

## [Understanding the Difficult Transition for East Germany](#)

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# Understanding the Difficult Transition for East Germany

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## Hindus and Friends Suffer as the Communist State Goes "Out of Business"

East Germany had only one employer - the government. When it was absorbed into West Germany recently, this communist system ended and effectively every person in the country was out of a job, awaiting the necessary restructuring to a "market economy" (formerly known as "capitalism"). Few Indians live in what was the German Democratic Republic, but there was a lot of cultural, political and social interaction with India which have been drastically curtailed as state funding disappeared. Our England correspondent, Rakesh Mathur, visited Germany recently for a first-hand evaluation of the situation. In a series of interviews he uncovers the impact of Germany's historical transition upon Hinduism and our friends in Germany.

Mr. S. Suresh, Stuttgart

"There are about 34,000 Indians in the former West Germany, but we do not have any contact with those in the East. Most Indians are married to Germans - father Indian, mother German - and talk only German at home. They live like Germans, they think almost like Germans, they are perfectionists almost like Germans. When they go back to India, they are foreigners, foreigners in the sense that they think German so they feel not very comfortable and it takes some months to get used to them. Whenever we Indians talk to each other, we find that India has not at all changed but we have changed.

"Most of the Indians in Stuttgart area are Bengalis. Each year they do Durga Puja and Divali functions. The minority groups from the South tend to organize, but it never comes out in a good manner. We started a magazine. Hello India, to inform interested people including those intermarried people or with one Indian parent. It covers cultural activities of the Indian community in Germany, Germans interested in India, literature in India, festivals and the political situation.

"The Stuttgart Indo/German society is for people who love India. They give lectures organized in a very professional German way in such a professional manner that Indians don't like it almost. Germany itself has a very good relation with India, though Indians do not know that. Germans respect Indians and respect Indian religions."

Seshu Bhagavathulu University of Stuttgart

"One of the nicest things that Germans think of Indians is that we seem to be the kind of people who give ideas. But when it comes to making something very professional, I guess it is not the job of an Indian. Three years ago we wanted to get all Indians together in one place, which we did three or four times, but it didn't continue or function very well. Language was a problem. Most of people who live in Germany lose touch with English. It's almost impossible to get all Indians under one banner."

Dr. Luther Lhotse Heidelberg

"England has a day-to-day relationship with India, whereas many of our great indologists refused to go to India because they did not want their idealistic image of India disturbed by Indian religion. And this is the point I think you should bring out, this over-idealization being in the way of developing a sound face-to-face relationship with your culture. This institute here in Heidelberg is committed to building up this everyday reality, face-to-face relationship with your culture. "I suppose Germans find Hindu problems all rather confusing. Because of this old image that it is all spiritualism, Indian culture seems to be a particularly difficult one to explain and understand for a foreigner. They will say superficially, 'There are no castes anymore' but you know better than I do how vivid, how vigorous the caste system still works. Some of my Indian friends wrote so vigorously against

caste. But I tell my German friends, 'Wait until he has to marry away his daughter, that will be the safest test.'"

Dr. Helga Meier, East Berlin

"A majority of us, especially from the former East Germany, look back with a little pain and a certain sadness. It is not that we did not want it or are not welcoming what has happened since Oct/Nov last year, but there has been too much of a rush. We were just pushed into things, and I personally believe it has harmed us to quite an extent.

"It is a very practical question for us in universities and all the friends of India working in the friendship societies because all our structures have drastically changed. They are no longer there because they are considered old fashion to have been under the leadership and the guidance of that political party which is no longer there. People have taken so much pain in just removing everything which could remind you of the past - good or bad that even an organization like the Indian/German friendship organization is no longer what it was. The funds are cut, the structure is no longer there. We had to start right from new to organize all our friends again and to tell them. 'Whatever you do now, you will have to do completely on your own.' Which means people have to decide anew what they really want. It is no longer on your merits. If you support this party or that party, you can't make a living out of it.

"It is not easy for our students to see what they will do after they have ended their studies. Since everything has been taken over by the people in the West, our old contacts no longer work. Some of them are already asking if it might not be better to break up the studies [of India], to take up something more in line with market economy.

"I know that people are now wanting to engage in business and all sorts of activities, so why not set up a temple? But I personally would not find a necessity for the time being. There are much more urgent questions and problems to be solved. Most urgent is just for the people to become accustomed to the situation, to find their way, to understand why they have been thrown out and pushed into unemployment almost. The children go to school and find there is no food as there

used to be, because Berlin authorities are of the opinion that it is too costly. There are no longer clubs for the youngsters. Their youth organizations are almost crushed. Their children's camps are no longer there."

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Ilse Busch, Vedanta Center, West Berlin

"We have big plans. In 1893 the Chicago conference was held with Swami Vivekananda. In 1993, we plan to arrange a European Vedanta conference in East Berlin.

"Vedanta is not only for intellectuals, but for those who want to know how to live. To me the most important thing was that the Upanishads have shown a way for experience, not for belief, and that was for many people the main point. You have not to believe but can have experience through your meditations and other yoga disciplines to find a way. Some hope to have some big things, but after some time they see it is not so easy. Some have transformation, but not many, because the way of transformation is not the easy way. The goal is not so much money but development as a human being."

Pravrajika Vivekaprana Ramakrishna Sarada Math, New Delhi.

"The East Berliner is basically not happy because he doesn't know himself. As long as I don't know myself, I simply look around to see what will give me that happiness and will go on experimenting one level to another. But Vivekananda says unless you can turn around to yourself and find out what you are here for, it is not possible to go on forming the world around yourself and thinking that that will solve all your problems. If man does not understand himself, does not know his own roots, does not know the purpose for which he is born on this earth, nothing can go right.

"The greatest weapon that a human being has is his understanding. If you understand, you have the courage to face what comes, and if you don't understand, you are confused and whatever activity you do undertake doesn't really help and leads to tremendous dissatisfaction and frustrations, as is proved by our society today."

Prof. Dr. Weidemann, Asian Studies Humbolt University, Berlin

"We have to face major changes. We have in the united Berlin three universities - Humbolt, Frei University, and Berlin Universit[?]. Here in Berlin the problem of financing these three universities has become a major one. In our case, Humbolt University, it is not clear how we will be funded after January, 1991, and this of course creates a lot of problems.

"We have had for over 20 years very good and even relations with Indian universities. In the course of cultural exchange programs a good number of Indian colleagues have been with us and some even settled here. A lot of our colleagues had the opportunity to go to India for studies, for teaching. This cooperation is ranging from Sanskrit studies to modern Indian languages to economics, history, politics and international relations. No body knows at this moment if we can continue in this."

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