

Indian American woman to be honoured as 'Champions of Change'

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Washington: An Indian American woman is among 12 faith leaders to be honoured as "Champions of Change" by the White House for their efforts in protecting environment and communities from the effects of climate change.

Sunita Viswanath, the only Indian American to figure in the list, has been selected for her work to encourage Hindus to take care of the environment.

Working with women's and human rights organisations for almost three decades, Sunita is co-founder and active board member of the 14-year-old front-line women's human rights organisation, Women for Afghan Women.

"Sunita is also co-founder and board member of Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus, living and building a Hinduism that prioritises social justice, and upholding the Hindu principles of ekatva (oneness), ahimsa (non-violence) and sadhana (faith in action)," the White House said.

"Sunita is being honoured for her work with Sadhana to encourage Hindus to live out these principles by taking care of the environment," it added.

Born in Chennai, Viswanath says her childhood was steeped in ritualistic practice of Hinduism.

"I have always been secure in my identity as a Hindu. Growing up, I thought a lot about faith and religion, but I also had a very strong sense of social justice-what was fair," Sunita said.

"I imbibed profound lessons of love and justice from my religious upbringing, from the stories we were told, the prayers we learned, the texts we read. I went on as an adult to devote my life to advancing social justice causes, particularly women's human rights," she said.

"If Hinduism cares deeply about all people and all living beings, then there must be an active, vocal Hindu movement for social justice and human rights today," she said, adding that a small group of like-minded individuals got together to explore this question and Sadhana was born.

One of the project of Sadhana is Project Prithvi - a grassroots green project, which mobilise Hindus, especially the youth, to live out the principle of ahimsa by taking care of the environment.

Currently, they are working on a project to clean up specific beaches in Jamaica Bay where Hindus worship and litter the place.

- IANS