

Youth grab the torch of Vedic knowledge at WAVES conference



Some of the youth participants at the WAVES Conference, along with Vanita Shastri (right in sari) and Prashant Joshi (left in jacket)

PORT-OF-SPAIN, TRINIDAD

Hordes of young adults, from high school, colleges, and universities of India, Trinidad, and United States gathered at the 8th Biennial International Conference of the World Association of Vedic Studies (WAVES) held on August 4-7, 2010.

The WAVES 2010 Conference was inaugurated by the Indian High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago, Malay Mishra, and the Foreign Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Surajrattan Rambachan.

WAVES is a multidisciplinary, non-religious, academic society. It is a forum for all scholarly activities and views on any area of Vedic Studies variously called as Indian Studies, South Asian Studies or Indology.

The fact that WAVES is not confined to study related to Vedas alone or to India alone, and encompasses all that applies to traditions commonly called Vedic, past, present and future, anywhere in the world, youth particularly find it exciting. Such a broad and open minded purpose allow youth to take ownership of the knowledge and understanding it in a context applicable to them.

"This is empowering and encouraging to young generation", said Dr. Vanita Shastri of Meru Education Foundation, who single handedly coordinated the Youth track at the Conference.

The youth track was listed as Youth Summit, and allowed youth leaders and invited scholars to engage in a series of conversations to gain a better foothold on issues related to their Hindu identity, relationships, social activism, community, and building of a favorable

academic discourse.

The conference was held along three tracks: Academic Symposium on Vedic knowledge, Understanding Vedic Practices, and the Youth Summit, under a common theme of Vedic Knowledge for Civilizational Harmony. While all the tracks were well attended Vedic Practices track attracted the most participants.

Among the issues discussed included Negotiating Hindu Identity, Diaspora perspectives, institutions - schools, colleges, and temples, and Yoga and Art. Over 50 students and young adults participated in different sessions over 4 days.

Youth had so much to share, from discussing their activities and leadership roles at school and college campuses to researching history and sciences.

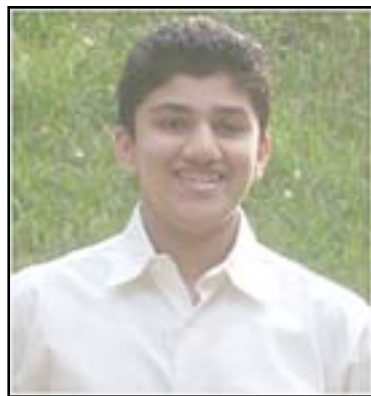
Two brothers, Arnab and Eshan Kejriwal from Dallas, presented their extremely well researched paper on Dating of Vedas and its link to modern Hinduism.

Arnab, a political Science and Economics student at Washington University stressed, "It would behoove all historians to look at the vast array of emerging evidences that seem to point to a date for the Vedas different from that proposed by colonial historians."

Priya Josyla of Wellesley College presented her research results on 'Benefits of Dhyaan Yoga on Attentional Processing in an Older Population', showing significant improvement in attention shift with the practice of yoga.

"This kind of scientific validation of our heritage excites my generation", remarked exuberant Josyla after her presentation.

Sohini Sircar, a student at Georgetown University



Aditya Prem

said, "young generation itself is becoming a major resource to Hindu students on college campuses".

Chinduri Selvadurai and Vidya Deendayal of Wellesley College addressed precisely this issue of resources for Hindu students at college campuses in the United States with data from several universities such as Harvard, MIT, Tufts, Princeton, San Jose State University to present different models for Hindu groups on college campuses.

Youth shared their ideas on schooling systems in Trinidad and Tobago and United States, and how Hindu students view their heritage portrayed. Students were seen involved in heavy networking with each other.

A mother was heard saying that she definitely wants her daughter-in-law to come from Trinidad and Tobago.

The expression of Dr. Visham Bhimull, a young physician working at University of West Indies Medical School, exemplified what the youth in Trinidad feel of their heritage.

"The magnitude of the meeting of minds that I had experienced at this conference was beyond compare. It has indeed left a lasting impression on me. It was certainly strange because I found myself in an environment where I could be who I was brought up to be and

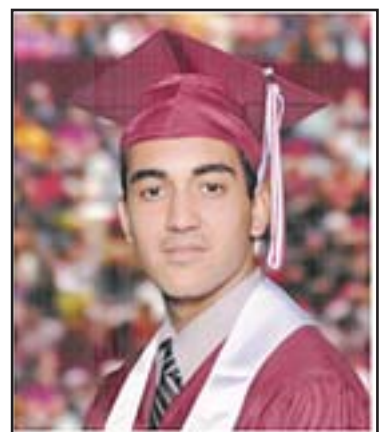
not be afraid because, it was accepted as mainstream."

Youth also saw their generation well represented in the conference when Kavita Pallod, a senior at University of Texas at Austin was invited to give a keynote on her leadership experiences in dealing young Hindu students carrying out public service.

Vidita Kanniks, a high school student from Cincinnati shared her view on how to discipline to become world class artist as she displayed her classical singing cum digital exhibit to explain history of classical music in India.

"Youth sessions have been introduced at WAVES conferences since 2004 but this year was the first year a separate track was organized exclusively for youth, and looking at the response we got, the Vedic Knowledge seems to have good shoulders to be carried forward" said Prof. Bal Ram Singh, conference chair of WAVES 2010.

WAVES organized an essay contest this year on "Was Ancient India Scientifically Challenged?" to en-



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courage more intellectual input of Hindu youth. Several entries were received, but first place winner was Aditya Prem of Gwinnett School of Math, Science and Technology, Duluth, GA, and the second place winner was Kushal Gulati of Plano, TX. Both will receive cash prizes and certificates from WAVES.

"The essays submitted were of extremely high quality. Vedic knowledge is going to be in good hands for the next generation," commented Amitabh Sharma who coordinated the essay contest.



Youth singing Sanskrit prayers at WAVES Conference