Young Hindus Must Prepare for Tomorrow
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Faced with discrimination, peer pressure and a major lack of knowledge, young Hindus of Malaysia need inspiration to keep faith

As with all faiths, the futureof Hinduism is the future of its youth. Some say that future is bright. Others disagree. In January, when Satguru Bodinatha Veylanswami, publisher of Hinduism Today, left his GardenIsland home in Hawaii to attend the Hindu Renaissance Rally in Malaysia as its guest of honor, Hinduism Today New Delhi correspondent Rajiv Malik traveled with him to capture a close-up glimpse of the lives of Malaysia's young Hindus and the modern-day challenges they face. During the five days they were there, Rajiv conducted a number of interviews on many issues affecting the youth. Here we share some of those candid encounters.

Our more wealthy Hindus are more Westernized than the Westerners themselves. Now their children are becoming lawyers, engineers and "information technology professionals." The majority of these kids from wealthy families do not go to the temples regularly and have no knowledge of Hinduism. The lower-income group is far more religious, but their religion is emotional, without much understanding. They perform the worship but do not know why. Hindus here can be divided into two broad groups: the English-speaking elite class and the Tamil-speaking lower class.

Today you go to any Hindu home and ask the youth who their heroes are, and they will name Bollywood or Hollywood stars. Today's youth do not know about our great Hindu saints who were spiritual giants. The parents know about them, but they don't tell the children. Consequently, these young people are not in awe of their religion.

In today's scientific age, we cannot just tell the youth that we cannot answer their questions. Their questions must be answered, and they must be answered in a way that makes sense.

Also, Hindu young people want role models. But these role models will never be swamis. They have to be young, successful entrepreneurs. And besides being successful, they must be good Hindus. From this the youth will get the impression that being a good Hindu is helpful in being successful in life.

Dato J. Jegathesan is an economist who serves the Hindu community as a leader, a speaker and a devotional singer.

I would like to see the older generation come here, sit with the children and share some of their experience. They should explain how they have succeeded in life. When I was young, many elders inspired me with this kind of talk. If we want a positive future for Hinduism, we need to bring about a change in the lives of our Hindu youth. The children are our future.

I have young people in their teens and twenties coming to me saying they will talk about Hinduism to the children in this orphanage. But this will not be convincing, because these kids are not good examples themselves. The boys here were telling me that one of these young men that was asking them to chant mantras and bhajanas yesterday was standing on a street corner smoking cigarettes today. All their talk won't make any difference if they set this kind of example.

Sri S. Chandrasekaran, is owner and manager of the Annai Illam Orphanage near Petaling Jaya.

My parents are highly spiritual people. They have inspired me to attend Vedanta classes. I am very fortunate. I have been taught the basic concepts of Hinduism by my parents. This is rare. Now I am trying to apply what I have learned in my daily life.

The general Hindu youth of Malaysia are not pursuing this path. There are very few Hindu children who are even interested in Hinduism. Basically, today's young people are busy partying. They have no direction or guidance in life.

Also, some of the South Indian youth are involved in gangsterism. They run around openly with knives. The Malaysian Indian youth are notorious for this. Again, the problem is a lack of proper knowledge and guidance. And parents are not even bothered about it. They don't seem to care what their children are doing.

I love India. My origin is there. I go to the temple, but most of the time I am not able to understand what the pundit (teacher) is saying, because he speaks in such difficult Hindi and Sanskrit. This is still another problem the Hindu youth must face. We just cannot understand what the Hindu priests and religious leaders are telling us.

I feel that the youth should go out and seek the right knowledge of Hinduism for themselves. If they don't do this, they are not going to get it at all.

Karuna Kukreja is a student. She is also a religious young Hindu.

Six years ago we made plans to set up an ashram for needy children, but we were looking for somebody to donate funds, as we just had no resources to run the project. It was then that I met Gurudeva (the late founder of Hinduism Today) at a

traffic stop light in Malaysia. When I first saw him, I was shocked. Was it really Gurudeva, I thought? He rolled down the car window, acknowledged me and assured that we would meet again. We did indeed meet again--right away. I followed him to the hotel where he was staying and received his blessings there. He gave me a donation of twenty dollars to get the ashram construction going. We are still preserving that twenty-dollar bill as a gift from Gurudeva. We never spent it. After that unforgettable day, lots of funds came in and the ashram is now constructed. Now we are even expanding.

Shantha Devi Muniandy is an English teacher in a Secondary School who assists at the Manjung Hindu Sabaj Sanatana Dharma Orphanage, located in Manjung about 150 miles north of Kuala Lumpur.

We Hindus comprise eight percent of the total population here in Malaysia. There are a lot of differences within our community, mainly due to economic status. Also the true Hindu philosophy has not permeated the entire group. The Hindu youth can play an important role in changing this situation.

There are a lot of slums here filled with people who have migrated from the rural areas which are slowly becoming industrial. They are having difficulty adapting to their new life and are consequently getting involved in all kinds of unsavory activities, which get publicized in the press. Some of the Hindu youth are part of this group. They need to have access to their religion.

One method of approach here is to get the youth to interact with each other, exchanging ideas and discussing religion. We have been able to achieve this successfully here at the temple with our new library.

Gangadara Vadivel is in charge of the Sri Siddhi Vinayaga Temple, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. The temple has recently constructed a library for the primary purpose of

providing youth with Hindu education.

As far as I am concerned, the problem with the youth is just bad parenting. Bad parenting and Tamil movies. Some of these movies are extremely violent. They are having a far more damaging effect on our youth than we are willing to admit.

Most Hindus in Malaysia speak Tamil, even if they are Gujarati or Telegu. Therefore, they all watch these Tamil films. Although censorship laws in Malaysia are very restrictive with regard to sexual content in films, there is no such limitation on violence. And these Tamil movies have some of the most gruesome brutality I have ever seen anywhere.

I have witnessed for myself how our Hindu teenagers emulate what they see on screen in action, dress and language. This can be very dangerous. For instance, one movie explicitly showed an enraged fellow chase a man with a machete and cut him to pieces--right on film! A few weeks later, I read in the newspapers that something similar happened in real life. Luckily, no one was actually murdered. But I have heard other stories of people who have.

Arvind Subramanian, a religious Hindu, age 23, works at a well-known chemical processing plant near Petaling Jaya