

**Reflections on Hindu Demographics in America:
An Initial Report on the First American Hindu Census**

by

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The estimated 1.2 million Hindus in the United States exist almost invisibly on the edge of the larger American religious community. Apart from a modest number of elaborate and impressive temples, Hindu centers have blended chameleon-like into the urban landscape. A 2001 survey conducted by the Research Opinion Corporation found Americans largely unaware of Hinduism's growth and equally uninterested in becoming more aware of its presence. By far, the greatest influence of Indian Hindu culture to penetrate American life—the practice of yoga—has been separated from its Hindu origins and most American did not connect the local center with yoga's Hindu roots. America's lack of awareness of Hinduism stands in sharp contrast to the widespread coverage of the various Indian gurus who founded popular new religious movements in the 1970s and which, led by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, became leading targets of anti-cult efforts through the 1980s and 1990s. While several dozen guru-oriented groups gathered Western converts, beginning in 1965, a steady stream of immigrants from India, the majority of a Hindu background, began to settle on the edge of major American cities, especially those with large international airports, and built the first temples following traditional Vedic patterns.

Through the first decade of the twenty-first century, attention to Hinduism in America has risen steadily, at least among religious scholars, though awareness of its presence continues to lag far behind Buddhism. While there are more than a dozen books which attempt to survey the history of American Buddhism, only one or two have begun to recount the Hindu saga.¹ However, as part of the 2010 survey of American religious

¹ While few texts attempt broad coverage of American Hinduism, a set of books explore more limited aspects of American Hinduism, including Priya Agarwal, *Passage From India: Post 1965 Indian Immigrants and Their Children* (Palos Verdes, CA: Yuvati, 1991); David Bromley and Larry Shinn, eds., *Krishna Consciousness in the West* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1989); John Y. Fenton,

bodies made once each decade² by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and the Glenmary Research Center, an attempt was made to include the Hindu community. The Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) was asked to conduct a survey of American Hinduism and in that regard carried out the first effort to count adherents to the ever-growing number of American Hindu temples, temple associations, satsang centers and other Hindu-based religious groups across the United States. Responsibility for the survey was delegated to Drs. Constance A. Jones, a professor at the California Institute for Integral Studies, and J. Gordon Melton, the director of ISAR. This paper offers some initial reflections on that survey.

The American Hindu community is built around some 260 relatively new Hindu temples, many constructed more-or-less on traditional Indian architectural patterns, but most housed in buildings previously constructed for other purposes, including a number of former Christian churches. In addition, there are more than 400 American Hindu temples and satsang centers attached to various new Hindu movements that originated in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—movements of what was termed the Hindu Renaissance, a response in large part to British colonialism and Christian missions. With few exceptions, these temples have been created to serve the Indian American community. There are in addition more than a hundred Hindu movements that have largely abandoned temple worship and meet together in meditation centers, often called satsangs, and emphasize one or more Hindu spiritual practices and the theology/philosophy that underlies the various disciplines. The different Hindu movements that include Westerners in their membership have far more meeting locations than the Indian American temples and centers, but far less members, the meditation centers as a whole averaging only ten to fifteen attendees.

Contemporary estimates of the American Hindu community have been made utilizing a variety of sources, primarily from polls. The oft-cited Pew Religious Landscape Survey found 0.4% of its respondents reported a preference for or adherence to Hinduism which would lead to an estimated 1.2 million Hindus in the United States.³ Laying aside all the

Transplanting Religious Traditions: Asian Indians in America (New York: Praeger, 1988); Maxine P. Fisher, *The Indians of New York: A Study of Immigrants from India* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1980); Thomas A. Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes, eds., *Gurus in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-century Explorations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Khyati Y. Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground: Religion, Race, And Ethnicity in Indian America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); M. V. Kamath, *The United States and India, 1776–1976* (Washington, DC: Embassy of India, 1976); Mahalingum Kolapen and Sanjay Kolapen, *Hindu Temples in North America: A Celebration* (Orlando, FL: Hindu University of America, 2002); Prema A. Kurien, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Karen Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Dale Riepe, *The Philosophy of India and Its Impact on American Thought* (Springfield, IL: Thomas, 1970); Wendall Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1930); and Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds., *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

² The 2000 survey appeared as Dale Jones, et al, *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000* (Nashville, TN: Glenmary Research Center, 2002).

³ “Affiliations.” U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. The Pew forum on Religion and Public Life. Posted at <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>. Retrieved February 18, 2011.

reflections on groups that show less than one percent on national surveys, the Pew data has previously represented the best estimate we possess.

Consistent with the methodologies developed for the surveys of religious bodies carried out by the ASARB and Glenmary, ISAR's survey of American Hinduism moved forward in two stages. ISAR has been monitoring the growth of Hinduism in North America throughout the forty years of its existence and had a working list of the different Hindu groups present across the continent. From its files, we initially assembled a list of some 1000 temples and local meditation centers, and went about the process of cleaning the list. Much of that cleaning was done by visiting the website of each temple and checking our data against the contact information found there. In the process we discovered that most of the Internet sites offering directories of American Hindu temples on-line were significantly out of date, having been poorly maintained since their original posting some years ago. We also verified previous observations that the majority of American Hindu temples continue to meet in temporary (i.e., borrowed or rented) facilities and hence move locations at relatively frequent intervals during the period when members are gathering resources to purchase land and erect a more permanent temple home.

During their first generation, temples typically begin life with meetings in the homes of members. As the number of adherents grows, members will rent a meeting hall for special occasions and the more popular holiday celebrations. Members of this proto-temple will, eventually, rent a building for a more stable meeting place and hire a priest who will be available full time for rituals. Lastly land will be purchased and a permanent temple erected.

As we began the process of contacting the various temples, movements, and centers utilizing both snail mail and email, it quickly became evident that hopes of getting a significant amount of our data by such a means were utopian. Thus, in the fall of 2009, we scrubbed our plans and decided to bite the bullet and gather the data by telephone. That meant further revisiting our original mailing list to emphasize possible phone contacts rather than email.

Through 2010, the staff of ISAR contacted each of the 250 American Hindu temples and the more than 100 national and regional movement associations by telephone.⁴ Follow-up visits to temples in and around Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area were made by Drs. Jones and Melton. In the end, we were able to establish contact and do interviews with all but 13 temples. All of the associations but three supplied us with some statistical data on their adherents.

The Development of American Hinduism

Hinduism was introduced to America through the nineteenth-century translations of religious texts, most notably the Bhagavad Gita, much admired by the Transcendentalists Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The first Indian teacher was P. C.

⁴ Most of the calling was done by Ms. June R. Pasco, ISAR's Director of Resources and Information.

Mozoomdar, who on his initial visit to Massachusetts in 1880 gave his initial talk from the porch of Emerson's home in Concord.⁵ Largely unnoticed was the appropriation of Hindu teachings by the early leaders of the New Thought movement, especially Emma Curtis Hopkins, and Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. Mozoomdar would return for the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, but would be overshadowed by the charismatic Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda would also be the catalyst for the founding of the first Hindu group in America—the Vedanta Societies, which early on developed centers in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

In the wake of Vivekananda's success, a number of gurus arrived to test the response levels to Renaissance Hinduism. Baba Bharati founded the first Vaishnava Krishna temple in Los Angeles, and though he stayed only a few years, remnants of his followers were still circulating his writings in southern California as late as the 1970s. Among the Americans who discovered Hinduism was William W. Atkinson, a popular New Thought author, who under the pseudonym of Yogi Ramacharaka published a popular set of books on what he termed Yogi Philosophy that have remained in print to the present day.

The blossoming of a Hindu community was cut short by the passing of the Asian Exclusion Act in 1924. Just prior to that legislation, which had the effect of suppressing the growth of both Hinduism and Buddhism, two gurus had arrived in America who would have immense influence. Swami Yogananda Saraswati arrived in 1922 to attend an interfaith conference sponsored by the Unitarians and stayed in the country to build the Self-Realization Fellowship. Yogananda developed a set of lessons in what he termed kriya yoga (a form of kundalini yoga) that were widely advertised and distributed by mail. Quietly without fanfare he developed a national following. Just before Yogananda arrived, Shree Yogendra, one of the pioneers in reviving yoga in India spent several years in the United States during which time he introduced many to the relatively new (to Americans) practice of hatha yoga. Most importantly, he taught the practice to Benedict Lust, the leading exponent of naturopathic medicine. The current popularity of yoga in America was really launched by Ramacharaka and Yogendra.

Though suppressed for half a century, Hinduism continued to exist through the decades of anti-Asian immigration policies. Several gurus made it into the country and a small Indian community existed. Ram Sekul, the head of a Vedic temple in southern California, became the personal chaplain to actress Mae West and for many years traveled with her personal entourage when she moved around the country. Then at the end of the 1920s, Hinduism received a major blow to further progress in the country with the publication of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*, which painted a devastatingly negative portrait of Indian religious life. This best selling book went through more than thirty printings within a few years and prompted a number of book-length responses, but the damage to Hinduism's reputation had been done. Hindu religious life ceased to grow and yoga would be separated from its Hindu roots and sold as purely a practice to improve one's health. Through the half century following the passing of the Asian Exclusion Act, Hinduism's major ally in the United States would be the Theosophical Society, which regularly

⁵ Sunrit Mullick, *First Hindu Mission to America: The Pioneering Visits of Protap Chunder Mozoomdar* (Northern Book Centre, 2010).

published Hindu-based materials and advocated Hindu ideas such as karma and reincarnation, though it was somewhat hindered after its American-based Indian teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti disassociated from the society in 1929.

Hinduism began to make its comeback immediately after the passing of a new immigration act in 1965 opened the United States to migration from India once again. Annually, Indian teachers arrived in response to what many had perceived as a new generation's call for the spiritual wisdom that India had to offer. Among the first to arrive in the West were Maharishi Melesh Yogi (the TM movement), Swami Bhaktivedanta (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), and Swami Satchidananda (Integral Yoga Institute). The new teachers would initially be welcomed, but the environment changed in the mid 1970s. They become the focus of attention by a new cult awareness movement that pictured them as illegitimately trying to woo young adults away from their careers. Also, as an Indian American community began to form in various urban centers through the mid 1970s, a lay Hindu leadership initially emerged to organize Hindu believers and initiate Hindu temple worship in a manner similar to what they had known in their homeland. The first such Hindu temple, built after seven years of effort by the Hindu Society of North America, opened in Flushing, Long Island, New York, in 1977. Flushing and nearby cities such as Jamaica and Elmhurst would become home to a major cluster of similar temples representing the whole spectrum of Hinduism. Through the 1980s and 1990s, similar clusters of temples would begin to appear in Atlanta, Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Mapping American Hinduism

Now, forty-five years after the change in the immigration laws, a substantial Hindu community has emerged in America. Unlike the Buddhist community, which is largely structured around a number of sectarian organizations analogous to Christian denominations, the largest segment of the American Hinduism community has been given shape around the hundreds of temples, each an autonomous entity unto itself. Most temples belong to one of the larger family traditions (called sampradayas in Hinduism). The three major traditions are the Vaishnavas, who worship the deity Vishnu, known for his having incarnated a number of times, most notably as Krishna, Rama, and Venkateshvara. Saivism is built around the Deity Siva, his spouse Parvati, and their children Ganesha and Murugan. Finally there is a Goddess-oriented Hinduism focused upon the Goddess who may appear as Devi, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, or any number of other deities.

In the United States, the earliest temple in any given community was often built by a group composed of people who came from different areas of India, spoke different languages and represented all three of the major sampradayas. Each sampradaya has its own rituals, observes different holy days, and gathers for distinct major celebrative occasions.

The variant religious needs of the people who built and supported the temple led to the appearance of a new phenomenon, the mixed tradition temple. Rather than being focused on a single deity, such temples give primary space to deities drawn from all three sampradayas, for example, to Krishna and his spouse Radha (Vaishnava), Shiva and Parvati (Shaivite), and Durga (the most common representation of the goddess in American temples). As such mixed temples grow, they may divide and build a second (and even third) temple on an immediately adjacent lot. In such cases, the deity statues related to the second largest group among the temple's corporate members will be moved to the new building.

In those locations with a large Indian American community, temples will be built to serve constituencies from different parts of India—the division between north and south India being most pronounced, but some temples have been created primarily to serve a single language group. The largest groups of Indians from a single Indian state hail from Gujarat, and temples where Gujarati is the primary language is spoken are most noticeable.⁶ In addition, the United States has also received a number of immigrants from the Hindu (mostly Tamil-speaking) community in the Caribbean (especially Trinidad and Guyana), and they have moved to build their own temples.

In addition to the 260 traditional Hindu temples operating within the American community, the Hindu community includes three distinct sets of related Indian-based Hindu movements. The first set of groups includes some two dozen movements that have collectively founded an additional 400 Hindu temples (now in various stages of development). These temples resemble the 260 traditional Hindu temples, differing primarily in (1) their sectarian particulars and (2) their association with like temples in a more or less centralized movement. The second set of groups have their basis in what is termed the Hindu Renaissance of the late nineteenth century. These movements, the first to find their way into the West, are characterized by their largely dispensing with temple worship and replacing it with an emphasis on spiritual practice. Thus, they will form satsang centers for adherents to gather and engage in the practice of yoga and various spiritual disciplines. Finally, there are a variety of new post Renaissance and post World War II movements that have come to the United States since the change in the immigration laws in 1965 and which are typically centered on one new Hindu religious leader/teacher. Like the Renaissance groups, these newer guru-oriented groups have largely found their support outside of the Indian-American society. (See Appendix 1 below for a listing of the different American Hindu groups.)

Within the Indian American community, there are some 400+ temples associated with various reform and revitalization movements that arose in India in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Some of these are clearly attached to one of the major sampradayas (the Vaishnava being the largest), but are built around a new teacher, a special emphasis on practice, some unique idea, or a combination of all three. The Swaminarayan groups, for example, believe that their founding teacher, who lived in the early nineteenth century, was an incarnation of Krishna, and their temples place a representation of him as the central focus of their temples. The Gayatri movement founded by Pandit Sriram

⁶ Usha R. Jain, *The Gujaratis of San Francisco* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

Sharma Acharya (1911-1990) focuses worship on the goddess Gayatri and the repetition of the Gayatri Mantra. The Sai Baba movement is built around reverence for the life and teachings of the popular modern Indian saint Sai Baba of Shirdi (d.1918), not to be confused with the still living guru Sathya Sai Baba. Some of these movements, such as the Krishna Consciousness movement, maintain deity worship and a variety of deity statues are to be found in their temples. Others, such as the Gayatri temples, have but a single deity as the focus of worship. The Sai Baba of Shirdi temples will have a single statue of Sai Baba in the main sanctuary, but may also have a statue of Lord Dattatreya, of whom they believe him an incarnation. Others, such as the Arya Samaj, which has come to the United States primarily by way of the migration of believers from the Caribbean, have dispensed with statues altogether.

Within the Indian American community, the Swaminarayan movement has attained a special role. A very successful Gujarati movement, the Swaminarayan community has split into a number of separate sects, at least nine branches of which have opened temples in the United States. One branch formed in the late nineteenth century, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), has become the single largest identifiable Hindu community in the West. It has also attempted to put a public face to its form of Hinduism through the erection of several very large and elaborate temples, the one outside Atlanta, Georgia, being dubbed the largest Hindu temple in the Western world. (The same movement has also built what is now the largest Hindu temple in India, located in New Delhi.) These new Swaminarayan temples have all become major tourist attractions.⁷

Within this complex of Indian movements, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) also has a somewhat unique place. It was the first Hindu group to establish itself in the West following the change in the immigration law in 1965. It grew out of the Vaishnava bhakti (devotional) movement which had experienced a significant revival in Bengal and eastern India in the late nineteenth century, but in the 1970s the American ISKCON organization attempted to build a movement of Western converts to a form of traditional Indian temple worship. Devotion to Krishna and the related deities, all represented in statues in the Krishna temples, is central to group life. While its American devotees could be counted in the thousands, by the 1980s, the movement had attracted Indian Americans, mostly Gujaratis, in the tens of thousands. Today, while some temples still cater largely to a European American membership, many are completely in Indian American hands.

Hinduism was brought to the United States by the likes of Swami Vivekananda, who represented the more philosophical wing of the Hindu Renaissance and had dispensed

⁷ The movement has also erected prominent temples in suburban London, Houston, Toronto, and Chicago, and (as of early 2011) has one under construction in Los Angeles. On the Swaminarayan movement see: H. T. Dave, *Life and Philosophy of Lord Swaminarayan 1781-1830*. Ed. by Leslie Shepherd (Amdavad, India: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 1996); Hanna Hea-Sun Kim, *Being Swaminarayan: The Ontology and Significance in the Construction of a Gujarati Diaspora* (New York: Columbia, Ph.D. dissertation, 2000); Raymond B. Williams, *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Raymond B. Williams, *A New Face of Hinduism: The Swaminarayan Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

with worship built around the veneration of deities through their representations in pictures or statues. The several movements that grew out of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Yogananda established worship centers (some referred to as temples) devoid of any representations of the traditional Hindu deities. Other gurus who appeared in India through the middle of the twentieth century, including Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Nityananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Ramana Maharshi, all of whom attracted significant Western followings, also abandoned the traditional temple worship built around the veneration of and devotion to the traditional Hindu deities.

Finally, since the end of World war II, hundreds of Indians have founded new religious movements. Some of these new teachers have seen their movement spread through the activity of travelers to India who discovered a teacher, converted, and then became a missionary to the West. More than a hundred, however, have found their way to the West, often establishing an initial base within the Indian American community from which they sought to spread their perspectives on the Hindu tradition to the general population. Some of the gurus who arrived in the 1970s became quite controversial, but as public concern with them faded in the 1990s, the successors to the first wave of gurus along with a new wave of gurus have moved West and quietly built their followings.

Where Are American Hindus Located?

As the Hindu population in America has emerged, it has not been evenly distributed across the country. Clusters of Indian Americans have formed in relatively close proximity to their entry points, America's international airports in New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Miami, Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Approximately a third of all Hindus in the United States are found in two clusters in a mere three states, California New York and New Jersey.

Table 2 Number of Hindu Centers State by State

State	Population 2008	Hindi Centers
California	38,049,462	296
New York	18,976,457	154
New Jersey	8,682,661	96
Texas	20,851,820	95
Florida	15,982,378	72
Illinois	12,419,293	64
Washington	6,549,224	51
Penn.	12,281,054	51
Georgia	9,685,744	45
Mass.	6,497,967	44
Ohio	11,353,140	44

Michigan	9,938,444	41
Oregon	3,790,060	37
Colorado	4,939,456	34
Virginia	7,769,089	32
Maryland	5,633,597	27
Connecticut	3,501,252	27
North Carolina	9,222,414	26

An additional eight states have between 10 and 25 centers: Minnesota (18), Missouri (16), Tennessee, (19), New Mexico (21), Indiana (18), Kansas (13), Utah (11), and Hawaii (15). The remaining states have less than 10 centers, with every state having at least one.

Looking at the states says much about the spread of Hinduism nationally, however, if we turn at look at the counties we become aware of why Hinduism still maintains a relatively low profile in the religious community. While there is at least one Hindu center in every state, a large percentage of the Hindu groups remain small and fragile, having no permanent home or facilities. And rather than being spread somewhat evenly across the country, Hindu centers are clustered in relatively concentrated spots. Of the 3,143 counties and county-equivalents in the United States, the 1625 Hindu temples and satsang centers are found in only 416 (13%) of them. There is as yet no Hindu center in the great majority of America's counties. The majority of Americans do not see Hindu worship centers in their daily routine.

Map 1

The Hindu Population

The ultimate intent of the 2010 Census research was to arrive as a total count of America's Hindu population and its participation in organized religious activity. At this point in time, only an estimate is possible as most of the centers and movements contacted had only approximations of numbers of adherents. The numbers attained, however, resonate with estimates obtained from recent polling on American religious affiliations and preferences. It is part of the transition process to the American system of voluntary support of religious institutions that temples develop an understanding of a supporting membership, at least for the purposes of maintaining a financially sound institution.

Moving to an estimate of the number of Hindus in America is a multi-layered problem. Quite visible are those individuals who participate with some regularity (weekly, monthly) in one of the several hundred Hindu temples or organizations. Secondly, there

is a much larger group that on occasion visit a Hindu temple/group for special events or holy day celebrations, who identify with the temple/group visited, and to some extent support it financially. Finally, there those who think of themselves as Hindus (especially if they have to choose between religious communities with which to identify), who may or may not engage in private family religious activities, but who for various reasons are not active in anyway in supporting the visible Hindu community. It is this latter group that is usually reached by the poll on American religious preferences, and in recent polls that number has been assessed at approximately 1.2 million.⁸ On one border, this latter group of inactive self-identified Hindus fades into the community of secular Indian Americans who at present profess no religious faith though they may hold some personal spiritual ideals. This largest group of “Hindus” becomes somewhat visible during Divali, a Hindu holy day that has become a widely celebrated and secularized national Indian holiday that nevertheless retains much of its religious flavor (much as Christmas is celebrated in the larger Christian culture).

This report is, however, primarily concerned with the first two groups who manifest some active relationship to a Hindu temple or group. Of the 258 traditional Hindu temples in America, 241 have reported membership figures totaling 249,097. This represents a core number of active adherents plus the larger community envisioned as being served by the temple. In addition, we asked each temple the number of people who attended the largest event (holy day) in the last year. As a whole, that number was lower than the reported membership. If the 17 non-reporting temples are taken as a group to be somewhat equal in size to the reporting temples, with an average membership of 1033, an estimated 19,276 members can be added. Thus a total number of 268,364 adherents can be seen to attend and support the 258 traditional temples in the United States. That represents approximately 22 percent of the total number of people who self-identify as Hindus in the United States.

The various temples associations formed by those temples from the several sub-traditions of the Hindu faith present a more complicated situation. The largest temples are associated with the single largest association, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). It reports some 25,000 affiliated families, or roughly 100,000 members in its 57 temples. Its larger temples have become popular and well-advertised tourist attractions that are visited by thousands of pilgrims and hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. Apart from it, however, the association temples appear to fall into the same range of membership and constituencies manifest by the traditional community-based temples.

There are approximately 400 association-based temples and the associated smaller centers that are in the process of evolving into a temple. Of the 41 temple associations, 25 have reported their membership:

All World Gayatri Pariwar	10	8000
Shri Surya Narayan Mandir	2	350

⁸ In 2007, the Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey found that approximately 0.4 percent of the population self-identified as Hindu. In 2010, the Census reported a population of 308,745,538.

Congress of Arya Samajs in North America	26	1200
American Sevashram Sangha of NA (BSSNA)	7	2000
ISKCON (Int. Society of Krishna Consciousness)	47	75000
Global Organization for Divinity (G.O.D.)	11	200
VRINDA/ Vrindavan Institute for Vaisnava Culture and Studies	2	50
Sai Baba of Shirdi Temple	21	20000
Sant Shri Asarmaji Ashram	20	5000
Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)	57	100000
Anoopam Mission	1	10000
Laxmi Narayan Dev (Spiritual organization)/ LNSO, Vadtal Temple	5	14,000
Maningar Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan (MSSGS)	1	2000
Original Shree Swaminarayan Sampraday (Under Shree Nar Narayan Dev Gadi)	19	7000
Shree Swaminarayan Gurukul, USA	1	5000
Swaminarayan Mandir Vasna Sanstha (SMVS)	2	2000
Yogi Divine Society/Illinois HQ/Waukegan Mandir	2	300
Yogi Divine Society/Hari Dham/Hindu Swami Narayan Temple + Cultural Center	2	5000
Datta Yoga Centers USA	3	3000
Five Fold Path Inc./Agnihotra Worldwide	1	500
Nithyananda Vedic Temples/Life Bliss Foundation	7	3000
Sadhu Vaswami Centers	11	6500
The Sambodh Society	1	700
Veerashaiva Samaja of North America	14	2000

Together they account for 169 of the 400 temples and have a reported 183,000 members

Among those associations that have not reported their membership, there are 54 centers reported as temples and 177 centers reported as a more informal group (satsang, chapter, center etc.) If we assume that the association temples average the same as the traditional community based temple, or approximately 1000 members and that the chapters and satsangs are smaller, around 250, we have found some 98,000 adherents.⁹ The temple associations thus account for an additional 282,000 Hindu believers.

The 40 groups of the Hindu Renaissance associations present a more complicated problem of assessment. While several of the older groups (such as the Vedanta Societies and the Self-Realization Fellowship) have an old and established membership/constituency, as a whole they have been reluctant to publish any membership figures. Most of the newer groups will publish lists of local affiliated centers but either refuse to count members or have shown little interest in offering any

⁹ We believe this to be a generous figure, but one that can become a future beginning point for further research.

assessment on the number of members. Many operate without any formal membership at all, though they have a core of dedicated supporters who attend regularly scheduled events. While almost all the groups have a permanent worship center attached to their headquarters, and many affiliated groups have similar facilities, the majority of groups affiliated with the Renaissance organizations meet informally in borrowed or rented facilities and have a minimal visibility in the communities in which they meet.

It has been observed that such informal groups, while on occasion growing larger, will overwhelmingly range between 5 and 25 adherents in size, averaging about a dozen regular participants. At the same time, none of the groups have the large constituencies manifest in the traditional Hindu temples. Even though physical facilities can be relatively small, they can often accommodate a worshipping community in the thousands. Based upon these observations, some estimate of the total membership/constituency of the Renaissance groups can be made. As of 2010 it is estimated that the total number of adherents of the 40 groups can be set at approximately 20,000.

Reaching an assessment of the last set of groups, the Post-renaissance Guru groups, is the most difficult task. The majority simply have no membership figures to offer, and many operate as non-membership organizations. In contrast, a few groups are large international organizations with 100 or more affiliated centers of activity in the United States. At the other extreme, some are relatively new, having been founded in the last decade, and have but a single center of activity. A few are large internationally, with centers in multiple countries, but have only one or two centers within the United States.

The largest of the post-Renaissance groups are the associated activity centers that facilitate the global activity of Mata Amritanandmayi (with 110 centers); the International Sai Organization headed by Satya Sai Baba (with 225 centers); Sahaja Yoga headed by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi (with 125 centers); and the movement founded by the late Sri Chinmoy (which declined participation in this survey). Each is an international movement with many centers in the United States. While each of these movements has dozens of affiliated centers, each center is relatively small. They may be as small as 3 to 5 people and rarely more than 25, with 10 to 15 an average size.

In addition, those groups which have but a single US center generally have from 50 to 100 participants, while a few may have more adherents, and an uncounted number of correspondents who have professed interest from a distance. Those groups meeting in borrowed or rented facilities generally average about a dozen (5 to 25) participants. Based upon these assumptions, we can reach a total estimate of 35,000 adherents to the Post-Renaissance groups.

Summary

	No. of Centers	Members/Participants
Traditional temples	248	268,000
Temple Associations	400	282,000

Renaissance groups	292	20,000
Post-Renaissance Groups	650	35,000

Adding all the figures proposed above together, we reach an estimated 606,000 active participating Hindus¹⁰ in the United States as of the end of 2010. If we assume that for every person who participates in some organized Hindu activity, that there is another who identifies with the community but at present is not manifesting their preference in any visible manner, we come very close to the figures reached in polls of the number of people self identifying as Hindus.

It is also difficult to assess from our present state of knowledge as to the percentage of Indian Americans included in the count. The first two groups of temples almost totally consist of Indian Americans, though a number of Westerners are to be found in a few groups such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The two latter groupings are predominantly made up of Western converts, but several of the movements, including the International Sai Organization, have received an influx of Indian members in the last few decades.

This first attempt at a census of American Hindus remains less than satisfactory in many regards. On the one hand, it resonates with the findings of recent polls and shows a vital growing Hindu community, though one that is somewhat smaller than what many had projected. Like other Asian groups, the Indian American community includes both a measurable segment that adheres to various forms of Christianity and a large number of people who currently neither practice nor profess any belief in a religion. At the same time, American Hinduism exists on an upward trajectory, growing at a rate far ahead of population growth, though substantially less than what had appeared to be happening in the 1970s when the Transcendental Meditation movement initiated over a million non-Asian Americans into its practice. Following a set of significant setbacks, including the loss of several highly publicized court cases, however, the majority of TM practitioners abandoned both their meditation practice and the organization from which they had learned it. Meanwhile, in the last generation a much more substantial movement of highly committed people has created a more permanent religious community that has taken its place as a primary American minority religious tradition.

¹⁰ It is noted that one movement about which only partial material has been received, and whose complete figures might measurable effect the total is the Global Country of World Peace, better known as the TM (Transcendental Meditation) movements, but it is extremely difficult to assess at present due to its rapidly changing organization in the wake of its founders' death.

Appendix 1

Table 1. Hindu Movements in America

I. Indian-American temples

Mixed tradition temples
Vaishnava temples
Saivite temples
Goddess temples

II. Indian-American Sectarian traditions

All-World Gayatri Pariwar

Gayatri Pariwar U.S.A.
 Gayatri Pariwar – Yug Nirman
 Gayatri Pariwar Yug Nirman Yojna Chicago
 Shri Surya Narayan Mandir

Arya Samaj

Bharat Sevashram Sangha of North America

Chinmaya Mission West

Divya Jyoti Jagrati Sansthan (Divine Light Awakening Mission)

Girnar Sadhana Ashram (formerly Anasuya Foundation)

Krishna Consciousness Tradition

ISKCON
 Sri Chaitanya Sanga
 Sri Chaitanya Saraswati Mandal
 Global Organization for Divinity (G.O.D.)
 Prabhupada Sankirtan Society
 Science of Identity Foundation
 VRINDA
 Jagadguru Kripalu Parishat (Aka International Society of Divine Love)

Sai Baba of Shirdi

Sant Shri Asarmaji Ashram

Swaminarayan

Bohasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS)
 The Original Shree Swaminarayan Sampraday (Under Shree Nar
 Narayan Dev Gadi) (ISSO)
 Shree Swaminarayan Gurukul, Rajkot
 Swaminarayan Mandir Vasna Sanstha
 Yogi Divine Society (New Jersey)
 Yogi Divine Society (Illinois)
 Shree Swaminarayan Sidhhant Sajivan Mandal

Laxmi Narayan Dev Spiritual Organization
 Maninagar Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan
 Anoopam Mission

Additional groups

Avadhoota Datta Peetham (Mysore, India)
 Fivefold Path
 International Society for Spiritual Advancement
 International Nithyananda Vedic Temples aka Life Bliss Foundation
 Pushtimargiya Vaishnav Samaj
 Sadhu Vaswani Mission
 The Sambodh Society
 Shree RamKibir Bhakta Samaj of USA
 Sree Rama Dasa Mission
 Shri Krishna Pranami Association of U.S.A. and Canada
 Sri Premananda Centers
 Veerashaiva Samaja of North America
 Vishwa Dharma Mandalam (Ramakrishnananda Yoga Vedanta Mission)

III. Hindu Renaissance Traditions

Nityananda/Muktananda

Adidam, Avataric Pan-Communion of
 SYDA Yoga Dham
 The Movement Center (formerly Nityananda Institute)
 Shanti Mandir
 Additional Independent centers

Ramana Maharshi/Advaita

Arunachala Ashrama
 Avadhuta Foundation
 EnlighteNext (A. Cohen)
 Gangaji Foundation
 Meeting in Truth with Isaac (Shapiro) and Meike
 Open Gate Sangha (Adyashanti)
 Satsang with Robert
 Satsang with Stuart
 Society of Abidance in Truth

Sivananda Tradition

Divine Life Society
 Institute for Holistic Yoga/ Satyananda Ashram
 Integral Yoga International
 North American Gurukul
 Prana Yoga Centres International

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres
 Yasodhara Ashram
 Independent centers

Vivekananda Vedanta

Vedanta Societies
 Self Revelation Church of Absolute Monism
 SRV Associations of Oregon, San Francisco, and Hawaii
 Vedanta Centre and Ananda Ashrama

Yogananda/Babaji Lineage

Self Realization Fellowship
 Amrita Foundation
 Ananda Church of Self Realization
 CSA (Roy Eugene Davis)
 Cross and the Lotus
 Haidakhan Samaj
 Hariharananda Mission West
 Hamsa Yoga Sangh
 International Babaji Kriya Yoga Sangam (S. A. A. Ramaiah)
 Kriya Yoga Ashram (Swami Shankarananda Giri)
 Kriya Yoga International
 Kriyayoga of Babaji (Guru Gyan swami)
 Self Enquiry Life fellowship
 Temple of Kriya Yoga

IV. Post Renaissance Guru groups

Advaita Fellowship
 Ajapa Yoga Foundation
 American Meditation Society
 American Yoga Association
 Amrit Yoga Institute
 Amritanandamayi, Disciples of Mata
 Ananda Ashram
 Ananda Marga Yoga Society
 Aurobindo Centers
 Blue Mountain Center of Meditation,
 Brahma Kumaris
 Dhyanyoga Centers
 Devanand Yoga Centers/International Divine Realization Society,
 Devi Mandir
 Global Country of World Peace (TM movement)
 Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy
 Hohm Community

International Sai Organization
International Sanatana Dharma Society
Isha Foundation, Inc./Isha Institute of Inner Sciences,
Kashi Ashram Ranch,
Krishnamurti Foundation of America,
The Kundalini Research Foundation
Louix Dor Dempriey Foundation,
Mahayog Foundation
Modern Seers (formerly Abhidhyan Yoga Institute)
Mother Meera Foundation USA
Oneness Movement,
Osho International
The Pranayama Institute
Scha Dham Ashram
Sadhana Ashram
Sahaja Yoga, World Council for the Advancement of (WCASY)
Saiva Siddhanta Church
Shanti Yoga Institute and Yoga Retreat
Shri Shri Shri Shivabalayogi Maharaj Ashram Trust
Shri Ram Chandra Mission, SMVA Trust (Sri Karunamayio
Spiritual Realization Institute
Sri Chinmoy Centre
Truth Consciousness
World Community Service Centre
Yoga in Daily Life

