal experience indicates that the X-gen, Y-gen and Millennials find Hinduism to be fatalistic, ritualistic, complex and confusing. Many believe it to be polytheistic. This is essentially based on what they have heard from the elders and what they see in the temples. These aspects can turn off many youths. If the youth is turned-off, or not convinced of Hinduism’s relevance in modern times, sustenance of dharma becomes a challenge.

It is the responsibility of our generation, the baby-boomers, to make sure that youth are taught the true meaning of the rituals, practices and the philosophical basis of our religious tradition. The Hindu religious philosophy is very broad-minded and when properly explained, very appealing to the younger generation. Therefore, the best way to ensure sustenance of Hinduism is to make its explanation SIMPLE and effective!

S – Systematic: Hinduism, like most religions has many rituals, practices, festivals, values, goals, and core tenets. All these get mixed up in a confusing bundle. A systematic analysis of the religion distinguishes what is essential and what is optional, what is core and what is time or location sensitive.

M – Meaningful: The HAF (Hindu America Foundation) study indicates that Hinduism is depicted in a biased fashion in the school. The true philosophical nature of Hinduism is rarely highlighted. Misrepresentations about our Dharma can have significant adverse effect
on our next generation. It is our responsibility to ensure that the younger generation learns about the rich and commendable doctrines of Hinduism and not get bogged down by the old and misinterpreted concepts or practices which may not be relevant today. We need to make the religion "meaningful" and relevant to the next generation.

P – Practical: Hinduism is a practical philosophy, applicable to everyday life. This message should come out loud and clear. The religious practices address health and development of the whole human being – mind, body and spirit. Patanjali’s yoga sutras provide a blue-print for healthy mind and body. Fortunately, as “yoga” has become popular, our younger generation, is becoming more aware and proud of this part of their heritage. However, we need to explain the other nuances so that the yoga-adulteration which is becoming prevalent, is recognized by our next generation who are expected to be the custodians of our heritage.

L – Logical: The core tenets of Hinduism are highly relevant to today’s global village. One key tenet states that all human beings have an Atman which is derived from Brahman. This promotes the concept of universal brotherhood. Another tenet relates to the universality of Atman, which means that animals, tress, plants, and everything which exists in this universe contains an essence of Brahman. This leads to the concept of universal family – वस्तुधातु कुपारम्. This is a very powerful message of environmentalism. If all the humanity takes this Hindu thought seriously, there will be a great care shown to protect the environment, the plants, the vegetation – since it is related to us and we are the custodians of this earth.

Hinduism is not a dogmatic religion. It allows everyone to customize how he/she wants to practice it. There are several paths to liberation. Depending on the individual’s disposition, one can design his/her own path. The “law of Karma” which forms another foundational tenet of Hinduism, makes an individual responsible for his/her own actions. According to this law, one has to face the consequences of one’s actions. This applies to all actions – good and bad!

E – Experiential: The beauty of Hinduism is that it is experiential in nature. The texts explain key concepts but encourage individuals to test these for themselves by questioning and experiencing the realization through proper effort and study/discipline (तप and अभ्यास).

They also encourage seeking guidance of the savants and personally experiencing consciousness. This can be truly appealing to the next generation who want to set their own paths and learn from personal experience.

So how to make Hindu Dharma sustainable?
Make its explanation, teachings and core philosophy: SIMPLE!

Seven Stars of Hinduism®

1. Brahman – One
2. Atman-Brahman Non -Duality
3. Universality of Soul
4. Law of Karma
5. Jnana Yoga (Path of Knowledge)
6. Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion)
7. Karma Yoga (Path of Action)

Ref: Seven Stars of Hinduism (Self-Published by the article’s Author)

About the author: Dileep Thatte, an ardent student of science, spirituality and Vedanta, is a trained Hindu Chaplain. He was awarded the “Vishwa Hindu Ratna” award for his contribution to the education of people on Hinduism. He is frequently invited to speak at high schools, colleges, churches, temples, synagogues and multi-faith congregations. He presented papers at the Parliament of World Religions in Australia in 2007 and Utah in 2015.

He has graduate degrees in Chemical Engineering and Business Administration, and was a senior executive for major corporations for most of his career. He currently works at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. E-mail: thatte7stars@yahoo.com
STORIES OF THE RĀMĀYANA RETOLD IN TERRACOTTA TEMPLES OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Apurba Chattopadhyay, Ph.D.

Most of the brick temples that are seen today in the southern districts of West Bengal, India, were built during 17th to 19th century AD. However, a very few older temples still exist. It is to be noted that only a few temples are ornamented with terracotta plates. The main subjects of these temple ornamentation are the stories of the Rāmāyana and Krishna. Besides these, plates of Hindu deities, stories of the Mahābhārata, social aspects, flora and fauna and designs are seen. These extremely beautiful terracotta plates are undoubtedly the unique creation of Bengal artisans and an un-parallel cultural heritage of Bengal.

It should be mentioned that terracotta plates of all the stories of the Rāmāyana are not found in one temple. Rather, only a few stories are inscribed in each temple. So, one should visit several temples to learn of notable events of the Rāmāyana. The following is a brief account of terracotta plates found in temples of seven districts of southern part of West Bengal [Barddhaman, Birbhum, Bankura, Howrah, Hooghly, West Midnapur and Murshidabad].

Ādi Kānda

1) Death of the son of Aandha Muni (a blind sage) who was accidentally hit by Shabdabhedi baan (a special type of arrow that recognizes sound). The deadly arrow was sent by King Dasharatha that was intended to kill a deer. King Dasharatha brought the dead body of Shravana to Aandha Muni who cursed King Dasharatha. The blind sage and his wife died out of shock due to death of their son. King Dasharatha cremated all the dead bodies. [Jor-Bangla Kestorai temple, Bishnupur, Bankura]

2) King Dasharatha invited Rishyashringa Muni (a sage with two antlers on the head) to perform jagna (special prayer). [Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

3) Rishyashringa Muni performed jagna (special prayer) and three queens of King Dasharatha were given ‘holy payasam.’ [Charbangla Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

4) Queens of King Dasharatha gave births to Rama and his three brothers (Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna). The new born babies were breast-fed by their mothers. [Charbangla Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

5) Killing of Taraka rakshasi (demon) by Rama. [Gangeswor Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

6) Rama broke the “Haradhanu” (the bow of Lord Shiva) followed by marriage with Sita. Marriages of other brothers of Rama also took place. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly; Ek-Ratna Anantabasudeba temple, Bansberia,
Hooghly]

**Ayodhya Kānda**

1) Manthara misguides Kaikeyi, the second wife of King Dasharatha. [Gangeshwor Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

2) Rama, Sita and Lakshmana went to the forest and built a hut in the Panchavati. [Gangeshwor Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

**Aranya Kānda**

1) Surpanakha wanted to marry Rama. When Rama refused she proposed to Lakshmana. When both Rama and Lakshman refused to marry Surpanakha, she tried to eat and kill Sitā. Lakshmana then cut nose and ear of Surpanakha with sharp arrow-head. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

2) Maarih (a demon) changes himself as a beautiful golden deer and is killed by Rama. [Charbangla Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

3) Before going to forest to help Rama, Lakshmana draws a circular line (Lakshman Rekhā) around Sitā and requested her not to cross the line. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

4) Rāvana came to Panchavati in disguise as a monk and abducts Sitā. [Ek-Ratna Damodar temple, Kendur, Barddhaman]

5) Sampati (a large bird) tried to engulf the chariot of Rāvana along with Rāvana and Sitā. [Charbangla Shiva temple, Baronagar, Murshidabad]

**Kiskindha Kānda**

1) Rāvana was immersed in sea water by the monkey king Bāli. [Jor-Bangla Kestorai temple, and Pancha-Ratna Shyamarai temple, Bishnupur, Bankura]

2) Monkey king Bāli was killed by Rāma.

[Sundar Kānda]

1) During crossing over the sea, Hanumān came across Surasā (a demon) and a great snake. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

2) After abduction, Rāvana kept Sitā at the Ashoka Kanana (a forest) at Lanka. One day in the early morning, he came to visit Sitā. Hanumāna witnessed the event hiding himself amongst leaves of a tall tree. [Aat-Chala Raghunath temple, Bhalia, Hooghly]

3) Hanumāna met Sitā at Ashoka Kanana and handed over a ring of Rāma to her. [Pancha-Ratna Lakshmi Janardan temple, Surul, Birbhum]

4) Hanumāna was brought down in the royal court of Rāvana (Dashānana) and Hanumāna talked with Rāvana. [Aat-Chala Raghunath temple, Bhalia, Hooghly]

**Lanka Kānda**

Preparation of ‘Setu Bandhan’ (a bridge over the sea). [Radhabinod temple, Kendubi decade, Birbhum]

1) Battle between soldiers of Rāma and Rāvana. [Deul temple, Baidyapur, Barddhaman]

2) Elephants were employed and drums beaten to wake up Kumbhakarna. [Janakiballava temple, Tilanta Para, West Midnapur]

3) Kumbhakarna at war and he engulfs monkey soldiers. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

4) Indrajit at war. [Ek-ratna Ramachandra temple, Guptipara, Hooghly]

5) Lakshamana, who was hit on his chest by Shaktisella (a special type of arrow), lying unconscious on the lap of Rama. Monkeys are trying to pull out the arrow from the chest. [Aat-Chala Raghunath temple, Bhalia, Hooghly]
6) Hanumāna carrying Gandhamadan (mountain) where medicinal herbs such ‘Vishalyakarani’ grows. [Nava-Ratna RaghunathJi temple, Alangiri, West Midnapur]

7) Sri Rāmachandra worshipping Devi Durgā just before the on set of Lankā war (Akala Bodhana). [Radha damodar temple, Hadanarayanpur, Bankura]

8) Battle between Rama and Ravana (Dashanana). [Charbangla Shiva temple, Uchkaran, Birbhum]

9) Death of Rāvana. [Naba-Ratna RaghunathJi temple, Alangiri, West Midnapur]

10) ‘Agni Parikshā’ -- purity test of Sitā over fire. [Aat-Chala Damodar temple, Rautara, Howrah]

11) Coronation of Sri Rāmachandra and Rāma and Sitā sitting on the throne. [Pancha-Ratna Vishnu temple, Kadashole, Bankura]

The ornamentations of the Hindu temples are multi-dimensional, diverse and at the same time educational. Temple ornamentations are potential medium and source of education of common people particularly to children and hence they are a highly valuable national property. It is very unfortunate that due to negligence and ignorance this valuable resource is slowly deteriorating and is going to be destroyed if proper care is not taken immediately.

About the author:
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CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HINDU EDUCATION

Vasu Murthy

Introduction:
To use Charles Dicken’s phrasing, it is the best of times and it is the worst of times in Hindu Education! Hindu Education needs are challenging in these modern times. At the same time, modern technology offers new methods of teaching that were not available in the previous era. We see that traditional methods of learning using face to face meetings are proving to be difficult. Traditional teachings schools are under intense pressure. At the same time, information channels for spreading information and teaching have spread to innumerable channels using technology. Blogs, Websites, YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp are being used to spread all sorts of educational contents including Dharma/Hindu Education.

Challenges:
Providing Hindu teachings in a modern context is challenging. Hindu/Dharmic material is deep, diverse and has many layers and levels of meanings. This requires several years of studying to fully comprehend the immense value and benefits that are buried inside. Modern life is fast paced; most children and adults don’t have the time and aptitude to do twelve years of dedicated study under teachers in a traditional setting. There is too much information and too much distraction by calls, texts, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp channels. There is information overload. Hindu education must cater to the needs of the current society to be successful.

Opportunities:
There are new disruptive technologies for education that are causing a transformation in how educational services are being delivered. Online Education in all different formats is being quite successful. Online format removes the physical barriers and makes the information accessible worldwide. Same thing is possible in Hindu education --best teachers in the world can deliver educational contents to students all over the world. Additionally, discussion forums, talk like formats can enhance education for all and enable all to learn Hindu teachings.

Strategy for Successful Hindu Education Program:
There is a samskruta subhashita that says that not all old things to be discarded and not all new things need to be accepted. Finding the right balance between the old and the new is the path to success. We must adopt the same strategy here. We must think about how can we deliver the Hindu education using the recent technology while retaining some of the elements of traditional delivery methods. Some of the strategies include:

- Delivery of information in small chunks using the talk-forums.
- Know your audience and focus on items that are of interest to special groups.
- Deliver information suitable for different learner levels from beginners to advanced.
- Experiment and learn what works for your audience and fine tune the Education content based on the feedback.
- Hindu Education is wide and diverse. Make sure that you get your teachers from diverse backgrounds and sampradayas.

This article gives a brief glimpse into the challenges and opportunities in providing Hindu education. Concepts presented here can be expanded further to deliver a high-quality Hindu Education service.

Author Bio: Vasu Murthy is a member of Board of Trustees at Sri Siva Vishnu Temple. He is interested in Indian Philosophy, Hindu Education, Yoga, Metaphysics, Meditation and teaches them as appropriate. He is championing a Hindu Education Project at Sri Siva Vishnu Temple. He works for Verizon Communications.
A million questions buzzed in my mind as I waited for my flight to takeoff. “What if I can’t adjust to the conditions there? What if I get too homesick? Will I be able to relate to anyone?” This was not just any regular summer vacation to India visiting relatives and sightseeing. Since high school, my family and I have been connected with Sewa International (a Hindu faith-based non-profit organization) in particular, its youth programs. I had heard about numerous Sewa projects and, as a college student, got a glimpse through the Yuva for Sewa summer internship program in Pune, India. I wanted to learn more about these projects and serve my brothers and sisters in Bharat (India). In June 2015, I embarked on an eight-month journey across ten states of India and Sri Lanka. Each place I went to had its unique culture, strengths, and challenges. But every place felt like home. There are just some connections which transcend language and cultural barriers.

My first stop were the untouched lands of Northeast Bharat traveling through the villages of Assam and Nagaland. The only way to get to the interior villages was to pile into shared vans, and trust the driver would safely maneuver the rocky roads. Each village had a unique personality but the same type of bamboo and mud/cement homes nestled in the vast rice and tea plantations. I conducted workshops for teenagers in these homes or nearby schools to initiate the Kishori Vikas Prakalp (adolescent girls' development program) of Sewa's partner nonprofit Sewa Bharati. Teenagers are undergoing a major transition, and they do not respond to guidance from adults. Due to this lack of communication, health education in schools and transparency with parents is inadequate. Through the Kishori Vikas program, the young adults who have gone through the transition, become “elder sisters” to the younger girls. This program creates a setting where girls and the ‘elder sisters’ meet every week and have a session on self-defense, games, songs, and, a discussion about selected health topics. We built a platform to discuss and understand the changes during adolescence, and, develop their skills and personalities.

I then visited Shillong and its surrounding villages in Meghalaya. Upon meeting with the women of the Khasi tribe, it became apparent to me that the matriarchal structure heavily contributes to their unique culture. They were struggling to find ways to preserve their unwritten traditions. Young mothers in the tribe shared that they were working tirelessly to open a Hindu school for the children in their community. Their biggest challenge, it seemed, was ensuring that their tribe’s culture and values were passed on amidst forced conversions. By immersing myself into a world starkly different from mine, I gained perspective on the challenges I face. I lived the lifestyle of the local people, ate the same food, slept on the bamboo beds, just doing everything I could to blend in. I stepped out of my comfort zone and put myself in their shoes. Interacting with people who have truly embraced sewa into their daily lives and even risk their lives for the right causes will always serve as my inspiration.

On the train from Delhi to Dehradun, I was excited to go back to the rural setting to enjoy the slower pace of life and escape the materialistic world I saw...
in the city. We were standing on the deck of the Sewa International center in Chandrapuri, Uttarakhand, admiring the powerful Mandakini river, towering mountains on either side covered with greenery and the Himalayan snow-capped peaks in the distance. Huge boulders on the banks of the river and the sound of the rushing river. I took in the fresh air and felt peaceful. After a few minutes, one of the volunteers mentioned that there used to be homes, farms, and stores in this area. Suddenly, an unsettling feeling replaced the peace.

In June 2013, Uttarakhand was hit by devastating floods and landslides which destroyed entire villages. After the initial relief, there were many long-term issues to be addressed. I decided to focus on adolescent girls’ health awareness. Girls are not told in schools about the changes happening during adolescence. She will rush to her mother the day she gets her first period, only to be given inaccurate information based on superstitions. For the next month, I trekked to schools tucked away in the mountains and gathered the group of at least 100 girls. I collected data on their level of health awareness, overall well-being, and challenges. After they completed the survey, I sensed there were a lot of questions hanging in the air. So, I conducted menstrual health and hygiene sessions. At first, the girls and teachers were very uncomfortable. They just needed someone to initiate the topic, and then there wasn’t enough time to answer all their questions and doubts in one session! Based on the results of the survey and my interactions with the girls, we proposed projects such as regular health education sessions and low-cost sanitary napkin production machines to address these challenges. This formal research approach to sewa was new to me but showed me the power of documenting and understanding challenges and strengths of a community.

These were two of the most impactful experiences of the places I visited. I had the opportunity to immerse myself in a mix of environments, interact with diverse populations, and work with many nonprofits. By stepping out of my comfort zone I uncovered many realities of society, understood myself through intense introspection, and experienced the true meaning of sewa. Sewa is any act done without expectation of results. This ranges from the individual to the ecosystem level - from serving yourself to serving humanity. I observed many divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ even though we’re all one. A higher standard of living does not mean one has a greater standard of life, it’s just different. When you boil it down, we face the same challenges, just in different forms and circumstances. It’s not that a ‘certain group’ has this problem and ‘we’ don’t so it’s not our responsibility. The Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam means “the whole world is one family.” We need to put aside our surface level differences and absorb that there is a stronger force that connects us all. All these experiences taught me to appreciate the differences that we have, yet find the stronger force connecting us to serve all.

About the author: After earning her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Georgia Tech and Master of Arts in Psychology from Boston University, Amruta Houde served with Sewa International (www.sewausa.org) in India where she worked with local NGO partners on adolescent and women’s health programs. Her experience during this time inspired her to consider a career in public health, and she is now pursuing her Master’s in Public Health at Columbia University. Email: amrutahoude@gmail.com (for more information on Sewa International’s youth programs contact yfs@sewausa.org.) Phone Number: 678-622-1127
YOUTH CORNER

HELP US HELP YOU: PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Shivani Bajpai

The next big wave, the endless discussion topic, every adult’s enigma: the youth! *zoom zoom zoom* It seems that from an adult perspective, the next hit Indian TV serial could easily find 10 years of material simply on the antics of the upcoming generation. There is a haze through which adults simply cannot see what makes our clocks tick. So first, uncle/aunty/dear reader: breathe. I’m here to help. Bhagwan Krishna opened his mouth and showed Maa Yashoda the entire universe. We just have to log into Facebook. For a generation that can fit in 140 characters, I promise, we’re not so hard to understand.

The question seems to be: how can we inspire the youth to be consistently engaged in Temple activities? From my experience as a youth coordinator, active volunteer, and a 23-year-old in the making, I’ve collected my thoughts into two big ideas.

Incentive. Freakonomics, a book written by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, established that a person’s motivation to do something is driven by three types of incentives: moral incentive, social incentive, and economic incentive. For our purposes, let’s change the last one to be more suitable: professional incentive. Concepts such as serving without expecting anything in return and being rewarded by Bhagwan’s aashirwaad are potent and powerful, but misplaced if you are trying to initiate the movement of youth towards the Temple. Think through the lens of a young adult using this scaffold of incentives. Ask yourself: Are my friends coming? Social incentive. Do I feel as though my service is making a substantial positive impact to someone or something? Moral incentive. Finally, is this a valuable opportunity to network, build my resume, and/or develop the leadership qualities sought after by colleges and jobs? Professional incentive. Will I get good food after? No wait, that’s just me. Anyway, if youth programming can satisfy these themes, I guarantee you’ve caught our attention. In fact, I would argue this logic applies across the age-spectrum. To skeptics, this infuses a transactional feeling to an otherwise devotional activity. I implore you to keep our initial goal in mind. We are trying to build the foundation of a relationship with the Temple as an institution. Once this is underway, these incentives, although still important, make way for a lasting feeling of positivity and fulfilling volunteerism.

Two-way accountability. Aaj kal ke bacche, I tell you, they think they know everything. I know I like to believe I’m always right most of the time. However, all jokes aside, we can be given enough credit to know at least some things that can lead an activity or a long-term project in the right direction. Schools nowadays require a degree of organization, critical thinking, and communication skills to be successful. The same diligence we use in implementing plans outside of the Temple somehow becomes diluted in collaboration within the hierarchy of Temple leadership. If I have an idea, I need to discuss it with ‘coordinator aunty’ and ‘budget uncle’ and ‘President aunty’ and ‘moral support uncle’. Then they discuss amongst themselves in a frenzy of debates called a meeting, and then we can begin planning. What happens here, at no fault of anyone involved, is that the division of labor starts to teeter in one direction. The “youth” in youth-led projects become more of a suggestion than an essential element in the plan. I’ll admit, sometimes the youth fade away themselves no matter how much responsibility they are given. Other times, they are unintentionally swept aside among the uncles and aunties. This situation may look different under different circumstances; sometimes more apparent or subtle. The solution is the same though. Keep each other accountable. If we want a place among adults in a group, give us space and let us work to maintain our membership. “I’ll do this and you do that…” is a good start on both ends as long as it ends with, “…we’ll call each other on this date and regroup.” And then actually do it! There is a compulsive rigidity that we learn
in school to making and executing plans which is different than the Indian approach to planning. If I don’t have someone to answer to, one episode on Netflix quickly turns into a few seasons before I look at my Temple tasks. If a deadline is set though, similar to how assignments are due in class, and I understand how important my job is to the group, I’ll be sure to deliver. In return, I will expect you to do the same. Then the magic begins! While planning is an uphill task, enjoying the product of everyone's hard work is always worth it. We'll stick around for that.

We are a different breed of humans; it may take a moment to see your institution through our eyes. But I promise you, we're capable and genuine in our work. Help us help you! That being said, every Temple is at a different stage of development – especially in the youth programming department. Not to mention, every person – young and less young – has a unique relationship with their Temple. Surely there is more to be said and even more to be done about inspiring more youth to be active in our communities; all I ask from you now is for an extra second of thought on the words that I have strung together thus far. If there is any hole that can be filled with these suggestions in your Temple, I would consider it a powerful step in the right direction.

About the author: Shivani Bajpai is a recent graduate from IUPUI and is now in her first year at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Outside of school, she continues her advanced training in Kathak and is actively involved in the Indian/Hindu community in Indianapolis. E-mail: shivanibajpai@hotmail.com

OUR CHILDREN OUR FUTURE

By Hansa Dave

Everyone agrees that our children are our future but speaking the statement alone will not enable them to be the future that we hope for. Balvihar/Balagokulam is a place for our children to bloom and grow. The curriculum in Balvihar encompasses everything from scriptures, language, gods/goddesses, festivals, shlokas to games. While the curriculum is the foundation, a significant role of Balvihar is to teach the kids to make the right choices in life, to be surrounded by like-minded Hindu children, and to have a second home and support system.

Looking back on our journey over the last 25 years when we first moved to Indianapolis with two little girls, there was no mandir, just a center where Hindus met once a month on Sunday to do bhajans and listen to discourses. I started a career at the bank while adjusting to new life far away from India. We quickly realized there should be a solid program for children at the mandir which would follow a specific curriculum. With small steps, we started incorporating Balvihar/Balagokulam into the Sunday sessions. What started with 10 kids has now expanded to 150 kids at the mandir.

Being a teacher for Balvihar/Mandir programs has allowed me to work with so many children and adolescents through the years. I have personally seen them grow and develop into hard working and successful adults who contribute to their community. Often times, these young adults tell me how much of a positive influence the Mandir programs have played in their lives. It is a place they can always call home, and it gives them a sense of identity long after they graduate from the programs. It is crucial to prioritize these programs at a young age to shape the future of our children.
YOUTH CORNER

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEVA

Nina Joshi Jain, Carmel Indiana

Seva and Charity. Many people would believe these are the same thing, but that is not the case. Even simply stating that seva means service would be incorrect, and devalue what the true meaning of seva is. Seva means selfless service. Seva is doing something good for another without any expectation of result or reward for performing it. Seva does not imply that you are not allowed to have a good result or reward for doing it; you just can’t do the activity in expectation of the reward. Everyone involved benefits from seva not just the person who receives the service. The person who performs it may be benefited by a huge gesture of gratitude, a simple “thank you”, or just feeling good about themselves. The person who does true seva does not value one of these over the other.

All cultures and groups value true seva over simply charity and service. The people who perform seva in any capacity are looked up to especially if they do not boast about the tremendous works they have done. All faiths that originated from Sanātana Dharma preach the value of seva, whether it is in Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, or the entire teachings of Sai Baba. In Sanātana Dharma seva is performed as a part of furthering one's spiritual growth. As Hindu spiritual leader Ram Dass says, “Helping out is not some special skill. It is not the domain of rare individuals. It is not confined to a single part of our lives. We simply heed the call of that natural impulse within and follow it where it leads us.” We need to stop thinking about “what’s in it for me” or if we can actually make a difference and just DO it. This does not mean that you need to change the world, but help someone. Even a small act of kindness can lead to great spiritual growth because “Nar seva, Nārāyan seva” Selfless service to humanity is service to God.

Seva needs to become an integral part of all Hindu temples, not just to benefit the members of the temple, but also to benefit the members of the surrounding community. We need to start implementing seva into our day to day temple life, especially with the children in our community. We need to start by teaching them what seva is, and the importance of it. We should also teach them that seva is not just doing helpful things around the temple, but helping people regardless of class, race, ethnicity, cultural background, or religion. Then the youth and young adults of our temple will really take the lead on doing actual seva. As we age in our spiritual journey it is not enough to simply learn in a classroom why we do, what we do, but to go out and do. We must go out and practice what it means to be a Hindu in real life. As the leaders of the temple community, adults must help in creating a connection to the community so outreach and seva is possible. We should also educate the new generation on how important it is to give back, and create new ideas to help our Hindu community and the greater surrounding communities. Only through true Seva is it possible to gain a greater spiritual connection and to have a positive influence on the world around us.

Bhagwan Ram Himself says:
पर हित सरिस धर्म नहीं भाई
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8. Toronto, Canada (2013)
11. Atlanta, GA (2016)
12. Indianapolis, IN (2017)
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- Prayer Book for Care givers
- Gita by Gandhi pocket book
- Antyeshti samskar book
- Vivah samskar book
- Hindu Chaplaincy program
- Sanatan Dharma Scholarship for youth
- Hindu American Vanaprasthi (senior adult) Network (HAVAN) Conference
- Hindu Mandir Priests’ Conference
- Archaka Bhushan award to priests for their Service to Sanatan Dharma in NA
- Hindu Mandir Youth Network – Coalition of Hindu Youth.
- Hindu Vrat/Upavaas book for family—simple steps
- Regional HMEC
- Mandir Survey by Hindu Student Council
- A Visitor's Guide for Mandirs – In progress
- Common Bal Vihar resources – In progress
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“That we need networking is not debatable. We survive only when we stand together. I advocate very active networking.”

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati, HMEC 2009