Letters to the Editor
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Whose Turbans

Concerning the photo of the dancing swamis before a Kali image in the Vivekananda centerspread [August, 1993] you have identified them as Ramakrishna monks. But I know only Swami Vivekananda used to put on a turban. Nobody put on a turban in the Ramakrishna Mission as a tribute to Swamiji. Instead, the caption should read Bharat Sevashram Sangha monks.

Swamy Vikramananda

Bharat Sevashram Sangha

Calcutta, India

Editor: Swami Chidananda of the Ramakrishna Order confirms no Ramakrishna monks wear turbans. However, Swami Vivekananda's gurubhais (brother disciples) did wear turbans. The monks shown could well be Sangha monks.

30 Years of Pen Paling

The idea proposed by Brahmachari Navin Raj [January, 1994] of Singapore for a pen-pal column is wonderful. As a high school teacher I would like to suggest correspondence between my students and any international students. I've been writing pen pals for over 30 years. My oldest, ongoing relationship stared in 1969 with Shun-ichi Sademotsu of Japan. We still write. It is a great way to promote tolerance and understanding.

Kevin Mann

Shoreham River High School

Shoreham, New York, 11786, USA

Female Hierophants

Your article on women priests in Trinidad [February, 1994] brings to mind Mrs. Kamla Sharma, the first woman priest in the US who has been performing religious rites for 20 years. Due to old age and bad health, she does not perform the services now, but would not miss an opportunity to do so in the case of an emergency. The spirit behind training of women pastor/priests comes from the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. He was the champion of giving equal rights to women on the authority of the Vedas. By his blessings, we now have many women priests in India as well as abroad.

Madan Lal Gupta

Alhambra, California, USA

World-Affirming Spirit

It was wonderful to see Sri Chinmoy featured in your February issue. He has been working tirelessly for many years to promote a unifying vision of world peace and spirituality. Many seem to view the spiritual life as a retreat from the world, but people like Sri Chinmoy help us correct this misconception. Please continue your coverage of such active and dedicated spiritual figures.

Karen Mandel

San Francisco, California, USA

Bold Step

We at the Saraswathi Cultural Society wish to compliment you on the bold step taken in publishing such a high quality, global monthly newspaper as Hinduism Today. Our members look forward to reading each Africa edition, not only because of the interesting articles therein, but also due to the keen interest in the preservation and promotion of Hindu religion and culture.

R. Singh

Phoenix, South Africa

Fresh Air

Your magazine is like a breadth of fresh air, bringing the wisdom and teachings to various communities which have been starved of Vedic teachings and philosophies for many decades. Continue the good work of distributing. Also send me some subscription forms to enable me to assist you by getting others to subscribe to your worth newspaper.

P. Kalkapersad

Port Shepstone, South Africa

Brahmins & Burgers

I read Vimala Thakar's letter "Vedic Heritage" [February, 1994] with outrage and would suggest she be more careful in making broad generalizations about "Hindus abroad." Further, to suggest that religiosity is determined by geography is ludicrous. Firstly, not everybody came to the West for the "sole purpose of acquiring money." Many people immigrated for a variety of reasons, including persecution on the Indian subcontinent. Secondly, not everyone is "aping and imitating non-Indian ways of life." Not that there is anything inherently wrong with that: there is good and bad in every culture. So there are things in this culture worth "aping" and things in Indian culture to be rejected and vice versa. The fact that Indians abroad have maintained their religion despite being immersed in a very different culture is a testimonial to their dedication.

I have also lived in India, where many of the people were running off in their blue jeans to their piano and tennis lessons and who had far more wealth than I will ever likely see! I certainly spent more time at the temple than they did. I also knew brahmins who went out for hamburgers, whereas my family has been vegetarian despite being in a meat eating society for over 25 years. So, India is not always the domicile of non-materialistic, "true" Hindus. Let me assure Ms. Thakar we are proudly carrying on Hindu traditions abroad succesfully. The reality is we are no longer 100% products of Indian thought. We are hybrids formed of Indian and Western influences. That is not necessarily bad, however. My parents have always taught me that we are fortunate to be able to pick the best of both East and West. I intend to do so.

Ms. Kothai Kumanan

Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada

More Arranging

May I take this opportunity to add a few words to Publisher's Desk on arranged marriages [January 1994]. I know of a friend who came down to Malaysia from India. He was staying in a hotel where two European girls were staying to attend the same conference as my friend. During their conversations, the girls were very keen to know about his marriage. When he told them that his parents were looking for a bride for him, they could not believe him! He told them he would not even look at the girl. If at all he wants to see the girl, he would do so in the presence of both the parents. And that, too, is only for a short while. The two girls were shocked to hear him telling that.

In traditional Hindu marriages, the parents of both the boy and the girl have to say "yes" before the bride and the bridegroom say "yes" to the marriage. Of course they seek astrological compatibility and elderly advice before they conclude any marriage.

Ramesh Sivanathan

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Casual Contact or Not

In the December, 1993 issue Dr. Tandavan had a column entitled AIDS-Awareness is Prevention. I would like to correct a piece of serious misinformation that was in the article. The Centers for Disease Control and other well-established authorities

on HIV and AIDS have repeatedly said that AIDS and HIV are not transmitted by holding hands or even by kissing. Your article incorrectly stated the contrary.

I have sent a copy of Dr. Tandavan's article to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. I have also sent a copy of the article to the Whitman-Walker AIDS Clinic, which is a highly respected institution in Washington, D.C. I would hope that in the next issue of Hinduism today you will go to great lengths to bring attention to the correct information. To do anything less would be a serious disservice to all of your readers around the world.

Abhaya Thiele

Buckingham, Virginia, USA

Dr. Tandavan replies: The medical evidence to support the presence of HIV in human saliva of those infected with HIV in sufficient amounts to be infective is undeniable. Furthermore, HIV patients often have oral diseases that allow (infected) blood into the saliva. It has also been shown that HIV appears in salivary glands, prostate and testicles of infected males. This is further suggestion that saliva and semen are both transmitters of the disease.

It has also been shown that HIV transmits through intact skin, easier if there are cuts, abrasions or open wounds. This evidence is so overwhelming that I fail to understand why the CDC, etc., continue with the old idea that HIV/AIDS is not easy to contract. Perhaps it would surprise the reader to learn that there is growing number of well-qualified researchers that believe that there is no causative relationship between HIV and AIDS, as is defined by the CDC.

References: Lancet, Sept. 20, 1986, pg. 694. Lancet, June 18, 1988, pg. 1395. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Review, May 22, 1987, Vol. 36; pg. 255. Federal Register (OSHA), May 31, 1989, pg. 223121. III International Symposium on AIDS, Washington D.C., 1987 No. MP120. Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology, 1987, 216A, 553-62. IV International Symposium on AIDS, Stockholm, 1988 Vol. 2, No. 160 ibid, Vol. 2, No. 7580. V International Symposium on AIDS, Montreal, 1989, pg. 474. Proc. Soc. Experimental Medicine; 178, 653-655

Correction

In our February issue article "Mixed Marriages," Sudhir Vummide was incorrectly identified as Sudhir Verghese.