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Thirty Years Serving Dharma

We celebrate Hinduism Today's productive past, introduce a few design changes and explore our impact and digital innovations

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The idea for hinduism today magazine came

as an inspiration to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in the late 1970s during his extensive global travels to visit hundreds of far-flung Hindu communities. His own words tell the tale: "I made several world tours, visiting Mauritius, Sri Lanka, India, South Africa, Malaysia, England and other countries where I spoke to hundreds of thousands of people. I discovered that Hindus in each country were totally unaware of, or did not care about, what was happening within the realms of their religion in other places in the world. Out of these tours came the mission of Hinduism Today,

to strengthen all the many diverse expressions of Hindu spirituality and to give them a single, combined voice, because everywhere else their voices were individualized. Through this magazine, we delineated the boundaries of Hinduism and placed this great and oldest religion alongside Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and the many other religions of the world. We showed the strength of Hinduism in articles by top writers and some of the finest photographers in the world, such as for our articles on the Kumbha Mela, the largest human gathering ever on planet Earth. We have been able to bring forward and honor a 'Hindu of the Year' and to listen to the wisdom of swamis and swaminis in our 'Minister's Message.'"

Like Hinduism itself, the message of Hinduism Today, as articulated by Gurudeva and the editors, has not changed over its thirty-year existence. However, the form the message has taken continues to evolve and improve with computer technology. Our first black-and-white newspaper issue when placed next to our latest four-color magazine shows a quantum leap in the use of computer technology. And certainly one of the reasons the magazine is greatly appreciated by our readers is its world-class graphic excellence. Readers feel that the magazine's aesthetic craftsmanship portrays well the richness and grandeur of the Hindu religion.

Our editorial staff is constantly finding ways to make improvements. In July of 1986 we moved the entire production platform from process cameras and light tables to that inventive little device, the Macintosh. In December of 1996 we changed from being a broadsheet newspaper to a full-color magazine. In 1998 we were among the first in the industry to adopt computer-to-plate technology, bypassing the old film-to-plate method. Since 2000 the image quality has skyrocketed as photographers have migrated to ever-evolving digital cameras. In 2006 we collaborated with our printer in Missouri to better control the color calibration and correction standards.

In celebration of our 30th year, the editors have made some small but significant changes. You will notice the cover type and art have been adjusted for better readability, and the page backgrounds have been lightened. Those who publish tend to love typography, and our team are avid typophiles. They have found a new font, called Relato, which is more distinctive and legible than the adaptation of New Caledonia, which we used since 1996. New Caledonia (used to set this one sentence) was designed in 1938 by William Addison Dwiggins of Linotype fame, whereas Relato was designed in 2005 by the contemporary Spanish typographer Eduardo Manso. Our team used some high-end tools to add diacritical marks to the font and make some kerning improvements that augmented Relato's versatile,

legible and graceful presence on the page. When we asked Eduardo to describe Relato from a designer's perspective, he waxed poetic: "Relato has a low contrast and 'muscular' structure that makes it useful for setting longer text. In display sizes it has a variety of details that lend it a unique and personal expression. The formal principle of the serif, the variety of terminal strokes and the combination of curves and semi-straight lines gives Relato a more 'human' flavor. Relato is a decidedly contemporary typeface, proposing individual ideas on the design of type."

Through our type and tools, our resources and writing, we are determined to keep Hinduism Today on the cutting edge of communication technology as the flagship magazine for Hinduism around the world.

Those efforts are not confined to the world of print. Hinduism Today also enjoys a growing digital presence. We have an HTML archive of the magazine available on our website, going all the way back to 1979. It is an ideal resource for searching back articles, something I myself often use. In 2006 we launched our digital edition of the magazine. Using an elegant software delivery system we developed, you can download and manage all the PDF files of each edition right on your computer. We know of some readers, residing in countries where the print edition is not available, who exclusively peruse the PDF version. The digital version has additional audio and video features that enhance some of the articles.

Our latest expansion is into the realm of video and was launched in 2008 by opening a YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/hinduismtodayvideos). After each issue is sent off to the printer, our editors produce a 10-minute video summary of the major articles, and I read my Publisher's Desk article on camera. Thousands of people who have never seen this magazine are learning about Hinduism through our YouTube videos. Now and then we add recordings of presentations our editors have given at conferences, including "Religion and the Media" and "The California Textbook Controversy." We produced our first major video in 2007, a three-part documentary on the amazing Thai Pusam festival in Malaysia. It still holds the record for the most views among our YouTube postings.

To extend the distribution of Hinduism Today's content, we print extra copies of key Educational Insight sections as 16-page booklets that can be purchased online and easily used in Hindu religious classes. One of the most popular is "Ten Questions People Ask About Hinduism." Back in the spring of 1990, a group of teens from Chicago sent a request to Hinduism Today for "official answers" to nine questions

they were commonly asked by their peers. These questions had perplexed the youth themselves; and their parents had no convincing answers. Hinduism Today founder Gurudeva took up the challenge and composed thoughtful answers to the nine questions. In 2004 we added a tenth dialog on caste, since that is the most relentless criticism Hinduism faces today. In the question-and-answer session of lectures I give, one or more of these questions is inevitably asked, which shows that the answers provided in this booklet continue to be useful.

In 2004 quite a furor developed around the California State Board of Education's questionable approval of material on Hinduism for its sixth grade social studies textbook. The controversy still continues in the form of an active lawsuit. Our own response to the matter was to research, design and write a model 16-page lesson on Hindu history, beliefs and practices for sixth graders, written from the Hindu point of view. It is historically sound, having been reviewed by prominent Hindu historians, and acceptable in content and tone to the various denominations of the global Hindu community. It, of course, is a popular educational booklet with a distribution to date of some 35,000 copies. The first lesson covers the period from ancient times to 300ce. Lesson two of this series, published in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2008, issue, covers the period 300 to 1100ce. Additional lessons are planned over the next few years. This is an important way that the editorial staff is reaching out to the broader community, both Hindu and non-Hindu, to present an authentic view of Hinduism that will be understood and appreciated in the West.

An inspiration came to me in 2007 to create a book out of Hinduism Today. Specifically, I envisioned the best of our Educational Insight sections compiled into a book called *What Is Hinduism?* Approached from scratch, such a book would take a large team years to produce, especially with the level of artistry, research, patience and care that is found in each chapter. The serendipitous beauty of the project was that the necessary thousands of hours of loving attention had already gone into researching and designing its chapters over the last ten years by our talented team of writers, editors and photographers. All that was needed then, in 2007, was to gather the best features and assemble them in a way that offers a thorough yet highly readable introduction to Hinduism. Voila! In all, 46 Educational Insights comprise the book and create a user-friendly way to read them versus a pile of 46 magazines!

The book *What Is Hinduism?* has been introduced to Hindus through dozens of my lectures, highlighting the book's rich graphics and clear presentations. Thousands have attended these seminars over these last two years. The book has also been successfully used at major Hindu summer camps. The students can take the book

home with them and continue to refer to it, helping them remember the teachings over the subsequent months. It is yet another way the magazine is impacting Hinduism.

Hinduism Today has become a resource for mainstream America, a place where people can find authentic and reliable information on Sanatana Dharma, and our editorial team is often called upon for hard-to-find answers to questions that few other institutions seem inclined to take the time to address. Harvard University is engaged in a CD-based Pluralism Project which teaches high school children about other cultures and religions. Prof. Diana Eck, head of Harvard's religion department, invited Hinduism Today to participate in the Hindu expressions. In 1997 the former editor of Christianity Today, Terry Muck, invited us to collaborate on a chapter of his new Doubleday book, A Guide to Religions in America.

We often get calls from religion editors in America, and was lauded as a solid source of Indian spirituality in a book published by John Dart of the Los Angeles Times called Deities and Deadlines. Time Magazine called years back to verify a story on Deepak Chopra's phenomenal success. Indeed, Hinduism Today has gained a reputation for credibility, access to authentic information and a commitment to objective, unexaggerated reporting.

But that's just the beginning and doesn't explain why a select committee seeking the Hindu view on the ethics of human cloning for a report to US President Bill Clinton called our editorial offices in March of 1997 or why the Ford Foundation sponsored two of our editors to join fifty prominent religion editors in the US at a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, or why we were asked to write a chapter on Hindu medical ethics for the Southern Texas Medical Association... you get the idea; as interesting as our past has been, we think the future is going to prove even more remarkable.