



Hindu Mandir Executives Conference

June 23 – 25, 2006

Atlanta, Georgia.



Organizer: Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America
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MANDIRS & HINDU ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED AT HMEC-2006*

Mandir of Irvine, Inc., California
N. American Hindu Assoc. of Dharma Studies, Canada
Radha Krishna Mandir, Canada
Vedic Hindu Cultural Society Mandir, Canada
Hindu Society Of Central Florida, Florida
Hindu Temple of Florida, Tampa, Florida
Hindu University of America, Florida
Sanatan Mandir of Tampa, Florida
Siva Vishnu Temple of South Florida
Hindu Temple Society of Augusta, Georgia
ICRC Temple/Sanatan Mandir, Georgia
Sankatmochan Mandir, Georgia
Shiv Mandir of Atlanta, Georgia
Shree Shakti Mandir, Georgia
The Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Georgia
Ummya Mataji Temple*, Georgia
Hindu Heritage Endowment, Hawaii
Kadavul Hindu Temple, Hawaii
Chinamaya Mission of Chicago, Illinois
The Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Illinois
Hindu Temple of Central Indiana
New England Hindu Temple, Massachusetts.
Sadhu Vaswani Center, Massachusetts.
Sarva Dev Hindu Temple, Massachusetts.
Satsang Center, Massachusetts.
Parashakti Mandir, Michigan
Paschima Kashi Viswanatha Temple, Michigan
The Bharatiya Temple of Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan
Datta Yoga Center, Mississippi
Hindu Temple of Mississippi
Hindu Society Of North Carolina
Saraswati Mandiram, N. Hampshire
India Temple Association, New Jersey
Sanskriti Parivar, New Jersey
Sri Venkateswara Temple, New Jersey
Hindu Temple of Staten Island, New York
Maha Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam, New York
Dayton Hindu Temple, Ohio
Hindu Society of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio
Hindu Temple of Columbus, Ohio
Hindu Temple of Toledo, Ohio
Hindu Jain Temple, Pennsylvania
Sri Venkateswara Temple, Pennsylvania
Hindu Temple of South Carolina
Hindu Temple of Spartanburg, S. Carolina
Hindu Community Centre of Knoxville, Tennessee
Sri Ganesh Temple, Tennessee
Dallas/Fort Worth Hindu Temple Society, Texas
Hindu Temple of The Woodlands, Texas
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, USA
International Society for Krishna Consciousness, USA
Swami Narayan Sanstha (Maninagar)*, USA
Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, USA
Yogi Divine Society (Haridham), USA

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About back cover - The text appearing on back cover is an adaptation of some of the content as it appears in "Hindu Rites & Rituals" by Sadhu Jnaneshwar das ji and Sadhu Mukundcharan das ji, pp. 55-59

* This list is based on registrations on or before June 15, 2006, the date when Souvenir went for printing.

* Awaiting registration from these mandirs or organizations as on June 15, 2006

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WHY HMEC?

Over last four decades, the Hindu-American community has grown to be approximately 2.5 million strong. Our achievements are well known and acknowledged world over. Much of these achievements are attributable to our *shraddha* in *Dharmic* values, which propel us to excel on material as well as spiritual planes. While on the material side, we have firmly established our credentials as intellectuals, engineers, entrepreneurs, scientists, physicians, teachers... we have also successfully established approximately 800 *mandirs* and *ashrams* across the continent, to fulfill our spiritual needs.

The next step is to ensure that all these wonderful institutions become self-sustaining, and keep nourishing the tree of Dharma in our adopted land – *karmabhumi*, well after we are gone from this earth. That will happen only if our children and youth get strongly engaged with Hindu Dharma and Hindu institutions. Also, as many of our *rishis* and modern social scientists have recognized, sustenance of a value system, starts with generation of social capital.

The Hindu Mandir Executives Conference (HMEC) initiative has been undertaken by VHPA with the express intent of developing a forum at which Hindu mandirs' leadership can develop strategies for meeting the social and spiritual needs of Hindu-American children and youth. At HMEC, *mandir* leaders will focus on shaping the future of our community by influencing the gradient and magnitude of changes which Hindus will experience in coming times. Together, we will develop plans aimed at sustenance and growth of Hindu Dharma in America. By moving in this direction, we will not only be helping us, and our children, but the larger American society and the humanity as well. Finally, and very importantly, this forum will play a pivotal role in the development of a very much wanted national leadership of Hindu-Americans.

I cordially invite and welcome all the *mandir* executives to join this *yagna*, and create something anew in this land.

Iyotish Parekh

President, VHPA

Blessings from Pujya Swamiji Dayananda Saraswati



Caring is AIM

SWAMI DAYANANDA

AIM for Seva
All India Movement for Seva

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I am very happy to know
that you are organising
a meet. of all the executives
of Temples in North America.
I note that one of the main
objectives is to create
national leaders among
the Hindus. This is a
great need. Enlightened,
dynamic leadership will
help the Hindu community
to protect and nurture
the Hindu Dharma. My
prayer and best wishes for
the success of the meet.
Swami Dayananda
2.4.06

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Time	Topic	Chair/Speaker	Recorder
FRIDAY			
6/23/2006			
SESSION 1			
6:30 PM	Inaugural Ceremony Parichay	Shri Rajkishor Pathak	Shri Mahendra Kapadia
8:30 PM	Dinner		
SATURDAY			
6/24/2006			
6:30 AM	Yoga	Shri Sudhir Parikh	
7:00 AM	Yoga ends		
7:15 AM	Breakfast		
SESSION 2			
8:00 AM	Welcome Session	Shree Shyam Pendharkar	
	Deep Prajwalan	Mandirs from Greater Atlanta	
	Ekatmata mantra & Bhavageet (<i>Kritva nav drudh sankalpam</i>)		
	Welcome address	Smt. Sneha Mehta	
	Opening remarks VHPA President	Shri Jyotish Parekh	
SESSION 3			
8:30 AM	Keynote Address: <i>Role of Mandirs to Sustain Hindu Dharma</i> Challenges & Opportunities for the Hindu-American Community	Swami Aksharanandji Dr. Nachiketa Tiwari	
SESSION 4			
9:20 AM	Panel Discussion: On the Need of Unity and Networking The How & Why of Unity of Hindu Mandirs Equal Respect for All Traditions and Ethnicities as a Basis for Hindu Unity Sustaining Hindu Dharma by Implementing Common Programs and Seva	Dr. M. G. Prasad Shri Hanuman Marur Shri Dwaraka Persaud Dr. Mahesh Mehta	Dr. Manjula Srivastava
SESSION 5			
10:35 AM	<i>Mandirs & Samskriti – Dharma as Source and Goal of cultural expression</i> <i>Samskriti – A comprehensive expression of Dharma through way of life</i> <i>Mandirs as centers of evolution of art forms</i> <i>Enjoyment and learning through cultural and festival activities</i> <i>Spreading Samskriti through cooking</i>	Shri Raghu Boorla Dr. Uma Mysorekar Shri Niraj Mohanka Dr. Ita Sukhadia Shri Gadadhara-Pandit Dasa	Shri Dahyabhai Patel
11:55 AM	Lunch Break		

SESSION 6**12:55 PM** Bhavageet - Vyakti vyakti mein jagao Hindu chetana**Mandirs & Worship - Continuity of Hindu traditions through proper understanding and practice**

Making Worship Relevant and Appealing to All Hindus

Engaging youth effectively in Hindu worship practices

Enabling priests to explain worship practices effectively

Celebrating samskars at home and mandir

Shri Rama Belagaje

Dr. Kumar Nochur

Shri K. Subramanian

Dr. V. V. Prakasa Rao

Dr. Shive Chaturvedi

Shri Prasada Nimmagudda

SESSION 7**2:20 PM****Mandirs & Education: The challenge of accurate understanding & depiction of Dharma**

An overview of the education needs of children, parents, priests and non-Hindus

What every Hindu child needs to know – implementing core common resource materials in mandirs

What every Hindu parent ought to know about raising children as Hindus

A case study on portrayal of Hindu Dharma in schools

Shri Kaushik Joshi

Dr. M. G. Prasad

Dr. Raju Vanapalli

Smt. Arunima Sinha

Shri Shivaram Sitaram

Smt. Jyoti Singri

3:40 PM Tea Break**SESSION 8****4:00 PM****Mandirs & Seva – Seva as the Binding Glue of a Community**

Seva as the sustaining principle of Hindu society

Seva and networking

Engaging vanaprasthis in seva

Hindu Seva Diwas through mandirs

Dr. Navin Kadakia

Dr. Ravi Sarma

Dr. Abhaya Asthana

Shri Arvind Patel

Dr. Savitri Hingorani

Shri Asvin Shah

SESSION 9**5:20 PM****Effective Operation of Mandirs**

The art of fund raising for non-profit organizations

Role of Hindu priests in North America

Eternal money for your mandir

How our temple achieved financial freedom

Shri Abhinav Dwivedi

Shri B. S. Verma

Dr. Kuldip Gupta

Shri Easan Katir

Shri Rajkumar Manickam

Shri Sekhar Reddy

6:40 PM Break for general interaction**7:30 PM** Cultural Program

Keynote Speech: Effectively Communicating Hindu Identity Amongst Children, Parents and Society

Anna sukti

Prof. Ramesh Rao

8:45 PM Dinner

SUNDAY

6/25/2006

6:30 AM Yoga

7:00 AM Yoga ends

7:15 AM Breakfast

SESSION 10

8:00 AM Bhava-geet: Hindu-Hindu ek rahe

Special Session on Marriage and Restoration of Hindu Pride and Identity

The challenge of finding marriage partners

Restoring Hindu identity and pride amongst youth

Smt. Sheila Natwa
Smt. Kanaka Prabhu &
Dr. Pawan Rattan
Smt. Sukanya Reddy

Dr. Hiranya Gowda

SESSION 11

10:00 AM

Closure: Resolutions, action items, and going forward, vote of thanks, & prarthana

Resolutions & Action Items

Parting thoughts

Vote of Thanks

Prarthana (Sangathan Mantra)

Dr. Nachiketa Tiwari
All
Swami Aksharananda ji
Smt. Sujatha Reddy

Shri Kundan Sharma

12:00 PM Bhojan & Departure



एकता मंत्र

यं वैदिका मन्त्रद्रुशः पुराणा, इन्द्रं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ।
वेदन्तिनो- निर्वचनीयमेकं, यं ब्रह्मशब्देन विनिर्दिशन्ति । 1

Yam vaidika mantradrashsh puraanaa, Indram yamam maatarishwaanamahuh,
Vedantino nirvachaneeyamekam, Yam brahmashabdena vinirdhishanti

*To whom the Vaidikas and the ancient seers call Indra, Yama and Matarishwa; the
vedantins indicate that inexplicable one by the word Brahma.*

शैवा यमीशं शिव इत्यवोचन्, यं वैष्णवा विष्णुरिति स्तुवन्ति ।
बुद्धस्तथा-अर्हन्निति बौद्धजैनाः, सत्-श्री अकालेति च सिक्ख-सन्तः । 2

Shaiva yameesham shiva ityavochan, Yam vaishnavaa vishnuriti stuvanti
Buddhastathaarhannitibauddhajainah, Sat-shree akaaleti cha sikkha-santah

*To which Almighty the Shaivites call Shiva and the Vaishnavites praise as Vishnu, the
Bauddhas call him the Buddha and the Jains as Arhat, the Sikh sages call him as Sri
Akal.*

शास्तेति केचित् कतिचित् कुमारः, स्वामीति मातेति पितेति भक्त्या ।
यं प्रार्थयन्ते जगदीशितारं, स एक एव प्रभुरद्वितियः । 3

Shasteti kechit katichit kumarah, Swaameeti maateti piteti bhaktya
Yam prarthayante jagadeeshitaaram, Sa eka eva prabhuradwiteevah

*Some call him as Shasta, some others as Kumar or Swami, Mata or Pita through
devotion and pray that the Lord of the universe is only one absolute without second.*



कृत्वा नव दृढ संकल्पम्

Kratva Nav Drdha Sankalpam

कृत्वा नव दृढ संकल्पम्, वितरन्तो नव-संदेशं ।
घटयामो नवसंघटनम्, रचयामो नवमितिहासम् । ।

kratva nav drudha sankalpam, vitaranto navasandesham
ghatayamo navasanghatanam, rachayamo navamitihasam - 2

नव मन्वंतर-शिल्पिनः, राष्ट्र समुन्नति कांक्षिणः ।
त्याग-धनः कार्यकर्ताः, कृति-निपुणः वय-नविषण्णाः । ।

navamantarashilpinah, rashtasamunnati kankshinaha
tyagadhana karyekartaha, kritinipunah vayanavishannah

भेद-भावना निरासयन्ता, दीन-दरिद्र समुद्धरन्ता ।
दुःख-वितप्ता समाश्वसन्ता, कृत-संकल्पन् सदा स्मरन्ता । ।

bhedabhavana nirasayantaa, dinadaridra samuddhranataa
dukhavitapta samashwasantaa, krtasankalpan sadaasmarataa

प्रगति पठान्नहि विचलेम, परंपराम् संरक्षेम ।
समुत्चाहिनो निरुद्वेगिनो, नित्य निरन्तर गतिशीलाः । ।

pragati pathannahi vichalema, paramaparama samrakshema
samutchahino nirudvegino, nitya nirantara gati shilaha

कृत्वा नव दृढ संकल्पम्, वितरन्तो नव-संदेशं ।
घटयामो नवसंघटनम्, रचयामो नवमितिहासम् । ।

kratva nav drudha sankalpam, vitaranto navasandesham
ghatayamo navasanghatanam, rachayamo navamitihasam - 2

Purport: It is our firm determination to create something anew, and
propagate our message (tradition) far and wide. Today, we gather
here to organize ourselves, and create a new history.



व्यक्ति-व्यक्ति में जगाएँ हिंदु चेतना

व्यक्ति व्यक्ति में जगाएँ हिंदु चेतना
जन मन संस्कार करें यही साधना
साधना नित्य साधना
साधना अखंड साधना

Vyakti vyakti me jagayen hindu chetana
Jan man sanskar karen yehi sadhana
Sadhana nitya sadhana
Sadhana akhand sadhana

नित्य शाखा जाह्नवी पुनीत जलधरा
साधना की पुण्यभूमि शक्ति पीठिका
रज कणों में प्रकटे दिव्य दीप मालिका
हो तपस्वी के समान संघ साधना
साधना नित्य साधना३

Nitya shaakha jahnavi puneet jaldhara
Sadhana kee punya bhoomi shakti
peethika
Raj kano mein prakate divya deep malika
Ho tapaswee ke saman sangh sadhana
Sadhana nitya sadhana...

हे प्रभो तू विश्व की अजेय शक्ति दे
जगत हो विनम्र ऐसा शील हमको दे
कष्ट से भरा हुआ यह पंथ काटने
ज्ञान दे कि हो सरल हमारी साधना
साधना नित्य साधना३

He prabho tu vishwa kee ajeya shakti de
Jagat ho vinamra aisa sheel hamko de
Kasht se bhara hua yeh panth kaatne
Jnan de ki ho saral hamaree sadhana
Sadhana nitya sadhana...

विजय शाली संघबद्ध कार्यशक्ति दे
तीव्र और अखंड ध्येय निष्ठा हमको दे
हिंदु धर्म रक्षणार्थ वीरव्रत स्फुरे
तव कृपा से हो सफल हमारी साधना
साधना नित्य साधना३

Vijayshalee sanghbaddha karyaashakti de
Teevra aur akhand dheya nishtha hamko de
Hindu dharm rakshanarth veervrat
sphure
Tav kripa se ho safal hamaree sadhna
Sadhana nitya sadhana...





हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे

हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, भेद भाव को नहीं सहे।
संघर्षों से दुःखी जगत को, मानवता की शिक्षा दे।
हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे।
Hindu Hindu ek rahe, Bhed Bhava ko nahi sahe
Sangharshon se dukhi jagat ko, manavta ki shikcha de.

एक ब्रह्म कुछ और नहीं, हरिहर दुर्गा मात वही।
देव देवियां रूप उसीका, देश काल अनुसार सही।
सब पंथों का मान करें, सब ग्रंथों से ज्ञान ग्रहें।
सद्गुरुओं की सीख समझ कर, जीवन को जीना सीखें।
हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे।
Ek Brahma kucha aur nahi, Harihar Durga Mat wahi
Dev deviyan rupa usika, desh kal anusar sahi
Sab pantho ka maan karen, sab granthon se gyan grahen
Sadguruon ki seikh samajh kar, jeevan ko jeena seikhien

जो भाई भटके बिछड़े, हाथ पकड़ ले साथ चले
भोजन कपड़ा घर की सुविधा, शिक्षा सबको सुलभ रहे।
ऊँच नीच लवलेश न हो, छुआछूत अवशेष न हो।
एक लहू सबकी नसनस में, अपनेपन की रीत गहे।
हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे।
Jo bhai bhatake bichude, hanth pakad le sath chale
Bhojan kapda ghar ki suvidha, shikcha sab ko sulabh rahe
Unch neech lavlesh na ho, chua chuta avashesh na ho
Ek lahu sab ki nas nas mein, apne pan ki reet gahe

धर्म प्रेम अमृत पियें, गीता गंगा गौ पूजें।
वेद विहित जीवन रचना हो, राम कृष्ण शिव भक्ति करे।
धर्म सनातन अनुगामी, बुद्ध शरणं गच्छामी।
अर्हन्तोंको नमन करे, नित वाहे गुरु अकाल कहे।
हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे, हिन्दु हिन्दु एक रहे।
Dharma prem amrita piyein, Geeta ganga gau pujein
Veda vihit jeevan rachna ho, Ram krishna Shiva bhakti kare
Dharma sanatan anugami, Budham sharnam gachami
Arhanton ko naman kare, Nita wahe guru aakal kahe





संगठन मंत्र

Sangathan Mantra

सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे सञ्जानाना उपासते ॥

San gachhadhwam, sam vadadhwam sam vo manaansi jaanaatam.
Deva bhaagam yathaa poorve sanjaanaanaa upasate.

Meet together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike, in like manner as the ancient Gods, concurring, accepted their portions of sacrifice.

समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी, समानं मनः सहचित्तमेषाम् ।
समानं मन्त्रमभिमन्त्रये वः, समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि ॥

Samano mantrah Samitih Samani Samanam Manah Saha Chittamesham
Samanam Mantramabhimantraye Vah Samanena Vo Havisha Juhomi

Common be the prayer of these (assembled worshippers), common be the acquirement, common be the purpose, and associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer, I offer for you a common oblation.

समानी व आकूतिः, समाना हृदयानि वः ।
समानमस्तु वो मनो, यथा वः सुसहासति ॥

Samanee va Akootih, Samana Hrudayani Vah
Samanamastu Vo Mano, Yatha Vah Susahasati

Common be you intention, common be (the wishes of) your hearts, common be your thoughts, so that there may be thorough union among you.



About a Hindu Temple (*Devalaya*)

M.G. Prasad

Hindu Temple and Cultural Society, Bridgewater, New Jersey

Introduction

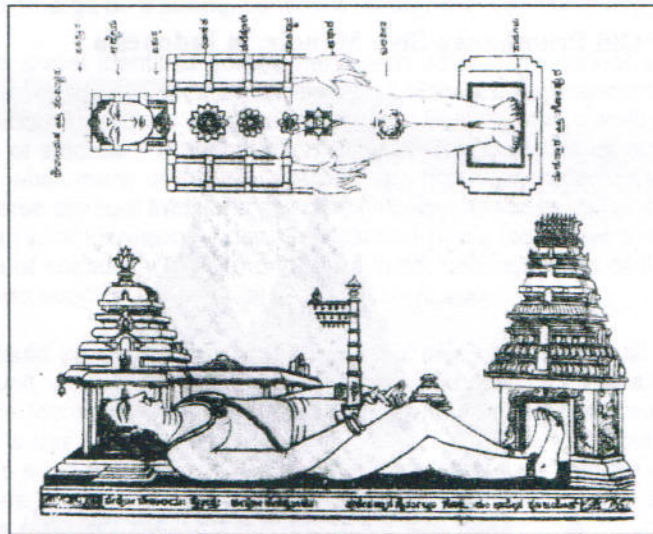
The origin of the word temple can be traced to word the "templum" which were used by Roman soothsayers indicating a section of the sky and also a piece of the ground to gaze and mark divine signs for foretelling the future. Eventually, temple referred to a building constructed at the site. A Hindu temple refers to in Sanskrit language to Devaalaya consisting of two words namely Deva (God) and Alaya (House).

Purpose

In Vedic Hindu view, an individual's body is referred to as a temple with the indweller as God. The Vedic seers (Rishis) having realized God within themselves gave designs and functions of temples in scriptures (Agama *shastras*) of Vedic Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma). Its purpose is to enable a devotee to use a physical temple and the ritualistic worship as a reminder to the spiritual journey to be carried out within oneself. In addition, it also serves as a place for celebrations of Hindu religious festivals.

Architecture

A Vedic Hindu temple's architecture is a divine and yogic representation of a human being as shown in the figure (ref: Agama kosha by S.K. Ramachandra Rao). The feet represent the spire (*rajagopura*). The hands represent the walkway (*prakaara*) encompassing all around the temple. The main hall (*mandapa*) represents the abdomen. The entrance porch (*antaraala*) represents the heart. The sanctum sanctorum (*garbha griha*) represents the head. The deity is consecrated with religious rites in the sanctum sanctorum. There is proportionality between the size of the deity in the sanctum sanctorum and the sizes of the temple feature.



Worship Practices

The ritualistic worship (*pooja*) of consecrated Deities (*vigrahas*) is carried out by priests on behalf of devotees to remind them of the inward yogic process of approaching the indwelling God. The various steps in a *pooja* offered to the deity with prayers and mantras (in Sanskrit) include steps such as washing feet and giving sacred bath using milk and water. Then with screen closed the deity is decoratively dressed with special cloths, flowers and ornaments. After the decoration the screen is opened to devotees to signify removal of veil of illusions so that devotees can see the beautifully decorated God. Then fruits and food are offered and incense sticks and lamps are waved in front of Deity. During the waving of lamp by a priest, devotees need to see with eyes open the radiating face of the fully decorated deity so that its memory will provide the spiritual joy. Then priests distribute sacred water (*teertha*) and sacred food (*prasada*) that devotees drink and eat for spiritual blessings. Thus the entire ritualistic worship can also be seen as expressing love, devotion and respect to one's guest of honor. The joyful resonance between the external and internal worship provides the bliss.

The elaborate worship of consecrated deity along with sacred rituals with Vedic mantras and the materials used in rituals such as water, milk, flower, incense, sandal paste, bells, conch-shell etc is to help devotees to focus their mind on the Supreme Being. The Vedic seers have recommended the temple and rituals so that devotees through sensory experiences can spiritually experience the bliss of God. It is inspiring to remember the words of my Sadguru Sriranga, a seer-yogi, "The worship of deities and rituals in a temple should be carried out with child-like loving mind by the devotees as little children play with joy using their toys as medium".

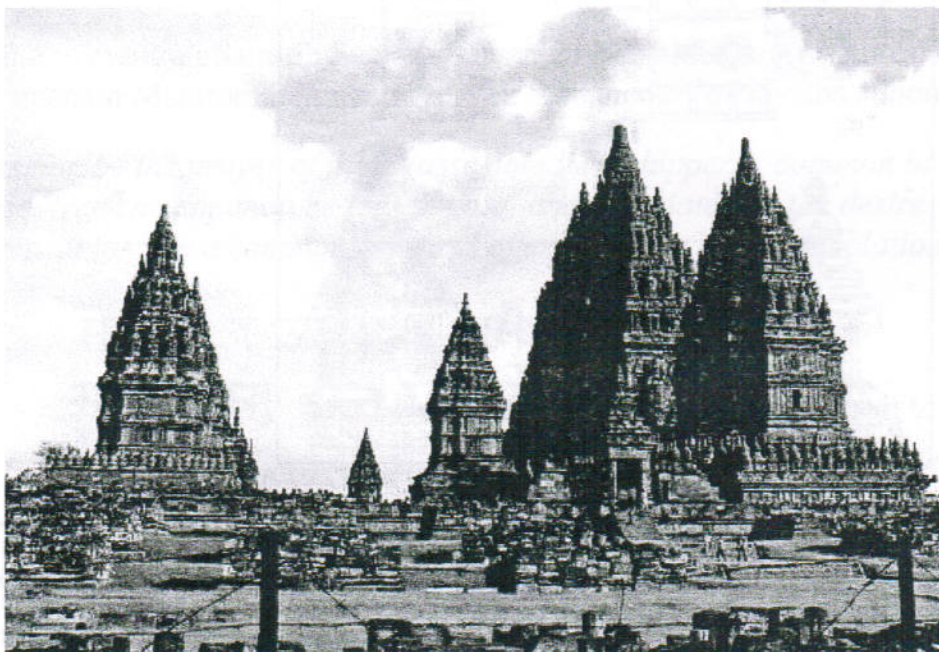
Role in Vedic Hinduism

Vedic Hinduism or Santana Dharma is based on the Vedas and Vedic literature. Solutions and approaches to all levels of inquiry into the nature of *atman*, universe and God are provided in Vedic Hinduism. Rituals, Music, Dance, Yoga, Meditation, Vedanta, etc. express its many facets. Celebrations of Vedic Hindu festivals bring out these various aspects, namely; religious, cultural, educational and social. A devotee focusing on the meaning of the Vedic mantras and ritualistic procedures will gain the spiritual knowledge. One focusing on the prayers and feelings in rituals will experience joy of devotion. One focusing on service in a temple will experience the joy of selfless service. Thus, a temple plays an important role in providing a sacred place and means for spiritual development of a seeker.

Conclusions

A Hindu temple (*Devaalaya*) has not only religious purpose but also spiritual, cultural, educational and social objectives. It provides a place for devotees to focus and develop their spiritual insight. A Hindu temple in essence can be recognized in three forms. The first is oneself with God within. The second one is a dedicated room (with altar and deities) in a home. The third one is the Hindu temple in which devotees participate collectively that reflects the pluralistic nature of Vedic Hinduism or Santana Dharma. Thus a devotee needs to integrate all the three forms of temples to develop the spiritual insight and enjoy peace and bliss.

The 1100 Year Old Prambanan Siva Mandir, in Indonesia



Prambanan is the largest Hindu temple compound in Indonesia, located in central Java, approximately 18 km east of Yogyakarta. It was built around 850 CE by either Rakai Pikatan, king of the second Mataram dynasty or Balitung Maha Sambu, during the Sanjaya dynasty. Not long after its construction, the temple was abandoned and began to deteriorate. Reconstruction of the compound began in 1918. The main building was completed in around 1953. Today, it is an Unesco World Heritage Site and one of the largest Hindu temples in SE Asia. It is characterised by its tall and pointed architecture, typical of Hindu temple architecture, and by the 47m high central building inside a large complex of individual temples. [Souce – Wikipedia]

Who Am I?

Strengthening Hindu Identity amongst Hindu Americans

A few years ago, during a casual conversation, a young Hindu student approached her Hindu teacher, who coincidentally is also as a good friend of mine, and invited her to an upcoming Navaratri event. The teacher politely declined since she had other plans. "But, Navaratri is the biggest Gujarati function of the year. How can you miss it?" pressed on the teenager. "Yes, I agree. But there are so many other Hindu organizations too, which celebrate Navaratri. Perhaps, time willing, I will attend one of those, if not this one," replied my friend. "But unlike those Hindu events, this is one is a Gujarati function," was the gentle retort from the pupil.

Our Social Identity - Hindu

That brief conversation, succinctly encapsulates the nature of challenge of raising Hindu-Americans as Hindu-Americans. Clearly, this student had never learnt that she was a Hindu-American with a Gujarati flavor. Rather, in her mind, being a Hindu and being a Gujarati could not go hand-in-hand. This is by no means is an isolated incident. An entire generation has grown up with multiple identities linked to tradition, region, and ethnicity, but oblivious of the fact that it is first and foremost Hindu. This lack of awareness of one's Hindu-ness is more than often rooted in the self-doubt of seniors and parents, who have the responsibility of raising children. Quite often, this self-doubt grows because of our inability to differentiate between our social and spiritual identities. For instance, while we insist on labeling ourselves in multitudinous ways (i.e. belonging to tradition A, B, C, ...), most of these distinctions do not accurately define the social component of our identities, which is captured best by the term "Hindu". We have analyzed in minutest possible detail the accuracy and appropriateness of terminologies that represent the *spiritual* components of our respective identities, be it Vaidik, or Arya Samajee, or Sanatan Dharmee, Saivism, or Vaishnavism, or Jainism, or Sikhism, ... However, as a community, we have paid little attention towards reinforcing the social component of our identities. And by neglecting our Hindu-ness, we have failed to emerge as a strong, confident Hindu-American community.

Our spiritual and social identities complement each other. One cannot sustain by itself *sans* the other. The longevity of every single Indic spiritual tradition, be it Saivism, Vaishnavism, Advaitism, or whatever, will depend on how strong Hindu-Americans are as a community. Similarly, the stability of a Hindu society depends on how strong is the fire of spirituality amongst each of us, for it is our spiritual core that works as the engine of Hindu society. Further, while many of the Hindu-Americans from Generation-I may view the philosophical differences between our diverse spiritual traditions as something very fundamental and substantial, an average Generation-II Hindu American (and increasingly new Generation-I Hindu too) views the same differences as mere *minutiae*. Clearly, the path of spirituality for him originates in his understanding of the idea that he is a Hindu, devoid of which, his progress even on the spiritual plane will be stunted.

So, while we should insist on sincerely treading our own unique spiritual paths, we should also acknowledge that as a social unit, we are all Hindus, and that such acknowledgement is for the benefit for all of us. The social component of the identity of all those who subscribe to spiritual traditions born in India is represented by the word "Hindu". It is this component of our self-definition that has to be cultivated and strengthened. Our social identity is only as strong as the number of people who vigorously identify with it. A clear proclamation that as a community we are all Hindu-Americans constitutes the first step of any strategy designed to inculcate Hindu identity and pride amongst our youth and children.

Pride in Hindu Heritage

If my child has to grow up as a Hindu, and remain as a Hindu, she has to feel proud of being one. She has to understand that being Hindu confers upon her a very unique privilege, which she inherited, and that she has to carry it forward and pass on the same to coming generations for the benefit of the whole world. Thus, being a Hindu is being a very special person, so she has to realize.

This feeling of being someone special, privileged, good and thereby proud in a positive way will only develop when my daughter learns about, at least a minimal common set of basic values which link her with all of her other Hindu peers. What are the common values that all Hindus cherish and live for is a question that Hindu-Americans should be comfortable with? A society's strength is only as deep as the expanse of its shared common values and morals. Educating our sons and daughters about a common set Hindu values, concepts and traditions in a planned and systematic way will go a long way in instilling pride in their hearts about our traditions, values and Dharma. This is not a difficult task. After all, the number of Hindus who have lived our

values and ideals in the truest sense of the word is endless. Who amongst us, regardless of whatever spiritual tradition he professes, will not be moved by the life of Ram, Krishna, Harischandra, Buddha, Mahavir, Gobind Singh, Arundhati, Sukanya, Savitri, Sita, Prahlad, Dhruva, Vasishtha, Agastya, Valmiki ... and countless others that the Hindu civilization has produced since times immemorial? Given the immense volume of resource material available in this regard, the only challenge for the Hindu-American leaders is to develop well-thought out programs based on *commonly* shared materials and themes that continually reinforce the idea of being a Hindu through books, videos, songs, dances, plays, and other mediums. The challenge is to infuse the message with sufficient fun so that enjoyment and learning go hand-in-hand. And finally, the challenge is to work on what we set out to accomplish with diligence, regularity and consistency. This is the second component of a strategy for engaging our children in Hindu traditions and values.

Working Together and Seva

But educating our youth that they are proud Hindus by itself will yield limited dividends. The feeling of togetherness is more a product of action vis-à-vis that of education. Togetherness emerges not only when people share common goals and values, but also work towards those goals, and practice those values. Commonness is also an output of our acts of sharing each other's joys, and helping each other in times of grief. The path of *seva* invariably leads to unity and strength. The Vedas themselves steer us in the direction of unison in thought, word and action through the famous "*sangathan sukta*" from the RgVeda.

सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।
 देवा भागं यथा पूर्वं सञ्जानाना उपासते ॥
 समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी, समानं मनः सहचित्तमेषाम् ।
 समानं मन्त्रमभिमन्त्रये वः, समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि ॥
 समानी व आकृतिः, समाना हृदयानि वः ।
 समानमस्तु वो मनो, यथा वः सुसहासति ॥

"Meet together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike, in like manner as the ancient Gods, concurring, accepted their portions of sacrifice. Common be the prayer of these (assembled worshippers), common be the acquirement, common be the purpose, and associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer; I offer for you a common oblation. Common be your intention, common be (the wishes of) your hearts, common be your thoughts, so that there may be thorough union among (all)."

The verse is clear. For acquiring strength and sustainability, the Self-realized *rishis* of Vedas instruct us to be driven by a common purpose, intentions and wishes, and to think, speak and act together. It is incumbent upon us to follow this eternal principle by:

- Acknowledging that on a social plane, we are all Hindus, regardless of which spiritual path we follow
- Educating us and our youth as Hindus in ways which generate pride and a sense of uniqueness
- Creating avenues and opportunities so that Hindus meet on a continual basis in large numbers and work towards common goals
- Helping each others in times of need and grief through *seva* programs

Moving along this path with patience, diligence and faith will lead us to where we want to be – a reinvigorated, inherently stable Hindu-American community working towards the benefit of one and all.

Hindu Temples and Generation-N

Establishing temple endowments for the coming generations

Niraj Mohanka
Sarva-Deva Temple, Mass.

Background

Over past 30-40 years, Hindu-Americans have spent a great deal of money building temples. Today we have nearly 1,000 temples in North America – many small, most modest and some quite large. These have been built by the Generation One, the immigrant Hindus who came to North America. They often bring their small children to the temple with the hopes that these children will pick up *samskaras*, but once these children become teenagers, they, in general find little time for mandirs and things related to *Dharma*. These are the Generation Two. Given that this generation is not continuing in the temple-going lifestyle of their parents, what will happen when these children grow up and raise their children (Generation Three)? How many of these Hindus will be temple-going? How many will spend money to build temples? Maintain temples? Sponsor Hindu educational activities? How many of them will even remain Hindu?

Perhaps the reality is that Hinduism today is a weak religion that tends to be subsumed by whatever other religion is in its proximity. Followers of other religions tend to not only hold onto their beliefs generation to generation but also work tirelessly to spread their religion. They believe that their religion is wonderful and that the world would be a better place if everyone followed it and therefore they work hard to spread their religions systems to every nation on Earth. Hindus, on the other hand, are either ashamed of their *Dharma* or are proud of it, but only in private. How can Generation One promote their *Dharma* to the world if they cannot successfully propagate their *Dharma* to their children (Generation Two)? And what will the future look like going out many generations – two, three, and four ... all the way to **Generation N**. Given current trends, the future is very uncertain and potentially bleak. I believe we, as a global Dharmic community, need to look in the mirror hard and ask ourselves – **what type of planet do we want to leave for our grandchildren?** If we believe the world would be a better place with more *Dharmic*, then we need to take action and the center-piece of those efforts will be temples. If change does not occur, then it is very likely that many of these temples will be abandoned in the next generation.

The Importance of Temples

A temple is an invaluable place for Hindus not only as a place of worship, but equally importantly as a *community center* with a spiritual foundation. Since the future of *Sanatana Dharma* revolves around temples it is important for temples to be open-minded about change so that they may continue to meet the Dharmic congregation's needs.

Temples have **POWER** – we should cultivate that power and expand it. A child cannot grow tall and strong without good food and plenty of activity. Likewise a temple cannot grow without constant community sponsorship – not only to create the physical building (the “hardware”) but also to develop the people and systems that are self-sustaining (the “software”). The sustenance of a *mandir*, thus requires creation of **TEFs (Temple Endowment Funds)** which must be a permanent part of temple budgets and be funded at a minimum of 5 to 10% of the total budget. The efficacy of the utilization of these funds should be measured not so much by the magnitude of the spending, but rather how and where these funds are spent. The direction of spending will have as large an impact on the future of global *Dharma* as the amount of spending.

Challenges

In today's global economy, nations are becoming increasingly interconnected and the pace of life is speeding up. People have less and less time for activities outside of work, family and essential home upkeep. That means less time for vacation, hobbies, and for many people, even less time for *Dharma*. Temple activities are *optional* for most Hindus and attendance outside of a few annual events is not a high priority. Donating a portion of wealth for temple development is also a low priority. In most cases of temple construction in North America, a few affluent Hindus donate large amounts of money to build a temple. They are often accompanied by a small group of temple enthusiasts who may be able to keep the temple doors open for some time, but if a larger section of the Hindu public is not integrated into the temple community, the temple will eventually run into trouble. It is not uncommon to see the raising of a temple with the expectation of having 50 to 100 regular attendees for weekly *satsangs*, while the real number may be less than 20. In addition, those 20 may not donate much money. Either the temple will need to request more money constantly from the wider community,

or they will someday "go out of business". A summary of some current problems that many Hindu temples face could include the following:

- Low attendance and lack of involvement of youth
- Hiring, and training of priests
- Lack of sponsorship of community and academia
- Disconnect due to language (many adults do not understand Sanskrit and many youth are weak at Hindi)
- Service composition (how much time is spent on *bhajan*, how much *baudhik*, how much time spent on local/national/global discussing local, national and global Hindu issues)
- Suboptimal management of mandirs
- Paucity of services offered (child care, elderly housing/care, education, counseling, etc.)
- Insufficient coordination with local community organizations
- Perennial lack of funds to maintain temples

Opportunities

The very nature of a changing global society can actually end up being Dharma's greatest advantage. If the world is getting more educated and informed, don't its citizens have a greater need for an internally consistent spiritual system instead of blind dogma? Don't they need a spiritual system that is flexible and adaptable? Don't they need a spiritual system that can help them cope and even prosper in this new hectic lifestyle and teach them more intelligent ways of diet, exercise and stress-reduction? The answer is yes, and the answer is Dharma. The need, therefore, is to spread awareness about Dharma as the principle that has given the world such wonderful gifts as Yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, science, etc. And the hub of such a movement which helps spread awareness about Dharma should naturally be the temple. Going forward, temples of North America expand their activities in areas, which remain untouched till so far. And the core financial engine of all this activity can be these TEFs. They can start out small and over time expand out to the wider community with a plethora of "sticky" services. Some of the new temple attributes (provided in large part by the TEFs) can be:

- Improving the composition of weekly temple services and liturgy
- Create leadership from Generation II
- Provide more services (day care, sponsorship of international poor or refugees, welfare services, job-training, after-school classes, seva opportunities for youth looking to improve their resumes for college, playground for children, sports competitions, etc.)
- Better coordination with local Indian Associations (and other non-religious organizations)
- Involvement and engagement with Hindu organizations on campuses
- Have an *acharya* (teacher) at each temple along with one or more priests; the *acharya*'s sole mission is to educate others (priests, adults, children, Hindu and non-Hindu public in general, etc.)
- Make temples the center of *samskara* (sacraments; life-stage ceremonies) versus the home
- Education programs for youth, adults and elderly, and academic sponsorships in area of religion studies

In addition to all the plethora of services that temples can provide, a few basics should not be forgotten. Temples need to be conveniently located. If they are more than an hour away from the Hindu population, then not many will attend the temple services. The temple must ensure that there are no schedule conflicts with the local Indian Associations/Community Centers. Also, the temple must understand the needs of its diverse audience. Children do not have the same interests or attention span of adults and will not want to visit the temple if the normal puja service is more than say 45 minutes. In addition, the children should have the opportunity to participate in activities versus only sitting and listening to lectures or mantras.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, our community's sustenance will depend on how well we planning our future implement this plan and raise money towards this end. We need to understand this and raise enough money to be able to entrust people who can dedicate their full-time efforts to the organization, management and propagation of Dharma. This cannot be done in our spare time. There is simply not enough spare time available to do an adequate job. We need to train a new generation of Dharmic experts and professionals (priests, *acharyas*, professors, activists, leaders, public-speakers, attorneys, marketers, politicians, etc.). The task is very tall, but we are a smart bunch of people and we can do it. So let's start – now.

Engaging Vanprasthis in Seva Motivating those who are not yet engaged

Arvindbhai Patel, Sanskruti Parivar Center, NJ

It is estimated that over the next decade, more than one hundred thousand Hindu professionals, businessmen and other seniors will retire. Many of these men and women have been involved to a certain degree in volunteer activities through religious, trade, community, educational or civic organizations. Also, they have time and inclination to share their experience and wisdom with others. In order to lead a meaningful and happy life post-retirement, it would be necessary for a *vanprasthi* to remain engaged with the society in the role of a contributor. By developing appropriate programs for these *vanprasthis*, mandirs could offer meaningful services to the community and also increase the number of devotees attending their services.

For many *Vanprasthis* retirement may create a sudden vacuum in life. Living in an empty nest sometimes brings loneliness, complacency due to lack of clear goals, and a sense of insecurity. Our rishis have described *vanprastha-ashram* as a transition between *grihastha-ashram* and *sanyasa-ashram*. Properly understood, *vanprastha-ashram* is the golden period in life. *Vanprasthis* can get engaged with the community through temples in following four general areas:

- Worship - sermons, *katha*, lectures, scripture readings, *puja*, *aarti*, *kirtan*, rituals
- Education - children and adult classes, art and cultural classes, youth conferences, *bal-vihars*
- Cultural - youth camps, Navratri, Diwali, Holi celebrations, stage shows, museum visits
- Seva - senior citizen programs, soup kitchens, disaster relief efforts, helping victims of violence, etc.

In each of these areas, *vanprasthis* can offer something very substantial. While some of them are already engaged in very meaningful activities and helping the society, a large number of these persons feel lonely and somewhat helpless. Perhaps, the first step in enthusing them, so that they can re-energize themselves and get involved with the community, could be to educate them about the value of being a *vanprasthi*.

Thus, a five-hour motivational workshop has been designed which touches upon the following areas:

- A conceptual understanding of *vanprasthashram* and its importance for the individual and the society
- How to enhance one's financial security, health and wellness
- Realization of one's own potential, and how to harness it for enjoyment and avoid pitfalls of retirement
- Managing mind for ultimate happiness
- Seva opportunities within USA and abroad

During the workshop sessions, focus is laid on emphasizing that retirement is not the end of a productive life. Rather, it is a beginning towards a new phase, where the focus of the individual shifts from helping oneself, to helping others, community and the world. Attendees are introduced to the idea that ultimate happiness is achieved by connecting ourselves to God, and that *seva* is the path for reaching God.

Further, participants are inspired to serve the community through temples. *Vanprasthis* are also introduced to a whole range of avenues through which they can serve the community, some of them being: teaching, involving children in prayers, story telling, bringing children to *bal-viharas*, planning festivals and rituals, counseling, providing emotional support, celebrating birthdays, supporting parents through daily chores, driving needy neighbors to religious events, organizing religious trips and events, helping plan funeral arrangements for the needy, helping conduct youth conferences, camps, soup kitchens, and disaster relief activities, helping family in times of distress, promoting fund-raising activities, maintaining and managing temples, volunteering for *prasad* distribution, cleaning up and maintenance of community properties, administration, coordinating purchasing, raising funds, publishing magazines and newsletters, conducting yoga and meditation classes etc.

We have found that such motivational workshops help many *vanprasthis* overcome their fears and sense of helplessness and reinvigorate them to become strongly engaged in community activities. Also, these workshops, if conducted with careful planning, could go a long way in helping *vanprasthis* become valuable resources for the mandirs. Such workshops have been conducted at various places in the USA. We will be very happy to help those interested organize similar events in your area. For more information, please contact Arvindbhai Patel at (973)-256-2472 or Gaurang Vaishnav at (732)-744-0851.

"Itihaasa" in Sanskrit Translates to "Myth" in English

About choosing the right terms when describing Hindu principles

Words we use in writing or in speech are important since they define us as individuals, as a community and as a civilization. There are terms that are unique to the Hindu civilization and have no parallel in the English language. One such word is Dharma. When an English word is used as a substitute for a Sanskrit word it is akin to fitting a square peg in a round hole. Many times, such substitutions, over a period of time, distort our own understanding of Dharmic ideas. Using a foreign word to describe a concept that is unique to a specific civilization is also fraught with danger of miscommunication and misinterpretation. Unfortunately, we often make this mistake in our everyday usage of prevalent English terms as substitutes for Sanskrit words. We think they are close enough or even equivalent. But many a times they are not. We justify this by thinking that the audience will understand and relate to it better if we use a popular and familiar word. But, in reality, we only create more confusion. The true meaning is never conveyed and the listener takes away a distorted and incomplete understanding of the subject. As this partial and inaccurate understanding is propagated over a period of time, it gives rise to misconceptions that are of a permanent and almost irreversible nature. A word wrongly used in a book or in a speech propagates for generations, the error multiplying manifolds in that process. This note is an attempt to mention a few such terms that we commonly misuse in our casual speech or writing, with the hope that we become more aware of the nature of terms we use to convey Hindu ideas.

Dharma or Religion

The dictionary defines religion as a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices, or the service and worship of God or the supernatural. Dharma, on the other hand, has an all encompassing meaning that goes beyond reverence for Gods, beliefs and attitudes. The root of Dharma is "dhrī" which means, "that which integrates, supports or holds." In a sense Dharma is the natural law of being. Everything in the universe is governed by Dharma. The Sun has its Dharma to radiate and sacrifice itself to support the solar system. The Earth has her Dharma to hold on to all the creature that exist on it making no distinctions whatsoever. All creatures have their Dharma and their actions are guided by them. Each individual has his or her dharma (Swa Dharma). A family has its dharma. A society has its Dharma. A nation has its Dharma and so on. And all these Dharmas are interrelated. Since religion is rooted in beliefs (which may or may not be rational), it leads to divisions and disintegration. Dharma, with its focus on responsibilities and duties, is the source of integration, and harmony, cohesion.

Murti or Idol

Here is how the Merriam-Webster's online dictionary describes "idol". (1) A representation or symbol of an object of worship; *broadly*: a false god; (2): a-likeness of something, *b-obsolete*: PRETENDER, IMPOSTOR (3): a form or appearance visible but without substance. Clearly, the *murtis* we pay our respects and obeisance to are not mere idols. A *murti* is vibrant with the presence of Ishwara. Our sacred texts describe a murti, on the other hand as a form, manifestation and personification of God. Murtis can be an-*iconic* (*avyakta* or non-manifest), such as the Sivalinga, or *iconic* (*vyakta*, or fully manifest) such as the Nataraja. In-between is the partially manifest (*vyakta-avyakta*), e.g., the mukha-linga, in which the face of Siva appears on the Sivalinga. Each time we call a murti an idol, we convey the message that we are worshipping "false gods", as that indeed is the dictionary meaning of the term "idol".

Itihasas and Puranas versus Myths and Mythologies

"Jews and Christians strongly object to the use of the term *myth* to refer to any part of their respective religious texts or beliefs. This is largely due to the fact that the Bible itself uses the word *myth* to mean an invented tale, a falsehood, and this is the use that has passed into common parlance"¹. For instance, in its New International Version (2.Tim.4), the Bible, very clearly describes myths as falsehood². Naturally, since early Western scholarship on Hindu Dharma was primarily drawn from Christian theologian and missionary groups, it was only expected of them to characterise our Itihasas and Puranas as myths and mythologies. Such distorted representations of our sacred texts very adversely impacts the psychology of our children and youth. Thus, the we have to consciously move away from "myths" and towards more frequent usage of traditional terms like

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org>

² "they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

Itihasas (Ramayan and Mahabharata) and Puranas. The word Itihasa, in fact, means, "This is how it happened". It is the documented eyewitness account of a reporter (Valmiki) writing the account of Ram and Sita as he saw it and experienced it face to face. Ditto for Rishi Vyas and Mahabharat. Similarly, the word *Purana* literally means, "That which occurred in the past, yet is ever new." So Puranas are not mere stories to amuse children but records of Hindu civilization. It is our duty to read, understand and present them as such.

Atman or soul

Another common error we make is to use the word soul as a substitute for *atman*. The two words have no connection at all. The word soul brings with it the entire context of Christian theology. As soon as we use the word soul to mean *atman*, we have unknowingly, already equated (contracted) the vastness of the Hindu thought to a much narrower notion of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The word *atman*, in fact, is inseparable from the Supreme Consciousness, SatChitAnanda.

Mandir or temple

The word *mandir* literally means going to the depth of your heart, the real seat of the *manas*. And, as Sri Krishna says in the Geeta, that is where He resides. Going to the *mandir* is going through this journey of searching for your inner self. The whole architecture and also the ceremonies in a *mandir* are designed to facilitate this quest. The temple is a meeting place where people congregate to pray. It does not have the rich symbolism and deep significance that a *mandir* has.

God(s) or god(s)

The word "God", when capitalized implies "the supreme or ultimate reality, (i.e.) the Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness who is worshiped as creator and ruler of the universe"³. The same word, when written as "god" (in lower case) represents as per the same dictionary as "a being or object believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to require human worship; *specifically*: one controlling a particular aspect or part of reality". It is in this context that Semitic religions refer to their conception of god in capitalized format while relegating all other gods to an inferior status. But the Hindu conception of the Divine is somewhat different, for our Deities, innumerable as they may appear, invariably represent Ishwar.

Darshana or philosophy

The Sanskrit word *Darshana* is formed from the root "*drś*", which means "viewing" or "looking at." Thus *darshana* deals with seeing with your mind's eye or coming face to face with the Truth. It requires intense practice, contemplation and personal commitment. In the Upanishads, for example, "*darshana*" refers to the different ways in which the Vedas could be viewed. These ways crystallised into the six "points of view", or six angles for exploring and validating the Truth. Western philosophy is an intellectual exercise, a verbal gymnastic for its own sake. Western schools of philosophy are often seen in conflict with one another – for example, Platonists and Aristotelians, rationalists and empiricists. In contrast, the *darshanas* of Hindu thought, despite often presenting contrasting articulations, are inspired by an implicit unity. Their aim is to examine an assertion from many different angles before accepting it as a verifiable, valid form of Truth. The *darshanas* are presented indeed as points of view, different above all in perspective and not in ultimate content.

Rta and Ritual

The term ritual originates in the Sanskrit word *Rta* which means order or the "course of things." The order and regularity in the universe relates to discipline in our lives. Thus in Hindu thought discipline is happiness, which is in sharp contrast to what the popular notions are about discipline. Similarly, simplicity and organization lead to happiness. These observances reduce the probability of everyday conflicts in life that lead to stress and misery. A ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, which is prescribed by traditions of a community. A ritual may be performed at regular intervals, or on specific occasions. The purposes of rituals are varied; satisfaction of spiritual needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, demonstration of respect or, sometimes, just for the pleasure of the ritual itself. Many activities that are ostensibly performed for concrete purposes, such as jury trials, execution of criminals, and scientific symposia, are loaded with purely symbolic actions prescribed by regulations or tradition, and thus are partly ritual in nature. Even trivial actions like hand-shaking and saying hello are rituals. In the Vedas, *rta* lays the foundation for *dharma*.

³ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

HMEC SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

MANDIRS & SAMSKRITI –

DHARMA AS SOURCE AND GOAL OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION

MODERATOR: SHRI RAGHU BOORLA

Sanskriti - A comprehensive expression of Dharma through way of life – Dr. Uma Mysorekar

Culture is not merely about music and dance. *Sanskriti* in particular is a much more comprehensive term. Thru *sanskriti*, a civilization expresses itself through actual conduct and actions. It is a way of life. It is more about actions and behavior and not so much about opinions, ideas and ideologies. One question that seriously needs to be explored is how mandirs can evolve into centers of Hindu *sanskriti* – i.e. places where people can see Hindu *dharma* in action through the conduct of all those present in the mandir and visiting it. Also, Hindu Arts, be it music, dance, paintings, cinema, theater and even cuisine, are expressions of what Hindus hold in high esteem and worthy of emulation. Arts are not culture by themselves. They are the medium through which *sanskriti* portrays itself, and communicates about its core principles to all the interested.

Mandirs as centers of evolution of art forms – Shri Raj Mohanka

"Art" is one of the numerous mediums, through which a culture expresses itself. As times change, so do mode of expressions, contexts, languages, and metaphors. But some things in a culture remain unchanged. An art form lives only to the extent it is able to effectively communicate and propagate the core elements about a civilization in new contexts and environs, without unduly corrupting itself. Can mandirs be the places where Hindu arts can evolve with changing times? And if the answer is yes, what are the initiatives that mandirs can undertake in this direction?

Enjoyment and learning through cultural and festival activities – Dr. Ila Sukhadia

"Culture" is typically misinterpreted as dance, music and drama (even movies). Most cultural programs tend to be influenced in a large part by "Bollywood" because that is what makes people happy! Classical dance and music is generally perceived as dull and drab – limited to smaller audiences, *arangetrams*, etc. There may be a valid reason for this "perception. Can "cultural" performances be "classical" as well as "fun" and entertaining?

Spreading Samskriti through Cooking – Shri Gadadhara Pandit Dasa

Sanskriti is harmonious thought in action. Even seemingly "trivial" actions, when done with thought and deliberation can be a medium for spreading Hindu values. Cooking is one such example. The speaker will share his experiences as to how through teaching vegetarian cooking, he has been able to invoke vigorous interest, amongst the principally non-Hindu student community of Columbia University, in Hindu spirituality and everything going with it. The speaker will also offer proposals as to how such experiments can be concretized formally and duplicated across US and Canada.

MANDIRS & WORSHIP -

CONTINUITY OF HINDU TRADITIONS THROUGH PROPER UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE

MODERATOR: SHRI RAMA BELAGAJE

Hindu temples, most of them already built on the strong foundation of the religious and spiritual traditions of *Sanaatana Dharma*, need to stand on four pillars - Worship, Education, Culture, and Service - to become enduring and sustainable institutions. While our temples generally have a strong worship pillar, they are typically weak in the other three corners. Even in the area of worship, there are many improvements and progressive changes that we need to make to make our temples model institutions for enabling religious and spiritual experiences that are integral and unifying, and also relevant to our modern times.

Making Worship Relevant and Appealing to All Hindus - Dr. Kumar Nochur

How can we make mandir worship appeal to all Hindus, and not just sub-communities? Most temples are consecrated in a particular agamic way, with priests from specific regions of India doing the worship in their traditional regional modes. This creates a situation where the worship appeals to subgroups of the Hindu community only and not to the larger Hindu population. This aspect also includes *Deities* that are known only in some parts of India, festivals that are also regional, etc. While some of the detailed and tradition specific way of worship can and should continue in mandirs, it is also important to note that our mandirs should promote relatively simpler worship practices which can be performed by one and all. This will require developing

resource material for people in general, and children in particular, and making this resource material available to everyone through mandirs. Such a step will also lead to the development of a sense of commonality amongst all Hindu-Americans that will transcend distinctions of tradition, age, region and generation.

Engaging youth effectively in Hindu worship practices – Shri Karthik Subramanian

How can we make our youth actively interested and engaged in our worship practices? Currently, most of them have minimal understanding of, and hence appreciation for, our temple rituals. Even adults are generally clueless about what the priests are doing. Very few temples have English-speaking priests who can explain to our children what's going on, and why it is important or useful or necessary. Very few temples have educational programs to teach our children the symbolism of Hindu practices, and yet, if we do not understand the symbolism behind all our worship traditions - be it *Vedic*, *agam*, *tantric*, or whatever - we just cannot appreciate most of our current practices.

It is hoped that the reader gets the picture of the abysmal situation with regard to lack of awareness, understanding, and appreciation among our youth of the Hindu heritage. So, the question is: What can we do to make our worship practices intelligible, appealing, meaningful, experiential, and fun, yes fun, for the younger generation of Hindus?

Enabling priests to explaining worship practices effectively – Dr. V. V. Prakasa Rao

How can we make our priests ambassadors of Hinduism both at the mandirs and with the community outside? This is related to topic 1 above and to the conference theme of Education. Currently, most of our priests are fluent only in one or two regional languages, and are generally inadequate in English speaking ability. This makes it hard for them to explain our worship practices to Hindus who speak other languages, as well as to non-Hindus. They are not able to represent Hinduism in any interfaith or cross-cultural forum. Often laymen like us have to assume this role. While we can continue to do this, and it is part of our job as mandir administrators to communicate Hinduism positively to others, the priests need to be trained in languages and presentation skills to enable them also to assume this vital role.

Celebrating samskars at home and mandir – Dr. Shive Chaturvedi

This presentation will start with listing down the familiar steps in the celebration of a typical modern birthday, and then some critical observations from Vedic perspectives will be presented. These will include some blatant contradictions and inconsistencies within our timeless Vedic wisdom. Despite some complaints from some awakened individuals that we have adopted a western way of celebration, no serious attempt, to the author's knowledge, has been made either to critique fully the popular way and/or establish a Vedic way. Truthfully speaking, our Hindu *adhyatmic* and socially conscious leaders have also failed to establish a Vedic alternative for society to follow. Traditional birthday *pooja* is considered to be the only alternative, and there too full range of meanings and purpose remains unknown to all the participants. This paper is an attempt to restructure the total celebration on the basis of some of the fundamental ideas of Vedic Dharmic traditions. The beautiful *suktam*, *Tamaso Maa Jyotirgamay*, is brought into full focus; full range of meaning and different action items are delineated; and the structure is designed to gain significant participation by all, even without the formal *pooja*. It is designed to remain effective in both private and public arena. It is a new unfolding.

MANDIRS & EDUCATION -

THE CHALLENGE OF ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING & DEPICTION OF HINDU DHARMA

MODERATOR: SHRI KAUSHIK JOSHI

An overview of the education needs of children, parents, priests, and non-Hindus – Prof. M. G. Prasad

The lack of education relating to Hindu *dharma* is deep and widespread. Formal educational institutions like schools and universities offer little, if any, in terms of educating people about Hindu *dharma*. And whatever they offer is more than often very unfavorable characterization of Hindu traditions and values. Such a mis-portrayal and misunderstanding of our traditions, *dharma* and values, has very adversely shaped the psyche of our children as they grow up. They learn little in their homes, because parents have little to offer in terms clear articulation of the principles of Hindu *dharma*. The priests, who could have filled this void, have their own limitations, particularly related to lack of communication skills, and unfamiliarity with the context of such education in America. And the feedback from non-Hindus, be it peers, lay-persons, or teachers, is generally negative, and sometimes even hostile. Correcting such an adverse situation starts with understanding the education needs of all of these stakeholders – priests, parents, children, and non-Hindus. That would be step one. Once that is accomplished, we could move on and start generating user-specific content, and also figuring out ways and means of effectively delivering this content to the target group.

What every Hindu child needs to know: Implementing core common resource materials in mandirs – Dr. Raju Vanapalli

Sustenance of any community lies in the feeling of belongingness to the larger whole. Unfortunately, this sense of belongingness amongst Hindus has diminished over last several decades. So, when a question is asked of a Hindu child about her religion, the answer is generally varied, inconsistent and complex, rather than being a straight-forward one-liner like "I am a Hindu".

Education can play a strong role in imbuing our sons and daughters with this feeling of being proud, and confident Hindus. While educational resource material can vary from mandir-to-mandir for reasons pertaining to specific traditions and preferences, this diversity could be taught only once children have learnt that and understood that they are Hindus first and foremost. In this context, it may be very well that mandirs have to develop common basic course materials that could serve as primers on Hindu Dharma. All such common resource materials could have the following three key ingredients:

- Hindu tradition, vis-à-vis other faiths is very *unique*, very rich and very beautiful.
- There are one billion Hindus all around the world that belong to this glorious tradition.
- I am proud of this tradition and will uphold it throughout my life.

What every Hindu parent ought to know about raising children as Hindus – Smt. Arunima Sinha

Much of the general lack of involvement of children in Hindu Dharma is a directly attributable to lack of awareness of parents as to how to ground their children in Hindu traditions and values. Raising children as Hindus requires conscious cultivation of the social identity of Hindu-Americans. Spiritualism, a key dimension of Dharma, by itself will not help us evolve into a vigorous and energetic community, since the journey to the inner-self is always a solitary one. If Hindu-Americans have to exist as a community and social group, then the social identity of this group has to be emphasized repeatedly through thoughts, words and deeds. What should parents know about this dimension of child-raising, is an educational need that will help them raise children as proud and confident Hindus?

A case study on portrayal of Hindu Dharma in schools – Shri Shivaram Sitaram

The portrayal of Hindu Dharma and associated traditions in mainstream textbooks, and media is heavily biased and demeaning. Such an unfair portrayal leads, besides others things, to a sense of shame and guilt amongst Hindu children who go through American school system while reinforcing the image of a "uncivilized Hindu" amongst children professing other faiths. There have been a few concerted and organized attempts to correct these distortions in the states of Maryland, Virginia, and California. A summary of what has happened till so far, and what remains to be done will be presented by speaker.

MANDIRS & SEVA –

SEVA AS THE BINDING GLUE OF A COMMUNITY

MODERATOR: DR. NAVIN KADAKIA

Seva as the sustaining principle of Hindu society – Dr. Ravi Sarma

Seva is the instrument through which different individuals, not necessarily belonging to a family connect with each other. It is the basis on which any society is constructed and sustained. Sans seva, the entire edifice of any society withers away with time. A very large number of Hindu sacred texts highlight the importance of seva. For instance, the adage *nara seva Narayan seva*, highlights the notion that service of a human being is identical to service of *Ishwar*. Countless Hindu pioneers like Dadhichi, Shravan Kumar, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Mahavir sacrificed all they had to serve the larger cause. Seva is *bhakti* of the Almighty by serving the weak, infirm, and meek. Through seva, a society becomes strong, and individual grows spiritually. Mandirs have to develop well-structured programs that enhance the seva aspect of Hindu heritage, so as to help the needy, strengthen the community and engage the children. Seva is also the medium which will help in restoring the Hindu pride amongst those in whose hearts the flame of Hindu *dharma* has diminished.

Seva and networking – Dr. Abhaya Asthana

A national network of mandirs has to emerge if mandirs as a collective have to get involved with seva. The development of such a network will help us in coordinating our seva activities more effectively and cost efficiently. Further, when a crisis occurs, all the mandirs of US and Canada can quickly collectively develop a coherent approach of meeting the needs of the society. This network will also effectively project a national image, that not unlike other communities, Hindus are also passionate about seva. This is "networking for seva".

Another aspect of seva is that it opens establishes bonds, friendships and goodwill. By strengthening bonds and friendships, and through enhancing goodwill towards Hindu society in general and mandirs in particular, the Hindu-American community gets stronger, more effective and listened to. The speaker will also offer ideas as to what sort of network can be developed towards this end. Perhaps the idea of a "Red Surya", which is equivalent to Red Cross, Red Crescent, or Red Star, can be discussed. After all, the sun is one of the supreme examples of sacrifice. It burns continuously, and unremittingly to provide light, energy and life to billions of organisms on planet earth. And its color red is that of the sunrise, indicating the time of growth, regeneration and rise.

Engaging vanaprasthis in seva – Shri Arvind Patel

Over next decade, several hundred thousand people will be reaching retirement age. These are the *vanaprasthi* generation – people who would have ample experience, time and wisdom to share with others. How can the Hindu society benefit from their experience and wisdom? How can they be meaningfully engaged? What roles can they play to help our children and grandchildren? What roles and programs can mandirs develop to help *vanaprasthis*, and through them, help our children.

Hindu Seva Diwas – Dr. Savitri Hingorani

The idea of seva is ingrained deep into Hindu ethos and psyche. It is, as per our rishis, the supreme Dharma. But still, as a community, Hindus, unlike followers of other religions, are not recognized as being passionate about seva. Perhaps, it is because we rarely come out as a community helping the cause of those in need. Most of our seva activities, although rooted in our traditions and values, happen at levels of the individual, or groups. This inaccurate public perception also leads the young Hindu to view seva as something that is not the forte of Hindu civilization. The idea of Hindu Seva Diwas is being proposed to correct these distorted perceptions, and also project the Hindu community as one which is vigorously involved in seva. Further, this idea will also lead us to establish systems and processes aimed towards helping the less fortunate ones more effectively.

EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF MANDIRS

MODERATOR: SHRI ABHINAV DWIVEDI

This panel discussion is designed to address the challenges faced by the increasing number of temples appearing on the North American landscape in recent years, in addition to the existing ones. Speakers will discuss and explore various aspects dealing with the enhanced role of temples, operational challenges and further development. Active participation of the attendees will be encouraged.

Fundamentals of Fundraising for Mandirs – Shri Brahma Swarup Verma

Why do people donate? The motivation for making a donation depends upon several factors. They include:

- *Samarpan bhav* – Those who have developed higher levels of consciousness consider their possessions as a gift from God and are very generous.
- *Seva bhav* – a large number of donors would contribute funds to make things happen.
- Social recognition – This is the most significant motivation. Even many \$5 donors like their name to be announced. Fund-raising organizers should not frown upon the ego-play. If handled properly, this emotion can produce remarkable results.

Fundraising dinners, Devi Jagaran, concerts, or similar other events can bring in huge amounts of donations, particularly in the presence of a high profile dignitary. Desire for immortality is a deep-rooted desire of all mortals. By providing ways to make a person memorable forever - immortalize him or her, or someone deeply donor loves, the Mandir can get substantially large donations.

Showing regard to the persons seeking donations – it works well if the fundraising team has some influential, and respected persons onboard. The fact that such individuals are available for a limited time, the organizers have to do extensive planning and preparation prior to taking them out.

Planning and Volunteer Training are vital for success of any fundraising campaign. The organizers should set goals, duration and timing well in advance. They should prepare prospective donor lists and select suitable fundraising events. Some of these could be individualized fundraising, walk-a-thon or other group activities, dinners, concerts, public celebration, product-based campaign, and religious *anushtanas*. Prior to the event, organizers must select volunteers and distribute responsibilities. They should hold preparatory and training meetings and plan the budget and acquire relevant resources materials well in advance. The event has to be extensively promoted and its results should be analyzed to identify what worked and what did not.

Role of Hindu Priests in North America - Dr. Kuldip Gupta

Our *purohita* and *pujaris* used to be the moral compass of the Hindu community. They were ambassadors of Hindu *Dharma* worldwide. Somewhere down the road, this role was forgotten, and currently, all they are involved in is limited to conducting *pujas* and *yajnas*. While this transition has happened, the needs of Hindus have not changed. Neither have new avenues opened up as substitutes for the traditional roles of Hindu priests. Thus, currently, a vacuum exists in terms of the needs of the Hindu American community. The role of Hindu *purohita* and *pujaris* has to be reexamined, and then our priests have to be equipped with appropriate skill sets, accordingly. For instance, a *pujari* could, above and beyond doing *puja*, also be a resource person helping people understand *Dharma* as per our *shastras*. Further, as a mentor he could also help us use this understanding in resolving our inner conflicts, doubts, and questions when needed. Each week, the *mandir* is busiest during the weekends. On remaining days, the *mandir*, and its *purohita* are relatively disengaged. If we can somehow expand the scope of responsibilities of *pujaris*, and then accordingly provide them with appropriate skills, then that will be a win-win for all. The Hindu community will develop excellent resource persons on matters concerning *Dharma*, and the *purohita* will have a clear roadmap for their own development: material, social and spiritual.

Eternal money for your mandir – Shri Easan Katir

It is the temple executive's duty to look into the future and provide financial security for the holy place with which he is entrusted, to protect his temple's assets from government confiscation, economic depressions, and ill-advised future trustees. How have other institutions solved these problems? A presentation of the benefits of Hindu Heritage Endowment, a financial fortress for your temple

How our temple achieved financial freedom - Shri Rajkumar Manickam

Rajkumar Manickam tells the story of Iraivan Temple's financial journey. There are two foundations to every temple. One visible, made of concrete, upon which all else depends. The second foundation is financial, just as important, although less visible.

Special Session –

Marriage and Restoration of Hindu Pride and Identity

Moderator: Smt. Sheila Natwa

Addressing the challenges of finding marriage partners – Smt. Kanaka Prabhu and Dr. Pawan Rattan

What can the *mandirs* do to facilitate the communication/meeting between parents and youth seeking alliances? How can Hindus stay married within the Hindu fold regardless of regional and *sampradayik* diversity?

Restoring a Hindu Pride & Identity – Smt. Sukanya Reddy

Much has happened in the past to harm the Hindu community. Our psyche has been damaged. Our self-esteem has been hurt. Our history has been distorted. Our education was incomplete. Our children's education was incomplete – and still is. Many have left the fold or are indifferent. Many others don't feel the need to assert and claim their heritage. Many in fact denounce and denigrate it openly and derive a sense of pleasure in doing so. How do we address this complex situation to connect with those that seem not to care? How do we bring the truth to all, raise awareness, a sense of Hindu identity and rekindle a sense of pride in them?



*Our Most Sincere Thanks to all the
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A *mandir* moulds man.

A mandir purifies society.

A mandir moulds society.

A mandir induces morality.

A mandir creates stability of mind.

A mandir achieves peace & happiness.

A *mandir* keeps alive traditional craftsmanship.

The temple is not an archaeological essay, but a sermon in stone, suggesting by its symbolism the rhythm of the cosmos, teaching the lessons of the universal life, and recording the sacred traditions of the Indian people.

