1993 Year in Review
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It was a year of Orwellian drama-the simmering Ayodhya affair with promises by hyper-Hindus to reclaim more Hindu temples under Muslim mosques, keeping Hindu-Muslim relations on edge. This at a time when the Parliament of the World's Religions and other interfaith efforts are trying to keep everybody on harmonious ice. Events in 1993 ranged from a Japanese producer creating an outstanding animated Ramayana to satellite TV bringing the best and the worst of western programming to every nook of India. Revered Hindu leaders passed on, and new ones gained recognition. And, once again, the Hindu youth appear to be riding taller on the horizon.

India Explodes as Militant Hindus Raze Muslim Memorial

In five frantic hours on December 6th, 1992, thousands of irate Hindus clambered over and tore down the 460-year-old Babri Masjid memorial in Ayodhya, India, a town historically pinpointed as Rama's birthplace. The Masjid was built by soldiers of the Afghan conqueror Babur on the ruins of a hallowed 800-year-old Rama temple . The razing of the memorial that morning was the nuclear trigger for deadly riots and an ominous chain reaction of temple destruction and damage by Muslims that spread around the globe and into 1993. By January the Indian government had banned the VHP and RSS-the two sister organizations blamed for the crisis. The RSS has since been released from the ban, the VHP has not.

A poll showed only 29% of India approved the demolition, but 72% say the structure shouldn't be rebuilt. Swamis were split evenly between condemning the act of anarchy and supporting it.

Abortion Under the Hindu Microscope

The ethical and metaphysical impact of abortion is coming under scrutiny by thinking Hindus. Like most of the Western nations, abortion is legal in India where in 1992 600,000 legal abortions were performed and uncounted illegal ones. Internationally, most doctors who are Hindu routinely perform abortions. In contrast, Catholic doctors refuse to perform abortions on grounds of belief. The metaphysical issue orbits around the knowledge of the soul's presence during fetal development and the killing of a viable life in utero as a serious spiritual transgression. In Hindu metaphysics abortion derails the reincarnation process of the soul. Most cosmopolitan Hindu women interviewed in the US were pro-choice, but admitted ignorance or apathy to basic Hindu metaphysics: karma and reincarnation. All felt abortion should not be a birth-control method. Swamis stated abortion was only allowed in the case of mortal danger to the mother.

World Religion Parliament And Global Vision 2000

Two US-based megaevents turned off the centenary lathe of Swami Vivekananda's barnstorming of America and Europe in 1893. The Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago August 28th to September 5th assembled representatives from all of Earth's faiths for high-minded talk on topical religious issues, just as 100 years ago the first Parliament clustered a galaxy of spiritual leaders from West and East faiths for fraternal dialogue. Swami Vivekananda was the superstar of that show. The 1993 Parliament-attended by 6,500-appointed 25 presidents (pictured above) to represent each faith. They hope to convene occasionally to continue the process.

The Global Vision 2000 event (picture at right) in Washington D.C., August 6 8, celebrated Swami Vivekananda's mission by producing the largest ever assembly of swamis in the US before a 3-day audience of 10,000.

Ramayana Goes Bonzai

Aso...this enchanting, special-effects-filled animated Ramayana was Made In Japan.

Japanese producer Yugo Sako, 61 and Buddhist, caught the Rama fever on a visit to India and decided the Ramayana would be perfect for Japan's world renowned animation techniques. Full-length animation features are very popular in Japan. Working with Hindu animation director Ram Mohan, Sako assembled a battalion of 350 Japanese animators to create the US$6.5 million saga in Japan. Soundtracks are in Hindi, English and Japanese.

Kanchi Sage's 100th Year

Actually, Shankaracharya Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati turned 99 on May 7th, but started his 100th year and the centenary celebrations have been going on since. The sage is the senior shankaracharya of the Kanchi Peetham in Tamil Nadu, the fifth cardinal monastery established by Adi Shankara. Swami Chandrasekharendra became shankaracharya when he was 13. He is renowned throughout India for his walking tours, Vedantic gnosis and peace-invoking presence.

Beaming MTV Into India

Satellite TV-with a cornucopia of soap operatic, violent, R-rated sexy, newsy and rock video programming from the West-flooded urban and rural India. No other single event is so changing the social face of India. India's budding cable systems pick up the satellite fare to pipe into mansion or slum. This on top of India's native movies and TV shifting more into titillation and bad taste.

Global Swami Nobly Dies

After 77 years of spicy life-including journalism, anti-British fomentation, jail, and decades of pragmatically promoting Advaita Vedanta-Swami Chinmayananda died of heart failure August 3rd. Founder of the international Chinmaya Mission, the swami-known for his arch, witty speaking style-trained over 100 brahmacharis and swamis, and thousands of teachers at his global centers. He was one of the founding patriarchs of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He authored forty sagely books.

AIDS' Bleak Forecast

In a series of Hinduism Today columns, Dr. Devananda Tandava unearthed a history and facts of AIDS that have largely been buried by government health agencies and the media. The disease is far more widespread than disclosed, ticking away unknown in multitudes of people across the planet, and is far easier to contract than normally presented (exchange of sexual fluids). Years old suppressed research shows the HIV virus lives outside the body for many hours, and can even be transported by sneezing.

In India 1 million known cases of AIDS have manifested. Asia now accounts for 63% of the world AIDS cases. The World Health Organization sees India as very vulnerable to the epidemic.

South Asia Atlas Unveiled

As cartographers say, "One map is worth a million words." And indeed the Historical Atlas of South Asia, released this year as a new edition, makes clear the 5,000 year tangled tapestry of India/Asian history in hundreds of detailed maps. Weighing ten pounds and measuring 12" by 16", with 150 pages of maps and 131 of text, the herculean atlas covers the regions of India, Afghanistan, Tibet, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka. The atlas was crafted from 1964-78 by a team at the University of Minnesota, including several historians from India. At US$250, the editors feel the atlas is affordable.

Russian Spirit Includes Hindus

Russia's bear-hug embrace of deep spirituality after the death of communism is reaching out to Asian faiths and techniques. According to Swami Sadasivachariya-a 25-year-old sannyasin from Siberia, Russia-many Russians are deeply interested in Hinduism. He believes the pre-Christian religion of Russia was Vedic. He notes, "The native Russian name of the Supreme Lord is Rod. In Russian that means the same as the Vedic Rudra or Siva."

The swami is a follower of the ancient Saivite Pasupata sect with 250 Russian members belonging to the Tantra Sangha he is associated with. For the future of Hinduism in Russia he says it will probably take on its own Russian flavor, a type of Russian Saivism. Ayurvedic medicine and Hindu astrology are mushrooming in Russian soil.

Hindu of the Year, Mata Amritanandamayi

In a world where US First Lady Hillary Clinton is a role model for adult women and Madonna still leads the noses of teen girls, Mata Amritanandamayi shines as a supernova of motherly spirituality. Hinduism Today takes great pleasure in announcing Mataji as the 1993 recipient of it's Hindu Renaissance Award, an annual prize for the 'Hindu of the Year.' Mata Amritanandamayi is the first woman to receive the award-begun in 1990. A cash grant of I.Rs.34,000 and a commemorative plaque is presented. Mata Amritanandamayi exemplifies the destined, mercurial rise of a teen mystic prodigy into a charismatic adult guru that recurs in Hindu history and myth. Born in the Kerala (Indian state in which the family tree is a matriarchy) village of Vallikkavu in 1953, Mataji was then Sudhamani, of a poor family. But early on she experienced a rich love of Krishna that would cast her into an oceanic trance, much like Sri Ramakrishna's early mood-visions. A shy-but promising smile became kind of permanently etched on her face, but her own family and most villagers thought she was bewitched.

A vision of the Divine Mother thrust her deep into Devi worship and meditation, culminating in a mission from Devi to bring humanity back to Her. In 1979 people started coming to Mataji for advice. By 1981, she was giving tear and-ecstacy satsangs, and now gives twice-a-week darshans dressed as Devi. A seashore ashram blossomed in Kerala and the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust activated service work globally, including orphanages, medical clinics and vocational schools. In 1987 she made her first Devi blitzkrieg tour of Western nations. In 1993 she was named as one of three presidents of Hinduism by the Parliament of the World's Religions (see story above).