

What Can Hindu Diaspora Do to Bring India's Traditions to the World?

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The concept of Hindu

The concept of India and the concept Hindu are the same, at least linguistically speaking. The origin of the name India used by British is the Indus River that flows from Himalayas in the northwest part of India and part of what is now Pakistan. The Indus river's actual name is Sindhu river, and Persians used to refer to people living across the Sindhu river as Hindus as Sanskrit 's' is cognate with Persian 'h'.

More ancient and original name of India is actually Bharat, which also currently used in Hindi and other Indian languages, and is referred in the modern Indian constitution as 'India that is Bharat'. More importantly, India's Bharat name comes after king Bharat who ruled over 8,000 years ago an India that encompassed from east of Iran to Indonesia (Fig. 1). King Bharat was son of King Dushyant (a descendant of king Manu through latter's daughter Ila) and Shakuntala, the daughter of sage Vishwamitra. A major story of king Bharat is that he is the first known king who did not choose any of his nine sons as the heir, rather a well qualified commoner since he found none of his sons as qualified to be a king. Such a legacy is important one to remember in today's world, both within and without India, as so many rulers even in democratic system tend to promote their offsprings into the political system.

The system of governance in ancient India while differed from Western democracy, there are many instances of righteous kings who considered the interests of their subjects with utmost sincerity. However, that is not to say that all the kings were nobles, and there were obviously problematic kings. There are stories of numerous major wars

within the land of Bharat (two major ones form the basis of epics Ramayana and Mahabharata), which were not fought for expansion of territories or power, but to right the wrong as the overriding factor. In other words, these wars were fought to assert dharma.

Role of Hindu Diaspora in a Globalized World

As the globalization is taking its roots throughout the world, and Indian government recognizes the value of its diaspora, it is important to review the role this group can play not only for itself and India but for the peace and prosperity of the whole world.

Many times there are conflicting viewpoints on how to promote the Indianness while living in other sovereign nations having their own culture and traditions. Moreover, India now has a mix of cultures and traditions, especially those which are remnants of invaders and colonizers, Islam and Christianity. While there are ample examples of fusion of these traditions with the basic ethos of Hindus or India, current political and religious environment in India, also in the world, leads to many conflicts in representing India's many time-tested values to the outside world.

In my opinion, the context of universality of India's traditions and practices is what must be looked upon for inspiration by the 22 million strong Indian diaspora living in each and every continent of the world.

India's value systems have been adopted throughout the world even in ancient times. For example, despite Thailand officially being a Buddhist country, it continues to relish in the essential human values of Ramayana through its *Khon* and *Lakhon* forms of drama-dance tradition based on *Ramakian*, the Thai version of Ramayana. The current king of Thailand is known as Rama IV. In Indonesia, Ramayana and Mahabharata govern much of the social and

cultural milieu, despite Indonesia being the largest Muslim country in the world. At a traffic roundabout on one of the busiest arteries of Jakarta city stands a monumental sculpture facing the central bank on one side and the national monument on the other. It depicts Krishna and Arjuna in a chariot drawn by several horses.

Unfortunately, India's rulers have no concept of its magnificent history. Their intellectual bankruptcy has led them to follow a path which defies India's tradition and values. Among the reasons for such a situation is the colonial education system in India, a copycat political system, and mostly westernized bureaucracy. There is a level of inferiority complex developed toward things Indian, mostly because it is not Western. No such issues exist amongst the Hindu diaspora, especially those living in Western countries. Therefore, they can readily take the leadership in bringing about traditional Hindu values to the rest of the world.

The list of India's outside admirers is long and cuts across all section of life – Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, Erwin Schrodinger, Max Muller, Mark Twain, Will Durant, Martin Luther King, George Harrison, David Frawley, Robert Blackwill, Bill Clinton, to name a few. What is so unique about India that it has remained the zenith of philosophy, science, music, and culture for thousands of years? The answer lies among other things on the nature's benevolence on India. India's geography, geology, and demography provide natural settings for human learning, leading to the philosophy of its diverse culture and traditions. India is the only country blessed with the highest mountain peaks of the Himalayas on one end and the lowest level of earth on the other (the ocean), with numerous geological formations in between. India is the only country on earth which witnesses six clear and distinct seasons during the year. Such crisp variation in seasons and weather could support many diverse species of life in India.

Although there is no complete record of all the life-forms anywhere in the world as of yet, India's share of life-forms tops that of any other country in

the world, with 75,000 animal species and 45,000 plant species counted so far. These natural forces have resulted in a myriad of diversity in the people who inhabit that part of the planet, be it the area of language, food, attire, traditions, and even gods (330 million of them!).

India's tradition of celebrating diversity remains the key to its success in the spiritual growth of its people, and its natural resources of fertile land and the world's most amenable weather to human living lends support for its prosperity and leisure time for developing thoughts in science and philosophy. In other words, India is truly a special land where ideas and observations intertwine to create an understanding of harmonious living.

There is plenty of evidence of this when one examines numerous philosophical and spiritual thoughts originating from time immemorial, be it Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Dvaitism, Advaitism, Sankhya, Vaishesika, Yoga, Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Sufism, etc. These ideas have generally been living in peace with each other, which is more than what can be said for rest of the world.

India therefore deserves homage on its merit of being the land of ideas and the practice of harmonious living and celebrating the diversity of mutual understanding. Being associated with people of India through blood relations is just an added reason for the Indian diaspora in general, and the Hindu diaspora in particular to promote the values and traditions of India by becoming the living examples, not for any egoistic reasons but simply in service of the adopted lands.

Note: A slightly shorter version of this article appeared in Swadharma, Harvard's Hinduism Journal, Volume 1, 33-35 (May 2006).

Figure 1. The approximate extent of King Bharata's empire. The brown line marks colonial India (The map taken from Wikipedia)

