

## [The Ups and Downs of Hinduism in the West](#)

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# The Ups and Downs of Hinduism in the West

For those on the Web, our editor has asked us to mention, ever so gingerly, that his editorial this month cannot be really appreciated in the narrow world of HTML. But then again, neither can the rest of the paper, being so full of graphics and photos polished to refinement with 600-grit elbow grease. You have to subscribe to get the real paper. Anyway, here is the text.

The Ups and Downs of Hinduism in the West, Being a History of Ten Decades During Which the Indian Diaspora Burgeoned, Reaching the Far Shores of Bhoga Bhoomi...

### 1900s

Memories of Swami Vivekananda's 1899 visit linger. New Gita and Upanishads translations appear. Mark Twain's tour of India is widely read in *Following the Equator*. A census records a mere 2,050 Indians in the US. Ruth Saint Denis, returns from India, spiritualizing American dance in Radha.

### 1910s

Anti-Indian riots in Washington state lead to expulsion of many Hindus, starting immigration laws that exclude Indians until 1965. Swamis visited the US on a regular lecture circuit. C.W. Leadbeater publishes *The Inner Life*, and renews Theosophy's popularity.

## 1920s

Yogi Hari Rama tours the US demonstrating levitation to audiences who had not seen it that much before. Paramahansa Yogananda founds the Self-Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles, lecturing avidly until 1936, and publishing his runaway classic Autobiography of a Yogi in 1946, many Americans' first encounter with India's spirituality and living mystics and holy men.

## 1930s

Paul Brunton's A Search in Secret India introduces yogis and swamis to American readers. The 1939 East-West Philosophers' Conference in Honolulu stirs Indian scholarship in US. Manly P. Hall publishes books on the guru and reincarnation. Meher Baba, India's Avatar, brings silent illumination through his US tours. Edgar Cayce teaches reincarnation and Indra Devi brings hatha yoga to Hollywood.

## 1940s

War brings a halt to just about everything in the West, and Hinduism languishes, too. Still, the Vedanta Society assumes a leadership role and a galaxy of creative thinkers and writers articulately propound Vedanta, among them Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, George Fitts and Gerald Heard.

## 1950s

The great Swami Sivananda's disciples bring yoga to North America, founding several large institutions-Swami Satchidananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Radha. The preeminent Vedantin, Swami Chinmayananda, begins decades of lectures on campus and study of the Gita among young seekers. In `59 Martin Luther King, Jr. visits Gandhians in India, brings back strategies of nonviolence for US civil rights movement. Haridas Choudery founds cultural institute in San Francisco and the first US Hindu temple is opened there by our publisher in 1957.

## 1960s

An explosion occurs in America. First the Beatles popularize Maharishi Yogi's TM, Bhaktivedanta's Hare Krishnas take to the airports and LSD guru Ram Dass brings Indian mysticism into the hippy subculture. In 1965 President Johnson signs new immigration laws, opening the doors to Indians-who grow from 60,000 to today's 1.5 million.

The trend is away from Vedanta and intellectual Hinduism, toward an embracing of the fullness of bhakti, temple rites, various yogas, tantras and more.

## 1970s

A decade of traveling swamis from India, Baba Muktananda among them, gain significant followings among US youth. Meditation becomes hugely popular and many Hindu spin-offs arise, including EST, Course on Miracles, and many New Age groups. Serious Indology departments in US universities finally appear. Hundreds of ashrams and yoga centers are founded. New publications are started to teach Indian spirituality-Yoga Journal, Hinduism Today and more. Metaphysical books by the thousands appear in bookstores.

## 1980s

Gandhi is 1982's Best Film, presenting India in a realistic new light. Ex-Jain Rajneesh moves to Oregon, buys 108 Rolls Royces, causes havoc and then is exiled to Europe. Many Americans adopt Hinduism, this time joining traditional orders and ashrams, fly by the thousands to India for spiritual guidance. It is a decade of extraordinary temple building in the US and Europe, with hundreds being erected. Hindu parents craft resources for teaching tradition to their children, including summer camps. Canada and Germany help Sri Lankan refugees settle in West.

## 1990s

We're only half way through the decade, but already trends take form. Hindus (many American-born) are a powerful presence at the Parliament of Worlds' Religions in Chicago, and hold major public events, such as Global Vision 2000 and Gayatri Pariwar's massive yagnas (reflecting a renewal of Vedic rites and sciences, including Ayurveda). Indian music reaches the masses on CD and Sanskrit studies in America grow popular. Karma and reincarnation become key themes in Broadway plays and blockbuster films. There is a parallel Jain resurgence.