

### Ram Navmi Celebrated With Religious Fervor

#### Source

SRINAGAR,INDIA, Apr 8, 2014 (Rising Kashmir, by Sumaiya Yousuf): Ram Navami, the birth anniversary of Lord Rama, was celebrated in Summer Capital with religious fervor and gaiety on Tuesday ending their nine-day-long fast of Chaitra Navratri. Hundreds of devotees thronged the temples since morning to pay obeisance. Havans, sankirtans and preeti bhoj were conducted. The local pujaris (priests) had organized rallies and other functions that were conducted smoothly.

A group of Kashmiri pandits told Rising Kashmir that they conducted the festival effortlessly. Expressing gratitude to Muslim community, they said that they were very happy to see Muslim brothers and sisters helping and supporting them. “We are pleased to see how everyone is supporting and enjoying our festival, we could see our Muslim brothers smiling and cheering with us so what could be better than this feeling on such a precious day,” another devotee from Karan Nagar Varun Gupta said. In several other places across Kashmir, Rath Yatra (religious processions) of murthis of Lord Rama and Sita are also organized, with devotees chanting hymns.

According to Kashmiri Pandit Sangarsh Samiti, an organization of Kashmiri Pandits staying in Kashmir valley, currently there are 651 families with of population of 2,764 Kashmiri Pandits staying in and outside Srinagar [against a pre-1995 population of more than 100,000]. As per the Indian online pages, J&K has 10,143,700 total population

and among them 3,005,349 are Hindu population maintaining 29.6% of the total population.

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### U.S. Congressman Introduces Legislation Make Religious Workers Visa Program Permanent

#### Source

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 10, 2014 (Hindu American Foundation): Leaders of the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) applauded the introduction of the Freedom of Faith Act by Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) earlier today. The Foundation worked closely with Rep. Honda on the legislation, which permanently reauthorizes the Special Immigrant Non-Minister provision of the Religious Worker Visa program. The Religious Worker Visa program is considered essential to many faith communities in the U.S., particularly Hindus, who rely on the program for the continued vitality of their places of worship.

“Unlike other faiths, Hindus lack facilities in the United States to train priests and religious workers here,” said Harsh Voruganti, Esq., HAF’s Associate Director of Public Policy. “We depend heavily upon the Religious Worker Visa to effectively staff our temples and religious institutions.” “For over two decades, Congress has reauthorized this program time and time again.” Rep. Honda stated. “It’s time we do what’s right for our communities of faith and make permanent this program that allows workers who lead worship, officiate events, and offer

pastoral care, to receive temporary visas like ministers and faith leaders do.”

Absent Congressional action, the Special Immigrant Non-Minister provision is scheduled to expire in September 2015. The provision has been consistently renewed by Congress every three years, but supporters argue that the constant need for renewal is inefficient and hurts houses of worship. “Houses of worship, like businesses, cannot function in uncertainty,” noted Padma Kuppa, a member of HAF’s Board of Directors and a prominent interfaith activist in Greater Detroit. “It’s difficult for a temple or church to make long-term management decisions when we don’t know if this vital program will exist next year. The Freedom of Faith Act solves this dilemma.”

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## **Panchavadyams And Poorams: Spectacles Of North Kerala**

Source

KERALA, INDIA, April 9, 2014 (Press Information Bureau): The months of April and May, when the temperatures soar and the countryside is soaked daily in the brightest of sunlight, villages and small towns in the Malabar region (Northern parts) of Kerala reverberate to the exciting rhythms of various instruments. The colorful and musical festivals of Poorams are held during this period.

The pooram festivals are conducted with the local temple as the centre. The biggest and most colorful festival takes place at Vadakkumnathan temple in Thrissur and is called Thrissur Pooram. It happens during the Malayalam month of Medam (April/

May). Another important festival not far from Thrissur is the Arattupuzha Pooram, which has around 60 elephants. This year the Arattupuzha pooram is being celebrated on April 11.

Thrissur pooram, the grandest spectacle of all has its beginnings during the reign of Sakthan Thampuran - one of the strongest rulers of the erstwhile kingdom of Kochi. He is said to have started the system of staging a grand pooram festival in repentance of having accidentally beheaded an oracle (what is locally known as a velichappadu - one who acts as a spokesperson for the local deity).

Panchavadyam, a rhythmic orchestra, that may feature more than 100 artists, playing five (pancha) different kind of instruments, is one of the major ingredients of the Pooram festivals. The term panchavadyam literally means an orchestra of five instruments. It is basically a temple art form that has evolved in Kerala. Of the five instruments, four — timila, maddalam, ilathalam and idakka — belong to the percussion category, while the fifth, the kombu, is a wind instrument

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