



HINDU STUDENTS & YOUTH NETWORK

Rise, Organise, Lead, Emerge



MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to actively involve Hindu Youth into playing a vital role in the Hindu Resurgence and Renaissance. Hindu Students & Youth Network will tap the boundless energy, creativity, and ideas of Hindu Youth and fully harness their potential to work for the resurgence of Hindu society on a global basis.

INTRODUCTION

The future generation of Hindu society in the form of young professionals, college students and teenagers has been endowed with wisdom and vast empirical talent and knowledge. This generation has been attempting to work for the Hindu resurgence in their own individual capacities around the world, but not in an organised manner. Indeed, there is a severe shortage of Hindu youth in established Hindu organisations worldwide, especially in responsible positions and leadership roles. It is vital to reverse this alarming trend as this is already harming Hindu society's ability to progress. The rejuvenation and revitalization of Hindu Dharma throughout the world rests predominantly on the shoulders of the next generation of Hindus, who will assume the leadership of the Hindu resurgence. The youth is the most motivated to challenge the status quo as well as to change it. One question that may arise is why this emphasis on the youth of Hindu society? It is the young who first stand against tyranny, injustice, suppression and exploitation, and declare that they will change the situation. A careful analysis of the major movements that have led to rejuvenation of Hindu society point to the fact that the bulk of the activity in such movements was done by Hindu youth. Therefore, there is a genuine need for a global platform to bring all Hindu students and youth organisations together.

Hindu Students & Youth Network aims to provide a proper platform and effective network for all Hindu students and youth organisations that are currently active in their countries to share their experiences and provide encouragement to each other. In addition, HSYN will rope in experienced individuals to share their experiences in these endeavours with current as well as aspiring individuals who desire to mobilize Hindu youth into the movement. This will help and encourage Hindu youth to work for the Hindu resurgence in the future.



Pritika Sharma

Joint General Secretary, Hindu Council of New Zealand

Introductory Remarks

Pritika Sharma stressed on the important role that youth had to play in the Hindu resurgence, for which they had to first strengthen their grounding in Dharma.

She thanked all the volunteers who had worked ceaselessly in Bharat and abroad to organize the Youth conference.





Chairperson: Dr. Anil Kumar Asthana

Specialist Gastroenterologist, Melbourne, Australia

Introductory Remarks

Dr. Anil Asthana said that Hindu unity stems from having a deep-rooted & confident identity. Hindu youth today are undergoing a renaissance, and becoming more organized and assertive. Across the globe we are well integrated with our host societies while also collaborating well as Hindus at the country level. Now we need to start coordinating at a global level, as the foundation of a strong Hindu society is confident, organized youth. He said the session would talk about how to recognize Hindu identity and steps to strengthen it.

Krishna Ramarathinam

IT Professional, Australia

Defining the Hindu identity

Krishna Ramarathinam started with deconstructing the word 'Hindu'. The word finds mention in many ancient texts like Rig Veda, but was subjected to many distortions and manipulations over the centuries. In the Mahabharata, there is mention of two Sindhu rivers in East and West of *Akhand* (undivided) Bharat. The word 'Sindhu' transformed into 'Hindu' through Panini grammar and other pre-Islamic influences. 'Sindhu' also represents the ocean surrounding the southern peninsula of Bharat. Hence, just by pronouncing 'Hindu', the entire geography of Bharat is visualized. *Hindu Dharma* is mentioned in texts related to Shivaji Maharaj and Guru Gobind Singh- words like *Sanatan Dharma* or *Bharat Varsha* were not used in their cause of fighting. Religion, faith, or 'way of life'



are incorrect translations of Hindu identity. Quoting Golwalkar ji, he contended that the term Hindu cannot be defined, as it comprises all. Hindus are the oldest surviving nation in the world and Hindu Dharma is the distinguishing feature and common voice for the Hindu nation. Hindu Dharma can also be interpreted as 'way of life' if the definition is broad enough to cover eternal values and aspects of our culture, but in the popular imagination a way of life is seen as transient, hence it is better to represent Dharma as Hindu civilization.



Simran Vedvyas

Founder of Synergy youth group, Dubai

Making the Hindu identity positively visible

16 year old Simran stressed that Hindu identity is the identity of Dharma - 'that which sustains'. It provides its followers a rational view of reality, and is defined just as the search for physical truth defines science. The spiritual laws laid down by Dharma are experience based, rather than belief based.

Vedas which are the oldest written texts form the bedrock of Hindu Dharma. They are mostly written in the form of questions and answers, thus exhibiting the importance of asking questions in the Hindu tradition. Hindu youth need to spread the spiritual message of their forefathers across the world. As young Hindus, we first need to learn the rich Hindu traditions in science, literature, mathematics, Yoga, medicine, and culture – and then make this

knowledge available to the rest of the world community. We need self-understanding, and then tell others that Hindu identity respects diversity in spiritual experience.

Kajal Valani Sheth,

Lawyer, UK

Connect and share to nurture

Kajal Sheth said that Hindus need to learn from other religious communities on how to be united and have one voice. We need to expand and help one another across boundaries - apply *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* to first look at Hindus as one family. We must work together, share ideas, resources and facilities globally to guide and push each other towards excellence in all fields. She presented the model of the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF), UK for emulation elsewhere. NHSF was founded in 1991 with the goal of preserving Hindu identity and culture amongst Hindu university students. Today, it has 150,000 members and 50 branches across UK. Core activities include a weekly *aarti*, *seva* activities, learning events, debates, and workshops. Innovation is necessary to make it



fun for youth to participate in Dharmic activities. NHSF interacts regularly with the Government and other bodies. It also imparts training and personal development skills to students, and their alumni network places them in strategic positions of society.



Sarika Rao

Student of Philosophy, Belgium

Western challenges to Hindu Identity

Sarika Rao said that our biggest challenge is that we have very little understanding of ourselves, and how we view the world. Bharat is the victim of two colonialisms – Islamic and British. We suffered terribly under these colonialisms, but the biggest damage was to our minds, to our consciousness. We identify ourselves most with casteism, corruption, superstition - because that is how our colonizers viewed us.

We need intellectual labor to make our experiences & traditions our own, to develop our way of looking at the world through the eyes of our *Sanskritis* and *Sampradayas*. One of the challenges posed by the Semitic religions is conversion, but the far more insidious threat comes from these religions

masquerading as the more scientific & rational way to be. Without even realizing it, we have internalized our own inferiority. We need to break this lens of colonial consciousness, and the only way to do this is to build intellectuals who can define what it means to be a Hindu in the 21st century.





Chairperson: Amit Srivastava

Coordinator of Hindu Students & Youth Network, Bharat

Introductory Remarks

Amit Srivastava said that despite being around 17% of the world population, Hindus still lack a strategic position in the international order and are unable to influence policy. For eg., the entire world outrages for the Palestinian cause, but no one is aware of the Hindu genocide happening in Bangladesh & Pakistan. The panellists for this session would discuss their experiences in different host societies & discuss processes by which Hindu society can position itself better.

Pritika Sharma,

Joint General Secretary, Hindu Council of New Zealand
Influencing local and central government and politics

Pritika Sharma presented some examples to show why we need to have a say in policy making. In 2013, a Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (PCTV) bill was debated in Bharat's Parliament, that originally contained some draconian clauses - the law could only be invoked against Hindus by religious minorities, and Hindus would be presumed guilty on complaint by minorities and arrested without bail. The first thing to do to influence policy debates is to make yourself visible and showcase your capability. We should participate in processes that influence policy: stand for election, vote, and make submissions as per these guiding principles - offer solutions, define and stick to your position statement, and look for endorsement from government bodies. She summarized the key areas for influencing policy



- Focus on outcomes, identify key neutral players, develop your action plan, create stakeholder profiles to see where the gap is and mobilize resources accordingly.



Murali Magesan

Engineering Student, New Zealand

Connecting and influencing host society - New Zealand Case Study

Murali Magesan said that basics of the indigenous Maori culture are taught in New Zealand schools, and now even Hindu culture is gaining popularity. Hindus are making important contributions in different sectors and have connected well with their host society. Hindu Council (VHP) of New Zealand is well established, and now different temples & Hindu communities are being brought together under the HOTA (Hindu Organizations & Temples Association) platform. Awareness & celebration of Hindu festivals like Deepavali and Holi has spread to schools, universities, and even the New Zealand parliament. Hindus share many similarities with the native Maoris – attitudes to nature, our language

and culture - due to which there is good integration between the two communities.

Sushyanth Subramanian

Economics Student, Australia

Connecting and influencing host society - Australia Case Study

Sushyanth Subramanian said that Hindus constitute 1.3% of the total Australian population of 23 million. Their median age is 30.05, below the national average of 37. VHP Australia is the mother organization and Hindu Youth Australia (HYA) is its youth wing which was established during the 2nd National Hindu Conference in 2009. The goal of HYA is to unite Hindu youth in the cause of Dharma, clear misperceptions about Dharma and the Hindu identity, and integrate Dharma with the Australian life style. HYA conducts several community service, cultural, and sporting activities, and tries to involve the native Aboriginal community in these programs. Their efforts have been well-recognized, resulting in a 100,000 Australian Dollar grant from the State

Government of Victoria. Through HOTA Forum Australia, HYA has also requested Hindu temples to provide explanation of Vedic hymns and prayer rituals for the benefit of Hindu youth.





Sachin Rustogi

Founder ChakraNews.com & Entrepreneur, Canada

Influencing media projection of Hindus

Sachin Rustogi said that there are five pillars of every media institution - expression, education, persuasion, satisfaction and monetization. Today, there are many anti-Hindu channels, especially in Bharat, which have distorted the five pillars - they use expression to create bias, persuasion to create propaganda, user satisfaction through sensationalism, and monetization through agenda based funding. There has been a strong rise in Hinduphobia in media which is caused by several factors - misrepresentation and ignorance of Hindu Dharma, lobby groups which are anti-Bharat, association with political parties, and fundamental hatred for certain kinds of faiths considered pagan. To counter this Hinduphobia he proposed several measures - Hindus should build relationships with

media personalities and journalists (like is being done through the media conference at WHC); each organisation should appoint a media spokesperson; spread positive news & invite media to cover local events. Each individual can make a difference by sharing positive articles and creating content as per their ability (blog, video, infographics etc). We should start our own media organisations like ChakraNews.com & WorldHinduNews.com, but ensure that new content is regularly posted.





Chairperson: Liza Bhansali

Co-Coordinator, Hindu Students & Youth Network, Bharat

Introductory Remarks

Liza Bhansali started by providing a definition of human rights: Certain inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled since she/he is a human being, irrespective of gender, location, religion or ethnicity. The doctrine of human rights has influenced laws in many countries. She said that in this session we would get acquainted with Hindu human rights violations that are taking place around the world.

Jayant Sital

Law Student, Netherlands

A deep dive into violation of Human Rights

Jayant Sital said he is a proud Hindu, but he is not proud of Hindus as a community because we let other Hindus around the world suffer without raising our voices for them. He is an active volunteer with GHRD (Global Human Rights Defense), an organization based out of Netherlands, which fights for rights of minorities in South Asia – where the most egregious violations are taking place against minorities like Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, and others. He outlined the 3 pillars of GHRD – human rights, monitoring & advocacy. They work at grassroots by educating people about their rights & fighting legal cases for them, and also ensure European, international, and local institutions are informed about the violations taking place in countries like Pakistan & Bangladesh. In Pakistan, crimes against Hindus like abduction of girls, forced conversion, child rape, murder, property grabbing are common. He recounted the chilling case of 12-year-old Kajal Bheel who was abducted and raped just last month, and courts ruled that she was actually 17 (overlooking her birth certificate) and had chosen to stay with her abductor! Sadly, not many Hindus are aware of such cases, and we are not aiding those in need. This alienates persecuted Hindus and also pushes them to convert.





Wayan Sudane

Chairman, Indonesian Hindu Youth – PERADAH, Indonesia

Human Rights violations of Hindus in Indonesia

Wayan Sudane spoke about Indonesia, a large island country with population of 250 million, mostly Muslim, with only 2% Hindus as per Government records (but 5% as per the Hindu Council of Indonesia). Hindus form a large majority in the island of Bali, but face discrimination in other parts of Indonesia where they are in minority. Indonesia was once a Dharmic nation, and the influence of Hindu thought can still be seen in its nation symbol 'Garuda Pancasila', and national motto 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (Unity in Diversity).

Hindus in Indonesia face Government inaction in face of attacks by Islamic groups, apathy in budgetary allocations, and discrimination in matters

of citizenship, education, and jobs. Hindus try to conduct inter-faith dialogue with other religious groups to resolve conflict and partner for development.

Rashneek Kher

Co-founder, Roots In Kashmir (RIK), Bharat
Genocide of Kashmiri Hindus

Rashneek Kher explained that the word 'Kashmir' is derived from the name of Rishi Kashyapa, the progenitor of all those living in Bharatvarsh. He gave examples of Kashmiris who have played an integral role in Hindu civilization - Kalhana authored 'Rajatarangini', the first written history in Bharat; Sarangadeva helped evolve Carnatic music; scholars like Nagarjuna taught Buddhism. Kashmiri Pandits have faced genocide for over 800 years - there have been seven exoduses since the first Muslim rulers invaded Kashmir. When we read Muslim texts like 'Tuhfat al-ahbab', we see the kind of barbarianism that was unleashed on Kashmir. But the Kashmiri Pandit exodus in 1989/90 was the most shameful because it happened in a plural, secular Bharat, in a constitutional democratic republic, and in the era of 'human rights'. 90% of Pandit families fled Kashmir by June 1990. Over 450 temples were destroyed after that, and 10,000 houses were razed to dust.





Dervesh

Human Rights Activist, Iraq

Yezedi - a threatened community facing genocide

Dervesh said that the Yezidi community is based mostly in Iraq, but also found in Syria, Turkey, Iran & Georgia. They follow an ancient religion & worship “Melek Taus” (Peacock Angel), who is believed to be the same as Bhagwan Karthikeya. He mentioned similarities with Hindu traditions like respect for Sun, Snakes, and lighting fires for prayer. The main temple Lalish in Iraq, is very similar to Bhagwan Murugan temples in Bharat. Yezidis have faced 73 genocides through history. The latest genocide by ISIS has seen over 5000 Yezidis killed, and 700 girls kidnapped for sex slavery. Some survivors are still trapped on Sinjar mountain, surrounded by ISIS.

Dr. Shilpi Tiwari

Human Rights Activist, Bharat

Dr. Shilpi Tiwari said that a question arises whether Yezidis are Hindus? He explained that Yezidis are pre-Abrahamic people from the Middle East, and their history says that they visited Bharat 6000 years back after *pralaya* (dissolution of world), and returned to Iraq/Sinjar area 4000 years back. They don't believe in religions of the book (Islam, Christianity, Judaism), and have faced persecution due to this. He listed their similarities with Hindu beliefs & rituals – reincarnation, lighting diyas, circumambulation for prayers, use of *janeu* (sacred thread) etc. He asked Hindus to step forward and help with Yezidi rehabilitation, and do more research on our shared heritage.





Chairperson: Swadesh Singh

National Vice-President, BJYM (BJP Youth Wing),
Bharat

Introductory Remarks

Swadesh Singh asked how the Hindu civilizational resurgence, which everyone agrees is necessary, come about? RSS has been working on the idea of national reconstruction for the last 85 years, and politics is one key component to achieve this goal. But besides state power, we have to influence school, religious sphere, and media as well, he said. This is what the session would aim to address.

Archit Kumar,

Financial Services Consultant, USA

Responsibility and leadership for worldwide Hindu Resurgence

Archit Kumar said that despite being 15% of the global population, Hindus are disorganized and hence weak. There is a lack of cohesiveness in message and action, especially in USA. We need to galvanize our communities to march along with the pioneers and leaders that exist. It is only the youth that can change the perception of Hindu Dharma as an enigmatic and backward religion, to the clear & beautiful Dharma it is. His message to the Hindu youth was “Reject detractors, Respect yourselves, Rise up!” He gave examples to show how Hindus are mocked & discriminated against in USA – from the California history textbooks which portrayed Hindu Dharma as inferior, to anti-Hindu political rhetoric against a *bhoomi puja* (ground breaking ceremony). Silence is no longer an option, and a fresh dose of energy will change the worldview of Hindus. But first we need to know our Dharma, and then ensure we speak up when anyone denigrates it. He urged Hindu Youth not to depend on others, but take actions to lead the Hindu resurgence.





Samir Ashthana

Practicing Attorney, USA

Leading nationally through Hindu organization

Samir Ashthana said that a Leader is someone who can find a goal, and drive the masses to that goal with blazing accuracy and efficiency. Knowing who we are and our Hindu lineage is important, but we cannot dwell in the past. We need to take inspiration from ancient greats like Chanakya to develop Hindu leaders who will propel us into the future. The most important reason to have Hindu leaders is to ensure the persecution and derision that Hindus are facing across the world today, does not recur. The Hindu mindset needs to change – we need to run for elected office, respect teaching as a profession, join the military (in US), and think beyond making money. We need leaders like Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu member of the US Congress, who is proud of her Hindu beliefs, unlike politicians of Bharatiya

descent like Niki Haley and Bobby Jindal who disown their Dharmic roots. Our temples should have leadership programs, so that intrinsic Hindu values shine through in new leaders. The urge to conform to American culture is high, but we should nurture our Hindu identity and wear it on our sleeve.

Shreshtha Sharma

IT Professional, Bharat

Ensuring visibility of Hindu society through mass media

Shreshtha Sharma said that Hindu civilization has been in hibernation for many decades, and as a result we have become defensive. We have failed to create the platforms to present the correct picture of Hindu Dharma. He categorized media as: 1. Old age media – the oral tradition in which knowledge was transmitted across generations through Sanskrit shlokas, using analytical power of Sanskrit and retentive abilities created through Yoga and meditation. We have lost this tradition. 2. Mass media - This can be further divided as print and electronic. 3. New age media – social media etc. We have to bridge the divide between old and new age media. Our focus should be on untapped areas and disruption in existing models, rather than large investments in mass media. Initiatives should be financially self-sustaining, and not rely on charity. We also need to create data repositories of Hindu knowledge to make these easily accessible to everyone. Besides content, we also need to focus on better presenters to market it well. Radio is another medium that has been ignored.





Aniket Kale

ABVP, Bharat

ABVP - Nurturing nationalist youth leadership in Bharat

Aniket Kale informed that ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad) has 30 lakh members spread across Bharat. With communist student organizations like AISA and SFI well entrenched & spreading anti-Bharat ideology, ABVP plays a crucial role in countering their propaganda and developing nationalist leadership. ABVP follows the RSS ideology which places nation first, unlike the dynastic sycophancy seen elsewhere. ABVP started a forum 'Think India' in premier institutes like JNU, IIT, IISc to counter communist thought, and also give direct experience of various Seva activities to students. ABVP is also demanding elections to student councils in universities across Bharat to have more representative & nationalist leadership.

30 years ago, ABVP floated the World Organization of Students & Youth (WOSY), which works with all international students coming to Bharat for their studies - WOSY alumni now span 40 countries. He said that ABVP is also looking to develop a mechanism to connect with Bharatiya students going to study abroad, and with Hindu student bodies which already exist in countries like UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia etc.





Moderators: Hiten Sheth and Nitika Sharma
“HSYN - revisit / review the mission & vision”

In the final session, the assembled Hindu youth from different countries were asked to brainstorm to come up with a common mission statement & action plan for HSYN (Hindu Student and Youth Network). The HSYN mission statement agreed to was “A collaboration of Hindu youth designed to globally empower Hindus”. It was decided to form a global co-ordination committee for HSYN, with 4 representatives from Bharat, and 2 from all other countries. The key action areas for the committee would be - Content generation to define Hindu identity & share experiences; Focus groups to tackle Hindu Human Rights violations; Connect regularly to plan for conferences and events in each country & the next Youth Conference in 2016. It was also decided to form an advisory board for HSYN in consultation with WHC leadership.