

[RK Mission Head In North America](#)

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The USA and Canada were blessed this summer with the three-month visit of one of the Ramakrishna Mission's most venerable monks and their General Secretary, His Holiness, Swami Hiranmayananda. Through the kind offices of Swami Bhaskarananda of the Vedanta Society in Seattle, Washington, Hinduism Today, interviewed Swami Hiranmayananda just before his return to India.

Hinduism Today: What observations do you have on the state of Hinduism in the West?

Swami Hiranmayananda: During my travels in Canada and the USA I have observed that the emigrant Hindus have been setting up temples and ashrams mainly on a sectarian basis, and preaching sectarian ideas. I think this trend will let loose divisive forces which will create disharmony and disintegration among Hindus. I believe that the idea of harmony of all sects and faiths as exemplified by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna can alone serve the best interests of the Sanatana Dharma or the perennial religion of the Hindus.

HT: How can western Hindus best bring their children along in the religion of their parents?

Swami: There should be private schools started by the Hindus in the West where their children will be introduced to the beauty and grandeur of Indian civilization and culture. Special emphasis should be put on nonsectarian religious instruction because such religious teaching alone will be able to counteract the West's harmful, materialistic trend today.

HT: What would you like to see Hindu organizations do more of, or improve on?

Swami: In my opinion the Hindus should come together on one platform, and their religious organizations should not only accept and respect the views of one another, but should try to bring about the harmony of all faiths.

HT: What is your opinion on sati?

Swami: As an organization, we of the RK Mission do not try to bring about any sociopolitical reform either through preaching or through pressure. It is for the government of India to take care of such reforms or enact relevant laws whenever needed, and to see to their observance. We only preach that, as atman, no man or woman is in eternal bondage to each other. The soul or atman is ever free.

HT: What do you think of the Shankaracharya of Puri's defense of both sati and excluding non-caste Hindus from temples?

Swami: No comment.

HT: In your opinion, how can the problems in the Punjab be solved?

Swami: The problem of Punjab being a political one, we keep away from it. But we consider both the Sikhs and Hindus as belonging to our great Sanatana Dharma.

HT: In your opinion, how should the Ram Bhoomi temple/land dispute be resolved?

Swami: In my opinion, the dispute should be settled through discussion between

Hindus and Muslims in a conference without their feelings dominated by rancor or prejudice. The government of India can, if it so wants, pave the way for such a settlement.

HT: Has the RK Mission retained control of its schools in Bengal, or has the government taken them over?

Swami: The provincial government has not taken over our schools and colleges in West Bengal. They are still being run by our Order, although we have been facing recurring interference in our educational activities there.

HT: How many young swamis does the RK Mission have in training presently?

Swami: At present there are 84 trainees in our Probationers' Training Center at the Headquarters in India.

HT: What qualifications, including secular education, must they meet for initiation?

Swami: Initiation or diksha is given to those who have sincere spiritual yearning. They must be at least a high school graduate, but academic qualification has nothing to do with one's fitness for being blessed with Diksha.

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