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International Conference Highlights India's Contributions to the World Balram Singh

The Center for Indic Studies (CIS) of UMass Dartmouth hosted the International Conference on India's Contributions and Influence in the World on July 12-14, 2002. The conference was coordinated by the World Association for Vedic Studies (WAVES) Inc., which has organized such biennial conferences since 1996. This was the fourth of such WAVES event; the three previous ones were at Atlanta (GA) in 1996, at Los Angeles (CA) in 1998, and at Hoboken (NJ) in 2000.

The conference attracted many international scholars on Vedic literature and Indic civilization, with nearly 200 abstracts submitted for presentations to run in the course of three days. UMass Dartmouth with its beautiful and serene campus provided its auditorium, lecture halls, parking, housing facilities for almost four days to the Center for Indic Studies to host this conference.

Academic scholars and non-academic practitioners alike presented Vedic and Upanishadic ideas of understanding and Ahimsa to address some of the most pressing global problems in today's world. Dr. Francis Clooney of Boston College presented ideas on how today's global audience with diverse religious, philosophical, and cultural interests, can still learn from the language, methods, and conclusions of the Upanishads. Professor Hope Fitz of Eastern Connecticut University stated that "never has there been a time when ahimsa, basically nonharm and compassion, was needed more than it is today." She elaborated principles of ahimsa as practiced by Gandhi as well as in the Jain and Buddhist traditions

The inaugural address presented by Dr. Kalyanraman highlighted incrementally acceptable theory and existence of on Sarasvati Civilisation. Dr. Frawley followed up on this in his lecture on the Rigveda and the Ocean, referring to the significance of the discovery of the course of River Sarasvati over 1,600 kms. from Manasarovar to Gujarat (with an average width of a staggering 6 to 8 kms. of palaeo-channels of the river, as seen from the satellite images) and the discovery of over 2,000 archaeological sites of the civilisation (i.e. 80% of the so-called sites of Harappan culture). The Rigveda was composed on the banks of River Sarasvati, the same river along the banks of which Balaram (elder brother of Krishna) goes on a pilgrimage for 40 plus days visiting the ancient pilgrimage sites, r.s.i a_s'rama-s and offers homage to the r.s.i-s and pitr.-s (as described in the S'alya Parva of the Maha_bha_rata in 200 s'lokas). The continuity of this Sarasvati culture in Bha_rata was elaborated by presenting emphatic cultural markers, for example, wearing of the sindhur by married women

"What I would like to do is bring India to the West," said French journalist and author Francois Gautier. "I believe India is going to be the spiritual leader of the world. That is why I fight for India." Other scholars from China, India, Nepal, the Caribbean, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Canada, and the U.S., as well as artists of all kinds were also in attendance. A general theme running throughout the conference reflected on the deep scientific and systematic nature of life of Vedic tradition people, and the culture of celebrated diversity commonly visible even in today's India.

Dr. B. K. Modi, President of Indian Council of Religious Leaders, presented a general overview of India and Hinduism as an epitome of Arts and Sciences of Human Welfare. Mr. Rajiv Malhotra, President, Infinity Foundation, presented ideas for repositioning Hinduism in the American education system. He was particularly critical of Western academicians who after learning many ideas from the Indic traditions end up trashing the source of their information.

One of the non-academic, nevertheless most attractive items of the conference was 'Nrityamala' - A Garland of Dance was featured on Saturday July 13th evening in the Main Auditorium of UMass Dartmouth. The event included spectacular presentations of Indian Classical dance and music. Dr. Sadhana Upadhyaya, Amrita Saigal, Amudha Pazhanisamy, Prafula Velury, Sunanda Narayanan, Kripa Iyer and Sudarshan Belsare made presentations. The event was coordinated by Mrs. Ranjani Saigal of Eastern Rhythm dance school.

Ayurveda and Health, and Consciousness sessions attracted the most delegates. Several presentations emphasized the scientific nature of Ayurveda, and the opportunity for an enormous market for Ayurvedic medicine in the west. Consciousness studies are becoming popular in Psychology departments on most US universities. According to Don Salmon of Salem, South Carolina, "when compared to Indian Philosophy/Psychology, the western psychology, neuroscience, and consciousness studies combined do not correspond to even significant fraction". Dr. Koenraad Elst of Belgium presented a lecture entitled "Hindu Influence on Christianity" outlining some of the philosophical elements of Christianity including the doctrine of incarnation have their roots in Vedic/Buddhist traditions.

The last part of the program was a very lively panel discussion on Current Global Influences of Vedic Thoughts and Hindu Practices; panelists consisted of Dr. Deen B. Chandora, Dr. Konraa Elst, Mr. Francois Gautier, Mr. Rajeev Malhotra, and Dr. Bal Ram Singh, with a very heavy participation from the audience. Issues related to Hindu vs. India, ways to include other groups who follow Indic tradition of dharma and accept diversity of cultures and religions, less than adequate representation of practicing Indians to be involved in academic Indic scholarship, and need for an assertive Indian/Hindu point of view were discussed.

The proceedings of the conference with all the edited papers presented in full-length is planned to be published and will be available for public perusal and dissemination. Further details can be accessed at the website: www.umassd.edu/indic/waves.