Religion for the Young
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My Turn

Religion for the Young

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In Bangladesh, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian people live together. Among these communities, only the Hindu community fails to practice their religion in an organized way, something I have been observing since my childhood. I spent my childhood and boyhood with my family and some other Hindu families in a Muslim-dominated area. I saw that Muslim children learned their holy books and went to their holy houses everyday. They knew many facts about their religion, but we Hindu children did not learn our holy books, although we went to our community temple regularly. We had no clear idea about our religion. We only knew that we were Hindus. We did not even know that the name of our religion is Sanatana Dharma, which I learned from a friend in six grade. I did not go to any religious school to learn our religion. I did not get any education about Hinduism during my regular schooling either. Overall, I was not provided any religious teaching during my childhood. And, generally, I did not give proper answers when people asked me questions about my religion.

At primary school, a Muslim teacher consistantly told us that we should not worship idols. I was upset by his comment because I performed regular puja.Actually, I did not know why I did it. My non-Hindu neighbors, youth and children frequently criticized me about my religion, pujasand lifestyle. I had no explanation for them. They questioned, why Kali is black? Why does Durga have ten hands? Why do we worship the Shivalinga? What is the Shivalinga? I had no answers. But, inexplicably, I liked our religion and lifestyle very much. I always knew that our religion, Hinduism, was greater than all other religions, though I did not know why.

We all loved our parents' Gurudev, Sri Radhika Gobinda Goswami, who visited our house once or twice every year. He offered many programs. Everyday he read from the Bhagavatam, Chaitanya Charitamritaand the Srimad Bhagavad Gita.He explained these holy books. He performed kirtansand Bhor Aration the path of the colony where we lived.He explained why we don't kill the cow. Generally, he spoke about Vaishnavism. He directed us deeply into our religion during the time of his visits. But I saw a discrepancy during his programs. Children and young boys never came forward to learn about Hinduism. I think their parents had no interest to send their sons and daughters to Gurudev to learn our religion. Of course, all the children and youth approached Gurudev, but they only did pranams. I think they had no idea that they could learn many things from this guru. My guardians always told me, practicing religion is only for elders, not children and youth. So we youth avoided practicing the basic religious rituals such as puja, japa, surya pranam, sanskrit mantras,etc. But my parents did encourage us to collect flowers for puja.

Nevertheless, we did practice our religion in several ways. We celebrated Saraswati Manasha puja, Dole yatraand Ratha yatra.We organized these programs and participated. We danced and offered anjali.But the priests chanted the mantras and did the pujas.Every year during the summer season, we youth decorated ourselves as Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, Saraswati, Laksmi and as lions. As a group, with a village music band, we went to every house and sang songs, danced and collected pranamiat the end with a puja.I played the role of Saraswati for two years. We followed our religion in this way. Yet we lacked any concrete idea about the basics of our religion.

Thousands of village gurus control the majority of the millions of Bangladesh Hindus. They travel to every corner, even to very remote places of the country, and tell Hindus about their rich culture and heritage. They are the living Hinduism in Bangladesh. I think they should be sure to teach Hindu children and youth about Hinduism. If our neighbors know about our religion, they will honor our religion and culture. And if the Hindu children and youth know the Sanatana Dharma, then they will feel proud of their religion and will give good answers when they are asked tough questions.

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