1994: Year in Review
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1994 was a year of historic changes as so many selfless spiritual giants moved on to moksha. Apartheid fell in South Africa. The Hindu world uncovered the repressed issue of wife abuse within its ranks. Women's rights, religious rights and human rights were in the foreground in Hindu homes, Kashmir and Fiji. Following our publisher's lead, we focused often on the heart of Hindu culture: the extended family-intent on resurrecting this ultimate fortress of dharma. We also witnessed the wonderful, amazing religious gatherings of the Gayatri Pariwar. Positive portents appeared quietly yet powerfully on the frontiers of the information age as Vedic knowledge and Indian aesthetics marched vigorously into the modern multi-media world of cyberspace and high-class publications.

A Year of Mahaprasthana-Great Saints Go "Home"

In Tamil, liberation from rebirth is known as veedu or going "home." In 1994 we reported pensively and proudly on the treasure of our sagely leaders who went back to their Source. As predicted by astrologers, many Hindu spiritual leaders were to travel on from late '93 through '94. The greatness of these selfless souls struck deep. In the aftermath of our loss is their silent call to each one of us to pick up the staff, dharma's danda-to sacrifice all in service.

His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in South India attained Mahasamadhi in January at age 99. In a position of great prestige, a brahmin's brahmin, he ever remained a perfect tapasvin, a strict ascetic, a pillar of tradition and the linchpin of faith for millions of orthodox Hindus.

Globe-trotting Swami Vishnudevananda passed on in November of 1993. A flamboyant preacher of peace and palatable yoga to the western world for over 34 years, he took yoga to lands far and wide, finally building a traditional Hindu temple in Canada.

Dr. Swami Gitananda passed on December 29th, 1993. Canadian-born, he taught a disciplined yogic path. Residing in India for nearly 30 years, he was a fiery champion of Hindu rights and resuscitated traditional Indian, yogic "rishi" culture.

The renowned modern Tamil saint Thirumuruga Kirupananda Variyar attained Siva's Feet on November 7th, 1993. A child prodigy teacher and Muruga bhakta, he was a spell-binding orator-a clear channel for orthodox Saivism for over seventy years.

Sushil Jain Kumar, a Jain monk, went to the Brahmaloka April 22, 1994. A dynamic activist preacher of nonviolence to world forums and politicians, he courageously worked toward conflict resolutions among warring leaders in India and the Mid-east.

Shivabala Yogi passed on March 28, 1994. Directly initiated by Lord Siva at the age of 14, he did tapas for 12 years. He then traveled worldwide on a simple yet potent mission: giving darshan in silence to transmit shaktipat, leading others into meditation. Bhagavati Devi Sharma, dynamic leader of Gayatri Pariwar, architect of yagnas and yatras for millions, passed on September 19, 1994.

There were also ones who did not travel, who stayed in one community, ever present to help everyday, year after year, leaving a solid legacy for the future. Swami Satchidananda, head of the Divine Life Society in Trinidad died on December 8th, 1993. Swami had received numerous awards and metals for his service to Hinduism. In South Africa, Swami Shivapadananda, late head and driving force of the Ramakrishna Mission, attained Mahasamadhi on October 1, 1994. A key figure in the renaissance of Hinduism in South Africa he took the mission there to great heights, dynamically expanding Hindu social service to the poor.

To each one we offer our pranams for their limitless spiritual will, the many great works they completed and our gratitude for the unspeakable gift of selfless love they bestowed upon the world.

Year of the Family and Non-Violence at Home

The Global Ethic formulated at Brazil's 1992 Earth Summit calls for a return of the extended family and a focus on women and children. This past year Hinduism Today examined the issues of mixed marriages to discover that inter-racial marriages were more successful than inter-religious-a question more of beliefs than color. We looked at American parents adopting Indian kids and the high rate of suicide among Hindu girls in Trinidad. We removed the wife abuse blinders and called it a horrible crime-everyone's business.

We printed navigation aids, traditional guidelines for marriage, parenting and a personal look at the Hindu view of family life. We focused on the inestimable value of the extended family-people, young and old living together, taking care of each other, learning from each other. Though we didn't solve many problems, we brought issues to light, brought forth a new will to manifest ahimsa at home, the foundation for peace and a better world during this year, designated as the Year of the Family by the United Nations.

Nations in Focus

South Africa: Free and Leading the Way

In April of this year, the African National Congress won democratic elections ending 300 years of white racist domination. As the abomination of apartheid fell, Hindus rejoiced as Nelson Mandela (right) took the presidency, pledging himself to the goal of an inter-racially harmonious South Africa. In various ways we saw the South African Hindu community take a lead among Hindu communities outside of India. The Arya Youth League and the Hindu Youth Federation activities show the South Africa youth to be a decade ahead of American Hindu youth in matters of religious study, adherance to brahmacharya and Hindu culture. Other signs were

the Hindu Center built at the University of Durban (left), where the shrine is attended weekly by over 500 students, expansion of the Ramakrishna Mission, and tremendous growth for the South African Edition of Hinduism Today, which boasts a monthly print run of 10,000, outstanding regional news and wide distribution thanks to the support of community leaders and the dynamic leadership of the South African publisher.

Tragedy Strikes North Bharat

In the sacred highlands of Bharat, which in old days included Afghanistan, Hindus have suffered tragedies we unveiled this year.

Amarnatha: Lord Shiva's holy cave shrine in Kasmir brings tens of thousands of pilgrims for annual darshan of the ice Lingam. Islamic terrorists threatened the August 94' yatra. Despite attacks which killed two and injured four, 45,000 courageous souls marched on. The 10,000 Indian soldiers on hand to foil the terrorists' plans were inevitably forced to turn the sacred journey into a war zone-body searches, identity cards and armed guards disappointed many.

Kashmir: Nestled in the southern confluence of the Hindu Kush and Himalayan mountain ranges, Kashmir has been the crossroads of Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian and Persian cultures for thousands of years. It is a beauteous center of spiritual life. Some trace to Kashmir the Agamic culture that today permeates all Hindu worship. Kashmir has also been a pawn of military strategies over the centuries, a focal point for invasion, a northern fortress of plenty perched above the Indian subcontinent. Today she lies cut in pieces between India, China and Pakistan. A climate of violence, destruction and fear struck by Islamic terrorists, has forced Hindu Kashmir pandits off their ancestral lands into the tent camps of Jammu. Their culture nearly destroyed, their spirit badly broken, with nowhere to go they appeal to the world for help.

Afghanistan: Ancient land of Vedic fires, gateway through the mountains to the sacred Indus valley, Afghanistan was home to Hindus from the beginning of time. But war and Islamic fundamentalism forced them to flee. Temples have been destroyed. Hinduism in Afghanistan is virtually dead. Afghan Hindus now ply the sea of migration, homeless and searching.

Fiji: Injustice and Rejuvenation

Last year a Hindu school was torched in Fiji, following objections by non-Hindu parents to the requirement for children to wear the AUM school badge. In 1994 an Indian Hindu convert to Christianity got drunk and burned the popular Shakti temple in front of his own home. The government nearly abolished the Deepavali Holiday-a rough year. But Hindus were joyful as the largest Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere was finally completed in Fiji in September.

Trinidad: Initiates First Woman Priest

Indrani Rampersad was ordained as Pandita by the Arya Samaj to become Trinidad's first woman priest. Local critics of the action were promptly countered by others who cited the significant position women held in the Vedas which authorize their initiation into Vedic studies. Not a new phenomena, a number of women priests have been successfully trained by the Arya Samaj and other Hindu institutions and serve today in South Africa, Australia and in India itself.

Trends We Watched

Hinduism Today Finds High Tech Wings and Worlds

1994 was the year Hinduism Today and the Tirukkural, started spreading their tendrils through the Internet nadis. Power to the modem! New gateways opened to networks in India. We finished an issue, distributed it on the networks, got hot letters back via E-mail and rebuttals to those same letters all before hard copy rolled off the press. From our small ashram in the middle of the Pacific, beneath a holy mountain, by a sacred river, we have 24-hour turn around communications with readers, devotees, associates the world over.

Vedic Culture Upscales to Modern Art and Media

Not long ago we shuddered with embarrassment over Hindu publications. We watched TV despairing at the dearth of Vedic viewing. But this year was an aesthetic feast. Manick Sorcar gave us cartoons and his joy-filled, award-winning animated Indian stories. Exquisite books like Garden of Life, Wine of the Mystic and Vaishnava India, Indian Sadhus and Kumbha Mela stunned the mind's eye. Sensitive videos like The Living God and Praying with Anger rivetted our attention, highlighting the transcendent wonder of Hinduism and our beloved Bharat.

Engineering Giant Hindu Gatherings in UK and India

While kumbha melas have always been the largest spiritual gatherings of humanity, 1994 Hindus launched new kinds of mammoth gatherings with goals, networking Hindus, pushing Sanatana Dharma into the limelight. Most astounding was Gayatri Pariwar's Asvamedha Yagna in which a million Hindus participated. A single Sindhi man brought together 150,000 for the UK Spiritual Unity Conference-broadcast to over 200,000 throughout Europe. In May, 60,000 women met in Delhi for the All-India Women's Sammelan to repudiate western style feminism and affirm Hindu women's power. Simply amazing!