

## HINDU SOCIETY IN USA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Hiro G. Badlani, M.D.

There are nearly 3 million Hindus living in USA. It will perhaps not be wrong to say that USA has become the preferred second home for Hindus. In some ways the present US culture may be compared to the ancient culture of India, which too attracted people from all over the globe to reach there to benefit from the highly advanced civilization. Like what is America now, ancient India also had become the chief hub of education. The first university in the world was established in Takshila in 700 BCE, where scholars from other countries would come for higher studies. The University of Nalanda in the fourth century CE was one of the greatest achievements in the field of education in Hindu civilization. They came from far lands, and many chose to settle there permanently, contributing in significant manner toward the cultural as well as corporal growth of India. Today the two countries are the largest democracies of the world, and are also marching shoulder-to-shoulder in many common projects.

In USA, Hindus have made special mark in the field of medicine, engineering, computers, business, etc. Their presence in NASA, Boeing and Microsoft is noteworthy. Many have climbed to the top positions in the corporate world. They are also now showing their skills in the White House top administrative jobs. Hindus have acquired a good reputation as law abiding community with very low crime rate. Those who are more fortunate and have made good wealth may take the attitude of trusteeship, *Visvastha*. Earning money with righteous means is highly commendable, but only when the same is spent for good cause. It is mentioned in scriptures that we may earn with two hands, but we may spend with hundred hands. Giving *Dana* is valued in Hindu society. We may also remember not to ignore the local causes here in this country, both in our own Hindu and Indian community as well as in the general populace. We may not neglect our sacred duty to the country of our origin, but now our responsibility lies more with the new country of adoption. A proper balance may be needed. Hindus may also always maintain positive rather than negative attitude toward other communities.

Hindus form less than 1% of the population of USA,

a ratio that is not likely to change significantly in the near future. Hindus have come from India where they have enjoyed the position of majority, and may need to learn to accept this minority status and conduct themselves with utmost grace, humility and deference. As a minority community, it will be more prudent to maintain harmony and goodwill with the mainstream population, while not giving up rights granted to other citizens. In USA, there are very organized methods of protesting against any grievances, including the legal avenues. In this respect, it will also be worthwhile to maintain healthy and cordial relations with local council members, congressmen, senators, and executive authorities at all levels. Shri Sarda Devi, spouse of Shri Ramakrishna laid the dictum of the Mahabharata: *tasmāt tikshnataram mridu*, meaning "by gentleness one can overcome the greatest difficulty in the world."

New survey has shown that about 38% of Hindu, Jain, and Sikh young adults in America are married to Christians, Jews, or Muslims. The children of these mixed marriages are likely to visit both Hindu as well as other non-Hindu places of worship. Since this section is likely to be a very large portion of future Hindu community, their special needs should be kept in mind now itself and develop plans to cater to their special requirements in the future. The settings in Hindu temples may also need to be modified to suit and comfortably accommodate the non-Hindu spouses. Lengthy rituals performed without any understanding may be better molded to make them precise and purposeful. In America, at present, the Hindu priest usually explains the meaning and significance behind each step of the ritual associated with most wedding ceremonies. A similar approach may be adopted in all rituals, when the original purpose and meaning of the ritual is explained. This new method has won much appreciation, not only from the Hindus, but also from non-Hindus, who attend these ceremonies as guests. A judicious combination of ancient Sanskrit as a traditional culture, along with the regional language, Hindi, or English as a practical language, may become a prime requirement in years to come. In America the first immigrants from different European countries did conduct their proceedings in their respective native lan-



guages like French, German, Spanish etc but later most have changed over to English for practical reasons.

Hindus are much more family-oriented than most other religious communities. Starting and maintaining a family is considered a religious duty, which is well defined in the *Grahashta Ashram*. Sacrifice is the bedrock of good living. Hindus basically endorse the family lifestyle in preference to an individualistic one. Sharing and caring are virtues of greatest importance in Hindu society. Children are often given the highest attention in their formative years.

Elders have enjoyed very respectful position in Hindu society for millennia. The Vedic teachings "Treat your mother as God, and treat your father as God" gave high status and dignity to the elderly. Traditionally, it is considered auspicious for Hindus to live under the shade of the elders. Family commitments are highly valued. Even though the parents don't usually live with children now, they often arrange to live near each other. In USA Hindu society, there are reports, although not frequent, of elderly being not treated with dignity that they deserve.

*Dr Hiro Badlani is the author of "Hinduism: Path of the Ancient Wisdom" www.hinduismpath.com. He is a retired physician and lives at Los Angeles.*

*He may be contacted at [hgbadlani@aol.com](mailto:hgbadlani@aol.com), Phone 562-865-5880.*

This needs attention by the community.

In present times, Hindus have acquired a new position of respect in world stage, thanks to their rapidly increasing affluence and growth in India and many other parts of the world, including the USA. Synthesizing modern society with traditional religious activities may bring forth challenges as well as golden opportunities previously unimagined. Hindus would do very well to build modern, places of worship, where they may spend most of their spare time in search and practice of higher values of the Divine.

The mega temples of yore are clear inspiration in this direction. Hindus must also adopt the modern ways of life in other social and religious activities to their great benefit. They must learn punctuality, speech economy, and many other similar exercises that would impart an avant-garde image to their spiritual and secular projects. They may even accept the good practices of other faiths without feeling embarrassed. Learning from any source is always a sign of progress; not learning is shameful ignorance. Human evolution is a saga of such endeavors, where the good and worthy is accepted and the harmful and unworthy is dropped.

#### Peace Invocation (Taaittiriya Upanishad)

ॐ शं नो मित्रः शं वरुणः । शं नो भवत्वयमा ।

शं न इन्द्रो ब्रिहस्पतिः । शं नो विष्णुरुक्रमः ।

नमो ब्रह्मणे । नमस्ते वायो । त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि ।

त्वामेव प्रत्यक्षम् ब्रह्म वदिष्यामि ।

ऋतं वदिष्यामि । सत्यं वदिष्यामि ।

तन्मामवतु । तद्वक्तारमवतु ।

अवतु माम् । अवतु वक्तारम् ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

om śaṃ no mitraḥ śaṃ varuṇaḥ | śaṃ no bhavat-varyamā |

śaṃ na indro brihaspatiḥ | śaṃ no viṣṇururukramaḥ |

namo brahmaṇe | namaste vāyo | tvameva pratyakṣaṃ brahamāsi |

tvāmeva pratyakṣam brahma vadiṣyāmi |

ṛtaṃ vadiṣyāmi | satyaṃ vadiṣyāmi

tanmā mavatu | tadvaktāramavatu |

avatu mām | avatu vaktāram |

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||

Om May Mitra be blissful to us. May Varuna be blissful to us. May Aryaman be blissful to us. May Indra and Brihaspati be blissful to us. May Vishnu, of long strides, be blissful to us. Salutation to Brahman. Salutation to you, O Vayu. You, indeed, are the immediate Brahman. You alone I shall call the direct Brahman. I shall call you righteousness. I shall call you truth. May He protect me. May He protect the teacher. May He protect me. May He protect the teacher. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace !