

As Hindus in Ontario get ready to conclude the Hindu Heritage Month, it is as good a time as any to ponder, explain and understand this most ancient of all religions that has given rise to ideas and concepts over the centuries that continue to illumine the humankind to this day.

As a part of Ontario's Hindu Heritage Month celebrations, several Indo Canadian organizations, including the Canada India Foundation, are collaborating on holding a major virtual event on Nov.29, 9.30am, focusing on the salient features of the millennia-long rich Hindu Heritage. It is also an opportunity to educate and enlighten the rest of Canada on the basic principles that guide Sanatan Dharma, or the Eternal Tradition, a concept that predates all religious texts.

The primary Hindu texts are the Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharat, passed down the centuries first through a robust oral tradition and later through written down texts. These writings contain hymns, incantations, philosophies, rituals, poems, and stories from which nearly a billion Hindus draw their inspiration.

The combined wisdom inherent in those words resulted in creating a culture that was forward thinking, innovative and above all, inclusive. The great discoveries in sciences, logic, economics, politics and every other sphere of human activity that followed continue to influence the world.

At a time when the whole world is in crisis due to the Covid19 pandemic, it is prudent to consider the wisdom inherent in the Vedic sciences, like that of yoga and Ayurveda. Evidence has emerged recently that establish that the practices and medicines recommended thousands of years ago for good health and wellness may still be valid in the time of Covid19.

As with any religious traditions, the values developed and insights gained through the ages, need to be continuously renewed for them to be relevant and useful to the current challenges. Clearly, in an increasingly polarising world, the importance of dharma (ethics and duties), and ahimsa (two of the key principles of Hinduism), cannot be overemphasized.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one big family), first found in the Vedic literature, and the only such universal humanistic concept to emerge out of any ancient literature, is considered a crucial guiding principle of Hinduism and still revered for its deep humanity.

Thinkers, scholars and seekers have made a beeline to the shores of India in search of truth for millennia. The myriad aspects of the Hindu way of life have fascinated many world figures. The depth and originality of Hindu thoughts and traditions have impressed great men and women who have written in praise of its core values.

Famous American author, Mark Twain, writing just as a World War loomed in the horizon, noted, *"At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way."*

George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright and activist, wrote: *"The apparent multiplication of gods is bewildering at first glance, but you soon discover they are the same god. There is always one uttermost god who defies personification. This makes Hinduism the most tolerant religion in the world because its one transient god includes all possible gods."*

The man who is credited most with taking the message of Hinduism to the rest of the world in the 19th century, Swami Vivekananda, once said, *"I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We not only believe in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true."*

Mahatma Gandhi who spearheaded India's freedom struggle to a successful conclusion, explained: *"If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through nonviolent means. A man may not believe in god but still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth. Hinduism is the religion of truth. Truth is god. Denial of god we have known. Denial of truth we have not known."*

Yog Rishi Baba Ramdev, one of the world's most popular Yoga Gurus with an estimated following of 800 million and a great orator will deliver the Keynote Address online, to celebrate Hindu Heritage in Ontario. Besides, there will be more dignitaries joining the virtual event with greetings to the community.

The event is being held with the enthusiastic participation and supported by various diaspora organisations.



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