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## The President's Message

Last weekend I had the privilege to attend a garden party hosted by the Hon. Philip Ruddock, to celebrate his 39 years in Parliament. Philip has been associated with and been a long term friend of the AISV and he celebrated this event at a beautiful property called 'Dunrath', in West Pennington Hills in NSW. Amongst the invitees there were five other local Indian community leaders. The Premier of NSW, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, was a special guest.



Though it was a celebratory party, the Premier, in his speech, blasted the leaders of the Muslim riots and vowed to use the full force of the law to punish the people responsible so as to deter others from partaking in any such organised riots ever again.

The leader of the opposition, The Hon. Tony Abbott has said about the rioters, quote, "you can bring your heritage with you but you must leave your hatred behind". I feel strongly that this is a very appropriate message for those communities who harbour old hatred and animosities and bring these along with them to Australia. Riots do not resolve anything and though the hurt and damage caused by these riots has almost died down, the offending film is still on 'You Tube'. In this respect nothing has changed.

I have not seen the offending film and I believe the producer of the film has now been arrested, not for producing the offending film but for breach of his parole, suggesting that he has had a criminal past.

Last year, a local fashion designer in Australia had printed the pictures of the Goddess Lakshmi – a highly revered Hindu goddess of wealth - on her bikini tops and pants. The placement of the pictures was very offensive to all Indians. A simple phone call to the fashion designer airing our concerns brought on a quick apology and withdrawal of the offending product from the shops. The problem was resolved very quickly and without any street protests.

Incidents such as these will occur from time to time and I feel it is difficult for any government to control the action of any one individual responsible for such incidents. There cannot be any world legislation passed to prevent blasphemy. We need to stay calm and try to peacefully negotiate to have the offensive material removed from public view as deemed necessary.

## Inside this newsletter

Place of Women in Indian society and support systems

Page 2

Independence day celebrations announcement

Page 3

Membership Application form

Page 4

## Vice President's Message

### Place of Women in Indian Society and Support Systems

Nehru in his book *Discovery of India* (1946) described the position of women in Indian society as not good dating back to Manu's description in Vedas. Vedic religion was a patriarchal religion, although in pre-historic times of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilization (4000bc) there existed a cult of a great goddess. Many terracotta coins of mother goddess on one side and a man with a sickle on the other side were discovered. This reverence for woman as a goddess declined as the ascendance of patriarchy in Vedas took hold (Klostermaier 2006). Nonetheless many Indian women have earned a great place in history of India and many goddesses like Durga (Goddess of power), Saraswati (Goddess of knowledge and music) and Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) are revered by millions of Indian men and women. In modern times names include the likes of Indra Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and many more who have carved out a similar place in Indian hearts and minds.



James Mills (1780) an English historian wrote the sophistication of a society is judged by the position of its women.

How does the power balance between the two genders play out in Indian homes?

Manu, the ancient law giver of medieval times defined the legal position of women in India. They were dependent on a male - father, husband or the son. In law they were not independent. Yet there was a contradiction with reverence for women as Devis or goddesses. Many homes gave and still do give an honored place to women in the home. Manu himself also said where women are honored gods dwell!

Living in Melbourne we Indians do not wish to believe women are not always guaranteed honored place in the home. The rates of domestic violence in India are said to range between 16-69%. In some parts of India including educated North India many female babies are aborted and girl children are neglected. There can never be too many sons according to some but we do not want too many daughters! We want to believe Indian migrants leave such undesirable practices back in India Unfortunately a recent American research study has shown that female foeticide is going on in modern Indian families of USA and Canada. Similarly domestic violence against women is common. Many Indians know at least one family in their network where domestic violence is going on. The woman and children suffer in silence for years. But no one seeks help? Why is this happening? What we as a community should do about it? How can men be a part of the solution, not a problem?

The diversity of India is huge, yet with all the differences there is a striking resemblance in Indians especially apparent when Indians migrate.

Indian Diaspora in Australia may be from Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, Delhi, South India, Rajasthan and all look very different, speak different languages, eat different foods and yet there is the same Indian heritage of ancient values, moral qualities and mental attitudes. The Indian homes carry a distinctive Indian culture inheritance which runs more than 5000 years deep.

A window into our heritage is to be found in old Chinese scholar Hsuan –Tsang's book described in Nehru's *Discovery Of India* (1946). The book "Si-Yu-Ki" meaning The Record of the Western Kingdom (India) written in 7<sup>th</sup> century, travelling through India he observed "in the behavior of ordinary people there is much gentleness and sweetness, in their government there is remarkable rectitude ... in administering justice they are considerate. ....there are very few criminals and rebels and only occasionally troublesome. ....system of education which began early (4000 BC) and proceeded by stages to university (Taxilla and Nalanda) .... 5 branches of knowledge are taught- Grammar, Science and arts crafts, Medicine, Logic, and Philosophy. As the administration of government is founded on benign principles, the executive is simple."

This depth of culture has survived waves of assaults over centuries which are possibly attributable to a certain resilience of the Indian character and mentality. Indians are social, hardworking, gentle, peace loving, have love of learning, revere education, get strength from their religion and love festivals. Another traveler Arrian, the Greek historian accompanying King Alexander the great 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC was struck by the fun loving nature of Indians. He wrote "No nation is fonder of singing and dancing than the Indian". Not once in 4000 years there is recorded Indian invasion of any country. Yet the country was invaded countless times by others.

One assault on Indian women was introduction of the custom of purdah (literally curtain) and seclusion around 1200CE influenced by Mughals. The position of women in India deteriorated considerably according to Nehru. They were excluded from any social intercourse outside the family. Nehru viewed seclusion and isolation of women as a barbarous custom "it injures women, men, children and society as a whole." Gandhi cited in Nehru(1946)urged Indians to give women equal status and liberty and opportunities by removing the seclusion and isolation of women as he believed that the social isolation further downgraded their position in the family. He bitterly condemned domestic slavery of women; he saw the joint family system as perpetrating inequality.

In the joint family system the laws of inheritance were designed to avoid transfer of property to another family and as the woman after marriage was seen as changing her family she could not be trusted with the original family 's property and inheritance.

She continued to be seen as the dependent of her husband and later her son. She could not hold property in her own name, there were rare exceptions.

Leaders like Gandhi and Nehru sought to give legal and moral impetus to change, the change that started slowly in 1947 is now visible among the middle and educated classes .No doubt the Indian Diaspora of Australia is modern, educated and willing to challenge old notions that no longer serve beneficial purpose. Community support networks consisting of volunteers - 15 men and 15 women from West, South and North Melbourne would be very well placed to support vulnerable victims- women, children and male victims, such network would also be in a strong position to put in prevention and education campaigns.

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## Independence day Celebration

Australia India Society of Victoria is celebrating India's 65 years of Independence on Saturday 3 November 2012 at 7.00PM at the Punjabi Masala Restaurant, 2-6 Market Street, Nunawading 3131. This function has been combined with the continuing 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of AISV. In addition the trustees of the Victorian Indian Community Charitable Trust will outline its plans to build an Indian Community Resource Centre and hopes to display plans for the Community Centre at this function for your feedback.

The format of the evening is a cultural program and a three course dinner (BYO Alcohol). Soft drinks will be provided

Tickets \$30 for Members and \$35 for Non-members.

For bookings contact the committee members



# Membership Application/Renewal

(Please Print)

New Application .....Renewal.....

Title/s .....

First Name.....Surname.....

Partner/Spouse's First Name.....Surname.....

Children's names

1.....

2.....

3.....

Address

.....

City .....Post Code .....

Tel (B/H) .....Tel: (A/H) .....

Mobile: .....

Email: .....

Other Details: (Hobbies, Interests)

.....

.....

Would you be interested to join the committee of AISV Yes ..... No.....

Membership Category (Circle one) Life: \$500, Family: \$80, Concession: \$50, Single: \$50

Do you want a receipt Yes/ No

I hereby apply/renew membership of AISV in the above category. I am aware of the rules and regulations of the society.

.....

Signature / Date

Membership Application may be sent to:

**P O Box 482, Brunswick VIC 3056**