Letters to the Editor
Category : April 1995
Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 1995

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American Hindu Schools

Looking around America we see many ethnic groups having their own teaching institutions such as Catholic, Methodist, Baptist and Jewish schools which teach a particular religion and culture along with general science, math, language, history, etc. But we don't have a similar school emphasizing Hindu or Vedic culture. We have bal vihars which are filling this need in a small way but without structured curriculum and any large scale support. It is about time we start thinking about introducing our rich heritage to this "melting pot" in a serious way.

I have seen schools in India which started as one-room, one-teacher institutions ending up as universities over a period of time. There is no reason why teaching institutions with Vedic background should not take off in America.

V.B. Somasundaram, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA

Editor's note: Over the past ten years ISKCON, Swami Satchidananda's Yogaville and Saiva Siddhanta Church have run full-curriculum Hindu schools. In September `93 the Hindu University of America in Florida began its first college-level school year [see article and ads in HT] with a handful of students. It continues today, still with less than half-a-dozen students, and strapped for support.

Vedic Abe Lincoln

On behalf of the Abraham Lincoln School, located in New York City, I would like to thank you for your coverage of the activities of the St. James School [January '95]. Our school, which opened its doors in September 1994, is closely affiliated with the St. James School in London, following a similar model and applying the guidance of both the St. James faculties and of the Shankaracharya. Like the St. James School we offer our student body the best education has to offer, combining it with the "deep spirituality" that you so accurately attribute to that institution. This includes the study of Vedic mathematics and basic Sanskrit as part of the regular curriculum, as well as prayer from various traditions, East and West.

Barry Steingard, Chairman of Board of Trustees, Abraham Lincoln School, New York, NY, USA

I Love Classical

I enjoyed your article and have been relishing Indian CDs for a few years now. Hindu classical music is another great treasure that India has to offer to the world. I was very glad to see that your article included the possible dark side of popular music. I have recently returned from India and I find very little interest in classical music. Many people know of Michael Jackson and almost everyone is familiar with songs from the film industry but a rare few know of the great Hindu classics. As Shree Raja Mohannath observed in your article in the same issue, the East is giving importance to yoga because the West found it valuable. I hope the East will follow suit on the interest in classical Hindu music.

Mark Rosen, Compuserve 75144,677

VHP Ban

I am writing to convey my admiration and respect for your great service to Hindus around the world through a very informative and well researched reading material on Hindu heritage and issues.

During the period of the previous ban [of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad], compared to the expectations of the Indian government, the organization of VHP was established in over 4,000 villages in Gujarat alone compared to 750 villages covered prior to the ban. If VHP activities are in any way harmful to society, the organization wouldn't spread widely as it wouldn't get support of common people. In fact, VHP has been in the forefront of social upliftment programs all over India, with over 5,000 service projects.

Almost all national, religious and cultural organizations have condemned this ban. Badrikashram Shankarachariya, Jagad Guru Shree Vasudevananda Saraswati, Sringeri Shankaracharya Swami Bharti Teerth, Govardhan Peet Shankaracharya Swami Nishchalananda, Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamkoti Peetham Sri Jayendra Saraswati and other revered sants, mahamandaleshwars and acharyas have demanded an immediate removal of the ban on the VHP.

Sri Mahesh J. Mehta, President, Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Needham, Massachusetts, USA

Intellect Shattered?

In the last part of the article on chatushpada [January `95], you pose the question "What is the value of the jnanapada?" and answer "The yogi's intellect is shattered and he soars into Parasiva." As we all know, a true yogi has immense intellectual power and mental balance all the time. It is radically wrong to say the intellect is shattered. It is too unpalatable to accept. You also say dhyana leads to enstasy. Is it not wrong to say such as, the fact is, it leads to ecstasy in the spiritual system.

T.N. Qazi, Andover, Massachusetts, USA

Editor's note: For readers' benefit, the word enstasy was coined by Mircea Elieade in 1969 to contrast the Eastern view of bliss as "standing within oneself" with the Western view of ecstasy as "standing outside oneself."

Rituals are Hogwash

In a recent article, some one was emphasizing the importance of rituals and puja. The pomp and ceremony, the strict rules for rituals, etc. This is nothing but hogwash, pomp and ceremony do not make god or religion. Though the Vedas talk of rituals and ceremonies, undue emphasis is placed on these. This is at the root of all that is wrong with religion in India. It can be argued that the emphasis on rituals is at the very root cause of the destruction of many places of worship, and the rise of BJP/RSS/ VHP. One cannot blame the scriptures for this, but the blame must lie on the shoulders of the people who make an attempt at interpreting the Vedas, etc. For they interpret(ed) them for their own ends and not for the good of the society. Hindu religion (if it can be so called) is essentially concerned with the mastery of the evil in life and the moral questions arising from such a life. By emphasizing pomp and ceremony we are only indulging in show-off, and it is priestcraft that reigns supreme. The role of the priests should be one of emphasizing the moral aspects of our day to day tour of life.

True religion is not made up of rites and ceremonies but in the realization of the innerself, (call it moksa or jivanmukti-the realization here and now, the liberation of the soul here and now and not in some other birth). We need to rekindle the true spirit of religion and prayer. A good deed done with a pure heart is worth more than a thousand hours spent in rituals, and the returns are more than the amount spent on ceremony.

C. Kambhampati

Hindu in Spirit

I was dismayed after I read your recent review on the book Famous Vegetarians and Their Favorite Recipes by Rynn Berry [January `95]. While I appreciated the article as a whole, one sentence in particular was considerably puzzling: Levina Melwani writes, "Rynn Berry is not a Hindu, though he says he is, spiritually." I had to read this sentence several times over before I could make sense of it. What is Hinduism if it is not spiritual? She [Melwani] implies that "Hindu" denotes only persons of Indian parentage-an odd criterion for the tradition which rests on the aphorism aham brahmasmi, wouldn't you say? Many of today's most stalwart and

influential sadhus-even Hindu leaders-have made their appearances within non-Indian families. Thus, it is a person's qualities, and ultimately one's consciousness, which determines whether one is truly "Hindu."

Rupa Manjari Dasi, Chaitanya Vaishnava Sanga, Haiku, Hawaii, USA

Editor's note: Lavina Melwani had no intention of minimizing the affinity Rynn Berry has with Hinduism and did not say or even imply that you have to be Indian to be a Hindu. Rynn himself first responded to her question whether he considered himself a Hindu with "No," and then laughed and offered accommodatingly, "Well, maybe in a spiritual sense." He, most of all, is not surprised at not being identified as a Hindu, by whatever definition.