

A way of life? Cultural fascism? Universal spirituality? Which Hinduism will dominate the 21st century?

Aim

To help the participants to

- Understand the impact of Hinduism today
- Pray for Hindus
- Begin to develop creative ways to communicate with Hindus

A. The Hindu world: South Asia and the Diaspora

B. Hinduism's impact on the rest of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries

- Vedanta for the Western world (Vivekananda, Aldous Huxley, Radhakrishnan)
- Packaging the faith for the market (the gurus)
- Beyond the New Age: Universal spirituality

C. The impact of globalisation on South Asia

- The colonial and missionary experience: ideas of freedom, self-determination and struggle
- Market forces: economic exploitation, the consumer revolution, global competitors
- The global village: windows on the world, MTV to Bollywood, the Internet highway
- Technology: factories & dams to missiles, software solutions and transgenic mice
- Environment: devastation and degradation

D. Hindu Nationalism

- 19th century renaissance
- 20th century polarisation: the RSS, defining Indianness as Hindu culture
- Hindutva, Ayodhya, Gujarat: the Sangh Parivar and the cycle of violence
- Conversion as an escape – to Christianity? Buddhism? Islam? Buddhism again?
- Nepal's unenviable choice: Monarchy? Maoism? Hindu nationalism? Or...?

E. Christian responses

Can we turn barriers into bridges?

- Social/cultural structures: the dilemmas of caste and people groups
- Theological/cultural challenges: Christ is unique but is he Asian?
- Spiritual powers: demonstrating Christ's love and power

Hindus today

Hindus are inescapably linked with India, the *Punya Bhoomi* (sacred land). Traditionally a Hindu could not leave its boundaries without losing caste. But all that has changed and now Hindus are found all over the world.

This is something comparatively recent. Although South Asians had been migrating all over the former British Empire, the last 50 years have seen large scale migrations to Europe, North America and Australia. The pace has been accelerating over the past 5 years, especially to North America. The USA has been issuing around 100,000 visas a year for computer professionals. The majority of these are Indian Hindus.

Converging cultures

Today we see a process of "convergence" of the culture of middle class, urban South Asians around the world, whether they live in New Delhi or New York, London or Lahore, Colombo or Paris. They watch the same films, listen to the same music, enjoy the same food, read the same books.

Hindus in the *Diaspora* come from different parts of the Indian sub continent, but the largest groups are Gujarati and Punjabi, of whom many migrated via East Africa. They are mostly business people, professionals or skilled workers. Sindhis are another key business community. Recently Sri Lankan Tamils, escaping from the civil war, have settled in every European country, the USA and Canada.

Many of the recent migrants are highly educated professionals. Many also come from higher castes, so that the spread of caste in the diaspora is different from that of India as a whole.

Diaspora Hindus face a marked generation gap. The 1st generation, especially of those who moved 20-30 years ago, are very different from the 2nd and now the 3rd generations, born and brought up away from the sub continent. This younger generation finds itself living in two (or more) worlds: the world of their parents and the worlds of schools, friends, work and pleasure.

Pressures

Like everybody else, Hindus face the relentless pressures of secularism and materialism. For some, their religion becomes irrelevant; for others it becomes more important, as they try to retain their identity or rediscover their roots. In recent years large numbers of temples have been built and many priests and gurus are invited to visit. Strong efforts are being made to teach the younger generation what Hinduism is, through books, camps, special lectures or CD ROMs. This was never needed "back home" where the younger generation "absorbed" Hinduism as their way of life. What will be the impact of this globalisation on Hindus in the diaspora? And what, in turn, will be their impact on India and the rest of South Asia?

India continues, with China, to be the world's most diverse, populous and challenging country. It is the world's largest democracy, with an expanding economy, self sufficient in food, a nuclear and space power, resilient in the face of political divisions and natural disasters. At the same time it is still predominantly rural, still with 40% living below the poverty line, still with vast disparities of wealth and poverty, sophistication and superstition, education and illiteracy, high and low social status.

Hinduism remains India's driving force, along with the many other forces which it has absorbed and synthesised, especially over the last 100 years. How will it change, if at all, as the world becomes smaller?

Positive

The contribution of NRIs (Non Resident Indians or people from any part of the sub-continent) is increasingly significant. They generate as much wealth as the entire South Asian economy. Their entrepreneurial, social and educational skills are increasingly valued, as the links around the world strengthen, and as resources - and ideas and values - flow back and forth. What happens in the Diaspora impacts South Asia, and vice versa.

Negative

The last three years have seen a disturbing trend. Along with reports of much response to the Good News, there has been a strong increase in extremist Hindu nationalism. This has resulted in unexpected pressure on Christians in certain parts of India and Nepal.

The challenge of prayer

Praying for Hindus is still our greatest challenge.