



**R G ENTERPRISES** A Diversity Consultancy

Equality, equity, diversity, ethnicity...Helping you look beyond the words

**RESEARCH INTO HINDU PRESENCE  
AND RELATIONSHIP FOR THE  
EAST OF ENGLAND FAITHS COUNCIL**

**SEPTEMBER 2008**

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## INTRODUCTION

R G Enterprises is a Diversity Consultancy that has been in existence since 2000CE, working mostly with the statutory sector looking at issues of race, faith, equality and diversity. The consultant has been attending the East of England Faiths Council as a representative of Bedford Council of Faiths, as a Hindu representative and later as consultant to the National Council for Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education. In June 2008 the consultant was approached by a representative of EEFC and invited to undertake a consultancy exercise on behalf of the organisation. The brief requested the consultant to:

- Gather views of the Hindu Community groups and individuals on EEFC, and constraints which may stop them from attending Council meetings.
- Act in an ambassadorial capacity to increase awareness and improve attendance of Hindus to Council meetings.
- Recommend to the EEFC on best ways to engage the Hindu Community in the future.

During the research period the consultant contacted the following organizations and individuals, by phone, email, letter or personal visit, to gather information for the report.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Education Trust  
Bavis Gam Patidar Samaj, Stevenage  
Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha of Bedford  
Bharat Hindu Samaj, Peterborough  
Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha  
Clacton Hindu Cultural Heritage Society  
Diverse Ethics  
Ms D Mandalia/Ridge, EEFC database  
Hindu Forum of Britain  
Hindu society of Bedford  
Indian Community and Cultural Association, Cambridge  
International Society of Krishna Consciousness  
Ipswich Hindu Association  
Mr K Ladwa, Peterborough  
Mr M Patel, MENTER  
Members of the ICCA Cambridge  
Mr N Solanki, SSSS  
Norfolk and Norwich Asian Society  
Cllr R Shah of Cambridge  
Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj Luton  
Thamil Samookha Mantram  
The Ipswich Hindu Samaj  
The Ipswich and Suffolk Indian Association  
The Prajapati Association of Watford  
Ms Swapna Mazumdar, EEFC database  
The South West Council of Faiths  
The South East of England Faiths Forum  
The West Midlands Faiths Forum  
The North West Forum

## **THE CHALLENGE OF FINDING HINDU GROUPS**

Hinduism is a pluralistic Faith and there are no hard rules about affiliation to a specific denomination or congregation. Individuals are free to worship as individuals or join groups when and if they feel the need. Consequently many Hindus worship at a home shrine and do not seek out religious groups. Nationally Hindus represent 1% of the population of England, however in East Anglia it is just 0.58%, this and the above singularity means it can be quite a challenge to find Hindus groups in the region.

As there is no compulsion to worship in groups, it takes a relatively large number of Hindus to be in an area before a temple is viable. Where a temple is set up it is often called 'Sanatan Mandir', dedicated to the 'Eternal Faith', the correct name for the Faith known as Hinduism.

In the United Kingdom such temples are usually dedicated to all the major deities, Shiva Parivar or Shiva family i.e. Shiva-Parvati, Ganapati, Murugan; Vishnu Avatars Rama and Krishna, and the Goddess Durga/Amba. These ecumenical temples are then open to all Hindus, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, caste, economic status, gender, ability, faith, or denomination followed. In the Eastern region, such temples have been established at Luton, Peterborough, and Clacton. Only the Valmiki Sabha based at Bedford has a single deity temple in the region, dedicated to the sage Valmiki who wrote the Ramayana, one of the sacred texts of the Hindus.

Where the Hindu population is too small to form religious groups, they tend to form social and cultural groups, and in the smaller population centers form geographical groups based on the unity of the members origins on the Indian Sub-continent, often called 'Indian Associations'. These associations include all faith traditions from the sub-continent and celebrate a limited number of high days, and cultural festivals such as Diwali, Eid, Vaisakhi, Christmas, Indian Independence Day and so on.

One of the newest predominantly Hindu populations in the region is the Tamil Ethnic group. Tamils from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Mauritius and India, have formed the Tamil Samookha Mantram based in Luton.

Some Hindus follow Guru Paramparas, religious houses that are lead by human leaders, with hierarchies similar to the Christian Churches. Worshippers are expected to hold regular congregational worship with the monks or priests from the orders officiating, and to follow instructions and edicts that come from the leadership. In the Eastern Region we have several such organisations that have established temples/meeting groups, the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPs Swaminarayana) organization, and International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) are the biggest and the most established.

Caste groups form in some areas where there are a large number of families from a particular caste. Where there are no temples or faith based groups to organize puja for Holy days the caste

groups tend to organize them, serving both a social and religious need. Although the groups are run by a particular caste the functions are usually open to all.

## **CONTACT WITH GROUPS IN THE REGION**

All the groups and individuals were contacted either by email, phone, letter or at face to face meetings, and in some cases all the aforementioned modes of communications were used. All were given information about the East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) and were asked if they would like to send a representative to the meetings. The groups were also asked to state any restrictions that would prevent them from attending, and things that would aid attendance. Most of those contacted were prompted to attend the July meeting and it was evident from the meeting that the numbers were higher than they had been for some time.

Those individuals and organizations whose remit is not faith based were not encouraged to attend, however the information they were able to give was useful to make contacts and to gather information which was useful. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century education trust and Diverse Ethics were two such organizations.

### **Temples**

The Shree Sanatan Seva Samaj of Luton has membership of some 800+ heads of households, representing approximately 5000 people. A representative of this organization has attended EEFC regularly but has had to step back because of health issues. The committee of the mandir is not willing to appoint anyone else to attend in his stead. One of the restrictions stated by the committee is that most of them are working people and they find it difficult to spare the time to attend outside meetings as well as volunteering to run the mandir and all its activities.

The temple at Peterborough called the Bharat Hindu Samaj, was contacted through three different routes, the members on the EEFC list, telephone to the mandir office and a visit to the temple itself. The mandir office did not reply to the message left on the answering machine, the officer that met with the researcher felt he cannot attend the meetings as his grasp of the English language is not good enough to get the best from the meetings. The members on the existing database appear to be interested individuals and not backed by the organization, they therefore have restrictions based on time and finances. However, one stated that if the meetings were rotated then they would attend the ones that took place in Peterborough.

*“Thanks for getting in touch.*

*I'm unable to attend the meetings due to the distance (from Peterborough )and the timings (evenings)*

Clacton Mandir insisted on a visit. The mandir is set in a private house and was until recently run by the home owners. It has now been incorporated into the Clacton Hindu Cultural Heritage group. The group now wants to work towards getting grant funding to set up a community centre and would be willing to attend outside meetings if it means getting funding and other practical support. They would however require help with travel costs.

Cambridge Indian Community and Cultural Association (ICCA) has internal conflict which is an added barrier to the organisation taking part in outside activities. The conflict is so great that it has prevented the group from finishing the temple. According to the Chair, no one else other than him has the capability or the commitment to attend, and, he lacks the capacity. However meetings with other committee members indicate that the information may not have been shared. The conflict has also led to community members becoming more distant from the organization and as a consequent less people coming forward to join the committee.

Hindu Society of Bedford, gave up running the temple some years ago due to lack of support, and the demise is such that there is no longer a structured committee, although a group of individuals still meet to organize a few functions. From a meeting with one of the prominent individuals, it was clear that although there was awareness of EEFC as information was being passed on by the Bedford Council of Faiths, there is no capacity to attend.

The respondent for Ipswich Hindu Samaj was confused between the East of England Faiths Council, East of England Development Agency and East of England Faiths Agency, so his reply stated

*“I believe SIFRE from Ipswich is a member of EEDA Faith Group, and from time to time I do get information from David Capey, who represents SIFRE in EEDA.”*

Upon clarification he stated,

*“Most and nearly of our members are employed or running small businesses and therefore are unable to attend meetings at Cambridge during working time. With the running cost of travelling to Cambridge makes difficult for any one to come that way including myself, who is retired pensioner.. may I suggest that you rotate meetings in Ipswich, Norwich, Cambridge & other important towns in Eastern Region, though I accept that Cambridge is a central place for every one to come who could afford or travelling expenses paid.”*

Although the Valmiki Sabha respond to other things that the consultant sends out, they have not replied on this issue.

### **Caste Groups**

The caste based groups Bavis Gam Patidar Samaj UK, based at Stevenage, and Shree Prajapati Association UK, based at Watford, were contacted but did not reply.

### **Indian Associations**

The Norfolk and Norwich Asian Society (NANAS) replied to the original enquiry, although they felt they are a;

*‘...cultural organisation, who celebrate festivals, and did not want to get involved in anything too religious or political’.*

They promised to put the suggestion to their committee. There was no reply received as to the outcome, probably due to the fact that it was in the negative.

The Ipswich and Suffolk Indian Association did not reply.

## **Ethnic Groups**

The Chair of the Thamil Samookha Mantram stated

*“It is quite interesting to be part of this organisation only thing is it is quite far from my home would there any expenses available to claim”*

## **Paramparas**

The region has the world headquarters of (ISKCON) better known as The Hare Krishna Movement. The Temple at Radlett, Hertfordshire, draws devotees and other Hindus locally, nationally and internationally. Tens of thousands of Hindus, pass through the temple on Krishna Festivals and high days. ISKCON groups have also been established at Cambridge, Norwich and Chelmsford. Contact was made with the then leader of the movement Gauri Das, and he suggested that we link with a representative from the Cambridge branch who will represent all ISKCON. Email and details have already been passed on to EEFC office.

An approach was made to BAPs Swaminarayana Sanstha, through its UK headquarters at Neasden, inviting the group to send at least one representative to represent the movement which has a dedicated Temple at Luton, and congregations that meet at Colchester and Southend-on-Sea. When no reply was received after several emails and face to face conversations, the researcher approached the Luton temple directly only to be told that “...*nothing would be done unless Instructions were received from the Centre*”.

The Satya Sai Baba group was not contacted because of the controversies surrounding it and its leader.

The Bababalaknath Temple at Bedford was not contacted as it is felt within the Hindu community that the Temple is run for the personal gain of the founder. If this organisation was present at EEFC meetings, many of the other Hindu organisations may withdraw.



## **HINDU REPRESENTATION ON OTHER REGIONAL FAITHS COUNCILS**

The South West Council of Faiths has no Hindu representation.

The South East of England Faiths Forum lists Hindus and other Brahmic<sup>1</sup> faiths as ‘being involved’ in its work. However earlier this year were lobbied by national Brahmic organisations, because they were going to hold a conference and re-launch of the forum called ‘Faiths Together’ with a programme which only had Abrahamic faith speakers and workshop leaders.

The West Midlands Faiths Forum is also struggling with representation with only one person attending meetings regularly.

The North West Forum is the only one that seems to have regular representation and input from Hindu communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The collective term used for Faiths that originated on the Indian sub-continent and sharing basic beliefs such as karma and dharma...also sometimes called Brahmanic or Indic faiths.

## ISSUES

- Many of the groups seem to exist on small budgets and rely almost entirely on volunteers to run the groups. There does not seem to be any will or budget to attend meetings outside of the organisations.
- There is a gap in skills whereby some people and groups though willing feel that they do not have the skills e.g. language skills, to attend.
- There also appears to be a lack of experience of sitting in meetings outside of the organisations, which prevents people from coming forward.
- Many of the groups are apolitical and see involvement in a group like EEFC as something which may not be suitable for their organization.
- Many groups are still in the process of consolidating themselves and looking for practical support and are not ready for engagement at this level.
- Groups were pleasantly surprised to be contacted by a fellow Hindu, and were eager to access information about the wider networks in the Hindu Community and to gather contacts for the wider networks.

This should be seen in context, other Faiths Councils are also struggling with the similar issue, of low or no attendance from Hindus. This is also borne out by the work the researcher did in the Further Education Sector, where the researchers' remit included capacity building in the Hindu Community, to sit on steering groups.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

There is no single reason for the limited engagement with EEFC from Hindu groups, the reasons are as varied as the groups themselves. However there are several things could be done which may lead to better and wider engagement.

1. Offering expenses may help to increase attendance as quite a few individuals and groups find this an issue.
2. The lack of confidence may be an issue which could be tackled by offering support during the meetings, be it someone of Hindu background to make the initial introductions, and a debriefing afterwards to explain things that may not have been understood. This could be on the day if practical or a follow-up phone call.
3. Many of the groups are apolitical and will not want to be involved in bodies such as EEFC because it is seen as outside of their remit. It may be difficult to interest and involve these groups and it may be best to just keep them on a distribution list and keep them informed. This may lead to involvement in the future. NANAS definitely falls in this category.
4. Some groups are looking for practical support such as help accessing funding, and would prefer to attend an operational rather than a strategic group. It is probably more appropriate that they get the newsletters and information on training rather than invitations to attend the council. It may eventually lead to a level of capacity where they will be ready to attend the council. CHCH Society falls in this category.
5. There is no better encouragement for people to take something up than seeing a role model. It may be more encouraging for Hindus to attend if they see a Hindu in a position of prominence on the EEFC. This may also encourage those who in the past have expressed the sentiment that Abrahamic faiths are favoured and the Brahmic ignored.
6. Rotating the meetings may also encourage groups to attend meetings, at least when they are held in their vicinity.

## CONCLUSION

Many of the other Regional Faiths Councils also lack Hindu representation, making this a national issue. Clearly work needs to be done with the Hindu organisations to raise awareness of the advantages of participating in such groups, alongside the capacity building that is so necessary in all the groups visited/communicated with.

At a national level, a recommendation has been made to the Hindu Forum of Britain that they should endeavor to have a presence on each Regional Faiths Council, a suggestion which is being considered at present. Permission has been given to the researcher to attend EEFC as a HFB representative, which will secure the Regional Faiths Councils will be discussed at national level in the Hindu organisations through the HFB.

The exercise has also led to a greater awareness in the region of other Hindu organisations, and has led to two representatives being identified to advise the Regional Resilience Forum on needs of Hindus.

Bharti Tailor  
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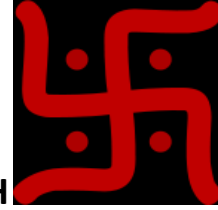
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## SANATAN DHARMA – HINDU FAITH



- The Faith is called Santana Dharma (Eternal Faith). It is one of the oldest faiths and has no single founder. There are two main Hindu calendars, the Vikram Samvat 2064 & 5101(2008CE) in the Kaliyuga Calendar used in South India.
- Sacred scriptures include the Vedas. Vedas are the divine revelation to Man. There are various scriptures based on the Vedas. The Bhagvad Gita being the foremost. Other sacred scriptures are the Puranas, Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
- Hindus believe in One God (Parameshvar). God is one, but has many names and forms to describe his qualities and actions. He is all-pervading (Sarvinivashi) all-knowing (Sarvagn) and all-powerful (Sarvashaktiman).
- Hindus believe in Prayer (Prarthana). Prayer, Worship and disciplined living is believed to help build a relationship with God. Places of worship are called Mandir, Kovils. The priest may be called Pujari or Brahmin.
- Hindus believe in Rebirth (Punarjanm). Life does not end when the body dies. Escape from the circle of birth and death is called Moksha.
- Hindus believe in the Law of Action (Purusharth). The Law of Karma (Action) assures us that, what we sow, we shall reap, however this is not in the hereafter but in this life and other rebirths. Good Karma will assure a good life and birth and bad Karma will assure bad life and birth. In this way we are masters of our own fate.
- Upon death Hindus are cremated so that the body returns to the base elements as soon as possible and the soul moves on in its cycle.
- Hindus believe in Non-Injury (Prani-daya or Ahimsa). To hurt any living creature, by thought, word and deed, is to deny the presence of God. This leads many Hindus to follow a lacto vegetarian diet, with some restriction on plant matter eaten as well.
- Hindus believe in a joyful state of mind (Prasanta). It is only through a joyful and pure mind that we can appreciate the greatness of God.
- Hindus believe in living a life which is beneficial to all of God's creation, with love for all and hatred for none.
- Hindus believe in respect and reverence to our parents, elders and teachers.

