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Hindu Clan Pours Free Millions into Religious and Educational Projects

The Hinduja clan, the richest Hindu family in the world, began with potatoes in Persia. In the heartland of shahist Iran in the 1920's, young Parmanand Hinduja established a trading firm on potatoes, onions, sugar, dry fruit and carpets sailing between Iran and India. Hinduja was an expatriate Sindhi, from Shikarpur, a town now in Pakistan. With shrewdness, finesse and a charitable nature his trading enterprise gradually swelled into a Bombay-based business empire worth millions. His four entrepreneurially-gifted sons took over in the 1970s, creating a giant octopus of commerce with arms in international commodities trading, banking, oil, films and real estate. The New York Times reports the Hinduja businesses amass US$11 billion in gross sales a year. While the Hinduja brothers are propelled by an acute and very private business sense, they are equally driven by spiritual sensibilities inherited from their father: "'My dharma is to work so that I can give' was my father's philosophy," proudly exclaims S.P. Hinduja, the eldest brother. For the Hindujas, the Gita's guidance of giving charitably and generously as an expression of the spiritual heart has crystallized into the Hinduja Foundation, the family philanthropic institution. In Krishna-sized volume, the Foundation parcels out hundreds of millions of dollars into hospitals, orphanages, schools, cultural projects, environmental programs, AIDS benefits, sports support, science and dharma research. Sitting with the Hinduja brothers, often the conversation turns to how to

transform a cosmic sense of religious destiny into earthy reality and significance. Besides mammoth undertakings, the Hindujas accomplish this in small, personalized touches. They are vegetarians, and as gifts for all their corporate clients and associates produce a Hinduja custom vegetarian cookbook. They also stay close to the programs and organizations their money goes to. Since 1984 the Hindujas have been philanthropically aligned with Cambridge University in England and in 1992 established the Hinduja Cambridge Trust with US$3.5 million for scholarships to Indian students and Hinduja Cambridge Scholars at the Center of South Asian Studies. The Hinduja Foundation works closely with the Bharat Vidya Bhavan cultural society. But the biggest and most exciting project for the Hindujas is the Vedic research centers being established in India, Europe and the US. A reported US$200 million is going into the endowment for these institutions. A workshop on the European Center for Vedic Research was held in May, 1993, attended by professors from twelve European universities. In league with ISKCON, the Foundation is funding the construction of the ISKCON Hinduja Glory of India Vedic Cultural Center on three acres outside New Delhi.