

[19 Trends for the Trendy 1990's](#)

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Palani, Sivasiva

In December of 1988 as part of our celebration of ten years of publishing, the HINDUISM TODAY staff produced a summary of ten Hindu megatrends. Our goal was to climb atop the nearest journalistic mountain, survey the 900 million or so members of our faith and try to describe their broader movements for our readers. At that time the ten trends in Hinduism that most impressed us were these, much abbreviated here: 1) A replacement of historical timidity with a newfound pride and determination to preserve dharma. This is being called the Hindu Renaissance; 2) A movement away from village life and consciousness to a global presence; 3) An intensification of the influence of Hindu dharma in the West, including environmental groups, the health and vegetarian movement, the ecumenical movement, new age movement and more; 4) The emergence of women at all levels of Hindu religion, and their refusal to tolerate unfairness in forced marriages, spouse abuse or economic disadvantage; 5) The reversal of centuries of decline in temples emphasis, reflected in the remarkable flood of temples being constructed, especially outside of India; 6) A tendency to be more extroverted, to creatively reach out to help and serve others coupled with the institutionalization of many kinds of social service and the sometimes violent approach to solving social problems; 7) The burgeoning of once-scarce Hindu resources which are becoming abundant. These include children's courses, Hindu schools and academies for art, dance and music, a first-ever Hindu encyclopedia, the rise of Sanskrit studies, more university courses focusing on Asian studies, and more; 8) India's emergence as the world's newest superpower; 9) The dizzy changes among Hindus from an agricultural era to one of technology, nuclear power, space exploration and communications; 10) And finally a number of setbacks such as difficulties in preserving the culture and tradition, failure to teach Hinduism to a whole generation of children, tendencies to abandon the vegetarian ethic, public perception problems caused by "anti-cult" Christians like TV evangelist Pat Robertson and the (now deceased) non-Hindu leader Rajneesh.

That was what we saw three years back. As 1991 comes to a close, we found

ourselves wondering what trends could be added to that list. Strange as it seems, we found 19.92 of them. They summarize much that we have encountered in the past three years, and we hope they add to your understanding of how this global spiritual family is growing and changing, mostly for the better, but sometimes...

Nineteen Point Nine Two Trends for 1992

11. **ACADEMIC ACCEPTANCE.** Hindus (and most non-Christians including American Indians, Jews, Hawaiians and pagans) have cringed under the abuse flung their way by scholars of the past. Even the neutral dictionary writers have published their prejudices. An early Webster's New International Dictionary defines swami as "often equivalent to yogi, fakir, wonder-worker, etc." Recently Webster has done better in its New World Dictionary: "A Hindu title of respect, especially for a Hindu religious teacher; a learned man, pundit." That improvement reveals the new intellectual balance among scholars toward non-Christian matters. Academia has embraced the whole non-Semitic universe in the last few decades. Harvard's Diane Eck and Virginia's Dr. Seshagiri Rao are but two examples of Hindu studies coming of age beyond India.

12. **REBIRTH OF RITUAL.** From the earliest days when Germans first brought Hinduism to the West, the philosophical side was emphasized and the ceremonial more or less ignored. When Vedanta swept through Europe and the Americas, nothing was mentioned about puja. Today there is a new trend. Small groups don't just listen to literate lectures anymore, and they aren't agonizing over (please read this in a hushed voice) idol worship, as did their less-informed forerunners. Instead, they immerse themselves in all the colorful rites and rituals. They are mastering the mantras and sitting for long, elaborate rites. This devotional side of Hinduism has become a major theme in Hindu groups and yoga institutions.

13. **CORPORATE PROTECTIONISM.** Something quite extraordinary is happening in the global dharma business. Hinduism is doing well in the marketplace. People are finding truth in the old adage that the West has the best of science, while India has grade-A spirituality. Groups are prospering with publications and seminars, giving Hindu sacred teachings (which always enjoyed intrinsic value) new monetary value. We all know what happens when entrepreneurs realize that something is valuable. They want it, and they want to keep others away from it. In the Gold Rush days it was called "staking a claim." The rules were simple, whoever got there first and removed a sample of ore could petition to own the whole mine. Hinduism was

never thought of as a mine of worldly riches, so nobody ever staked a claim. Things change. Our readers will be familiar with Siddha Yoga Dham's protection of the term Siddha Yoga, and the subsequent legal maneuverings. Just this week we have learned that another group is seeking exclusive use of the term Self-Realization, a common English term for atmavidya. A third group is reported to have locked up the word vairagi, the Hindu term for a perfectly desireless and detached soul. Does all this portend a future where groups divide up our spiritual teachings and terms, then fight to defend their claims? One hopes not.

14. INJUSTICE. Injustice is a renewed theme among Hindus, especially with respect to women. There is a cycle at work in Indian history which other nations also go through. When the stars (or something) are right, citizens seem content. Progress is tangible, problems are trifling. People are prone to silently endure the little inconveniences in life, like injustice and personal abuse. Then something happens, and a cry goes out for relief, rectification and revival. Such cries gave birth to Buddhism, Sikhism, Virasaivism, the Arya Samaj and a hundred more of India's great traditions. There is a new cry among Hindus, about injustice towards villagers, untouchables, widows, wives and children. In all these arenas Hindus are wrestling with ways to cope. If it sounds familiar, it is. Every society is looking at these issues more than ever.

15. MORE CULTURAL CRITICISM. This sounds like a negative trend, but it's not. Hindus place a high value on harmony and hospitality and thus are shy, as a rule, about criticism of others. But there is a trend now to speak out, to not remain silent when things are not quite right. We are learning that there is a difference between cultural criticism, which can bring about insight and change, and personal criticism, which creates disharmony and antagonism.

16. NEW FRIENDSHIPS. One hears too little about the smaller, gentler religious traditions who have almost no voice in the political scheme of things. In recent years Pagans, Polynesians, Wiccans, Gypsies and Aborigines have rediscovered their brotherhood (and sisterhood) with Hinduism and are forging informal ties. These are happy fellowships, and Hindus are responding in kind, offering support and helping these traditions to gain access to world forums.

17. LESS STRICT MORES: Historically, swamis and sadhus have been celibate monks. In fact, if one was not, he was assiduously avoided, even maligned. There is a trend of late for Hindus to accept, or at least tolerate, married swamis. A related

microtrend is co-ed ashram life. The strict separation of single men and women engaged in yoga and spiritual pursuits is no longer an assumed protocol. Men and women are sharing the same living facilities, and experiencing the often difficult consequences of such arrangements.

18. REDEFINING HINDUISM IN INDIA. David Frawley visited us this week and observed a few trends. He sees Hinduism reemerging in India, but the problem is defining it as a true revival of dharma. In this awakening of Hindu consciousness, how do we define it in a proper, universal way rather than something merely nationalistic? The present revival of Hinduism in India still hasn't found the right balance. Political ambitions are in the way. A new model of Hinduism needs to be developed and defined in a universal sense. Also, he sees a tendency in India to misrepresent and improperly classify Hinduism as right wing and fundamentalist, whereas Hinduism stands for ecology, vegetarianism, etc., (which are all left wing in the West). Nowadays in India these are being considered as right wing. Overall, Hinduism is being recognized as a positive term. For a long time, someone would say I'm a Christian or I'm a Buddhist, but the Hindu would say I'm a follower of all religions. That's not so true today.

19.92. POTPOURRI. Two happenings, not yet trends, can be added. In Sri Lanka, under the weight of years of ethnic struggles that have cost 17,000 lives, Hindus have stopped cremating and begun to bury their dead. A similar thing is happening outside of Asia, where cremation facilities are lacking. Dharma can be entertaining. Major visitor's centers are evolving, designed around Hindu thought, and culture. Swaminaranaya's Culture Festival of India, TM's Disney-Better World in Kenya are a few examples.

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