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PRESS RELEASE

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Vedanta Philosophy holds key to harmonious and sustainable living, scientific advancement

Over hundred scholars and participants descended on the sprawling and secluded campus of UMass Dartmouth for 3 days (July 16-18, 2009) of parlance on the wisdom and meaning of Vedanta philosophy and practice.

The Center for Indic Studies at UMass Dartmouth hosted the 18th International Congress of Vedanta with the scholars coming from dozens of universities of different countries, including India, Israel, Canada, Croatia, Holland, and the United States.

The Congress was inaugurated in the Main Auditorium of McLean Campus Center, on Thursday, July 16, with a welcome of delegates by Dr. Anthony Garro, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at UMass Dartmouth, who also oversees the operations of the Center for Indic Studies. Dr. Garro pointed out the need of global ideas to solve world problems and mentioned his own sojourn with Bhagavadgita in his college days.

Swami Yogatmananda of Providence Vedanta Society delivered the benediction highlighting how the Vedanta philosophy brought to the western world by Swami Vivekananda has made deep impressions in the American society.

The Congress covered such diverse topics as Consciousness, Ethics and Phenomenology, Modern Education and Ayurveda, Yoga, and Vedanta and Science. In the inaugural speech, Dr. Jagdish Srivastava emphasized on much published work that exists to suggest that Vedanta, particularly as it explains consciousness is testable with modern scientific advances in neuroscience.

The Congress in the past has been held at Miami University for the past 23 years, and was this year transitioned to UMass Dartmouth under the Center for Indic Studies. Professor Rama Rao Pappu, the Founder of Vedanta Congress was present along with his wife, Mrs. Suryakantham Pappu, who has been playing a critical role in the organization of the Vedanta Congress over the years.

Dr. Bal Ram Singh, Director of Indic Studies Center, introduced the Center to the delegates and said, “the Vedanta Congress has rightly landed in the land of Emerson and Thoreau”, the 19th century Vedantists who were the first Americans interested in this philosophy and were from New England and Massachusetts.

The Congress started amidst traditional shankhanaad (conch blowing) and lightening of the lamp, and Vedic chanting, giving an authentic ambience for the delegates to begin their discussions on many aspects of Vedanta and modern thinking and relevance.

The discussions were intellectually engaging, as several speakers tried to break new ground or at least made efforts to revise the old ones. Rajiv Malhotra of Infinity Foundation spoke on “The Forest Paradigm: Context vs. Universalism, and pointed out that Indian philosophy must be



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accepted as a whole for it to be understood by western scholars, even if the latter group feels uncomfortable with certain aspects initially. Accepting yoga for health benefits but not its philosophical aspect is not likely to create appropriate understanding and practice of the philosophy.

Ashok Aklujkar, and prominent scholar of Sanskrit and philology from University of British Columbia presented a keynote on “Indian Philosophy before the earliest available texts: Need for a philology-based revamping”, and urged his colleagues to go beyond current textual philology approach in fixing a historical timeline for Indian civilization.

At a public lecture, Subramanian Swamy, Janata Party president and a visiting professor at Harvard University, outlined the need to develop a holistic system for the society’s development based on the values. “Indians need to feel proud of their civilization and Vedanta’s acceptance worldwide can make that process easier.”

Dr. Subramanian Swamy release a book entitled “The Salem-India Story: Maritime Trade between Salem, Massachusetts, and India 1788-1845” written by Dr. Vanita Shastri of Meru Education Foundation. The book traces first sets of trade trips between independent United States and India, and is written as a supplementary resource of school children in USA.

At a brief ceremony during the Congress on July 18 was organized between the Light on Ayurveda Education Foundation (LOAF) and, Center for Indic Studies, UMass Dartmouth, and the 3 R's Foundation, signing a memorandum of understanding to transfer the publication of Light on Ayurveda Journal (LOAJ) to the Center for Indic Studies. LOAJ is currently the only peer Ayurveda journal serving many Ayurvedic practitioners and institutions in United States.

The ceremony involved 3-way signing by Provost Garro and Dr. Singh (representing UMass Dartmouth), Genevieve Ryder and Robert Ryder (representing LOAEF and LOAJ), and Pandit Ramsamooj (3 R's Foundation) to facilitate LOAJ publication by UMass Dartmouth, and transferring LOAEF to 3 R's Foundation.

Vedanta Congress had several presentations on Ayurveda, including by students who traveled all the way from India. In fact, this Vedanta Congress had the most visible student presence with about 10 students participating, majority from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi.

A musical program organized by doctoral student, Koyel Ghosal, who played sitar accompanied by Christopher Pereji on Tabla. Vocalist Supriya Kulkarni and Kathak dancer Rajani Kaimal entertained the delegates with their performance while explaining the human connection to art.

The Vendanta Congress will be an annual event now at UMass Dartmouth. Next year's Congress will take place on July 28-31, 2010

For more information on this other activities, please visit <http://www.umassd.edu/indic/>