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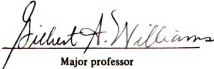
A SPIRITUAL EXPEDITION

presented by

BINDIYA DUTT

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

MASTERS degree in TELECOMMUNICATION

  
Major professor

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**A SPIRITUAL EXPEDITION**

**By**

**Bindiya Dutt**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A SPIRITUAL EXPEDITION**

By

Bindiya Dutt

*A Spiritual Expedition* is a video documentary produced and directed by Bindiya Dutt, as part of a master's thesis. This twenty-minute documentary explores Hindu Spirituality in the United States by taking us onto a journey to a Hindu temple. The documentary is comprised of the history of the Hindu temple in Lansing, prayer rituals, priests, concepts of Karma and Reincarnation, and the core essence of Hindu spirituality.

This paper aims to explain some of the layers of Hindu Spirituality and its teachings. It looks at how the video documentary has been used as a medium to gain knowledge of Hinduism.

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# Introduction

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In life, some take a journey to reach a destination, while others to experience the ride. But where do we come from, why do we come, and where do we go? As we walk on our individual paths, we ask many questions and often seek to find the eternal truth, but what is the eternal truth? Maybe we are not meant to know. We might just be here to search and find our own answers. For many, those answers lie within.

Hindu philosophy espouses that happiness is our true essence and we seek happiness throughout our life. Although we all take different paths, the core of our divine existence is to attain happiness and joy.

In order to get in touch with our inner selves, some take a spiritual path. In the midst of life's rush there are the calm, slow-paced spiritualists who devote their lives to something that cannot be seen, or heard, but only felt and believed. These are those who explore life's journey and seek its meaning. Such devotion to a spiritual life may be supernatural to some while second-nature to others. We have no control over when our journey begins or when it ends, according to the Hindu saints, we create our own destiny while the journey lasts.

This paper and the video documentary explore spirituality through Hinduism by taking us onto a journey to a Hindu temple in the United States.

The video captures the essence of a Hindu temple in Lansing, Michigan and shows how it came into existence in a mid-western American community while providing basic knowledge of the Hindu religion.

This paper touches upon some of the core aspects of Hinduism, provides a literature review on Hindu temples in the United States and suggests some ways to integrate multi-religious communities in Urban American society. Also incorporated in this paper is a brief examination on why a video documentary is used as a medium to expose individuals to Hinduism.

# Literature Review

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With the dispersion of Hindus around the globe, there has been an emergence in the Hindu temples everywhere. Research shows that today in the United States alone there are more than three hundred and sixty religious organizations that espouse Hindu philosophy<sup>1</sup>.

This literature review focuses on the history and origin of Hindu temples in the United States, how the temples have become significant to Hindu communities in the United States and why some people oppose the continuously emerging temples. The resources used in this essay discuss the significance of Hindu temples in the United States as well as question their existence.

## The Early Hindu Temples in the United States

Over the past thirty years, the religious landscape of the United States has changed radically. There are Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples and meditation centers in virtually every major American city<sup>2</sup>. Raymond Brady Williams in his article, *Asian Indian and Pakistani religions in the United States*, speaks about the most notable example of Hinduism as an effect of the preaching of Swami Vivekenanda (an Indian Guru) at the world's fair in Chicago in 1893.

The first temples built by immigrants from India in the United States were in New York and Pittsburgh. They were built and consecrated between 1975 and

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<sup>1</sup> Maha Prana Pratishtha Mahotsav, pp. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Eck, "The pluralism Project," Harvard University; [www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism); retrieved, April 25, 2001

1977. The late seventies saw the beginnings of many new temples in major towns all over the United States<sup>3</sup>.

Religious diversity in America can be attributed to immigration, and the change made in the US immigration law in 1965, that removed the 'national origin' as the basis of American legislation. Adherents of all the religions of the Indian subcontinent are now at home in the US, creating a new religious landscape and requiring new religious adaptations to pluralism in America<sup>4</sup>.

The influx of new immigrants from Southeast and South Asia since the 1970s has led to the construction of many more temples. Experts put the number of Asian temples, shrines, monasteries and retreat houses in the U.S. today at 1,500. Some sit on sprawling estates spread across hundreds of acres while others are merely areas set aside in private homes<sup>5</sup>.

According to Bradley, one of the reasons cultural and religious organizations came into existence were the children of the early immigrants reaching an age when they would receive a cultural education outside the home. This is when the parents looked for help in raising their children. The first organizations created were national in character, gathering Asian Indians into social and cultural organizations such as India cultural centers<sup>6</sup>.

Since Hindus constituted a large majority of the members, the religious ethos of many of these organizations was Hindu: the organizations observed Hindu holidays and welcomed Hindu religious leaders as guests. Out of these

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<sup>3</sup> Maha Prana Prathishtha Mahotsav, pp. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Asian Indian and Pakistani religions in the United States, pp. 178

<sup>5</sup> Transplanting God, pp. 34

<sup>6</sup> Asian Indian and Pakistani religions in the United States, pp. 180

organizations developed the Hindu temple societies, which raised funds and built Hindu temples in most major American cities<sup>7</sup>.

According to the Far Eastern Economic Review, Hindu immigrants have donated \$ 125 million in the last decade for temples. Apart from these temples, about two-dozen other facilities such as the Hare Krishna temples and ashrams costing over \$100 million and built mostly with donations of American devotees have developed<sup>8</sup>.

### Hindu Temples in Michigan

The Hindu community in Michigan has built and established a few religious organizations in the past two decades. The temples in Michigan are fairly recent developments because of the period of time it has taken from initial conceptualization to the final establishment.

People of Indian origin who settled in Detroit area had a dream for setting up a Hindu organization serving the need of the growing community. In 1981, the Bhartiya Temple was inaugurated in Troy, Michigan to serve the spiritual needs of the Indian community in the neighboring areas.

In October 1982, The Hindu temple of Flint, Michigan was inaugurated. And in 1994, the Bhartiya Temple of Lansing was opened. In Lansing, the capital of Michigan, the Hindu population felt that they would attract people from all over Michigan to the temple.

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<sup>7</sup> Asian Indian and Pakistani religions in the United States, pp. 181

<sup>8</sup> Transplanting God, pp. 34

### Some Concerns of the Hindu Community

A great sadness is that children of the second generation are losing the use of the family language and cultural norms. Indian languages are becoming sacred languages as they are used in temples, gurudwaras, and mosques. Sporadic attempts are made to hold language classes for the children, but many leaders realize that they are waging a losing battle and that the third generation will be alienated from their past. The older children often resist visits back to the family home and find themselves strangers in the strange land of the Indian subcontinent.

How the religious organizations adapt to these realities is the most important challenge that they face. Have the parents gained the whole world but lost their children in the bargain? That is the awful question<sup>9</sup>.

However, according to Brady Williams, author of Religions of Immigrants From India and Pakistan, "Immigrants have always brought their religions and reshaped them in America."

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<sup>9</sup> Asian Indian and Pakistani religions in the United States, pp.181.

## Critics of the Temple Movement in the United States

Not all favor the temples and some even question their existence. Is there a God? Is religious faith a resolute way for some that can never be questioned or challenged and if so, why? According to Prakash M. Swamy, writer for News-Times India, Jagadguru Shri Jayendra Saraswathi Swami has appealed to Indian Americans to not to construct more temples than what is necessary in the US. In an exclusive interview with News India-Times at Kanchipuram, the Acharya said it has almost become a fad to construct more and more temples and places of worship in foreign lands such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

"More often than not, temples are constructed to satisfy ego and aspiration of individuals than offering places of worship to Hindus living abroad. There is no necessity for more than one temple in a city abroad," he said. "Instead of using their influence with the federal or state governments to build temples, they should use their influence to collect funds to repair dilapidated temples in India. There could be one temple in a city with all the deities than constructing temples for different deities at different places. This would only dissipate energies resulting in wastage of devotees funds," he clarified<sup>10</sup>.

Pais and Sanders also discuss some critical views of people. They say that some question how long the temples can sustain them selves. "Many of them have taken loans from banks owned by the Indian Government," says one. "And right now, they cannot pay the interest, for they are dependent on donation from devotees and fees."

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<sup>10</sup> Prakash Swami, News India-Times

While others question the relevance of the temples to life in America. The late Surendra Saxena, who was president of the Association of Indians in America, asked, "what appeal these temples will have to the second and third generation of Hindus." He said: "Ask the rich doctors and businessmen who cough up money for temples to fund a community hall or contribute to a social cause or a scholarship, and many will refuse." This is another issue that Indians are faced with. How do they get the young generations who have been influenced by the American culture involved in the temples?

According to Pais and Sanders, many say that while the temples dwell on rituals, they have mostly eschewed social responsibilities. "There are hundreds of Indian women who are battered, and who are afraid to go into shelters," says A. Bhattaryajee of Sakhi, an organization for South Asian women. "Temples could help to get them temporary abodes. But they won't."

#### Supporters of the temple movement in the United States

With the growth in immigration, many people are hopeful for the future of the temples in the United States. Supporters of the temple movement say that temples will continue to survive as long as new immigrants keep coming. "And precisely because we fear the second and third generations will lose their faith, we must have temples and educational centers," says Manshueh of Hsi Lai Temple. Ram Chandran, until recently an executive director of The Hindu Temple in New York, says, "We have achieved the first task, the construction. Now comes the challenge, how to keep the faith alive, especially among the young."



To this end, the New York temple and others have organized children's camps and seminars.

"The older generation is used to the chanting of mantras in Sanskrit or an Indian language," says Uma Mysorekar, a doctor who has donated US\$3 million to the New York temple. The involving the younger generation, however, remains an issue.

# Religion in Urban America

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The development of religious institutions in cities and suburbs has created a multi-religious society in Urban America. The 1990 census reveals a tremendous change in the ethnic structure of the American Society.

Religion has continued to play a significant role in many facets of the American life. The political structure, the schools and universities, all of these have been touched by religion in some way or the other. Religious organizations are part of a community's make-up and this is manifested in both urban and suburban geographic locations. Churches, temples, mosques, etc, are built everywhere in the United States, both cities and suburbs. However, not everyone in these communities is exposed to what goes on inside a temple, a mosque or a church.

## Urban Communities

Community means kinship or convergence, and the term "healthy community" has been defined as "the presence of a vibrant social infrastructure consisting of formal and informal organizations held together by the social fabric of the community<sup>11</sup>."

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<sup>11</sup> "The Sense of Community Project", Urban Affairs Program, Michigan State University, Retrieved: May 4, 2001 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.msu.edu/user/socomm/>

In most urban communities, the weakening of the social fabric has exacerbated existing problems. Schools, colleges and universities are all part of a community and although there is religious diversity in schools and students come together into classrooms, religious tolerance, respect and understanding may still be an area that needs attention.

The relationship of the communities and religious organizations is two-fold. Religious reform organizations have been functioning to help the homeless, the youth and many more. However, there is a flip side as well. Some religious organizations do not contribute to the community's welfare to their fullest potential. This has been a concern for many critics of the temple movement in the United States as discussed in the literature review.

The challenge of the urban researcher is to bridge the gap between communities and organizations that are a part of it by working with both to build better relationships.

There are diverse mediums that could be used to inform, educate and expose individuals on many issues. Electronic media is now on the rise and urban populations are swamped with media messages, and stereotypical portrayals each day. Thus, it is not only important for the creators of media messages and programs that the mediums be used in an appropriate fashion, but it is also important to educate our urban audiences of how to perceive such messages.

Urban researchers can focus upon several issues in fostering community development and multi-religious awareness. Some of the ways are discussed below.

- Researching diverse organizations in the communities and exploring the services that they may be able to provide to individuals.
- Studying religious communities and their forms of adaptation to diverse communities.
- Educating students in schools through planning programs and field trips.
- Informing communities of media messages and stereotypical portrayals.

Urban research, documentation and planning in the area of multi-religious communities in the United States can assist and foster healthy communities and provide acknowledgement and sensitivity to the existing religious and non-religious diversity.

# Religion and Spirituality

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Religion means, "to unite," referring to the unification of the soul, the essence of our being, with God. Religion is also viewed as a means of union with our fellow human beings and the Divine<sup>12</sup>.

Dr. John J. Cremins describes Spirituality as a perception by saying that the actual experiences for all people are more or less the same but that most people go beyond the details and come to the conclusion that there is a meaning that permeates all their experiences. This is a spiritual perception of life's meaning<sup>13</sup>. While religion serves to provide various ways of worshipping God through rituals and prayers, spirituality consists of internal attitudes and practices, which leads to self-realization and transcends all external rules and rituals. One who enters the spiritual path goes beyond all outer religious identities<sup>14</sup>.

There are many world religions and they each have their personal philosophies, teachings and values. The element of spirituality could be present in religion, however one can be spiritual without being religious and vice versa. Through both religion and spirituality, we tend to seek answers. Sri Ramana

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<sup>12</sup> David Frawley, "Religion & Spirituality Hinduism the eternal tradition: Sanatana Dharma", [http://www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/hinduism/religion\\_and\\_spirituality](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/hinduism/religion_and_spirituality), retrieved April 29, 2001

<sup>13</sup> John J. Cremins, "Are We Wired for Spirituality or Religion?" retrieved: April 25, 2001 [http://www.iona.edu/academic/arts\\_sci/orgs/resiliency/cremins.htm](http://www.iona.edu/academic/arts_sci/orgs/resiliency/cremins.htm)

<sup>14</sup> David Frawley, "Hinduism: the eternal tradition Sanatan Dharma", retrieved: April 29, 2001 [http://www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/hinduism/religion\\_and\\_spirituality](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/hinduism/religion_and_spirituality)

Mahrishi says that all metaphysical discussion is profitless unless it motivates one to seek within the self for the true reality. One tries to find out about things that are external before one looks within. Only by looking within our own selves can happiness be gained<sup>15</sup>.

### Happiness – the true essence of Humans

Hindu philosophy espouses that in our lives we seek *Sat-cit-ananda*. *Sat* means everlasting existence. *Cit* means awareness and true knowledge, and *Ananda*, is the happiness we experience when all limitations are removed<sup>16</sup>. When we are happy we do not complain because happiness is our natural state.

Swami Shantananda acknowledges that, "in time and space there is limitation and any limitation, whether it is physical, emotional, or intellectual produces sorrow<sup>17</sup>."

Swami Vivekananda gives an analogy of a lake. He says that our mind is like a lake in which each thought is like a wave. It comes and goes but the water underneath needs to be stable. As we seek to unfold the mysteries of the self and the universe through different paths, the following chapter takes us into an understanding of Hinduism and its core teachings.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.hinduism.co.za/creation.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Reincarnation: A karmic cycle, pp. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Reincarnation: A Karmic Cycle, pp. 120.

# Hinduism

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## HISTORY OF HINDUISM

There is very little chronological or archaeological evidence about the origin of Hinduism. The ancient Indian scholars as well as kings had very little sense of history and therefore they left no true historical accounts of their times<sup>18</sup>.

However, it is said that Hinduism is the oldest and most complex of all religious systems. Although its origination and specific founders have not been discovered yet, it is said that it could have been originated from the religious practices of Aryan tribes who moved to India from central Asia more than three thousand years ago. After the Aryans came to India, they attacked the Harappan civilization, which lived in modern day India, around 1500 BC. After being invaded, the Harappan's adapted to the religious beliefs of the Aryans, and thus both groups developed similar religious belief systems<sup>19</sup>. Although there had been no discoveries of temples or places of worship in the Harappan civilization, there have been some archeological clues of the figures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses<sup>20</sup>.

The Aryans brought to India with them the term *Veda* that is used to signify sacred knowledge. The collection of Hindu literature is known as Vedas. The Aryans also brought with them the Sanskrit language but it is said that as

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduhistory1.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://emuseum.mnsu.edu/cultural/religion/hinduism/history.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.faithnet.freemove.co.uk/historyofhinduism.htm>, retrieved, April 20, 2001

they could not write they had to pass their teachings on through oral tradition. The *Rig Veda* is the oldest of the Vedic texts and contains 1,028 hymns of praise to mainly male deities who personify the various powers of nature, such as the sun, fire, sky, and wind. These hymns do not contain any systematic exposition of the Aryan belief but an array of mythical themes, often in contradiction, which speak notably of the myths of the gods, myths of the cosmos, reincarnation and karma. Thus even today, many Hindus believe in the cosmic principle of nature instead of a God. Sometime between 2400 B.C.E. and 1600 B.C.E. much of the oral vedas tradition was put into two vast works of literature, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. There are many stories and epics, which were written using these two texts as inspiration, one of which is the Bhagavat Purana<sup>21</sup>. These sacred writings include the Epics, which contain legendary stories about gods and humans. The Upanishads, which date back to 1000-300 B.C.E. are commentaries on the Vedic texts. These speculate the origin of the universe and the nature of deity, and *atman* (the individual soul) and its relationship to *Brahman* (the universal soul). They introduce the doctrine of *karma* and recommend meditation and the practice of yoga<sup>22</sup>.

Hinduism is based on the concept of reincarnation, in which all living beings, from plants on earth to Gods above, are caught in a cosmic cycle of becoming and perishing. We would be looking at the concepts of Reincarnation and Karma in further detail in later chapters. Hinduism is not only a religion but also a way of life for many Hindus. Also known as *Sanatana Dharma*, which

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www3.sympatico.ca/untangle/hindush.html>, Retrieved, April 25, 2001

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.bright.net/~jimsjems/hindu.html>, Retrieved, April 25, 2001



refers to the eternal principles that hold the universe, Hinduism teaches that all humans are divine creatures. Hinduism is based on the practice of Dharma, the code of life. We would be exploring these concepts through Hindu temples.

## HINDU TEMPLES

There are many Hindu temples around the world, which are considered to be dwelling places of the deities and to which people bring offerings.

A temple is the home of images, the material representation of the divine spirit<sup>23</sup>. A Hindu temple is the home of a deity or many deities, where deities are awakened, bathed, dressed, and fed as if they were human. At night the deities are put to sleep<sup>24</sup>.

Hindu Temples observe and enforce certain rules and regulations to maintain their purity. These rules have been taken from the scriptures. At a Hindu temple, visitors and devotees must take their shoes off before entering the sanctum area to keep it clean and pure. Another reason to take the shoes off before entering the sanctum is to show respect to the deities by leaving the dirt on the shoes outside and coming in bare feet.

Since using a temple is optional, a Hindu may go to the temple everyday, once a week or only at the time of a festival<sup>25</sup>. Although God is omnipresent and worship can be done in all places, yet its presence is felt more in a temple than

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<sup>23</sup> World Faiths: Teach Yourself Hinduism, pp. 12.

<sup>24</sup> World Faiths: Teach Yourself Hinduism, pp. 13.

<sup>25</sup> World Faiths: Teach Yourself Hinduism, pp. 17.

anywhere else due to the fact that the temple is built solely for communion with God<sup>26</sup>.

The temple space is considered sacred. The temple provides an environment that helps one to commune with the Divine. By constant and regular worship performed by the devotees of the temple, holy vibrations are created and maintained. Congregational worship produces a great effect on those who take part in it. This manifests the power of thought and that many hearts and minds tuned to a particular attitude of love and devotion are bound to produce tremendous results.

The reason that temples have come into existence is because one likes to grasp the infinite in some concrete form<sup>27</sup>. Besides serving as places of worship, temples also stand as centers of learning. A temple is also a house of art and ancient architecture. A temple is designed by the guidelines outlined in the scriptures to lift one to a higher realm unveiling the infinite horizon of the Divine. So the temple's architecture not only manifests a sense of the beauty in art but also the beauty in life. In the United States as well temples are built with the same guidelines as mentioned in the scriptures.

Once the temples are built, they require priests to keep the temple open on a daily basis for worship. Some temples have hired one or more full-time priests, while others depend on volunteers to perform rituals and prayers. Hindu festivals and holy days are celebrated at the temples with special rituals, food,

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.hinduism.co.za/temples.htm>, Retrieved, April 25, 2001

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.hinduism.co.za/temples.htm>

cultural programs, and socializing. Most of the temples also have facilities for social and cultural events.

The video documentary tells a story of one such temple in the United States and through this temple explores some of the core concepts of Hinduism.

## BHARTIYA TEMPLE OF LANSING

### **HISTORY**

The Bharatiya Temple of Lansing was legally established as a non-profit religious organization on January 12, 1982. There were about a 100 Hindu families in the Lansing area during that time and a few of them deeply felt a need to build a place for worship. Some of the families got together and brainstormed this idea and passed it on to the Hindu community in the greater Lansing area. However, not everyone was in favor of having a temple in Lansing. There were existing temples in the cities of Troy and Flint and the Hindu's from Lansing visited these places. So they did not feel the need to have a temple in Lansing.

However, there were those who were determined, such as Sudhakar Kulkarni, Manohar Naga and Srikumar Poddar who took the initiative of building a temple. However, they met many challenges. The biggest challenge was finding the money. So they asked the Hindu families for donations and applied for a loan from the bank. Gradually donations started coming in and they got an approval from the bank to receive a loan. However, they still had to convince the township and get a permit to build a temple in Haslett. Initially the township was hesitant in approving a temple in the Haslett area. In the midst of a

predominantly European American community, with many Christian churches, the idea of a Hindu temple seemed odd to some. The township was concerned about the kind of religion this would be, and what their practices would entail. They were also concerned about the traffic and noise problems the temple may potentially bring in to the community.

After a detailed dialogue clarifying all concerns the Haslett Township approved the temple, and construction began. The first Constitution of the Temple was completed in May 1982, and in November 1982, the Temple received their first deity of Lord Ganesha, the God with a face of an elephant.

Now the temple needed land in an area that was not too crowded but at the same time provided all the facilities of a city to comply with the township codes for religious organizations. Haslett, a community of the greater Lansing area provided what they needed.

In December 1988, the land was purchased, and temple construction began. Once the temple was established, volunteers from the Hindu community performed the prayers and rituals.

However, all Hindu temples need to go through a ceremony known as the Prana Prathishtha at some point before they become the home of Gods and Goddesses. Once this ceremony takes place, the deities in the temple are said to come to life and therefore need to be cared for each day. This created a need for full-time priests at the temple.

## **PRIESTS**

The Bhartiya temple of Lansing began to place advertisements for Hindu priests and finally found two priests in India whom they decided to hire. The temple sponsored the two priests and brought them to the United States. Hindu priests have to go through a rigorous process of study. Their course of study involves about twelve years of schooling in Hindu scriptures. They study Sanskrit language and learn mantras and chants. During their entire course of study they are expected to live a disciplined and simple lifestyle. They are supposed to stay away from worldly pleasures, eat a vegetarian diet, and devote themselves completely into the process of staying in purity.

After completing a course of study, they function in various priestly capacities depending upon their inclination, scholarship and effectiveness. Some prefer to teach, some conduct rituals, while others become religious philosophers seeking their salvation through meditation and asceticism”<sup>28</sup>.

In whatever they pursue, Hindu priests are supposed to strictly follow purity in all aspects of their lives. The priests at the Bhartiya temple of Lansing follow the teachings of the Scriptures and take care of the deities in the temple.

## **DEITIES**

One of the myths of Hinduism lies in the number of Gods and Goddesses that exist in the world of Hinduism. Some say Hindu's have 330 Gods, while some take the number in millions. In Hinduism, the concept of the divine is vast. God in Hinduism is not limited to a particular place or limited by gender,

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<sup>28</sup> World Faiths: teach yourself Hinduism, pp. 45.

appearance or name. The variety of forms and places, have given rise to misleading statements that Hindus have 330 million Gods<sup>29</sup>. Hindus believe that God may take any name and any form. Any way the devotee wishes to have a relationship with the divine, the divine takes that form.

According to Cole and Kanister, some Hindus do not believe in even one God, but in an impersonal cosmic principle, known as *Rta*. The term *Rta* signifies the cosmic order, or the regularity of the cosmic process, such as day and night, the seasons, springtime and harvest; and the intrinsic justice, moral law and order underlying all things<sup>30</sup>.

The Bhartiya temple is unique in that it has several deities in the sanctum sanctorum. Mostly, Hindu temples have one deity in them and those temples are specifically homes for the particular deity that resides there. However, there are many reasons why this temple has many deities. In the Lansing community there are many Hindus, both from the North of India and the South of India, and the devotees worship different idols. Thus the temple has strived to be inclusive.

Hinduism is a religion with many stories and the scriptures are a vast literature in which these stories unfold. All deity in Hinduism have stories of their own and unique reasons behind their existence.

Each deity in the temple has a day assigned to it, when special prayer is offered to that particular deity. However, each morning all the deities are awakened, bathed, and fed, and at night are put to sleep just like humans.

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<sup>29</sup> World Faiths: teach yourself Hinduism, pp. 43.

<sup>30</sup> World Faiths: Teach Yourself Hinduism, pp. 44.

Hindu deities have many different forms. Some deities are in the form of a human, while others in a form of an animal. In the world of Hinduism, it is believed that the divine takes different forms depending upon the devotee. Whichever way the devotee wishes to worship, the divine is willing to adapt to that form. Hindus see divinity in all living creatures, and thus animal deities have an important place amongst others<sup>31</sup>. The next section explores prayer and how Hindus offer prayer to the deities.

## **PRAYER**

Prayer, widely known as puja in Hinduism, is the ritual worship of an image or a picture representing some divine form<sup>32</sup>. Puja is a gesture of devotion to a supreme power and has a special importance in Hindu temples and at other holy places. However, it can be performed anywhere. Most often puja is performed in one's home. Special pujas are done at each Hindu festival and at special events such as marriage.

Prayer is considered a powerful way to reach God. Hindus pray in many different ways to many different forms. Some may pray to the sun, while others to an idol. Although there is no specific time to perform a puja, usually Hindu priests recommend doing puja early morning or just before sunset. Puja requires purification of mind, body and speech. Hindus usually bathe and wear clean clothes before they perform a puja, either in their homes or at a temple. It is said

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.hindunet.org/god/animal\\_deities/index.htm](http://www.hindunet.org/god/animal_deities/index.htm), Retrieved: April 25, 2001

<sup>32</sup> Maha Prana Prathishtha, pp.116.

that while performing a puja, one must concentrate on the worship only then will a deity enter one's heart.

Spiritualists agree that both prayer and meditation are powerful. However they are different. Shri Chinmoy says, "when we pray, we go up to God; when we meditate, God comes down to us". He explains by saying that when we pray we experience a one-pointed flame soaring upward, but when we meditate we throw ourselves into an infinite sea of peace and bliss, or we welcome the infinite into us<sup>33</sup>. Special days are assigned for each deity at the temple for prayer.

The ritual of prayer has three steps. The first is seeing the deity, also known as *Darshana*. The second step is the worship of the deity. This includes the worshiper offering flowers, fruits, and cooked food to the deity. The third step is retrieving the blessed food known as *prashad* and consuming it. This is thought to bring the deity down to earth and brings the person closer to them.

## RITUALS

According to the early scriptures, the theory behind the rituals is that the performance of certain actions controls the forces of nature. It is through these rituals that the spiritual forces are directed<sup>34</sup>.

However, it is said that the chief function of ritualism is determined by its symbolism. Most of the rites we perform are intended for visualizing belief. The worshipper has the satisfaction, after going through a long ceremony, that she/he

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<sup>33</sup> The Wings of Joy, pp. 28.

<sup>34</sup> World Faith: Teach Yourself Hinduism, pp. 46.



has done something with a holy purpose, and that this act is different from everyday acts<sup>35</sup>.

Other reasons to perform rituals are that rituals are seen as special kinds of karmas or acts which are enjoined by the scriptures, and are a great help to fulfill various desires, help in purification of mind, facilitate integration of inner faculties, and the most important help bring God into our day to day activities. Rituals also help bring about a cultural identity<sup>36</sup>. Below are examples of some Hindu rituals.

*Namakaran*, also known as naming of a child, is the first real ceremony held for the newborn child. It is usually held on the twelfth day of the child's birth. This is done on the twelfth day because the first ten days after birth are considered an 'impure' time for the mother and the child. The twelfth day is also when the child's horoscope is formally drawn up. Many Hindus name the child according to the star, of its birth. The child could also be named after the family deity or *guru*.

*Lakshmi Puja* is one of the most important rituals conducted during the festival of Diwali. Diwali is the festival of lights, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is believed to visit all the houses on this day. So, people spruce up their houses, and perform Lakshmi Puja in the evenings.

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<sup>35</sup> D.S. Sarma, [http://www.hindubooks.org/essence\\_of\\_hinduism/hindu\\_rituals\\_and\\_myths](http://www.hindubooks.org/essence_of_hinduism/hindu_rituals_and_myths), retrieved: April 25, 2001

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.vmission.org/hinduism/rituals>, retrieved, April 25, 2001

## **FESTIVALS**

There are many festivals Hindus celebrate. These festivals play a significant role in the social and spiritual lives of people. Since these festivals are religious, there is a bond between them and worship to deities. Hindu festivals reflect a role of divinity. A Hindu Festival consists of purification, prayers, worship, fasts and other acts of piety. These festivals are a great source of spiritual and moral advancement. The celebration of the festivals is generally for remembering the existence as well as recognizing the power of a supreme power and is more in the form of offering worships<sup>37</sup>.

Many Hindus observe fasts; perform rituals and prayers during festival seasons. This chapter describes a few major Hindu festivals.

### Diwali

Diwali is the festival of lights. It means "rows of lighted lamps" and the celebration is often referred to as the Festival of Lights. During this time, homes are thoroughly cleaned and windows are opened to welcome Laksmi, the goddess of wealth. Candles and lamps are lit as a greeting to this Goddess. Gifts are exchanged and festive meals are prepared during this festival. Diwali signifies many different things to Hindus around the world. For some, Diwali celebrates King Rama's homecoming after the defeat of Ravana, an evil spirit. While for others, the festival honors Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. However, everywhere, it signifies the renewal of life, and people wear new clothes on the

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<sup>37</sup> <http://godsspeak.indiahit.com/astrology/vratahas/main.htm>

day of the festival. Similarly, it heralds the approach of winter and the beginning of the sowing season<sup>38</sup>.

### Raksha Bandhan

The annual festival of Raksha Bandhan, which is meant to celebrate the ties between siblings of opposite sex, usually takes place in late August, and is marked by a very simple ceremony in which a woman ties a rakhi, a decorative thread, around the waist of her brother. The word "raksha" signifies protection, and "bandhan" is an association, signifying bond. When a woman ties a rakhi around the wrist of her brother, she signifies her loving attachment to him. He, likewise, recognizes the special bonds between them.

### Holi

The festival of Holi begins with a bonfire at night made up of dried leaves and branches left through the winter. This is a way of cleansing and making way for spring. The fire is meant to signify the destruction of evil. The heat from the fire is also a reminder that winter is behind and that the hot summer days are ahead. The following morning begins with worshipping Lord Krishna by smearing his idol with colors. This is a festival that is as much a gateway to celebrate the arrival of spring as much as it is a way to celebrate the season of love. Lord Krishna has been considered the ultimate lover in the Hindu scriptures. Holi is supposed to be an exuberant celebration of goodwill and cheer.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Culture/Festivals/Diwali.html>

Festivals are a significant part of Hinduism. However, there are many major concepts of Hinduism, such as karma, reincarnation, and astrology that are discussed in the following sections.

## **KARMA**

The world of Hinduism believes in the *law of Karma*. “Karma means that nothing arises by itself”<sup>39</sup>. There lies a cause and effect relationship that governs our experiences and each experience is conditioned by a preceding action. Hindus believe that we create our own Karma in this lifetime. Our deeds determine our consequences, and those consequences determine our future actions. In essence, the cycle of our actions and their results continues in future actions and future results.

However, karma is not only a creation of *action*, but also *intention*. Therefore, it is very important to understand the power of intention<sup>40</sup>. The intention that we bring to situations in life is a detrimental factor in creating our karma. For example, if we use a knife to cut someone with the intention to do harm, it would result in certain karmic results, but if we are surgeons and perform the same action to save someone, the intention is different. So the same action can be performed with different intentions, and cause different experiences in life<sup>41</sup>.

Hinduism also teaches that one must create good karma and do good deeds without the expectation of getting something in return. In essence, the

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<sup>39</sup> Reincarnation, the Karmic Cycle, pp. 73.

<sup>40</sup> Reincarnation, the Karmic Cycle, pp. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Reincarnation, the Karmic Cycle, pp. 79.

result or the fruit of our action should not affect our deeds or attitude. For example, when we study for an exam, we must not worry about what the result might be, but only be concerned with our action of studying. In this case, if we pass, we are fine and if we do not, we are still fine. This way we stay detached from the results and do not pre-condition our joy. We stay unmoved and concern ourselves only with the actions, not the results. So our joy and our state of mind do not depend on what we get but who we are.

According to the law of Karma, we are the creators of our destiny. Some might question though, that how would we know the difference between good and bad karma, that is, between meritorious deeds and sinful deeds. Swami Shantananda explains that we can tell what kind of deed it is by the reaction we experience after the action is performed<sup>42</sup>. Swami Chinmayananda says that we are not punished for the sin, but by the sin.

Hindu spiritualists have questioned why sin creates unhappiness? Sin is described as the psychological conflict created between the ideal and the real<sup>43</sup>. When we can live up to our own ideals, we come into a state of merit. All humans are seeking a state of merit and happiness, and this is part of our spiritual essence. Happiness is our essential nature<sup>44</sup>. And we are only completely content when we reach happiness. Our life becomes a search for this true essence, but in order to seek happiness we must navigate our lives in the right direction.

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<sup>42</sup> Reincarnation: the karmic cycle, pp. 116.

<sup>43</sup> Reincarnation: the karmic cycle, pp. 117.

<sup>44</sup> Reincarnation: the karmic cycle, pp. 117.

Our mind is a battlefield and in order to live righteously we must be aware of our thoughts<sup>45</sup>. This would allow us to think of the consequences of our thoughts and actions. In other words, our mind should be alert of the thoughts that flow inside so that we may alter them if necessary.

In the karmic sense, no action goes unnoticed. Every action creates a response or a consequence. One reincarnates or is reborn until one realizes their true nature. This concept is known as reincarnation and goes hand in hand with the concept of karma. In order to gain moksha, a state of liberation, one must let go of her or his ego. Our self need not be conditioned and be enslaved by our mind, body or intellect, but should be freed from all limitations<sup>46</sup>.

The doctrine of karma means, "as you sow, so shall you reap." Karma is based upon the inner reality of things, not upon the outer names and forms of the world. Karma as a spiritual law is not adjusted according to our various and conflicting cultural definitions of success and failure.

According to the ancient myths all the Gods abandon us so that we can discover ourselves, only we ourselves can destroy the dragon of our own ignorance<sup>47</sup>.

The law of karma does not mean simply that we will be rewarded or punished in the future for the effect of actions done today. Its main effect is immediate. The law of karma states that the condition of our consciousness and inner happiness is based upon how we act in the present. The main punishment

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<sup>45</sup> Reincarnation: the karmic cycle, pp. 118.

<sup>46</sup> Reincarnation: the karmic cycle, pp. 121.

<sup>47</sup> David Frawley, [http://www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/riverheaven/karma\\_and\\_the\\_science](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/riverheaven/karma_and_the_science); retrieved: April 25, 2001

for an evil man is that he has to reside in the consciousness of evil, which cuts himself off from his true soul and source of life<sup>48</sup>. All branches of Vedic Science teach us to take control of our karma. This occurs by becoming aware of it. Once we see how we create our destiny we will avoid the factors that bring us pain.

Rituals are said to aid us in getting past the effects of collective and individual karmic imbalances. Yet Yoga and meditation is the sovereign means of going beyond karma. It teaches us through detachment how to no longer be affected by karma. This is the means of bringing our karmic bondage to an end. We will be discussing Yoga and meditation in detail in the upcoming sections, but first we will discuss reincarnation, a concept that is closely attached to Karma.

## **REINCARNATION**

Reincarnation means re-birth. Hindus believe in the cycle of birth and death until one reaches moksha, or liberation. The soul can never die and it can never be destroyed. Until one realizes their true nature, they are reborn. For Hindus the ultimate goal is to reach moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Moksha is a Sanskrit word which has many connotations: to loosen, to free and thus also to spare, to let live, to allow to depart, to dismiss and even to relax, to spend, bestow, give away and to open. Philosophically, moksha means release from worldly existence but it is not a state of disappearance of the conscious being. Nor is it mere unconsciousness. Rather it is perfect freedom, an indescribable state of non-differentiation, or oneness with

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<sup>48</sup> [http://www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/riverheaven/karma\\_and\\_the\\_science/karma\\_pg2.htm](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/riverheaven/karma_and_the_science/karma_pg2.htm)

the divine. Moksha is an end to the earthly journey, but it may also be understood as a beginning of detachment and freedom.

Having lived many lives, each soul eventually seeks release from mortality, experiences the divine directly through self-realization and ultimately attains liberation from the round of births and deaths. All Hindus know this to be their eventual goal, but the means of attainment and understanding of the ultimate state varies from person to person<sup>49</sup>.

In the Hindu View of Liberation the dawn of freedom from the cycle of reincarnation is moksha and one who has attained the state of liberation is called a liberated soul. While some schools of Hinduism teach that liberation comes only upon death, most recognize a condition liberation in which the spiritually advanced being continues to unfold its inherent perfection while being alive in this world. In essence, one does not need to die in order to be free. This is death of the ego, or limited self-sense. Some schools hold the view that liberated beings may voluntarily return to the physical universe in order to help those who are not yet liberated.

The ego we know and experience is not reborn. The personality of this particular incarnation is not particularly stable even within it. Most of us change significantly the idea of who we are several times in life. We cannot expect it to go on to another. Nor is our inner self ever born, nor does it die, as its nature is eternal. The true reincarnating entity is the causal body, wherein our karmic impressions are stored. It is its stream of impressions that continues with the reflection of consciousness upon it but there never is any real separate self. The

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<sup>49</sup> Hinduism Today, pp. 1.



individual is only a power of divine aspiration and service<sup>50</sup>.

The goal of the soul in evolution is to merge into the divine or the inner self. This brings about freedom from the cycle of rebirth. This is the highest goal of human life through which everything is accomplished. It can be brought about only through self-knowledge. All life is an experience to provide us with self-knowledge. To see our selves in all beings and all beings in our selves is the essence of life. Only by becoming all can we go beyond all.

Liberation from the world, therefore, is not abandoning the world but merging into the world and beyond, becoming the all. This is a return to our true nature. Hence from this viewpoint, Hindus believe that there is no birth and no death, no one is born and no one dies, there is only the unborn, perfect and infinite self-nature beyond all limitations and possessed of all powers of self-manifestation. This state has been called Nirvana, Kaivalya, Mukti, Moksha, etc. and is beyond all states of body and mind and not limited by them. This state is everything and nothing, everyone and no one.

Hinduism is a pluralistic tradition. On any given subject it offers a variety of views that reflect different human temperaments and different levels of emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual development. So, too, on the subject of liberation, various learned opinions exist. Since liberation involves transcending time and space, and yet is a state that can be achieved while in a body, it defies precise definition. For this reason, some have argued that different views of liberation simply reflect the built-in limitations of language and reason.

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/riverheaven/karma\\_and\\_the\\_science/rebirth\\_pg1.htm](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/riverheaven/karma_and_the_science/rebirth_pg1.htm)

All schools in Hinduism have agreed that liberation is the ultimate fulfillment of human life, whose purpose is spiritual growth, not mere worldly enjoyment. Having lived many lives and having learned many lessons, each conscious being seeks release from mortality, which then leads to glimpses of our divine origin and finally self-realization. This consists in discovering our true nature, beyond body and mind, our identity in the incomprehensibly vast ultimate Being. Upon this discovery, we are released from the round of births and deaths and realize eternal freedom, untold bliss and supreme consciousness.

There are many paths to discovering this. In the next section, we would briefly touch upon some of these paths, such as astrology, yoga and meditation.

## **ASTROLOGY**

Astrology has been regarded all over the world as the foremost of the occult sciences. It is the primary the limb of the Vedas. Also called the science of reason or causes it can discern the karmic patterns behind events. Another name for it is "Jyotish", the science of light, as it deals with the subtle light patterns that inform and sustain our physical being and determine our destiny in life.

Some form of astrology was used in most ancient cultures to aid all aspects of life. In the Vedic culture as in others it set forth the ritual and the calendar and the main sacraments and initiations of life. The ancients did not look to the stars out of mental curiosity or primitive superstition but according to a profound reverence for the power of the cosmos. It was their means of making

their action in harmony with the rhythms of the universe. Modern science also shows us a mysterious universe that we must pay homage to but has yet to provide us with a means of tuning into it to guide what we do<sup>51</sup>.

However, astrology is not just another system of interpretation. Its purpose is not just to tell us what our destiny is through the stars. It does not leave us helpless before fate but shows how we can use the planetary energies operative in our lives in the best possible way. It also has a practical side, which is Yoga. This is its series of remedial measures aimed at purifying our subtle or psychic environment, balancing our planetary influences and maximizing our karma. Its methods include the use of gems, colors, mantras, deities, rituals, herbs and foods. An astrologer can provide us with tools to harmonize our entire being with the stars and align us thereby with the beneficent forces of the entire cosmos. Astrology is the basis for a total examination of our life on all levels, inner as well as outer.

We all clean our bodies and our houses on a regular basis. Yet few of us know how to clear our psychic or mental space. We are blind to the occult influences in the world around us. Such things as the use of rituals, mantras and the science of astrology help us to do this. The foremost of these psychic influences we have to deal with is that of the planets.

Astrology is closely related to Cosmology, known as the Science of the Universe as a whole. Hindus believe that God created the Universe. According to the scientific view, it was created by chance. It has taken its present form after

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<sup>51</sup> David Frawley, retrieved, April 25, 2001;  
[www.hindubooks.org/david\\_frawley/riverheaven/science\\_of\\_light\\_vedic\\_astrology/page2.htm](http://www.hindubooks.org/david_frawley/riverheaven/science_of_light_vedic_astrology/page2.htm)

billions of years by the process of Evolution<sup>52</sup>. Yoga has been related to astrology as the practical way of maintaining one's psyche. The next concept we will discuss is Yoga.

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<sup>52</sup> <http://godsspeak.indiahit.com/astrology/universe.htm>

# Yoga & Meditation

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Yoga is union of the mind and the body. There are three important aspects of yoga, meditation, breath awareness, and bodily postures. Meditation is the first phase of yoga. It includes deep breathing. Spiritual seekers walked fifteen to twenty miles a day and found it necessary to add postures and exercises to their yoga practice<sup>53</sup>. As these seekers observed mammals, and amphibious creatures, deep breathing developed.

Swami Nikhalananda says, "The main obstacle to self-knowledge is the tendency of the mind to dwell on objects other than the Self"<sup>54</sup>. The reason that one gets attracted to the external and forgets the self is because the creator has created the organs with outgoing tendencies<sup>55</sup>. This concept is known as *Maya*, where we are attracted towards the physical world. Hindu saints believe that Maya binds humans, however they possess the power to turn their senses and behold the inner self.

There are many kinds of yoga; Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Siddha Yoga, Dhyana Yoga.

Meditation is the heart of yoga<sup>56</sup>. Meditation requires the elimination of all thought and action<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Insight Into Yoga, pp. 18.

<sup>54</sup> Reincarnation: A Karmic Cycle, pp. 102.

<sup>55</sup> Reincarnation: A Karmic Cycle, pp. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Play of consciousness, pp. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Insight into yoga, pp. 22.

Swami Muktananda in his book speaks about the necessity of meditation in our lives. He says, "All the pleasures are inside you. Through meditation your world will become full of delight, and your life will become heavenly"<sup>58</sup>.

He says, "Meditation is the infallible means of conquering the restlessness of the mind"<sup>59</sup>. According to the Bhagvad Gita, the vision of the self is obtained through meditation<sup>60</sup>.

Meditation is a mind free of thoughts<sup>61</sup>. Shri Chinmoy, in his book *Wings of Joy* talks about meditation being a divine gift that simplifies our outer life and energizes our inner life. He recommends that in order to follow a spiritual path, one must meditate at least once a day<sup>62</sup>.

When talking about soul, Chinmoy uses the analogy of food. Just like we need to feed our body, we need to feed our soul. He says, "Only if we feed the inner life the outer life can have real meaning". He goes on to say that spirituality does not negate the outer life. The outer life should be a manifestation of the divine life within us<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Play of consciousness, pp. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Play of consciousness, pp. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Play of consciousness, pp. 39.

<sup>61</sup> Play of consciousness, pp. 39.

<sup>62</sup> The Wings of Joy, pp. 28-31.

<sup>63</sup> The Wings of Joy, pp. 14-15.

# Documentary

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## History of Documentary

Documentary was first created in Russia. Dziga Vertov, a young Russian poet and film editor, produced educational newsreels that were vital to the struggle for allegiance during the Russian revolution. He developed a passion for capturing real lives of people by the camera. He disliked fictional exaggerated re-presentation of life by the bourgeois cinema<sup>64</sup>. European documentaries of the 1920's and 1930's tended to reflect more the onset of urban problems<sup>65</sup>.

John Grierson, in the 1930's, first used the term documentary, derived from the French word *documentaire*, which means travelogue<sup>66</sup>.

## Documentary Genres

According to Barry Hampe, documentaries can range from those shot in a hot situation, happening right now with the outcome in doubt, to fully scripted re-enactments or re-creations shot with the same preparation and attention to detail as a feature film or television program<sup>67</sup>. Documentaries have mostly looked at history and biography of interesting people. History and biography are after-the-fact reports on past events.

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<sup>64</sup> Directing the documentary, pp. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Directing the documentary, pp. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Making documentary films and reality videos, pp. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Making documentary films and reality videos, pp. 9.

Hampe in his book also talks about the two kinds of documentaries. The former is the documentary of behavior, one that records behavior(s), such as the PBS series *An American Family*. The latter is the documentary of emotion, one that explores the emotional dimension of a behavior<sup>68</sup>.

Vertov believed that by compiling a rapid and ever-changing montage of shots, life itself would emerge free of any point of view but that of the all-seeing camera<sup>69</sup>.

### Documentary As a Medium

Documentary is an art of story telling. According to Rabiger, "The documentary film reflects a fascination with, and a profound respect for actuality." Documentary is an informative format compared to others since it was developed from newsreels<sup>70</sup>.

One of the characteristics that makes documentary different from other formats is the use of non-theatrical effects. The producer for this project has used a video documentary as a medium to explore the subject because through this video the audience can view what goes on in a Hindu temple. Video also provides a visual array. The temple has a website, however it is an informational medium. The video acts as a tool for story telling. For those who have never been to a Hindu temple, it is a great way to learn about what goes on.

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<sup>68</sup> Making documentary films and reality videos, pp. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Directing the documentary, pp. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Directing the documentary, pp. 15.



It includes audio, visuals and music, the three elements of discourse. These variant streams of visual, aural and music compliment one another and create an experience of inter-connectedness enhancing the story.

A documentary is a form of storytelling and focuses on manifesting relationships and linking the elements to each other. The themes explored in this documentary are history of the Hindu temple in Lansing, the experience of the priests, the essence of deities in Hinduism, prayer, yoga and meditation, and karma and reincarnation.

# The Production Phase

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The Production process for this thesis documentary involved several phases, including pre-production, production, post-production and evaluation, each of which are described in detail.

## Pre-Production

The first phase in production is known as the pre-production. The pre-production phase begins with a concept or a story idea that gradually progresses to a written production proposal. Extensive research is involved related to the subject matter, in this case, the temple and the priests. Once the subject and proposal are approved, the next step is UCRIHS approval if the documentary involves human subjects.

The other steps in pre-production were story development, writing a preliminary script, and getting approval of the temple board of directors to film at the temple. This phase also involved identifying individuals to be a part of the documentary, pre-interviews of these individuals and a sketch of how the documentary would shape up.

## Production

Once everything has been approved and the concept has been developed, the production process begins. This is generally the next phase of the production process. This phase involves the actual shooting of the

documentary. Subjects are interviewed on camera and necessary footage is shot.

Particular attention needs to be given to lighting, shot composition, audio, and other technical aspects such as white-balance. The camera is an eye that depicts what the documentary would look like.

The major part of the production for this thesis documentary took place at the Bhartiya temple of Lansing. Priests and the board members were interviewed at the temple premises. "B-roll" of the temple was shot and chants and mantra were recorded. The other interviews were conducted at Michigan State University.

### Post-Production

Post-Production involves editing the documentary into a finished form. This is the phase where the documentary is structured and refined. All the raw footage collected during the production phase is organized and is created into a story that has a beginning, solid content and an end.

Music, voice-overs, narration, effects, graphics, and credits are all added during editing.

There are different forms of editing systems, linear editing, and non-linear editing that includes Media 100, Avid, etc. This documentary has been edited on the Avid editors.

## Evaluation

The final phase of the documentary was evaluation. This video documentary was shown to an audience to get their response. They were asked to fill out a voluntary form and comment on the technique used by the producer and the content of the documentary.

Although these responses cannot be measured or validated, they are treated as general comments from the audience. The evaluation process provided feedback and enabled the producer to gain understanding of how the audience reacted to the video and if the medium of documentary was effective in conveying the message.

The goal of this documentary was to provide basic information about Hinduism and generate thought in the audience's mind. The responses of the audience who participated in the screening were helpful in understanding the audience's taste and provided feedback enabling the producer to know what worked and what could be changed. The feedback form used to gather responses and a summary of audience feedback is described in the next section.

## ***A Spiritual Expedition***

### Video Evaluation

This is an anonymous evaluation form of the video documentary “*A Spiritual Expedition*” that you watched. The evaluation is voluntary and would take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated and your answers would assist the producer to gather feedback on the video.

#### **Demographic Information:**

Student/Non-student:

College/Major (if applicable):

Religious preference (if any):

Racial/Ethnic Background:

Sex:

Age:

#### **General:**

1. What was your general impression of the documentary?
2. Prior to watching this video, were you familiar with Hinduism and its practices? Please explain the extent of your familiarity?
3. Were you familiar with the Bhartiya temple of Lansing, Michigan, prior to watching this video? If yes, what was your source of information on this temple?

#### **Content**

4. Was there anything new that you learned/gained from watching this video? If so, please explain.
5. Were your perceptions of Hinduism altered after viewing this video? If so, how?
6. Was there anything in particular that you liked about the video? If so, please explain?

7. Was there anything you did not like or thought could be changed? If so, please explain?

**Documentary**

8. What is your general impression of video documentaries?
9. Did you think that the medium of video documentary was helpful to you in understanding the content? Please explain.
10. What did you walk out with after watching this video?

(Please check all that apply)

11. Did you think that this documentary was...

- A). Informational \_\_\_\_\_
- B). Thought provoking \_\_\_\_\_
- C). Both (A) and (B) \_\_\_\_\_
- D). Neither \_\_\_\_\_

12. Any other comments:

Thank you for watching!!

Some of the viewer responses included that the video was informative and touched upon a topic that is seldom discussed in the United States. Some people had very little knowledge on the subject while others were familiar with it. This manifested the lack of day-to-day avenues of gaining knowledge on diverse subjects in society.

The audience reciprocated that they learned about the Hindu way of life, the art of yoga and the Bhartiya temple of Lansing. They also mentioned that they did not know the priests had to overcome challenges as well. Some of them did not even know that there was a community of Hindus nearby prior to viewing the video.

# CONCLUSION

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The purpose of this documentary and the paper were to inform and educate the audience on Hinduism and some of its major concepts. The two mediums, visual and written, used for this thesis project were very different in format and style. While the visual allowed the viewers to actually see what was happening in the form of a story, the written was a more descriptive and detailed form of explaining Hinduism disparate from a storytelling technique. The components in the written form not only explored the contents of the video, but also explained the actual process of creating this video documentary.

The video documentary explores Hindu Spirituality in the United States, which is manifested through Hindu temples. As we continue to live in a multi-religious society, it is necessary to be well informed and exposed to diverse cultural, religious and non-religious paths. This documentary strived to provide a step towards that awareness by incorporating Hindu practices, Hindu temple and Hindu priests.

This paper attempted to compliment the video documentary and answer some questions about faith, rituals, karma and reincarnation.

Although we all are in this life's journey together we choose different paths to liberation. In Hinduism this is known as creating our karma. Dr. John Grimes talks about creating Karma by not worrying about the outcome, but doing good deeds and remaining happy. Thus with the one's Karma, one creates his or her destiny.



## **Glossary**

Ananda – Happiness

Aryan – A group of people that came to India

Atman – Individual soul

Brahman – Universal soul

Cit – True knowledge

Darshana – To see

Dharma - The religious and moral duty of a Hindu.

Karma – Cause and effect principle of Hinduism

Mahabhartar – An ancient epic

Moksha – Liberation

Namakaran – Naming ceremony

Prashad – A blessed offering from God

Puja – Prayer

Pundit – Priests

Ramayana – A book of ancient literature, an epic

Reincarnation - The belief in Hinduism that one will live and experience many lives in many lifetimes on the way towards salvation

Sanatana - Eternal

Sat – Everlasting Existence

Swami – Saint

Veda – Sacred Knowledge

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