It's Easier to be Hindu in Ireland than India
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Years of self-denigration have created a crisis of religious confidence for NRIs

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It is easier for me to bring up my children to be Hindus in the West than it is in India. My children here in Ireland have the freedom to express their Hindu values and heritage in a non-Hindu society where people are tolerant and eager to understand us. The local Irish people take part in programs of bhajans, yoga, yajna and the like. Lately, vegetarianism is becoming popular among them--while Hindus arriving here are taking to meat eating. We are fortunate to have contact with the present Avataras like Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba and Mata Amritananda Mayi and the many Hindu saints who come to the West to propagate Sanatana Dharma. Many of these saints are ridiculed and laughed at in India by "rationalists," whereas in the West they receive enormous respect.

I find the opposite situation in India in the midst of Hindu society. Everything there is colored by Western glamor. People belittle long-held sacred values which not only India needs, but the whole world. In the fast-moving Indian society it is very difficult to bring up children as Hindus in a Vedic way. It is "uncool" to have a Hindu identity. Traditional culture is dying in many big cities. Even in villages, a Hindu who openly

displays his lifestyle or goes to the temple is laughed at.

I was born in post-independent India in a small village in Tumkur District of Karnataka to a Virasaiva (Lingayat) family. My parents never taught me about our glorious Sanatana Dharma and, despite the fact that they did pujas and practiced rituals, they had no idea of the significance of these ancient practices. To them it was simply a custom handed down without explanation. By the time it came to my generation, these practices were no longer handed down. We were never encouraged to read the holy books, scriptures, Vedas, Puranas or to perform pujas and rituals. The occasion to visit the temple only came on certain holy days. As a boy, I was told that religion was the affair of old people. Nothing was explained to us about our glorious heritage. We were even actively discouraged from Hindu observances. My love for Hindu heritage, if openly displayed, was ridiculed. I had to study holy books and other scriptures in secret because this attitude to

denigrate Hinduism in India is very
wide spread.

Nehru and the Congress Party's idea of pseudo-secularism allowed the education system to give Muslims and Christians free voice to practice and teach their religions freely even in state-funded schools. The indigenous religions--Sanatana Dharma and its branches--were prohibited from teaching religion in state-funded schools. In India, secularism became something for Hindus, but not for Muslims and Christians. Hindu identity was scorned and made a mockery of.

The waves of Hindu shame of our own heritage swept through even tiny villages. These deep-planted seeds of self-shame are being reaped in present India, especially among our youth, who have no direction in life and are fast succumbing to Western influences. The indigenous and eternal religious heritage of India was neglected and misunderstood by its own practitioners. The result is that it is easier today to be a Hindu in the West than it is in India. I hope and pray Hindu Indians will realize their folly and regain their lost identity.

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