

## **It is a special privilege to be born a Hindu: Francois Gautier**

**NEW YORK, *August 10, 2009* :** Noted French journalist and writer Francois Gautier who has made India his home and propagation of Hinduism his cause and mission for over three decades, is currently traveling across the US to raise funds through his foundation, [FACT – India](#), for the setting up of an Indian history museum in Pune, India.

Gautier, perhaps one of the very few Westerners to have unconditionally adopted a Hindu way of life, feels the widely prevalent distorted image of Indian history as propagated by the British, Christian missionaries, communists and the western world in general for over two centuries, has necessitated the museum to portray Hindu civilization in the right light.

In an interview with India Post during his visit to New York last week, Gautier spoke about the many threats to Hinduism in today's world and how Hindus can gain the respect of the world.

### **IP: Can you tell us about the Museum of Indian History?**

Gautier: I have been donated some land in Pune by a private trust where I want to build the museum to be called the Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Museum of Indian History.

I see in India there are no museums of Indian history worth the name. So the idea is to start from the Vedas, go on to talk about the greatness of the whole of India and the entire drama of the invasions through history, the Hindu holocaust, and then portray India of today and tomorrow.

### **IP: What kind of funds do you need and how long will it take to complete the museum?**

Gautier: It's a huge project but definitely it will happen. It's about \$40m dollars, and I don't know how long it will take — perhaps 10-20 years, because I don't have the money right away. But I am ready to start, once I start, the donations will come and people will understand the importance of this museum.

### **IP: Why is it important to have such a museum?**

Gautier: As a journalist and writer, when I started documenting for my book, I realized that most history books on India are based upon very old theories considered defunct or debatable such as the Aryan invasion theory, which evidence shows has never taken place.

Both British historians and later Nehruvian historians have toned down the considerable impact on Indian culture of the invasions starting from Alexander the Great to the Arabs, the Muslim invaders and the British — that entire part of the history has been swept under the carpet. And even later, the history of India's Independence is very unfairly portrayed.

The need of the museum is very important so we can look at India's history in a very scientific manner, which is what my organization FACT India is doing.

**IP: Will the museum focus only on the Hindu history of India?**

Gautier: The museum will also broach upon many of India's dark periods in its history like the inquisition in Goa by the Portuguese, the Sufi persecution, the Ahmedi Muslim persecution in Bangladesh, how the Buddhist history was wiped out and how some of the early Syrian Christians of Kerala were persecuted. And of course the Hindu holocaust right from Hindu Kush (massacre of Hindus) to the current terrorist activities against them.

I want school children to come to the museum and learn of their own culture and be proud. Kids in Indian schools are learning about Shakespeare and Milton, not about their Hindu or Indian culture. In my country we are taught about great French people like our poets, social reformers, artists etc... so I grew up proud of my culture, but Indian kids do not grow up learning about or feeling proud of their culture.

**IP: Do you see any kind of opposition to your project from either the government or any section of the Indian society?**

Gautier: Of course there's bound to be some opposition, you can't make everybody happy. But one has to go by the truth. Whatever one's limitations, if backed by truth, even if it is opposed, there will be some kind of direction and protection.

In fact, there are three reasons for setting up the museum in Pune: One— of course the land donated is in Pune; second— since I work in Pune, I found that people of Pune, irrespective of their political affiliations, are quite nationalistic in nature. I feel my museum will be more protected in Pune than anywhere else in India; thirdly— Pune is Shivaji's birth place. There is no museum of Shivaji anywhere in Maharashtra though he is a true hero. So naming it after Shivaji will be a protection for this museum.

**IP: Over the many years of your career, how successful have you been in changing western perceptions of Hinduism?**

Gautier: It's a very difficult task, because unfortunately the image of Hinduism is not that good. But, there is more ignorance than hostility. Westerners do not know that it is a monotheistic religion. Secondly, Hindus, especially Brahmins have been at the receiving end of many like the British, the missionaries, the Islamic invaders all of who created a very negative image of Hinduism — particularly the missionaries emphasized only the negative sides of Hinduism and amplified them a thousand times. Today we still find that even after 200 years, these negative images have survived even in the minds of Hindus in India.

Unfortunately it is a great handicap for journalists like me who like Hinduism and want to defend it. I can't say I have been very successful, but at least now westerners are open to going to India and understanding Hindus.

There are so many good things to be said for Hinduism, but unfortunately there is no will among Hindus to try to explain to westerners. Hindus are just content to come to the West and melt into local cultures or at best keep their spirituality and religion to themselves.

**IP: What do you think of the role of the Indian intellectual elite and media in projecting the image of Hindus?**

Gautier: The British have left such a mark on the minds of much of Indian intelligentsia and elite, right from the erstwhile Maharajas who have copied the British way of life that it has left a deep impression on generations after that. Today Indians think that everything that comes from the West is good. It's very stupid, because many things in the West have failed like family values etc.

This generation of Indian intelligentsia is aping Marxism so brilliantly, which is dead even in Russia, and is probably only left in Cuba, but I don't see why Indians should copy Cuba (laughs).

Look at the Chinese, they are so proud of their culture; nobody dares to fiddle with them, even America will not dare to interfere with their affairs.

**IP: Many Hindus fear the very survival of Hinduism in the face of Islamic fundamentalism. How real are their fears?**

Gautier: The fear is very real. I see there are five or six enemies that may be covertly or overtly attacking Hinduism. In the past there was any one threat at a time like the Greek, British or Muslim invasions. But today, there are the threats of Muslim fundamentalism, Christian conversions, Marxist onslaught, Westernization and so on which are eroding the Indian culture all at the same time. However, there are many great gurus today like Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and others who are repackaging the Hindu tenets like spirituality, pranayama, yoga, ayurveda etc for everyone's easy consumption while not associating them with Hinduism. Though I do not agree with that, it's an important movement today and helping to preserve that culture.

It's true that Hinduism is under attack and it looks frightening at times. That's why the museum is so important.

**IP: Have you ever felt conflicted about the culture you were born into and the one you adopted?**

Gautier: Personally I have never felt conflicted, but people of my country often do not understand why I defend the Hindus— that has been a bit of a problem. Though my country is sympathetic to India, when you touch the intellectual layer

– people who are fed on the Nehruvian history and the downgrading of Hindu culture, I have come into conflict sometimes with these people. But for me living in India is a protection; people often appreciate the work I do. Some of my friends do not understand why I poke the dangerous Islamic fundamentalism by defending Hindus. I started speaking about it (Islamic fundamentalism) 20-25 years ago when it was not at all politically correct to speak about it. Even those friends who like me sometimes do not really understand me. I have faced a lot of hostility also.

**IP: What can Hindus living in America do to preserve their culture?**

Gautier: For Hindus living in the US, whether first or second generation, it is important that they carry their Hinduness. It is a special privilege to be born a Hindu, because you inherit the knowledge which is very ancient and very practical. Also the many Hindu groups which are scattered should unite to become a lobby like the Jews. They should teach their children to be proud of being Hindu while being faithful to their Americanness. They should create a lobby in the US to be able to influence South Asia policy at the administration level and see that it does not cap India's nuclear policy.

**IP: Is there something that really frustrates you?**

Gautier: Hindus don't think big. Most Hindu movements in the US have mostly people without a vision, they don't unite; it's very frustrating. When I last visited the US in 2002, the Hindu community was more vibrant, today I find many of the Hindu leaders of that time burnt out or taken a back seat or gone back into mainstream life; that is saddening. If only Hindus knew their own power — there are one billion in the world — Islam is conscious of its might and its numbers; Christianity though on the decline, is conscious of its greatness in terms of technology and power. Hindus, who are not all that small in number, have to use more muscle. Meekness and submissiveness will not take them far, they have to show muscle power. That's the way to get respect in the world.

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