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Here, the word 'Hindu' is formed by the first letter of Himalayas (**Hi**) and the second letter of Indu (**ndu**) sarovara (lake). On the north we are sheltered by the Himalayas. On the other three sides we are encircled by the sea. This wonderful place called Hindusthāna, we hold, is built by God (*deva-nirmitam deśam*). Of course, the entire earth, all the celestial bodies, are handiwork of God, the supernatural power. But by reminding us specially that this land is 'built by God', our ancestors had displayed their dexterity of associating everything with the divine. That is our culture. Those who live in this place are called Hindus.

When the words 'Hindu' and 'Hindusthāna' are thus explained, even a child will imbibe the right identity and bond. 'Jai Hind' then will have a deeper National significance.

Hindu Dharma is not a religion

Hinduism is more a Dharma-śāstra than a religion. It verily excels as a scientific treatise on life, values, goals, and the ways to fulfil the individual life while ensuring the long-term welfare of the society.

The eternal values enshrined in our Dharma-śāstras are all based on our mind, intelligence, and emotion, and independent of the concept of God. Hence, they are independent of religion. These values, when properly explained, will instantly evoke a two-fold response from any human being: an irresistible emotional persuasion from the mind, and a rational compulsion from the intelligence. You may or may not believe in God, but you cannot be without mind and intelligence! When you understand values in this manner, where is the question of religiosity there?

Oxford Dictionary defines culture as: “The art and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively - a refined understanding of these”. Listen to this oft-repeated proverbial verse, a sine qua non for all our ancient exposition, theory and philosophy:

युक्तियुक्तं प्रगृह्णीयाद्बालादपि विचक्षणः ।
अन्यत्तु तृणवत्त्याज्यमप्युक्तं पद्मयोनिना ॥

– Subhāṣitam

Whatever is endowed with reason should be accepted, even if presented by a child; the rest (unreasonable utterances) should be discarded as a blade of grass, even if proclaimed by Brahmā, the Creator!

Mental and cultural poverty reflected in Constitution

Is not each one of us born of a mother, from her womb? As a child we were passed on to Mother Earth. Is not thus Mother Earth as sacred as Mother? It is on this Earth that the Mother lived. Inextricably, we are rooted to the Earth throughout our life. That is why we call the land as Matṛ-bhūmi, our Motherland. Culturally, we are indebted to the land.

However, in the preamble to our Constitution, we have not called the nation as our “Motherland – Mātṛ-bhūmi” at all. There is no mention of preserving, enhancing or inculcating our eternal spirituo-cultural heritage, for which India has been cited by the great scientists and philosophers all over the world! Our traditional inheritance has been neglected! How did we miss this fundamental anchor?

This grave lack, shall I say blunder, has to be courageously gone into by the noble thinkers. What prevented the makers of

our Constitution from calling our land as our Motherland? Were they so much Anglicized, sold out to Britain, that even after the British left, they felt enslaved not to use the beloved epithet? In not having mentioned 'God', I am not so much hurt. Hinduism, studied in full, does not always mention God. But, how could we disregard the lofty spirituo-philosophical discoveries, thoughts and feelings, that transcend all religious, racial, and linguistic identities? What made us downgrade or shy away from our grand inheritance?

Economically, India is now a poor country with millions struggling for their daily bread. But why and when did we become poor? At present, perhaps, our poverty is a result of excess population. But, just a few centuries ago, we had an all-fold abundant prosperity.

Here is what McCaulay submitted before the British Parliament in 1835: "I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in the country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would conquer this country unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture, and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation."

Blindly following the line of the British, we have almost fully replaced our Motherland's ancient and time-tested value-

based educational system, refusing to own Her cultural enrichment and bounty. Indians were made to think all that is foreign and English was, and still is, good, nay greater than their own. They were made to lose – they also lost voluntarily – their self-esteem, their native elegance and splendour, making Macaulay’s words perhaps come true. Our people were made to lose self-esteem and love to be what the British wanted us to be.

This is the depiction made in 1835. But, was there not a time when India had honey and milk flowing here? We did not have this kind of poverty at all. We had achieved academic and economic excellence, parallel to inner spiritual cultural profusion. This had always been the fundamental distinction of India.

World Universities

We had a number of excellent world universities, much before the concept of university was thought of anywhere else in the world. Takshashila, Pushpagiri, Nalanda, Vikramashila were some of the primary International Institutions of higher learning existing during the period 5th century BC to 12th century AD. Nalanda had 10,000 residential students and 2000 renunciate teachers (with a student-teacher ratio 5:1). People from all over the world used to study there as residential students. Many of our esteemed thinkers, including Chanakya, Charaka, Patanjali and Panini are said to have studied in Takshashila.

Academic and scientific achievements

Our science of health, **Āyurveda** deals with the subject of bodily welfare, longevity, prevention and cure of diseases.

*Genesis & Relevance of
Temple-worship*



Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

To the Readers

To worship and to adore is in the nature of the human. The sight of something or someone great, rare or distinguished evokes admiration in the human mind. And it wants to give expression to this sentiment in one way or another. God being the source of the whole creation, how much will the mind be moved to express its feelings of adoration!

Thus people resort to a variety of ways, in which they express their respect, adoration, allegiance and loyalty. The instance of religious worship and adoration has to be viewed in such a background and relevance.

In worship and adoration, emotions generally take the first place, and reflection or introspection comes later. This naturally results in a significant gap in the human personality, especially in the worshipping public. The effort of true religion has been to bring the missing link to attention and make people think about true Godliness, and get to the right way of worship, that will lead them to clarity, correction and refinement.

Earth, water, air, fire and space that constitute the world are a creation of God, the Almighty. But somehow, due to lack of proper thought in the matter, people are not able to perceive the world as Godly, as a Godly product, with the result that they look for something additional or special to relate to God, while thinking of worshipping Him.

The Idol, the sculptor makes and the priest consecrates, becomes the general focus in religious worship. It is in a way strange, nonetheless, an irrefutable need of the human mind. Our thinkers, Sage Authors, have always understood this fact and catered to the needs of the society.

The manner in which devotees go to the temple, stand in front of the Lord, submit their prayers and express their feelings, fondness as well as needs, is something greatly touching.

Whenever I used to go to the temples, my attention often turned more to the devotees, their moods and expressions, than to the sanctum sanctorum. I have found the sight very moving and stimulating.

To construct a place of worship like the temple, the scriptures point out, is the most holy act, rewarding and fulfilling in every way. It is pleasing to the Lord, Śreemad Bhāgavatam

emphasizes. There is no service greater than providing the people with a facility to worship, where they may find relief, hope and assurance. To keep the temple clean, orderly, holy and brilliant is also a greatly devotional act. To help in any of these is the best service to the Lord, with which He is most pleased.

The residents of each home have the responsibility to look after its maintenance. But the care and maintenance of the temple, a place of public worship, rests jointly upon many such homes and residents in the region. If the residents around a temple have good houses and their repair and maintenance are also attended to well in time, but the temple in their midst stands dilapidated, it would be a grave disharmony. It clearly shows how ignorant, deluded and negligent the people around are. The plight directly affects their fate and fortune, a truth that all concerned have to be aware of.

Whenever you go to a temple and want to do pushpāñjali or other special offerings to the Lord, make it a point to do it in the name of the Lord Himself, after 'His own star (*nakshatra*)'. When the Lord is pleased, the whole world is blessed. Your family also will be included in the beneficiary list. At the same time, your mind expands, because of your attitude

towards pushpājali. The offering, as a means, remains the same. But its effect brings a drastic difference. As Krishna says in Bhagavadgeetā, for the same effort, there is an infinite result. Why not be a blessed beneficiary of such an expansion and glory!

Make a habit of giving some offering to the priest. To drop money in the 'Huṇḍi or Bhaṇḍāram' should also be a regular practice. It is from such offerings that the temple is maintained.

Many houses may be rebuilt after modern trends. But the temple will essentially be of the archaic architectural elegance, as it should be. Residences of people may be sold, made at different places and rebuilt periodically. But the temple will not be moved from where it is for centuries. A village or town generally has the Central temple as its landmark. It carries the divine identity for the whole location and settlement.

To go to a temple, worship and to circumambulate there a few times, breathing the air oxygenated by the Peepul tree, keeping God in the heart and lips, is not only refreshing to the mind but also rejuvenating to the body. Many are the

benefits accruing to the people and their residences from a properly maintained temple in their midst.

The whole Hindu culture and civilization have survived mainly due to two important centres – Temples and Ashrams. Both carry an importance and indispensability.

It is up to individuals, families and the society to take personal interest in both these Institutions and ensure their continued existence. Whatever is to be done to help and strengthen these should be done heartily and liberally. May you all have the necessary devotion and devoutness to fulfil your part in reinforcing this great benedictory note.

Hariḥ Om Tat Sat.

Swami Bhoomananda Tirtha

Narayanashrama Tapovanam

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Temples – Their Evolution and Purpose

Dear and blessed Children of Bhārat :

“*Śṛṅvantu sarve amṛtasya putrāḥ*, Listen O ye, children of Immortality” – this is the way our Upanishads address the people. There is a lot of revelation in this statement. The general notion is that we are all mortals. But is it verily so? In truth, our body alone is mortal. What makes the mortal body born, alive and active, is the spirit immortal, the Soul.

And what is the Soul? It is that mystic presence, power, that animates and activates the body. Without such a constant inner Presence, how can the mortal body be functional even for a moment?

The question thus is quite clear and inescapable: Are we the perishable body, or the imperishable Soul? Can we just be **offsprings of bodies**, or are we the children, the **heirs to the eternal Soul**? The fact that we live for a few decades acting, speaking, thinking and knowing – playing many roles – clearly proves that we are not the inert, insentient body at all. Our real identity is with the sentient presence in the body, namely the Soul. It is this

Genesis and Relevance of Temple-worship

unnegatable truth that the Vedic thinkers make us instantly aware of, when they call us “*amṛtasya putrāḥ*” – children of immortality. How loving, how revealing, how reassuring is such a gesture!

What is a Temple?

A temple is actually a place of public worship. When a place is set up wherein worshippers can come, stand before the Deity and worship, it becomes a temple.

There are ‘self-born (*svayambhūḥ*)’ temples, as also those instituted and consecrated with the relevant ceremonial and scriptural procedures and prescriptions. ‘Self-born’ are those, where suddenly the presence of Divinity in a particular place is revealed to someone. Following that, people begin to congregate there and offer worship, and very soon it becomes a place of worship.

The instituted temples are those designed and built for the purpose of public worship. This process of institution, involving both architectural designs and ritualistic procedures, in fact, dates back to Vedic times. The *āgamas* and *tantra śāstras* governing temple-worship are thus ageold. Like Vedas, they too belong to prehistoric times.

Temple Culture

Vedas begin with hymns of praise. Vedic thinkers began to praise the higher powers, upon which, they believed, the life on earth depended. The earth itself is huge, and the surrounding

Temples - Their Evolution and Purpose

atmosphere is also vast. Still mightier are the luminaries like the sun and the stars. What about the endless space, within which all these reign with no conflict, but with mutual complementariness?

All these led the Vedic thinker to raise his hands in wonder and articulate his humility, adoration and dedication in all heartiness. The sight of something or some power greater than yourself, irresistibly evokes a deeper emotion, making you feel humble. A sense of surrender also embraces the mind. Humility, praise and adoration naturally well-forth from the mind and heart. And these gentle notes can rise to any height!

The oldest Rigvedic hymns emerged like this.

But the mere verbal praise offered to the higher powers did not satisfy the Vedic votaries. They somehow felt that something tangible should accompany their praises, making them meaningful, relevant and effective. As a result, they hit upon fire, which has the power to burn everything. Making an altar and placing fire on it ceremonially, they began to offer into it all kinds of oblations, liquid as well as solid, beseeching the blazing fire to receive them in all fondness.

It is this persuasion of adoration that evolved into temple and temple-worship. Temples, as places of public worship, became a strong social necessity when people found it hard to pursue the Vedic rituals regularly with austerity and discipline, as prescribed by the Vedas. Performing rituals called for rigorous effort, adherence and specific involvement.