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Diaspora

USA

New Life in Arid Arizona

Another us temple came

to life during the prana pratishtha Deity installation ceremonies held at the Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona, May 16-18, 2008. Eleven priests from around the US performed the rite, which literally means "Establishing life breath in the Deity." The event was blessed by the presence of Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami and attended by 5,000 devotees.

It was a joyous fulfillment for the devotees who had worked so hard for nine years. In 1999 Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami sent them a 1,400-pound granite Maha Ganapati, as he had done for many other fledging Hindu societies. The murti was first kept at home by Vignesh and Darshini Sukamaran. Devotees began attending the weekly Sunday puja and in 2000 they formed a nonprofit society--the Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona (see www.ganapati.org) Ganesha then went to the home of Ganesh and Radha Krishnan for two years. Suri and Sujata Gunnala donated 15 acres of land near Maricopa, 20 miles south of Phoenix, where Ganesha lived next in a modular home for five years with a full-time priest. In May of this year, He was officially placed in his new, permanent shrine.

The traditional South Indian temple was designed by Muthiah Sthapati. Only Lord Ganesha's main sanctum is finished. The adjacent shrines for Siva Lingam on the right and Balaji on the left will be completed next. Future plans include a wedding hall, priest quarters and a retirement home.

New Zealand

Hindu/Maori Mind Meld

"A landmark in the history of New Zealand and race relations," boasts the press release from the 2nd New Zealand Hindu Conference held May. His Highness Te Arikinui King Tuheitia, the Maori King, inaugurated the event at the Hindu Heritage Centre, Auckland, by lighting the lamp in the traditional Hindu way. The conference theme was "Sustaining New Zealand communities through health benefits of yoga, meditation and ayurveda." Mr. Vinod Kumar, the President of the Hindu Council of New Zealand, said the Council was working to strengthen the bond between New Zealand communities, develop the creativity of the youth, and understand and experience the Maori culture. Rahui Papa noted that mana means the same in Maori and Sanskrit.

United Kingdom Britain's Hindu Chaplain

Son of a brahmin shop owner in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, Krishan Attri studied the Vedas in a rigorously disciplined gurukula as a boy, excelled in school and went to England all alone in 1986, at the age of twenty-two, to serve as a priest at the Hindu temple of Newcastle on Tyne. Nineteen years later, in 2005, he was a leading Hindu priest, fluent in English (and 7 other languages), when the Ministry of Defence made him the first Hindu chaplain of 470 Hindu soldiers in the British armed forces. Besides offering spiritual guidance, he performs army weddings, family counseling and acts as their liaison with commanding officers

In his interview for the job, when asked what he would say if a soldier did not want to go to war, he responded, "Duty is our priority. It's our karma, and we have to face it." Hindu teachings have armed most of the soldiers he counsels with resolve. "They know they've undertaken a contract to look after the boundary walls of the country." The Bhagavad Gita is his most crucial tool for counseling soldiers. He says, "I use it all the time."

USA Youth Issues Flood WAVES

The world association for Vedic Studies, WAVES, is a multidisciplinary academic society formed in 1996 as "a forum for all scholarly activities and views on any area of Vedic Studies variously called Indian Studies, South Asian Studies or Indology." Through the years, it has served as a powerful network for academics.

Over 200 delegates came to Orlando, Florida, for this year's conference in June. It

was unique for its focus on youth and contemporary issues facing Hindus. The all-day youth workshops on June 30th organized by Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and Hindu Student Council (HSC) were lively. Hindu youth sitting on panels at the plenary session felt heard, empowered and engaged in thoughts on their heritage and how it could shape their life and lives of future generations.

"We want to be listened to by our parents so that together we can incorporate our heritage in our lives," said Jaya Goswami, the past president of HSC Chapter at University of Central Florida. "By being included in the WAVES Conference we feel empowered." added Ruti Dwivedi, a UCF junior.

Intergeneration sessions had hot debates on contemporary issues facing Hindus in America, such as: "Is there at all a need to establish one's Hindu identity? What about inter-religious marriage and Hindu value of all religions leading to the same God?" It was encouraging to see the WAVES community stepping out of the world of academic discussion into the world of real life Hindu experience, challenges and solutions.

Malaysia

Easing up on Priest Visas

It is regular pujas by trained priests that keep the power of the temple strong. Though he does not stand between the devotees and God, the priest keeps the spiritual engine running and doors to the heaven worlds open. Many important Hindu ceremonies require not only one but many priests. So, Malaysian Hindus were relieved when the Muslim government's Human Resources Ministry said in April this year that it had decided to renew the visas of temple priests, musicians and sculptors from India who are currently in the country, a move that was seen as a goodwill gesture to the ethnic Indian community which alleges marginalization in this multi-racial nation. The announcement came after immigration authorities had adopted a go-slow process on renewing visas of temple priests. The statement issued by the Ministry said, "The Cabinet has made the decision to allow or renew the visas of the temple priests, musicians and sculptors currently in Malaysia. The Cabinet has agreed to extend their service in this country, in special categories only."

Chicago

Police Video Wins Kudos

Amidst the clouds of modern misinformation on Hinduism, a video produced by Chicago Police Department offers some sunshine. Released as part of a DVD series in 2005 that was sent to 50 police headquarters nationwide (see www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/pubs/diversity.htm) Chaplain Rev. Kevin Dean introduces his officers to Hinduism with a brief history and then provides a series of tips for law enforcement techniques sensitive to Hindu religious and cultural traditions. Drawing on interviews with Hindus, the film's subjects include, non-touching of ladies by male officers, removal of shoes in temples and homes, respect for shrines in homes, conducting interviews in view of other people, never asking women to remove their marriage pendant, explanation of the forehead tilak-bindi, the original meaning of the swastika which may appear in homes, and more. The video series also covers other religions. They all end on a similar note, "All of the people we encounter on a daily basis expect to be treated with dignity and respect. Those who practice Hinduism are no different. It is our hope that this video will help enlighten and foster a new understanding."

Education

Texas WASPs Want Control

The battle by US Hindus to rescue their heritage from distortion in school textbooks has spread from California to Texas. Mel Gablers' Educational Research Analysts (see www.textbookreviews.org) is a "conservative Christian organization that reviews public school textbooks submitted for adoption in Texas." Inflicted with a severe case of cultural myopia, the group focuses on the negative aspects of pre-colonial cultures. They want control over educational material relating not only to Christian values, but to Asian history as well. Their recommended review criteria for adoption process on the subject of world history says, "Prevent stereotypes of whites-as-oppressors and people-of-color-as-victims from slanting discussions of Western imperialism by noting that British rule brought peace and a common language (English) to deeply divided India, ended or opposed suttee, infanticide, and child marriage there..."

The Gablers would have authors overlook important facts. India was the richest country in the world before the British arrived. It was then systematically looted and abused by such diabolical operations as Britain's use of India as a giant poppy farm that profited off the sale of opium to China, where they nurtured addiction.

The foundation writes, "Our reviews have national relevance because Texas state adopts textbooks and buys so many that publishers write them to Texas standards and sell them across the country." Hindus need to be heads up. For an excellent

analysis of the situation read "Don't Mess with Texas" in Tamin Ansary's article at: <http://www.edutopia.org/muddle-machine>

USA

Vulgar Film Incites Hindu Censure

"The love guru" moviestarring Mike Myers as an American raised in India who became a self-help guru led to hot debate among Hindus in the US. Though little of the script besides the words guru and karma relates to Hinduism, some Hindus felt that the character would promote negative stereotypes about Hindu religious leaders and tried to get Paramount to cancel the movie. Vocal protester, Rajan Zed, a Hindu chaplain from Nevada, said, "cinema is a powerful medium, and people who are not well versed in Hinduism get misinformed." Hindu American Foundation board members found it "vulgar, crude ... and tasteless," but few thought it anti-Hindu or mean-spirited. Most Hindus thought it was harmless, dumb humor, no different than similar satires of other religions, and urged people to just forget about it.

Briefly

In Kerala, a controversy rages over a seventh standard social studies text. The chapter "Life without Religion" has raised opposition from Hindu and Muslim religious leaders in the Indian state. Those objecting allege that the chapter undermines the role of religion and had been deliberately included to propagate the state's Marxist ideology.

Human rights organization Manushi is protesting false charges against its founder, Madhu Kishwar, which they allege have been brought by corrupt police and gangs that she claims are practicing extortion and abusing Delhi city's street vendors.

The historic Somnath temple in Gujarat is all set to regain its old glory as a golden temple by 2010. The famous temple's Trust is carving and gold-plating the Sabha Mantap, the place where devotees gather, and will also embed porous Bellastones on the outer structure that will be coated with fungus resistant paint.

battle over control of one of America's first Hindu temples ended on July 13, 2008, when the New York State Court of Appeals unanimously validated the original management rules for the Ganesh Temple in Flushing, Queens. The attempt to have

elections for temple trustees was thwarted. Under New York Religious Corporations Law, it remains a "Free Church," governed by a self-perpetuating board.

The Tirumala Venkateswara Temple has become the world's most visited place of worship. With over 60,000 visitors each day, that is 20 million per year. The crowds are nearly double those estimated to visit Vatican City. The numbers are so large that every visitor is given a bar-coded wristband that indicates the time of his or her darshan (their time to see and receive blessings from the Deity).

in june, 2008, a group of Sannyasins met the Governor of Kerala, urging him to direct the government to take action against the attack on ashrams in various parts of the state. Young militants, presumably from communist groups, have violently assaulted several religious institutions.