Sanskrit
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Window to Hinduism's Glory

Murugan, Jai Eminent Sanskrit scholar Dr. Satya Vrat Shastri published his first Sanskrit poem at the age of twelve. He's since gone on to write 9 books and 85 research articles, serve as Head of the Department of Sanskrit at the University of Delhi and receive the President of India Certificate of Honor in 1985. An interesting and entertaining speaker, Dr. Shastri was interviewed by our correspondent at the University of Alberta, where he was lecturing.

Hinduism Today: What, in your opinion, are Hinduism's greatest characteristics?

Dr. Shastri: Hinduism has three great theories: the doctrine of karma, that which shows experiences to be the result of past actions; the doctrine of reincarnation; and the Hindus' belief in the four-fold aim of life, that of dharma, artha, kama and moksha.

H.T.: What are its biggest problems?

Dr. Shastri: There are no problems with Hinduism itself, for Hinduism is the perfect, eternal Sanatana Dharma. The problem is with Hindu society. Years ago in India, groups of sannyasins moved from village to village, scriptures were read, stories told and the Mahabharata and the Ramayana acted out on a regular basis. But now the break has come. There has been a diminishing of traditional schools. Very few of these learned pundits, whom people looked up to, are available to them now. In countries outside of India, Hindus feel cut off and isolated.

H.T.: Why is no one motivated to go to a religious school?

Dr. Shastri: For economic reasons, fewer people go to the traditional Sanskrit schools. Brahmins have other professions. Knowledge of Sanskrit is diminishing. In the absence of trained brahmins, phenomenons previously unthinkable, such as video cassettes in place of priests, are making their appearance, even in India. Even pundits who know the ritual well don't know the significance of it and therefore cannot explain it to the inquisitive minds of the young Hindus. Nor are they in a position to explain the mantras accompanying the ritual. The moment is ripe to start the training of priests in an organized way. Also, nowadays only the brahmachariya and grihastha stages of life are being practiced. Very few people go in for vanaprastha and sannyas.

H.T.: Are there positive trends in Hinduism?

Dr. Shastri: Yes. The caste system is becoming less and less rigid. There is more tolerance. There is a growing anxiety about conversion. Hindus are trying to organize themselves with concerted thinking and concerted action.

H.T.: How do you view sectarianism?

Dr. Shastri: It will continue, organization will be toward the essential teachings only. There should be one umbrella organization, but not a conglomerate or diffusion.

H.T.: How does Sanskrit fit into this?

Dr. Shastri: There should be more emphasis on Sanskrit. We need to develop classes for adults. Sanskrit, which is not a difficult language, can be learned with modern language aids relatively easily. It is the language through which India has expressed itself through centuries. It covers all areas of human life, from religion to philosophy, from mathematics to natural and physical sciences, from agriculture to

poetry and architecture. Many people don't realize this. Sanskrit is not just a language of ceremony and ritual, it is the window to the past greatness of Hinduism.