My Turn: Remedies for a Lost Generation
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Many Indians currently residing in the United States emigrated here after the 1965 Immigration Act. Now, almost 30 years later, their children are getting married and having children. Much of their world is vastly different and lacking in the ties their parents hoped to preserve, especially in the area of religion. It would seem that our resources are wide and varied. Temples, literature and religious organizations should allow for the understanding of religion. Sadly, this is not the case. Most second-generation Indians know what they do about Hinduism only through general exposure to ceremony and perhaps college level courses.

Language may be one of the problems. Although most families maintain efforts to speak native languages, our younger generations are losing the ability. Obviously, it is unsatisfying to attend temple when there is an absolute lack of understanding as to what the pujari is saying or doing. The first or second time you attend, you may find the whole thing fascinating, but you soon lose interest.

Another problem is that so much of Hinduism is based on epic stories, rituals and symbolism. In earlier eras, religion came into strength through espousing the ambiguous or the unexplainable. Nowadays, in the era of science, ideas are subject to constant examination for logical proofs. People question the existence of God, the validity of religion, the purpose of symbolism and seem to want concrete answers to fundamental questions of life itself. This problem is magnified in Hinduism because of the lack of any particular "holy book" or any "set of rules and laws" given to live by. What has made this religion so open and universal has also been responsible for its own failure to attract future generations.

The single most important feature in the moving away from Hinduism in the second generation is "philosophizing." Indians and teachers of Hinduism in particular have a bad habit of being excessively verbose and overly complicated in conveying simple ideas. Instead of being straightforward and giving real life examples, there is an attempt to use vague statements, heavy philosophical insight or archaic metaphorical language. Children simply turn off the information. They sit at temple lectures, eyes glazed over, obviously bored. At home they simply carry out expectations by parents to prostrate themselves, say prayers, or light lamps with a morbid resignation.

This does not imply that the second generation has no interest; far from it. They desperately seek answers they can understand and use. Much can be done. It starts at home. Parents must make concerted efforts to teach children properly and not expect simple obedience. Find young second-generation Indians who are proficient in the concepts of Hinduism to explain to peers and youngsters. For ages 25-30, publish pamphlets explaining fundamental ideas, which could be made available at temples with explanations or step-by-step translations of what the priest is doing and the significance of the acts. Videos and other media can be developed on subjects such as "The Evolution of Hinduism," "Traditional Marriage Ceremony Explained," "What are Archanas?" Every effort must be made to make concepts understandable. We must change with society to improve our teaching or risk losing yet another generation.

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