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PRESS RELEASE

"International Conference Highlights and Exhorts India's Contributions and Influences to Solve World's Current Problems"

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 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 non-harm 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 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.

The inaugural address presented by Dr. Kalyanraman highlighted incrementally acceptable theory and existence of on Sarasvati Civilization. Dr. Frawley followed up on this in his lecture on the Rig-Veda 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 Rig-Veda was composed on the banks of River Sarasvati, the same river along the banks of which Balarama (elder brother of Krishna) goes on a pilgrimage for 40 plus days visiting the ancient pilgrimage sites, rishis and s'ramas and offers homage to the rishis and pitrs (as described in the S'alya Parva of the Mahabharata in 200 shlokas). The continuity of this Sarasvati culture in Mahabharata was elaborated by presenting emphatic cultural markers, for example, wearing of the sindhur by married women

The campus and community was abuzz with nearly 250 participants during the conference, some lingered on even after the last day just to relax a bit or to arrange a suitable departure flight.

The program officially started on July 12, with breakfast and registration at 7 a.m. But many international delegates had begun to arrive as early as the morning of July 11 at the T.F. Green and Logan airports in Providence, R.I. and Boston, MA, respectively. Picking them up from the airports, rail and bus stations and housing them created some challenging logistic and manpower difficulties. The dedicated faculty members of CIS, graduate students and other volunteers had to manage and resolve these problems. Most of the work ran very smoothly, despite their limited resources. Their hospitality

was specially appreciated by most attendees.

More than one hundred and fifty presentations ranging from spiritual Vedic literature to tradition to science took place over the course of 30 parallel sessions, in addition to inaugural addresses, keynote speeches, plenary and public lectures, keynote speeches, and a panel discussion.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served by volunteers many of whom also manned bookstands and directed attendees to the next presentation. Conches were blown to indicate the beginning of a new lecture or the end of a tea break.

Many prominent Indologists were in attendance, like author Dr. David Frawley, who spoke on the Rig-Veda; Professor Hope K. Fitz, who spoke on ahimsa in yoga sutras; and Dr. S. Kalyanraman, member of the Akhila Bharateeya Itihaasa Sankalana Yojana, who presented an in-depth and scholarly lecture on Sarasvati Civilization.

International and local delegates alike lingered in the vicinity of the main auditorium from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, and from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, often engaged in heated debates of Vedic significance, socializing, or reading.

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 featured on Saturday July 13 th evening in the Main Auditorium of UMass Dartmouth. Wearing gleaming garments that resembled flower petals, as well as bangles, anklets, and jewelry that adorned even their hair, professional dancers performed in sequences that lasted anywhere from two to twenty minutes. This cultural program of dance recitals was open and free to public. Mrs. Ranjani Saigal, Director of Eastern Rhythms School of Dance organized and presented this program.

On Sunday July 14, in the plenary session, Dr. Vasant Lad of the Ayuvedic Instite, NM, gave a scholarly overview of Ayurveda in daily life, followed by a two-hour special workshop for interested participants on the basic principles of Ayurveda.

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, said that 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 enormity and challenges in organizing the conference can be judged by the fact that the organizers, had to run six parallel sessions simultaneously on various special theme areas each afternoon of the conference to accommodate the number of presentations.

The last part of the program, which followed a lunch break, 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.

Dr. Bal Ram Singh, Dr. Suku Sengupta and Dr. T. K. Roy of CIS at UMass Dartmouth worked tirelessly in organizing and conducting the event. Dr. Shankha Bhowmick, Dr. Madhu Jhaveri and many volunteers from the campus and the community provided their assistance. Prof. Bhu Dev Sharma, President of the Hindu University of America, was the coordinator and arranged for most of the speakers in various symposia in the conference. Without the Himalayan efforts of Mr. Ishwar Patel, Mr. Mahesh Patel, and their families and friends the program could not have been successful.

The Center for Indic Studies at UMass Dartmouth hosted the conference whose mission is to highlight India's time-tested eternal values for world's progress, peace and harmony and cultivate relevance of ancient Indic human values through scholarly understanding and promotion. Some of its goals are to promote awareness among Americans of contemporary India and its demographic diversity in the 21st century as well as disseminate understanding of issues relating to the arts, philosophy, culture, societal values, and customs of India for the benefit of the world as a family.

The program concluded on July 14 th by remarks from Professor Bhu Dev Sharma and Mr. Dharendra Shah of WAVES. Dr. Bal Ram Singh, Director of CIS, expressed thanks to all the participants, the various organizations, and the volunteers who worked tirelessly to make the conference a success.

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](http://www.umassd.edu/indic/waves).

Prepared by Professors TK Roy and Bal Ram Singh, Center for Indic Studies, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth 7/22/02.

Pictures:

1. IndicStudiesWAVES_0702_1858.jpg - Inaugural session being addressed by Professor Bal Ram Singh. Seated at the dais are Prof. Thomas Forsthoeffel, Prof. Hope Fitz, Dr. Kalyanraman, Prof. BhuDev Sharma and Prof. T. S. Rukmani
2. IndicStudiesWAVES_0702_2010.jpg - An unidentified classical dancer at the cultural program
3. IndicStudiesWAVES_0702_1937.jpg Francois Gautier, French journalist and author giving a public lecture