

Resolutions passed in the third Conference of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, held in Sri Adichunchanagiri(near Bangalore) on February 9-11, 2008

This third Conference of the Acharya Sabha was held in the ancient Sri Adi Chunchanagiri Matha during February 9 to 11, 2008. The Acharya members present heard the Secretary's report and the Convener's observations. With that background, the Acharya Sabha deliberated on a variety of topics of concern and interest to Hindus world-wide and in India in particular. The substance of the deliberations and conclusions appears in the brief Statement below. It is followed by the Resolutions passed on individual topics in the Agenda considered by the Acharya Sabha.

Statement.

1. There is an increasing awareness among the Acharya leadership, of the seriousness of Hindu concerns and causes which are not addressed or insufficiently addressed by authorities and within Indian Society; some of the Acharyas have taken the initiative to project the grievances of Hinduism and Hindus in specific cases; many have lent their hand and support to collective action to highlight Hindu sensitivities and grievances;
2. Awareness of unjust treatment of Hindus in the country under the flawed concept of secularism, has increased considerably overseas; such awareness is providing support to Hindu awareness among the masses in India;
3. The State Government of Tamil Nadu has in callous disregard of Hindu sentiments pursued the ill-considered Sethusamudram project despite repeated representations from numerous experts and members of the public and also from the Acharya Sabha; the Government of India has also not been sensitive to the sacred resonance of 'Rama Setu' in the hearts of millions of Hindus all over the world, in persisting with the dredging of the narrow sea between Sri Lanka and India along an alignment that will damage the 'Rama Setu' irretrievably. The Acharya Sabha therefore fully supports the country-wide agitation in the matter, appreciates the scholarly documentation that was put together and the legal action mounted.
4. Several Hindu organizations in the country are becoming active and proactive in the field to counter adverse propaganda against Hindu society and Dharma, to oppose conversion and violence and to highlight Hindu sensitivities;
5. More and more subtle attempts are underway outside the country to 'appropriate' Hindu philosophy and practices(such as Yoga, meditation, Sanskrit language and even sacred scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita), detaching them from their Hindu identity;
6. Global warming resulting in the rapid receding of glaciers that feed the great Indian rivers, is a major threat to the world and particularly to India; sustained efforts are needed by several authorities to stem this adverse tide; the Hindu religious leadership must explain to the devotee masses how Hindu heritage strongly opposes reckless consumption and supports conservation of and respect to all forms of life;
7. Many ancient Mathas and temples in the country are in need of rejuvenation; these institutions have a major role in sustaining, teaching and strengthening Hindu Dharma; Mathatipatis must nominate their successors before it becomes too late to do so; otherwise another pretext becomes available for government to interfere in these Hindu institutions;
8. The Acharya Sabha re-pledges itself, in the aforementioned context to speak in a single united voice, act in a concerted manner to implement specific action plans drawn up from time to time, to strengthen Hindu Dharma and Society, and counter the problems and threats they face. In this context, a lot more needs to be done by individual Acharyas in their tours, Pravachans and among their vast devotee populations in: raising Hindu self esteem; resisting and preventing conversion by protagonists of other religions; refusing to be cowed down by threats of violence from any quarter; taking recourse to legal action in specific cases aimed at protecting Hindu interests at large;
9. Individual Acharya members should consider and project the activities of their Mathas and Peethas as an effort to implement the Resolutions of the Acharya Sabha.

In the light of the foregoing, the Acharya Sabha passes the following Resolutions and calls for their vigorous implementation both by individual Acharya members, sannyanis, Hindu activists and the secretariat of the Acharya Sabha.

Temple governance matters.

Noting that

- in Andhra Pradesh, a High Court Stay was in force on acquisition of temple lands for any purpose till writ petitions filed in that regard are finally disposed off;
- In Andhra Pradesh, certain amendments have been made to the Endowment Act, the primary purpose of which is to reduce the work load on the government department and to release very small temples with little or no income into the hands of individual archakas for implementing daily pujas with the help of govt. subvention/devotee offerings;
- in Karnataka, a high powered committee has submitted recommendations for a new Endowment Law after the High Court struck down the earlier ones on certain grounds not necessarily recognizing Hindu concerns in matters of temple governance;
- in Kerala, in a Writ filed with the help of the Acharya Sabha Trust, the High Court conceded a peripheral point regarding oath-administration, but did not favour any basic concern of Hindu Society as a whole in temple matters;
- in Madhya Pradesh a new Law is under consideration in respect of temples but it seeks to retain all control in a series of government nominated bodies and in the hands of the government itself;
- in Himachal Pradesh and in Uttarakhand new governments have taken over;
- the alarming tendency in governments, both Central and the State, to treat temples and places of sacred importance to Hindus as tourist attraction particularly for foreign tourism which detracts from their sacred value to Hindus;
- there have been many terrorist attacks on Hindu places of worship in the country, and the perpetrators have not been brought to book; and
- the need for local Hindu communities to gather experience in governing temples of different sizes and popularity among temple-worshipping devotees; and thereby for establishing the credibility of the claim that they are capable of managing their places of worship, efficiently, transparently and in an accountable manner.

It is hereby resolved that

- active recourse must be taken to concerted legal action and for this purpose legal cells may be identified and created in different States and at Delhi;
- a Legal Action Fund may be created in the Acharya Sabha Trust to which individual Acharya may contribute liberally;
- rapport may be established with the new governments in Himachal Pradesh and in Uttarakhand to explore the possibility of some salutary changes in the manner of temple governance;
- correspondence may be initiated with the Chief Ministers and the Tourism Minister of Govt. of India on the need to safeguard the sanctity of temples and other places of sacred importance to Hindus; this may be followed up with visits on behalf of the Acharya Sabha, to the ministers;
- representations may be addressed to appropriate authorities deploring increasing terrorist threats to and attacks on Hindu places of worship and demanding strong preventive and punitive action;
- temple committees comprising local temple-worshipping communities should be set up as a part and parcel of Dharma Rakshana Samitis (decided at the last Conference at Mumbai) as a measure of education in transparent and accountable management, harmonious local participation in such management and demonstrable credibility for self-management of places of Hindu worship. Individual Acharyas are exhorted to undertake this exercise within their Sampradayas and area of Matha/Peetha influence.

Temple –entry matters.

Noting that

- while long-held local traditions in regard to some restrictions on entering temples, can not be easily and abruptly brushed aside, it is necessary to take steps which contribute to reducing and eliminating divisiveness within Hindu Society and to thwart forces that stand to benefit by such divisiveness;
- it is necessary to distinguish between idle curiosity that brings some people to wander into temples and genuine visitors who want to observe and learn about temples and the time-honored customs of worship in them.

It is hereby resolved that

- it is necessary to follow all reasonable laws of the land , both in letter and spirit, in restricting entry in to temples and other places sacred to Hindus;
- it is not incorrect, however, to prevent or restrict entry of non-devotees and mere curiosity-seeking tourists, particularly improperly clad or groomed tourists and visitors including such persons from overseas;
- the basic approach in specific cases must be to harmonize local traditions gradually with the expectations of temple-worshipping Hindu devotees and to respect contemporary standards of equity and equality;
- in the event of necessity to restrain individuals from entering temples, the matter should be cordially explained to them; special care must be taken to see that sevadars and pujaris are not offensive or rude to them; and
- none except authorized religious personnel should be allowed to enter the Garbhagriha, which is a specially sanctified place in a temple.

Whom to consider as a Hindu and what distinguishes Sanaatana Dharma (Hinduism).

Noting that

- unlike in other religious persuasions it is not possible to straitjacket a Hindu and Hinduism exclusively in any set of practices, rituals or taboos;
- Hinduism should not be viewed only through the prism of what is construed as ‘religion’ by non-Hindus;
- various differing Sampradayas of ancient lineage with diverse interpretations and understandings of ancient scriptural teachings such as Vedas with all the Upanishads, Bhagawad Gita etc constitute Sanaatana Dharma(Hinduism) and are all integral to Hinduism;
- notwithstanding the foregoing it is necessary to compile a set of simple guiding principles with which modern youth, Ghar Vapasi families, and those outside Hindu Dharma, can obtain a basic understanding of Hinduism; and
- Bhagawad Gita contains a comprehensive code of Dharma, which could be followed by all human beings for a morally upright, happy and productive life.

It is hereby resolved that

- a compilation may be prepared as a practical guide to distinguish a Hindu and Hinduism, with the understanding that it should be taken only as a starting point for a deeper study by a serious seeker, of several authentic interpretations and of the chosen Sampradaya; and
- the idea that Bhagawad Gita merits acceptance as the National Book of India, is worthy of promotion.

Reconversion(Ghar Vapasi issues).

Noting that

- more and more families seem to be interested in returning to their own traditions of faith and worship, realizing the disruption and discord that religious conversion is creating in their communities;
- assistance to such ‘returnees’—Ghar Vapasi families—is resented by individuals and entities engaged in conversion activities, and therefore attempts will increase to throw doubts on and discredit re-conversion;
- after re-conversion, families face intimidation by hostile forces and will, therefore, need sustained efforts at re-absorption in their local communities.

It is hereby resolved that

- every Acharya member is hereby authorized and empowered on behalf of the Acharya Sabha , to encourage, undertake freely and bless all voluntary and genuine re-conversions to Hindu Dharma;
- Such blessing may be accompanied by a simple sanctification ceremony, chosen by the Acharya for the re-converting families/individuals; they may be given simple Hindu names by which they will be called and known to authorities henceforth; as a mark of re-conversion they may be blessed with a copy

of the Bhagavad Gita or a small pendant with a god/goddess of the family's choice or any other such religious symbol;

- Acharya members should in their tours and *pravachans* emphasize that such returning individuals/families must be readily accepted socially and get connected through marriage etc (“*roti-beti sambhanda*”);
- Acharya members may grant privileged darsanam, singly or collectively, to such Ghar Vapasi individuals/families in their field tours and in their Mathas/Peethas; this gesture will be valued greatly by the returning individuals/families;
- The reconverting individuals/families should be free to choose their ancestral caste identity if known and preferred; if not, this may be left to themselves and the village community to be settled amicably; in doing so, any special economic benefit that may be available under law or government schemes, should be kept in mind so that the returnees benefit accordingly;
- It is essential that suitable documentation should precede and follow any Ghar Vapasi program; they are: (1) an application for voluntary re-conversion; (2) an affidavit to be sworn by the voluntary re-convert; and (3) a Report to the District Authorities of the Government (sub divisional magistrate/District Collector or any other official prescribed by the State government concerned) intimating of such voluntary re-conversion with the new name(s). The documentation should be as shown in the attachment to this Resolution; and
- Special care must be taken, with the help of devotees of the Acharya Sabha member, to see that the reconverted individual/family is not subsequently intimidated or lured/enticed by evangelists or their agents, or authorities misled, about such re-conversion with a view to bring ill-repute or harm to such Ghar Vapasis. This follow-up action may need frequent visit to, or even stationing of an activist in, the village/ community for a while.

Distortion and Denigration of Hinduism by academicians.

Noting that

- for several years now some Western academics, particularly in some American Universities have been publishing articles, PhD theses and books, purporting to interpret and analyze Hinduism, Hindu deities and worship practices;
- some of these works are extremely ill-informed or purposely distorted; they do not meet the rigorous standards of scholarship nor do they undergo competent peer-review; they denigrate things sacred to Hindus;
- these works do not remain within scholarly circles but find their way as recommended readings in schools and colleges in the US; besides giving a completely wrong picture of what is Hinduism and what their deities stand for, they impact the young minds of Hindu children and young adults in a deeply injurious manner—destroying their self esteem and pride in their own tradition and cultural roots;
- TV media in India is dominated by non-Hindu interests, pseudo-secularists and Abrahamic religious leadership/institutions; the result is that Hindu youth does not get a correct picture of what Hinduism is and what is its stand on many contemporary issues amidst virulent propaganda against Hindu Dharma; and
- under the deeply flawed notion of what secularism means, school and college curricula avoid any serious Religious studies in the country in an academic setting; this affects Hindu thought particularly.

It is hereby resolved that

- the book, *Invading the Sacred*, which exposes in a scholarly setting these developments should be widely distributed to encourage large-scale readership; an adapted Summary version in different languages should be put out in the country and liberally distributed;
- till such time a full blown Acharya Sabha TV Channel becomes a reality, Acharyas may buy time-slots in the existing regional and national TV Channels (Sanskar; Astha; Vishwa Dharisanam, and several such regional language channels) for expertly designed programs; they should comprise not only *pravachans* on Hindu scriptural and Puranic wisdom but also lectures by Hindu scholars in various professions, debates on contemporary Hindu concerns and issues with a view to countering false propaganda by vested interests and uninformed criticism of Hindu Dharma, and to convey authentic information to youth about Hinduism's stand on several contemporary social issues. Some important examples are the problem of global warming and how families could contribute to mitigating

the adverse effects, child and women welfare, labor welfare, moderating competition in business with compassion and Seva for the underprivileged;

- efforts must be mounted to install departments and curricula of Religious Studies in educational institutions in different States; and well-educated and academically inclined brahmacharis and brahmacharinis should be identified by individual Acharyas and encouraged with financial support to undertake higher studies and PhD programs in civilization/culture/ religion-related subjects; such studies should also be encouraged to develop and clarify Hindu position on a variety of contemporary issues such as human rights, child labour, women welfare, labour welfare, good governance, legal and penal controversies, poverty eradication, sociology, Hindu history, anthropology, medicine, archaeology, architecture etc; and
- colonial constructs and colonized mind- set must be exposed in an academic setting, and in media-debates, journals and in scholarly publications, for which financial and other forms of support should be extended by Acharyas and their well-to-do devotees.

Dharma Index of the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies

Noting that

- the Oxford Center for Hindu Studies as a Consultant to some private companies including the Dow Jones of the US, had proposed and spearheaded the institution of a “Dharma Index” to ‘grade’ Industry and Business (and enterprises) as a guide to investors and businessmen/entrepreneurs;
- in doing so, the Center, on the basis of advice tendered by a group of academics overseas selected by it, has chosen ‘Ahimsa’, construed as ‘non-violence’ and ‘Loka-samgraha’, understood as ‘responsible action for universal welfare’ as guiding moral principles for such grading;
- on being requested by the Center to be a member of ‘spiritual leaders’ to ‘bless’ the Index, the Convener of the Acharya Sabha got the matter studied in consultation with the Director of the Center ; and the former came to the conclusion that the concept and operational modalities of the Index, needed more collective in-depth thinking by Business and Finance experts as well as Dharmic individuals sufficiently knowledgeable in lived Dharma; and that launching the Index without more thought might lead to consequences that may not be happy for those who choose to be guided by the Index; accordingly the Convener had written to the Center, a copy of which was circulated to the members of the Acharya Sabha;
- the Center had also, reportedly, approached directly a few Acharya members(HH Yatindra Mahadesikan of Ahobila Matha; HH Ramanuja Jeer of Vanamamalai math; HH Pejavar Swamigal; HH Pramukh Swamigal of Swaminarayana and Hh Kanchi Sankaracharya); the Convener accordingly apprised them of the stand taken by the Convener on behalf of the Acharya Sabha; and
- the Center notwithstanding the above had gone ahead and launched the so-called “Dharma Index”.

It is hereby resolved that

- individual Acharyas mentioned above and any other Acharya member who may be approached may kindly keep in mind the foregoing developments in mind; they may advise the Oxford Center that the association of members of the Acharya Sabha in a spiritual group or for ‘blessing’ the Index should be preceded by more careful examination of the concept and the consequences of the implementation of the Index.
- a Media Note may be circulated by the Convener accordingly.

Preservation of ancient Hindu heritage documents

Noting that

- a very large number of Hindu heritage manuscripts and other material are in the possession of individuals, religious institutions including Mathas and Peethas and they require proper scientific conservation, preservation for posterity, cataloguing etc by experts;
- around a million of such treasures of our heritage are reported to have been identified and a large number, digitalized with the help of the manuscript depositories all over the country;
- the National Mission for Manuscripts has identified 45 manuscripts to be included, as first instalment in a “Vigyananidhi” ;

- the University of Karnataka and an American company were to collaborate in digitalizing about a lakh of such manuscripts in diverse fields of knowledge; and the Union Ministry of Culture and the National Mission for manuscripts were also engaged in similar activities; and
- abrahamic religious institutions are more organized and tightly controlled to ensure scientific conservation of their heritage documents, their preservation by digitalization for posterity and their wide availability for research.

It is hereby Resolved that

- individual Acharyas may get this matter examined with reference to precious heritage manuscripts and other material that may be in their possession or their Mathas/Peethas or in the possession of their devotees and contribute actively to their location, identification, decipherment, evaluation, cataloguing, conservation and preservation by digitalization for posterity of all such heritage material.;
- in doing so, care must be taken that foreign agencies do not acquire ownership or management rights over our Heritage material;
- any assistance that may be required in this regard may be given by the Convener and the Secretariat.

Functioning of Regional Committees and the Emergency Committee of Acharyas

Noting that

- the regional Committees and the Emergency Committee nominated at the time of the last Acharya Sabha Conference have not been actively functional; and
- their active functioning is important considering the difficulty of convening the Acharya Sabha too often or for specific purposes as and when they arise;

It is hereby resolved that

- these committees may be activated by the convener Acharya members and kept active in respect of problems as and when they arise and the Secretariat may provide all assistance in this regard; and
- the socio-economic Seva and Ghar Vapasi work experience of Acharyas in their regions may be shared with other Acharya members for mutual benefit. The Secretariat should facilitate such mutual exchange of experience.

The Sabha concluded with the resolve that in the next Conference, each Acharya member may present to the Sabha as whole, the initiatives and work programs undertaken by his Matha/Peetha in the period after the present Conference.

February 13, 2008