Here's Hoping the Prodigal Sons Come Home
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The following interview is with Mr. Ramesh Patel, Joint General Secretary for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America. Hinduism Today phoned Mr. Patel in Connecticut as a spokesman of this worldwide Hindu body which has become increasingly outspoken on religious and social issues, especially in India.

Hinduism Today: Mr. Patel, what does VHP as a world Hindu organization think about Ramakrishna Mission's denunciation of their Hinduness?

Ramesh Patel: You see, you cannot renounce your Hinduness. If you do this you are, in my opinion, taking some easy approach, either to get some kind of monetary reward or other advantage. There being a secular government [in India], the only way you are going to get some grant from the government is to call yourself secular, non-Hindu, and for that matter non-Muslim.

Q: Is VHP upset about RK Mission's actions?

A: It matters little whether Parishad is upset or not. It is rather a sad thing. The whole West is calling Vivekananda a Hindu monk, and Ramakrishna Mission after 200 years is saying "We are not Hindu." Isn't that ridiculous?

Q: Hindus might rightly think VHP should be upset about it, that they should be saying, "Yes, this is wrong. "Some have asked if VHP will continue to invite the RK monks to stand on the platform and represent themselves as the preeminent Hindus, while at the same time saying "We are not Hindus," for economic advantage.

A: I think it is like this. When someone makes a mistake; if you are chewing your food and you bite your tongue by mistake, you don't knock the teeth out. Similarly in this situation, you try to correct it over the long term. We just hope there would be enough people associated with the Ramakrishna Order who would correct themselves and say that this is wrong After all, the whole world would be non-Hindu from the perspective they have taken.

Q: Is Parishad doing anything to help bring this about?

A: No, I don't think so. Parishad has actually no official for or protest situation. However, we would like to see the Ramakrishna Mission higher order open up the debate and let the whole Hindu society help. The people might say, "If you need monetary help for carrying out your projects, there are better ways of getting it than sort of losing your own identity."

Vedanta is nothing but the most sublime thought that has ever been expressed in the Hindu way of life. Hindus have reached to the point of total freedom in terms of spiritual thinking and thought processes. If a person says, "Well, I'm universal," I say what is universal. I have never heard a passport being issued to a person as a universal. There is not a person in this country or in the entire world who is universal. This is all escapism in my opinion.

I hope that Hinduism Today will be able to bring in the proper perspective in the minds of all the people and stimulate and open up the question, to say, "What do you think as a reader? Do you think this is right?"