

[Hindu Activists Meet in Dallas](#)

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CONFERENCE

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Conversion, Indology studies, nonviolence, yoga as medicine are all on the agenda

Passionate speakers and a wide-ranging agenda enlivened the fifth annual Human Empowerment Conference (HEC), held from October 12 to 14 in Dallas, Texas. Here in East Texas, site of John Kennedy's assassination and deep in the Bible Belt, two hundred men and women, all sharing a profound love of Hindu dharma, sought to define and address the key issues of our day. The Dallas-based Sanatana Dharma Foundation organized the roving conference, whose name comes from the Vedic dictate, *krunvanto vishvam aryam*, "Ennoble all humanity." HEC began as a project of the Voice of Dharma (<http://www.voiceofdharma.com>) in Houston in 2002. In subsequent years it has convened under the auspices of various local organizations, in Chicago, 2003, Nashville, 2004, Houston, 2005 and Los Angeles in 2006.

Hinduism Today editors Paramacharya Palaniswami and Sannyasin Arumugaswami flew in from Hawaii and wrote this report. Comprehensive details will become available with the publishing of the conference papers.

The ten official topics included empowering the next generation of Hindu youth, the treatment of Hinduism within academia, media and religion, unresolved historical issues and prospects for Hinduism in Bangladesh and India.

Ms. Shruti of the India-based Shruti Foundation addressed this last issue. Her work is a remarkable attempt to inculcate pride in Indic genius, particularly Hindu methodologies of integral living, education, scientific thought, societal organization, ethics and work dynamics. She told the general assembly that following India's independence the communist parties sought and, amazingly, were given control of

the education system in the early 1950s. The long-term consequence of this control is that academia in India is, even to this day, permeated with Marxist philosophy, which is brazenly antagonistic toward any religion, and Hinduism in particular. One aspect of this communist domination, something she terms "Sanskrit phobia, " has brought on a diminution of Sanskrit studies, which she points to as a major reason for the decline of Hinduism.

The conference's Sita Ram Goel memorial lecture, "The Evangelical Mind, " was given by Dr. Valerie Tarico. Goel, one of the great Hindu thinkers and activists of the 20th century, wrote extensively on Christianity's negative impact in India. Tarico is a Seattle psychologist, former evangelical Christian and author of *The Dark Side: How Evangelical Teachings Corrupt Love and Truth*. Her talk was riveting, rich with "true believer " tales of her early life in a narrow-minded evangelical family. It is the evangelical Christians who are the most active in trying to convert people in India. Their misguided attempts are driven by a fundamentalist belief in the "Great Commission, " the idea found in the New Testament that Christians are obliged to preach and convert all the peoples of the world. Tarico was scathing in her analysis of evangelical beliefs, concluding they are neither rational nor coherent. She offered the example of their belief in biblical inerrancy--that every single word of the Bible is true, punctuating her point with surreal examples.

She warned Hindus that evangelicals have the power of American innovation behind them, marketing their product, Christian fundamentalism, with all the savvy of the most sophisticated Western corporation. Hindus, she prodded, should regard the belief system of these fundamentalists as a force as deadly and addictive as drugs.

In her conclusion, Dr. Tarico challenged Hindus to "be more evangelical about what you do and know, especially your religious pluralism." "Right now, Hinduism is thought of as an antiquated bunch of people who think statues are God. But I think Hinduism offers a path, a power to sow the seeds of wisdom that we need. You need to evangelize the ideal of dharma to counteract the existing stereotypes of Hindu belief."

Rajiv Malhotra, founder of the Infinity Foundation and supporter of the conference, wowed a rapt audience with two major speeches, "Hinduphobia " and "The U-Turn Theory." The whole of South Asian studies in the West today, he stated in the first lecture, are divisive, emphasizing and, in some cases, creating schisms between Dalits and brahmins, Dravidians and Aryans, women and men, minorities and

Hindus. "India's problems are not seen as historical, or economic, but the result of a flawed culture, a flawed DNA." He explained how South Asian studies in Hinduism largely and quite intentionally focus on three narrow specialties: caste, minorities and women, all of them imbued with deep negativity. He pointed out that, by design or accident, the typical American social studies textbook covering Hinduism hides the positive aspects of Hinduism, such as yoga, vegetarianism, music, etc., while presenting inimical and prejudicial information about India in a concerted effort to "demonize the culture."

"India is the only major civilization whose study has been controlled from the outside, " he lamented, and counterpointed the situation in China, where the government sponsors hundreds of Confucian institutions which are the main force in scholastic investigations of China. Malhotra pointed out that "to fight for our rights is the American way, " and encouraged Hindus to become more active in supporting positive study on India while countering pervasive and pernicious foreign interpretations.

Malhotra's second talk introduced his thought-provoking "U-Turn Theory, " the phenomenon whereby Western academics or scientists study a science, technology or spiritual procedure which originates in India and ultimately arrogate it to themselves. For example, there have been recent studies in American universities on the effect of breathing techniques and meditation upon health and well-being. These procedures were developed centuries ago by India's gifted yogis.

The Western scientist studies such techniques in laboratories, determines they do indeed work, publishes a report and receives personal fame and glory (and money) as if he had discovered the technique in the first place. The true genius, the yogi who perfected the practice, goes unnamed and unknown. "It is like the referee holding the stopwatch at the Olympic 100-meter dash receiving the gold medal because he timed the winning runner, " quipped Malhotra.

He inventoried an long list of such "discoveries, " from techniques of yoga and meditation to ayurveda. The catalog of inventions, processes, techniques and wisdom insights that have been appropriated from India was startling.

Dr. Ramdas Lamb of the University of Hawaii noted that while a clear majority of

those who teach Judaism, Christianity or Islam are a part of the tradition or community they study, hardly 15% teachers of Hinduism in the West are practicing Hindus. The remaining 85%, he explained, fall into diverse categories. Some show great appreciation of Hinduism, others teach it from a Christian perspective while still others are influenced by a Marxist ideology that tends to see all religions in a negative light. Dr. Lamb, who is openly Hindu, told the community that if they want academic studies to embrace the Hindu perspective, they need to fund scholarships, institutes and university chairs in Hindu studies. Providing better financial support for the study of Hinduism's many positive aspects would also encourage more practicing Hindus to enter the academic community and discourse.

Dr. Indranill Basu Ray chaired a seminar on medical issues, especially the use of methods drawn from yoga, ayurveda and other Indian medical traditions to treat disease at lower cost. He shared that scientific research in America proves meditation and yoga play a beneficial roll in the treatment of heart attacks, cancer, asthma, chronic pain syndrome, etc., all without high medical fees. Dr. B.V.K. Sastri recommended establishing chaplaincy programs at all medical facilities. A well-attended morning meditation session by Dr. Ray put the concepts into practice.

An all-day Youth Leadership Workshop with 25 participants began with Niraj Mohankar's soliciting a half hour of complaints from the young adult audience: "lack of understanding of rituals, " "too many scriptures to be able to make sense of the tenets, " "unaware of the Hindu position on drinking, smoking, dating, " and more. Four working groups then set about to propose solutions.

The Hinduism Today team gave five presentations: religion and media, the California textbook controversy, proselytization, ahimsa and conversion to Hinduism.

Asked for his evaluation of the event, Dr. David Frawley, one of the main presenters, whose lectures ranged from Hindu astrology to the need for religious pluralism, offered, "The conference indicates the on-going Hindu awakening and the new effort to project Hindu dharma in the global context."

As with all conferences, much of the real action took place in crowded halls, fueled by animated discussions between (and often during!) the plenary and break-out

sessions. Over all, the conference seemed to fulfill its mandate, described as: "The confluence of 'Thought Leadership' and 'Activism Orientation' allows for the germination of new ideas, their fructification into real world projects and eventually into a measurable impact on the community at large." Dr. J.P. Sharma commented, "The zeal, the dedication, the industry and the competence displayed by the organizers were indeed commendable."

One project inspired by the conference launched almost immediately: to create ten full page, illustrated newspaper articles, one for each of the nine major Hindu festivals and one for the ritual of temple dedication, kumbhabhishekam. Fund-raising for this was completed within days and the Hinduism Today team is commissioning writers, artists and photographers. The resulting articles will be made freely available for Hindus to submit to their local newspapers as each festival comes around, or when a temple dedication is scheduled. Repeated over the years, this series could counteract prejudices in the US and offer positive, celebratory coverage of Hinduism. It is just one of many conference initiatives that seek to uplift Hindu dharma in the West.