Hindu Solidarity - Unity in Diversity
Category : September 1985
Published by Anonymous on Sep. 01, 1985

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Subramuniyaswami, Sivaya Hindus have always taken a pride in the broadness and diversity of their religion. Hindu Solidarity speaks of "unity in diversity." It is not a unity which levels or obscures the distinct and different beliefs and traditions. Indeed, some of the Hindu sects are more accurately viewed as complete religions in themselves. All of history proclaims this to be true. Hinduism is truly a divine family of religions. All Hindus must encourage one another to follow his or her own sectarian path. Let each encourage the other to adhere to his or her own sampradaya, and while doing so, to perfect and purify themselves, becoming a better person within its context.

In this "Information Age" people the world over are seeking their spiritual, social and cultural roots to regain mental and emotional security. All Hindus must allow others to derive strength and knowledge from the heritage and ancient roots of their particular religious tradition. For all the sects of Hinduism to survive in their pristine purity, maintaining their traditions, cultural heritages and religious theologies within our great Sanatana Dharma, each must strengthen the other by strengthening itself. All Hindus who have found their roots can hold their torches high, heralding Hinduism as the great religion it truly is. Having found their roots Hindus can proceed with confidence and work for Hindu Solidarity, for Hinduism today.

OUR COMMON HERITAGE

Hindus are also coming to recognize less and less the barriers of language, race, caste, creed, color or sex. There are many beliefs and practices common to most Hindus. Together these form the basis of the doctrine of Hindu Solidarity. Hinduism's common beliefs are the meeting ground. All Hindus believe in a Supreme Being and that all life is sacred to be loved and revered and that all souls are evolving toward union with God and that this pilgrimage is enhanced by purity, selfless action, worship, meditation and self-inquiry, Hindus all hold in common the

belief in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual molds his own future through his own thoughts, words and deeds. The knowledge of reincarnation is also shared, that the soul has not merely one birth on the earth, but many births through which it matures until all karmas are resolved.

All Hindus ascribe the highest scriptural authority to the Vedas and Agamas, though their Agamas differ. They all share the same tolerance in believing that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation, but that all genuine religious expressions are facets of God's Pure Light and should be accepted and honored as such.

On a mystical level Hindus believe that the soul ultimately finds moksha, release from the cycle of rebirth. Hindus believe in the subtle worlds, the inner unseen worlds, and in temple worship, which creates a harmony or communication with the spiritual beings within these worlds through ritual devotion and sacraments. Hindus believe in the guidance offered by enlightened masters and Gurus, and that the awakened Sat Guru can lead the soul to God Realization.

Many Hindus of every sect wear sacred marks, called tilaks, on the forehead. Each sect has its own distinctive insignia. All Hindus cremate the bodies of their dead and believe that the soul will inhabit another body in the next life. All Hindus believe in the importance of personal purification and devotional practices as expressed in individual spiritual disciplines and worship in the temple and home shrine.

Hinduism venerates dharma, karma, birth, death and the transmutation of the intellectual powers into intuition. Hinduism encompasses spiritualism, atheism, Vedanta and Siddhanta along with its temple festivals, home puja and worship services. So great is Hinduism, whose rishis unveiled eons ago the knowledge of the ever-expanding and contracting universe which modern science is only rediscovering again today. Hinduism on the planet today is the only religion whose incomparable resolutions, so central to its prophecies, are inseparably linked with science.

Millions upon millions of truth seekers in every country are informally becoming members of the Hindu family having accepted the beliefs in karma, reincarnation

and the knowledge that there is one Supreme God within all that has created all - the divine dance of evolution, of all animate and inanimate beings and things. Therefore, why not "unity in diversity?" Why not "Hindu Solidarity?"

UNITED FRONT AND NEW LEADERSHIP

In the past few years a global network has slowly formed and now an international Hindu alliance of organizations and religious men and women exists. The first purpose of this alliance is to provide a Hindu response to a common enemy the highly organized conversion tactics of the Christians and Moslems. The second purpose is to maintain Hinduism at its present standard of being one of the world's greatest religions through education and through encouraging support for all Hindu institutions, their sampradayas, swamis and religious leaders.

This new "World Hindu Leadership" has as one of its main objectives the promotion of "Hindu Solidarity" into being a long lasting, vital and vibrant movement. This will happen through re-establishing a lay ministry - a group of religious leaders who are elected by the people to perform the work of taking care of their spiritual social and cultural needs. Now is the time for Hindus to band together into one body-a grand international Hindu family.

THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Hindu solidarity is a concern to everyone. But "Unity in Sameness," a Liberal Hindu approach, has not worked. Many Hindus fought with hard words to convert the orthodox and failed. The Liberal Hindus drew a square around themselves that shut millions out "Unity in Diversity" draws the mystical circle that takes everyone in. Yes, we have found out the hard way that Hindus are too diverse to ever really be cut from the same mold. That is our beauty. That is our strength.

Ironically, today the Liberal Hindus are often more tolerant of alien faiths than they are of other Hindus sects. They inexplicably defend the Christian's right to his denomination while calling upon a brother Hindu to abandon his sectarian views. Hindu tolerance must now extend itself into Hinduism itself. The dictionary defines

tolerance as: "recognizing and respecting another's beliefs and practices without sharing them."

When the Christians left Europe for religious freedom in North America they brought with them a long history of wars, of aggressions, of hurt feelings and long-standing resentments. And they brought with them all of their religious differences. The Russians, the Greek Orthodox; the Italian and Spanish and Irish Catholics; the English, French and German Protestants - all had their own ways of worship and their own languages in which they worshipped. All had their own religious leaders. These early Americans were divided by hurt feelings, language, ways of worship and religious denomination. In spite of all this, they worked with and solved the problems. They solved the problems because they were all Christians, because they eventually saw that fighting each other cast a bad light on the common faith they held.

There are good lessons for Hindus in these historical happenings, for the founding fathers of America did not abandon their heritage or their faiths. The Lutherans coming from Denmark and Germany did not destroy the orthodox traditions of the Lutheran religion; rather, through practice they strengthened them. The Baptists strengthened their religion. The Methodists became strong. The Catholics from Italy became strong.

What they did not do is equally important They did not create a "Liberal Christianity" in which everyone was expected to be the same for the sake of unity. They did not destroy or dilute their religion. Nor did they leave their heritage in the Old World when they arrived in the New. They brought it with them. They also brought Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Handel and Chopin. They brought their national dress, their arts, their music, their foods, their local festivals.

There are 2,500 sects within Christianity in America. Imagine that! More than 2,000, each having its own identity, its own individual beliefs, creeds, doctrines and ways of worship. Of course, they are in the ninth and tenth generation now and almost everyone speaks English.

No, the Christians did not try to take the great tree of Christianity, with all its diversity, and make it "Liberal Christianity," where everyone had to think alike,

worship alike, in order to get along. They did not take an axe to that tree, did not chop away at its roots. They knew that individual ways of worship are important, that individual customs are important - important enough to preserve.

Hindus are now beginning to follow a similar course to gain a "Unity in Diversity." In America we have Saivite Hindus, Vaishnava Hindus, Sakta Hindus, liberal Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, agnostic Hindus and anti-Hindu Hindus. In truth, it is not a single religion at all. It is a divine family of religions which has evolved into one in the eyes of the world. There are different theologies, different philosophies, different scriptures for each of the Hindu sects. We do not have 2,500 divisions to deal with like the Christians, but we do have a few major ones, and within each of those many important distinct spiritual lineages.

Unity does not mean sameness, as the "Liberals" would have you believe. Sameness in religion is not healthy, not natural. It is a most common, uninspired and unenlightened solution, for it reduces that which is vital and rich in philosophical interpretation and background down to a common denominator. Such a solution would be very harmful to Hinduism in today's world. Hinduism has always taken a pride in its broadness and diversity. All of history proclaims this to true. In this most advanced age of civilization, shall we abandon that lofty view? Shall we take a wonderful meal, with its rich variety of curries and chutneys and dais and stir it all together, creating an unappealing stew? Certainly not.

TOLERANCE WITHIN HINDUISM

We can see that the future of Hinduism in the world today is a complex matter, but clearly its crux lies in the relationship between one Hindu and another. For a bright and promising Hindu future this relationship must be one of "Hindu Solidarity," and we can assure you that there is no single more challenging or significant lesson that we as members of the world's oldest religion have to learn. Our lesson is to be tolerant among ourselves. If we can achieve this, and we can, many of our other problems will be solved, and Hinduism will take a new place of pride in the world.

Hindu solidarity is not a new idea Mahatma Gandhi literally gave his life to religious unity. Of course, his greatest efforts were focused on the more serious conflicts between Hindus and Moslems, but he was a man for whom unity - but not

uniformity-among Hindus was the rock upon which harmony between members of all religions must be based. To him this goal was a prerequisite for freedom and for prosperity. Gandhi took religious harmony so seriously that it became for him the fulfillment, the "ultimate triumph of Truth."

Though the branches of Hinduism are many and different, the roots are common to us all. We share so much, and we can never forget this. Sharing a common heritage, we can then with confidence follow our own path within this great family. If our path is Liberal Hindu, fine. If our path is Saivite Hindu, Vaishnava Hindu or Sakta Hindu, fine. Each Hindu must perfect and purify himself in the context of his own individual way, while at the same time allowing others to do likewise. This is true "Hindu Solidarity." We must know our Hindu roots and derive strength from them. This is true "Hindu Solidarity." It is a showing of weakness to call out for all others to be exactly as we are. A tree has one trunk, one root system, but for survival its branches must reach in many directions. The different directions are not a weakness in the tree. Its very life depends on this diversity. The very life of Hinduism has always depended on its diversity. And in our world of great diversity, Hinduism today is a religion of today.

"I have not the slightest objection to anyone's concluding that either Vishnu or Siva is the first God I am a follower of the monistic doctrine, seeing no difference between Siva and Vishnu. But if, to establish Vishnu as the primary God, someone abuses Siva or hates Him. I cannot bear it Let no one think that I wish to denigrate Vishnu simply because praise the Grace and greatness of Lord Siva."

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