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In the Woods of North Carolina, Hindu Youth Learn About Their Heritage

by Aproova Murthy

Press Release – For Immediate Release

For more information, contact: Rishi Bhutada at 832-797-5147, or vp-outreach at hscnet.org.

[Camp Pic 1](#)
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While many enjoyed Memorial Day sales at local shopping malls, some Hindu young people preferred the solitude of Raleigh, North Carolina's William B. Umstead State Park. College students and young professionals from all over the United States drove and flew in to attend the Hindu Students Council's 17th Annual Camp. Here, young people gained the opportunity to learn about their rich Hindu cultural heritage as well as issues affecting Hindus, and to make new friends with similar interests and backgrounds.

Secluded from city life, the beautiful state park provided a calm atmosphere for such a retreat. To parallel nature's mood, the attendees began each day by assembling in Mess Hall for morning prayers led by



Sudeep Roy, HSC regional coordinator for Northern California. With every word repeated in unison, the campers formed one cohesive voice, with each word of each mantra reverberating through the pine trees surrounding the campsite.

In addition to the traditional recitation of age-old prayers, the attendees also participated in discussions on a variety of topics, some led by fellow HSC members and others by guest speakers. In these sessions, everyone was given the opportunity to offer his or her personal opinion on Hinduism's profound concepts as well as issues affecting Hindus. It was "unity in diversity," as camper Rahul Yadav from Illinois put it. "I got to hear the views of people from various different backgrounds and levels of religiosity." Regardless of the differences, one solid thread held the people together — everyone shared HSC's goals of knowledge, unity, progress, and dharma.

To bring out the more analytical and argumentative side in one another, numerous exciting debates were conducted in addition to the more serene discussions. Facilitated by various HSC leaders, the debates allowed each team to consolidate its members' viewpoints and develop a stance as a group. Debate topics ranged from what type of identity would best serve future generations of Hindus in the US to what should be Hinduism's view on artificial intelligence. "It was a community building exercise," states Aditya Undurti, a Ph.D. student at MIT and an eager participant in every debate. Though they were propositioned as disputes, these debates truly served as team-building activities, correlating with HSC's goal of unity.

In order to add another healthy level of competition, the attendees were split into four different groups. The groups then competed for bragging rights in three separate rounds. Kicking off the battle was a Rangoli-making contest. Provided with colored powder, each group innovatively created its own design of a Hindu symbol using this ancient Indian art form. Following this was a rousing round of Hindu Jeopardy led by HSC's president Nikunj Trivedi and general secretary Harshavardhan Vellanki. Complete with buzzers and a traditional game board, the absent Alex Trebek's presence was felt even in the middle of the woods. The final round was a skit competition in which each group was to craft a unique twist to the end of a Vikram & Betal story. Each group bonded in the process, as its members, swathed in team spirit, acted out each tale. Camp coordinator Manav Tandon said, "The best part of the camp for me was the fact that each and every one of the campers enjoyed all of these activities thoroughly."

Some highlights of the camp came from the guest speakers. Hariharan Gopalan, from the Art of Living Foundation, taught the campers some yoga

and breathing techniques, providing tools for maintaining a healthier lifestyle. Bir Krishna Das Goswami from ISKCON, a trained past-life regression therapist, discussed the concept of reincarnation in depth, citing verses from scriptures, and compiling facts from several researchers.

Jeffrey Armstrong, also known as Kavindra Rishi, a Vedic scholar and poet, remained with the attendees for the entire duration of the camp. His captivating presentations reflected his vast knowledge, and his amicable personality made him receptive to this audience. Besides presenting on topics such as the Hindu view of relationships and what it means to live as a Hindu, he also shared his prize-winning poetry with the campers. He was approachable inside and outside of his lectures, entertaining the attendees with informal conversations throughout the weekend. Serving as an inspiration to the youth and embodying the concept of "unity in diversity," Jeffrey Armstrong emphasized the fact that all the attendees were there for one purpose — to expand and spread their knowledge of Hinduism, or Sanatana Dharma.

Throughout the Memorial Day weekend, a sense of camaraderie was established amongst all attendees, as similar goals and diverse viewpoints laid the foundation for long-lasting friendships. The camp was organized not only to stimulate spiritual growth within each participant, but also to inspire each person to take back the lessons learned to his or her respective HSC chapter. As Atul Agrawal from the University of Texas put it, "only under the brilliant rays of knowledge can we expect to grow and flower. After attending the camp, I have begun to smell the sweet scent of divinity."

Hindu Students Council is a non-profit 501(c)(3) youth organization with chapters at over 81 universities around the world. Established in 1990, HSC is an international forum providing opportunities on college campuses to learn about Hindu heritage and culture; foster awareness of issues affecting Hindus; and provide Seva (service) to the community. HSC presents many opportunities for spiritual, professional, and personal development via campus study groups, seminars, lectures, workshops, conferences, and camps. For more information on HSC, write to hsc@hscnet.org or visit the HSC website at <http://www.hscnet.org>.

Apoorva Murthy is a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin.

"HSC is an international forum providing opportunities for students and youth to learn about Hindu heritage and culture."

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