



Editor: Vijai Singhal

Hindu Council of Australia Ltd



17 The Crescent, Homebush, NSW 2140, Australia



Phone: 02 8250 4007

Fax: 02 9746 8944

Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ॐ May Everybody Be Happy

www.hinducouncil.com.au

NEWS LETTER

Vol.11 Jul - Sep 2007

Yatra Nāryastu Pūjyante, Ramanate Tatra Devatāh.
“Where women are worshiped, there the Gods
reside.”

Dear Friends,

1. The status of women in Hindu Scriptures is very high. In any cultured, progressive and healthy society the women should be treated with respect. One criteria of social health as stated in the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata* is:

*Striyaśca āpuruṣā mārgam sarvālamkāra bhūṣitaḥ;
Nirbhayāḥpratipadyante yadā rakṣati bhūmipah.*

“If women, having decorated themselves fully with ornaments, and without any men accompanying them, can move about freely and fearlessly through the streets unmolested, that State is well-governed.”

The main objective of the Australian Women's Coalition (AWC) is to advance the status of women in Australia. Its national conference was held in Melbourne on 2-4 June 2007, which was attended by Mrs Madhu Singhal on behalf of the Hindu Women's Council of Australia.

2. I congratulate the Executive Committee of the Hindu Council of New Zealand for holding its first, very successful National Conference, which was inaugurated by the New Zealand Prime Minister, Hon. Helen Clark. The Hindu Council of Australia was represented by its Secretary, Mr Vijai Singhal.

3. The 3rd Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue was held at the Waitangi, Bay of Island, New Zealand. The Hindu Council of Australia was represented by its Canberra Representative, Mr Prakash Mehta.

4. Deepavali 2007 Fair will be held at the Fairfield Showground in Sydney on 21 October 2007. The celebrations at the Federal Parliament, Canberra will be held on 10 Nov. 2007. Please make a note in your diaries.

I look forward to your continued cooperation.
Regards,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam

Chairman

New Zealand Holds 1st Hindu Conference



AUCKLAND, In a historic event for the Hindu community of New Zealand, Prime Minister Helen Clark inaugurated New Zealand's first Hindu conference by lighting the holy lamp at the Hindu Heritage Centre in Auckland on May 12, 2007. The conference theme was The Contribution of Hindu Community to the National Life of New Zealand and the keynote address was presented by Dr. Guna Magesan, General Secretary of the Hindu Council of New Zealand. He highlighted the fact that the Hindu community is the second largest faith-based community in New Zealand and that it has grown by 62 per cent in the last five years.

Sir Barry Curtis, the Mayor of Manukau city, told attendees that Manukau is the Hindu capital of New Zealand because a large number of Hindus live in the Manukau county. Harry Williams, the kaumatua (a Maori elder) and Tangata Whenua (son of the soil), blessed the occasion with a Maori traditional prayer. Swami Vigyananand of the World Hindu Council chanted a Hindu prayer on the auspicious occasion. A number of Hindu

dignitaries from overseas attended the event: Aruneshwar Gupta, President of Hindu Heritage Foundation; Ravi Kumar, joint Coordinator Sewa International; Vijai Singhal, Secretary of Hindu Council of Australia; and Swami Sanyuktanand from Fiji Sevashram Sangha. Next year's conference will be held May 16 to 18, with the theme Sustaining New Zealand Communities with Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda.

* * *

Hindu Youth Council of Australia

HYCA has submitted expression of interest for the Living in Harmony Funded Community Projects Programme 2007 which is pending response at this point of time.

Currently, HYCA is working with Hindu Council of Australia in organizing the annual Deepavali fair and the Deepavali function at the national Parliament House in Canberra. HYCA is undertaking the task of organizing the cultural program and the publication of the Deepavali souvenir. HYCA aims to create a special feature on Deepavali in this year's fair to make it more interesting for the audience to watch and enjoy. They welcome participation and contribution of ideas from other Hindu youths/groups. HYCA is contactable via email at hycasydney@gmail.com.

* * *

The 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Dialogue



Hindu delegates from six different countries

WAITANGI New Zealand: 29-31 May 2007, The conference was attended by 169 delegates from 15 different countries representing Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism faiths. The theme of the conference was "Building Bridges". The opening address was delivered by New Zealand Prime Minister, Hon Helen Clark. The conference was addressed by President of the Philippines, H.E Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the Foreign Minister of Australia, Hon Alexander Downer Mr Andri Hadi, the representative of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Dr. Nur Hassan Wirajuda. Full details of the

proceedings of the conference can be found on our website.

Practicing Hinduism Under Australian Civil Law

Following is the talk presented at the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre, Brisbane on 1st May 2007 by Mr Vijai Singhal.

Tracing the Origins

Hinduism is the oldest religion. It is called: *Sanatan Dharma*, the Eternal Religion. It has had lot to give to the world, even in the field of jurisprudence. Many modern civil law systems in Europe and elsewhere are heavily influenced by Roman law. Roman law is the legal system of ancient Rome. Roman law as preserved in Justinian's codes became the basis of legal practice in the *Byzantine Empire* (530 BC) and—later—in continental Europe.

Rome studied Indian law indirectly, through the scientific studies by Roman judges and attorneys of Greek jurisprudence, which was founded on Indian thought. Sir Paul Vinogradoff, an eminent authority of law, wrote in his article "Comparative Jurisprudence" for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that, "The Romans absorbed an enormous amount of Greek and Oriental [Indian] law in their jurisprudence. Jacolliot noted many correspondences between the *Manu Dharma Shastra* and Justinian's *Digesta* regarding the different stages of social life. The *Manusmriti* is regarded as an important work of Hindu law and ancient Indian society. Noting the debt of the Justinian Code to the *Manu Dharma Shastra*, he wrote in his *Bible in India*:

We shall see, on examination, that these divisions [marriage, property, testaments, etc.] have passed almost unaltered, from the Hindu Law into the Roman Law and the French Law [the French civil code is said to be based on the Justinian Code and revised during the Napoleonic era], and greater part of their dispositions are still in vigour ...

The Hindu laws were codified by Manu more than 3000 years before the Christian era, copied by the whole antiquity, and notably by Rome, which alone has left us a written law - the Code of Justinian, which has been adopted as the basis of most modern legislations.

Hindu Traditions

As in the West, the idea of separation of the Church from the State has also existed in India since ancient times. Hindu traditions lend strong support to the idea that the functions of the priest and king are to be separated. According to the 'divinely ordained' caste system, the priestly function belonged to the

Brahmins while the rulership vested with the *Kshatriyas*. The *Brahmin* priest was expected to advise the king, but could not himself rule as per the caste rules.

Around 300 B.C., about two decades after Alexander's invasion, Megasthenes served as ambassador of the Greek king Seleucus Nicator to the Indian emperor Chandragupta Maurya. He mentions about the existence of a number of democratic states in India at that time. In ancient India the Government was not based on a theocracy. Considerable impartiality was practiced in the treatment accorded to various sects - irrespective of the sect to which a king belonged. The ancient Hindu state never sought to impose a particular creed upon the people. In the words of Donald Smith various schools of thought propounded the doctrines of agnosticism, atheism and materialism. Jainism, Buddhism and later Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam were permitted to propagate their teachings, build their places of worship, and establish their respective ways of life.

Thus in India the secular state of today is built upon substantial ancient historical foundations. Hinduism has a strong tradition of freedom of conscience and tolerance of religious diversity. Religious liberty for the Hindu is not based on political expediency but on the conviction of the ultimate oneness of the religious quest, howsoever varied the numerous paths which might be followed towards salvation. Hinduism states: *EKAM SAT VIPRAH BAHUDA VADANTI*, meaning: 'Truth is one. Wise men call it by different names'. Hinduism respects all religions and their teachings. This is the foundation of secular and democratic India.

Democratic Traditions in Australia

Australia is a democratic country, where all its citizens enjoy equal rights. Although Australia has no Federal Bill of Rights, it has one of the best human rights record in the world. Australian Parliaments have implemented many important Acts (or statutes) which serve to protect and/or promote human rights domestically. These Acts give direct or indirect expression to the main international instruments concerning human rights. Here everyone is entitled to all the rights and the freedom, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. "If society is tolerant and rational, it does not need a Bill of Rights. If it is not, no Bill of

Rights will preserve it," said Sir Harry Gibbs, former Chief Justice of Australia.

The Australian Federal Constitution (Section S116) states: "The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observances or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth."

The system in Australia based on the secular model works well. To overcome the unfair treatment of migrants the policy of multiculturalism was introduced in 1973 under the then Labor government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. This provided equality to all citizens irrespective of their race or religion and ensured that the people can rely on Australian Law if they are discriminated against due to their cultural beliefs. This also put responsibility on all Australians for accepting others who have different beliefs. This means that we have a duty to support our democratic model of government. Multiculturalism has brought great benefits to the society through mutual cooperation, trust and goodwill.

Practicing Hinduism in Australia

The Hindus are the most peace-loving and law-abiding people. They live quite happily in every country in the world wherever they have migrated to. They have lived peacefully and have contributed positively to the economic growth and prosperity of that country. Australian Hindus have demonstrated that they could practice Hindu beliefs in Australia quit happily under the current secular system and are not requesting that any faith laws be introduced in this country.

We believe the present secular democratic system in Australia is quite successful and ought not to be tampered with. Perhaps the innate national characteristics of tolerance and a 'fair-go' are more important than the black letter law.

Here everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and is allowed to practice his/ her own religion. This freedom is a very important aspect of living in a civilised society and we as Hindus of Australia cherish that privilege greatly. We are also aware that in practicing our religion we have a responsibility to see that those who are not adherent to our faith are also comfortable and not disadvantaged by our practices.

Rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. We are of the strong view that as responsible citizens of the country, we should try and do our best to uphold its law and order

and maintain the peace and tranquillity for the nation's prosperity and welfare of all its citizens.

I wish to close with this quotation:

"A world in which everyone demands rights but do not accept responsibilities, will be an unequal and even dangerous and discordant world." *Malcolm Fraser, Former Prime Minister of Australia.*

Australia to host the 2009 Parliament of the World Religions

MELBOURNE, May 30, 2007: Thousands of representatives of the world's religions will convene in Australia for the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions, the world's largest inter-religious gathering. An estimated 8,000-12,000 people will meet in Melbourne, Australia, December 3-9, 2009, to dialogue, build interfaith relationships, and discuss critical issues facing the global community. Adherents of a wide range of religious traditions will be present including: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i Jain, and Zoroastrian.

"The Parliament event is a place where people come together to encounter 'the other,'" organizers state in the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) website. "This encounter can lead to a deepening of one's own sense of religious and spiritual identity and an appreciation for the challenges or difference within one's own tradition, as well as between and among traditions. "

The 2009 Parliament will feature 500 events, such as dialogues, workshops, performances and plenaries on religious identity. Emerging topics for the gathering include social cohesion, poverty, the environment, indigenous peoples, and terrorism. Other issues attendees will address are indigenous reconciliation, environmental degradation and care, gender issues including sex trafficking, education and the challenge of social disengagement, forced migration, global terrorism, and the role of religion in modern societies.

Pre-parliament events in 40 cities are slated to take place around the world to highlight the upcoming event in Australia. Melbourne was selected as the host city because of its multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multicultural environment, according to organizers. The city is praised for demonstrating collaboration among its religious communities through inter-religious councils, school programs, and solidarity in times of stress and crisis.

Melbourne has also formed a council that works to ensure ongoing collaboration between religious leaders and police. Previous gatherings were held in Chicago (1993), Cape Town (1999) and Barcelona (2004). Plans are currently underway for a 2007 Universal Forum of Cultures in Monterrey, Mexico. The forum will include Parliament-style events and dialogues addressing issues such as religious and spiritual diversity, bioethics, violence, the plight of the marginalized and the role of religion and spirituality in society.

Hindi Becomes Hot Down Under

SYDNEY, 25 May 2007: Bollywood has made the Hindi language course offered by the University of Sydney's Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) quite popular among Australian students. Introduced in 2006 and run by Philip Claxton, the Hindi language course is a thriving component of CCE's languages-unit.

Claxton said, "so far the response has been quite overwhelming and the numbers very healthy".

"In fact, Bollywood is responsible for a large amount of interest in Hindi", he added. CCE is a non-profit centre of the University of Sydney. Its role is to make teaching and research expertise of the university available to the public through short courses. CCE publishes four general programmes, each containing around 260 courses, and a range of special programmes.

"Studying Hindi has been a really interesting and enjoyable journey," said Howard Shibuya, a Hindi student. "Studying Hindi is about a combination of crossing cultures and improving my own higher-order thinking." Surprisingly, the target audience for Hindi language are not the traditional stereotype India-bound entrepreneurs. "There are an extremely wide range of people who come to do the classes, ranging from heritage students who have an Indian background themselves to those whose partners, fiancés, spouses speak either Hindi, Urdu or Punjabi, to those who have an interest in religious traditions," said Claxton.

Mahatma Gandhi



Man with the smallest ecological footprint: vegetarian, walked everywhere on foot and wore only organic cotton.