

## [Dharma Suffers in US Schools](#)

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# Dharma Suffers in US Schools

Peruman, Markandeya; Peruman, Sundari A battle for dharma rages inside the brains and bodies, inside the hearts and minds, of the Hindu youth of America. On the one hand, with youthful valor, many really want to obey their parents, stand strong for the Hindu heritage, to be shining examples of purity. Yet puberty's passions, peer pressure, subtle propaganda, minority status, Christian influence and racism assail our children daily on the school campus. What may be a crisis of enormous emotional proportions in the mind of a 15-year old girl, often goes unseen by parents. Most of them are unaware of the "realities of teen society" and just look on helplessly. Outside the purview of parents and teachers, with confidentiality guaranteed, through hundreds of candid group and personal interviews, our children told us of their struggle:

Food, Sex and Drugs: The ancient values of brahmachariya (continence) are deeply embedded in the Hindu psyche. Purity in all dimensions of life is still the expectation of most Hindu parents.

But Hindu youth see most of their fellow students eating meat, and those that don't are considered out of step with the main stream. Those that do not date are considered completely out of step. At least 90% of their fellow classmates date. It is the accepted thing to do. This is particularly true at prom (main school dance) time. Without a date they stay at home. Unfortunately, in this sex-oriented society, most of the boys seem to have one thing on their mind. Drugs are prevalent on the campus. Many Students smoke cigarettes, a lot of them have smoked pot and some are into hard drugs. There are very few they know who haven't at least tried beer and/or wine. There is a lot of pressure exerted in this particular area of their lives.

Those who stand up for traditional values are often called old-fashioned, queer, priggish etc. Often they are faced with the remark, "You are now in America and you are expected to do what the others do, or else." Or, "If you don't do such and

such you won't be considered one of the group." Constant peer pressure is the catalyst, turning simple adherence to purity into traumatic confrontation.

**Christian Influence:** Most fellow students and teachers are Christians. The influence is subtle but thorough. Most holidays have some Christian religious connotation. Most textbooks are colored by the writer's religious persuasions. Music students, especially voice students, are expected to sing Christmas carols.

**Cultural Alienation and Racism:** Cultural events are frequently based on American history. In most cases our children feel completely left out of things. "White" Americans often project superiority. "Colored" Hindus of Asian descent are relegated to the Mexican, Black or Filipino group. Being ignored by the white students, they feel more comfortable with the minority groups. But these minorities do not uphold traditional Hindu values and are mostly Christian.

**Parental Guidance:** Hindu youth feel that their parents are not "hip" to what is expected of parents in America. They feel their parents want to raise them as they themselves had been raised in their home country. But conditions are different here in America. The youth want intelligent guidance, not just rules. Children feel parents are too strict in most cases. A few of those interviewed felt quite comfortable with their parents guidance, but the majority said parents were not understanding enough and certainly not aware of what really takes place on campus.

**Hindu Schools Needed:** Academically, our Hindu youth shine. However, they must be constantly appraised of the ever-present pitfalls. Most students thought that Hindu parochial schools could solve the problems, harmonizing education and religion, giving a sound knowledge of Hinduism. Then, as adults, they felt they could stand strong on the foundation of understanding and talk intelligently with their Christian and Jewish peers in a pluralistic society.

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