Let Us Call Ourselves "Hindu Americans"
Category : October 1997
Published by Anonymous on Oct. 01, 1997

MY TURN

Let Us Call Ourselves "Hindu Americans"

It is only logical as linguistic and state identities diminish over the generations

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According to the latest census estimates, there are about one million people of Indian origin living in the USA. Some estimate there are more. The majority of these people are Hindus. Every person and group of persons has to have an identity. Identity is not just a name or appellation which other people can attach to you. Identity is based on who you are, what your beliefs are and how you relate to the world and other things around you. Indians, or some times "East Indians," is the name or identity given to us or we choose to have. Of course, amongst us, we identify ourselves with a language group or a state group, such as Gujaratis, Punjabis, Telugu. Not many people who are Hindus and are of Indian origin identify themselves as Hindus. This is not true of the Muslims of Indian origin. Their Muslim identity to them is more important than their Indian identity.

The question to answer is: should we, the Hindus living in this country, call ourselves "Americans of Indian origin" or just "Indians" or "Hindu Americans"? My answer is the latter. Most of us left India voluntarily without compunction or by force. Many of us have taken up American citizenship. Our children, especially those who are born in this country, are definitely Americans. Indians is a political term, that is a citizen of India, or a racial term for a people of South Asian origin. When we have adopted this country as ours, we cannot go on saying we are Indians. Being Indians and being Americans is not contradictory, but it surely is confusing. To rationalize this, many Indians

have been demanding rights to dual citizenship. This has many practical and logistical difficulties. That is why, in spite of genuine efforts, the government of India has not been able to grant the request of dual citizenship. Why "Hindu Americans"? Because we are Hindus and we are Americans. As time passes, our linguistic and state identity is going to diminish.

I am not saying we should forget India or not care about India. On the contrary, Hindus living in any part of the world should care about India. We should see that India becomes strong and prosperous, because India is the fountainhead or the source of the philosophy, religion and the way of life we call Hinduism or Hindutva. If India is weak and poor, Hindus in the rest of the world will not get the respect they deserve. If Hinduism dies in India, Hinduism will die in the rest of the world also.

Our children and their children may be identified as "Indians" or "Americans of Indian origin." I'd rather we emphasize the Hindu identity. We should want to be considered Americans no less than any other American, and also as Hindus. There are Hindus in this country who migrated from countries other than India. Therefore, calling ourselves Hindus will increase our bond and fraternity with Hindus of non-Indian origin. Being Hindus gives us an outlook of the world which is holistic, universal, nondiscriminatory and more in tune with the thinking of the founding fathers of the American Republic. As Hindus, we have much more to offer to this country. Therefore, we, the Hindus living in the USA, should call ourselves Hindu Americans and live proudly by the Hindu ideals of Ekam satya vipra bahudha vadanti (Truth is one, sages called it in different names), and Vasudhaivya kutumbhakam (The whole world is a family).

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