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Over 75 students and alumni from 14 universities discuss being a Hindu on campus as well as contributions of Hindus to humanity, at the first *Drishti* Collegiate Conference

April 16, 2017. MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Over 75 students and alumni from fourteen different universities, including MIT, Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton, Boston University, Stony Brook and others attended Hindu Students Council's (HSC) first *Drishti* Collegiate Conference, whose theme was "Locating the Hindu Identity in the West." *Drishti* featured student panels and speakers who discussed and debated issues facing Hindus in the West and their impact on the youth as well as on the broader Hindu community.

"I immensely enjoyed the opportunity to take part in the conference," remarked Siddhartha Jayanti, a senior at Princeton University as well as one of the student panelists. "It was also heartwarming to meet other students that share my bicultural experience and with whom I can discuss the joys and plights of being a Hindu on an American college campus."

Attendees at the conference discussed important questions such as: What does it mean to be a Hindu for a college student? Are Hindu festivals like Navratri and Holi as well systems like Yoga being detached from their roots and does it matter? Who speaks for Hinduism and its contributions to human civilization?

Rajiv Malhotra, noted public intellectual, author and founder of the Infinity Foundation, was the keynote speaker of the conference. Sitting down with HSC General Secretary Parth Parihar, Mr. Malhotra discussed over three decades of Infinity Foundation's work in countering biased views of Hinduism in academic circles. He highlighted how prejudiced and inaccurate versions of Hinduism go beyond religion departments and into humanities, public policy and popular media, since scholars and writers from one discipline often and conveniently cite works of those from other disciplines. He alerted the Hindu community to carefully study the background of scholars and experts before funding their work and supporting them in order to ensure a balanced and fair analysis of Hindu practices and systems. In addition, he advised the community to actively promote practicing Hindus in the field of Hindu studies, much like how other religious traditions promote and have significant amount of scholars who practice these traditions.

"I feel that the conference provided a great opportunity to meet students from HSC chapters as well as people who heard about HSC and came to see what HSC was about," said Raghavprasanna Rajagopalan, a sophomore at Northeastern University and a key conference organizer.

The conference ended with Mr. Malhotra's keynote speech highlighting some of the contributions of Hindus to American society and the influence of Hindu ideas on Emerson, Thoreau, TS Elliott and others. Mr. Malhotra stressed the need to include these important contributions in American school curricula so that students understand that Hindu ideas and contributions are not recent and trivial, but have influenced American psyche for over a hundred years.

Looking forward, *Drishti* promises to be a regular platform for holding insightful conversations and discussions around Hindu ethos and practices for college students and young professionals.

Hindu Students Council (HSC) is the largest Hindu youth organization, with 50 chapters in North America. Started in 1990, HSC provides college students and young professionals the opportunity to learn about Hindu heritage and culture, as well as advocate for issues impacting Hindus. For information, please visit www.hindustudentscouncil.org or contact us at info@hindustudentscouncil.org.

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