

[England's Hindus Begin Religious College](#)

Category : [April 1991](#)

Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 1991

England's Hindus Begin Religious College

Hindu College London commenced on the auspicious day of Divali, 1990, fulfilling the dream of Dr. J.C. Sharma and J.N. Kharbanda to provide high-quality religious education for England's Hindu youth and others. Unable to afford the enormous sums needed to create a physical campus facility, Sharma and his collaborators hit upon the idea of providing faculty to conduct courses in established institutions of higher learning. As of March, 1991, the embryonic college modestly encompassed 6 teachers and 72 students in classes on Indian language - Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengal, etc. - at Hindu centers in London and at one local college in Croydon, a London suburb. Sharma is involved in negotiations with a teacher training establishment and with the University of London to incorporate Hindu studies into their existing curricula.

Sharma explains that, "The object of the Hindu College shall be to promote the cause of education, Indian languages, music, arts and culture based on Hindu ideals for all those who are followers of, or interested in, Hindu dharma and the Hindu way of life by way of teaching, research and publication and thereby supplement the mainstream provision of education and create peace and harmony and better race relations in society. The activities planned include teaching of Indian languages, music, art, culture and whatever else is associated with the Hindu way of life."

Prominent UK politician Dr. Vidya Anand told HINDUISM TODAY that he has long supported such a concept and was happy to see it being developed.

Many of those involved in the college are members of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement founded by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883,). Asked about the extent of Arya Samaj influence in the Hindu College, Sharma told HINDUISM TODAY, "If you follow strictly the Arya Samaj parameters of Hindu dharma, you limit its broader appeal." For example, Dayanand taught the supremacy of the Vedas and that the Mahabharata and Ramayana were literature, a position Sharma

modified for the booklet on Hinduism just now being published for the college. He also did not include the strong anti-ritualistic Arya Samaj doctrines.

The college is run by a board of trustees (presently one short of outnumbering the teachers) of Sharma, K.K. Singh, S.N. Bharadwaj, J.N. Kharbanda, K.B. Patel and Ravi Sharma. Bharadwaj is a founder trustee of Arya Samaj Ealing and Singh a founder trustee of the Hindu Centre London. Sharma holds a PhD in Comparative Education from London University and was most recently Dean of Education at Maharishi Dayanand University in India. Previously Sharma was Director of the Asian Centre for Comparative Education in Tabriz, Iran. There is no religious leader or Hindu swami directly involved with the college or serving in an advisory capacity.

Both the local and national government in England provide grants to religious institutions. Many Hindu temples have already found this a generous source of support. Some have received large grants of money, others facilities, such as an unused school. The long Conservative-dominated government in England has somewhat diminished these funds, particularly those promoting multi-culturalism. Sharma is actively seeking support from the local council of Croydon and possibly the Home Office of the central government which, in some circumstances, will provide three-to-one matching funds to local council grants.

Aside from expected government funds, expenses will be met from donations and fees. At this point the faculty is serving entirely on a volunteer basis. Unfortunately, Sharma said few Arya Samajists today follow Dayanand's requirement to give 1/10th of their income to religious work, or the college would be amply funded (as are the projects of the Swaminarayan Fellowship, whose adherents do follow this practice).

There are no immediate plans to provide the kind of training necessary to hold a position as a temple priest, but Sharma said "courses leading to such qualifications may be instituted in the future."

The course in Hinduism will use a just-published English-language booklet entitled Hindu Dharma Shiksha. ("Instruction in the Hindu way of righteous living"). According to Sharma, one college has agreed to do an exam based on the booklet,

which will be one module in a course in religious studies.

Asked about the potential of the college to spread Hinduism, Sharma said, "If information and knowledge about Hinduism is packaged the right way, it will lead to the promotion of Hindu Dharma without making a missionary-like effort. During a recent visit to a teacher training college, I found considerable interest in Hinduism by non-Hindu, white Christians who expressed their desire to take the basic course in Hinduism and sit an exam as well. This is not going to lead to conversion, but to an increased awareness which is absolutely necessary for any teaching working in a multi-cultural society."

Sharma is presently contacting the various colleges in England who might take advantage of the programs. He is willing to help others who would like to develop a program in their area.

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