

Hindu Unity Day - Concept

Why celebrate a 'Hindu Unity Day' ?

Ever since the Rig Veda said 'Ekam Sat Viprah Bahauda Vadanti', Sanatana Dharma has fostered a diversity of beliefs, systems, paths and practices. Even in the conception of the one Brahman, being manifested as many Gods, i.e. many Devatas, this essentially pluralistic, liberal framework has prevailed in our Bharatavarsha. Even as a spirit of 'Live and Let Live' has informed and permeated our civilization, it has progressively given rise to numerous sects, sub-sects and sub-identities, that learnt to live together in harmony and without conflict.

Today, with the long and hoary passage of time, Hindus generally have a stronger attachment to Sub-Identities, rather than their over-arching Hindu Identity. For example, Hindu people identify themselves as linguistic groups such as Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi etc. Secondly, they also identify themselves by caste - such as Brahmin, Bania, Reddy, Yadav, Jat, Kamma, Ezhava etc. Thirdly, they are also divided by Sampradaya identities - such as Vaishnava., Shaiva, Kashmir Shaiva, Vedantin, Vishishtadvaitin, Gaudiya Vaishnava, etc. Fourthly, many Gurus and Acharyas, emphasize their own specific version or aspect of the Shastras, and create new Paramparas and followings. Thus we have amongst us this abundance and diversity of expressions such as Ammachi followers, Sai Baba devotees, Art of Living group, Swaminarayan group, Hare Krishna group, Chinmayananda Group, Gayathri Parivar and numerous other groupings today that constitute the vast family of Sanatana Dharma.

United we stand, divided we fall is an old adage, but never more true in a democratic society, where numbers count in a fundamental way. We all know that it is very easy to divide Hindus into various conflicting groups, which don't agree with each other. For example - We can't even all agree that we are Hindus, and belong to the great multi-faceted, many sided family of traditions called Sanatana Dharma which incidentally is also called as Hinduism today. Some of us are comfortable being called Hindus - And others are very much ill at ease with that term. I am sure that if we start a conversation on the question of What is Hinduism, there will be so many views and perspectives, that we may never reach a consensus on what it is.

This then is our civilizational weakness - this inability to come together and forge a sufficient consensus on some common issues, some common themes, some common challenges that we share with all fellow Hindus. Adjunct to this weakness, is our inability to take on bold new actions, initiate well co-ordinated projects where it really matters. We create institutions that are like little islands in a vast ocean, which while themselves do very well and are even successful on a global scale, they exhibit a tendency to become somewhat inwardly focused, on their own institutional survival and growth, to the exclusion of the larger concerns that face us as a collective of the family of traditions and sampradayas, that we all belong to.

Hindu Unity Day then is an attempt to create an opportunity to come together at least for one day in a year, where we affirm our solidarity and belonging to that vast Eternal stream - called Sanatana Dharma. While a rose and a daffodil, a jasmine and a lotus are very different flowers - still they all belong to the same family of flowers. Hindu Unity Day represents an opportunity - for experiencing ourselves as part of a bouquet of flowers, as being a stream in the larger ocean of Sanatana Dharma, a note in the majestic symphony of Hinduism. It is an opportunity for us to appreciate each flower for what it is, experience each fragrance and color and variety for its own intrinsic uniqueness and not get caught up in a divisive thought such as my flower is better than your flower (which is the legacy of a competitive world).

And as we gather thus, we may in time to come even exercise the opportunity to discuss and debate the common themes, problems, challenges that face our Dharma today. And who knows, we may even embrace our collective responsibility to bring forth new leadership, create new initiatives and projects that will yet shape the emerging future of Sanatana Dharma.