Letters to the Editor
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Gita's Human Rights

Sivaya Subramuniyaswami recently brought up the interesting issue of what connection, if any, exists between religion and human rights [Publisher's Desk, March `95]. It is important to keep in mind that Hinduism and Hindu culture are the world's oldest. As such, we should not expect to find clear and distinct enumerations of individual rights that we might find in other modern documents like the US constitution or Bill of Rights. Rather, we should seek to understand the overall world view espoused by the religion and derive what relevance this world view has to the concept of human rights. Specifically, Hinduism advances many tenets which can be construed to uphold a broad spectrum of human rights, and we must be awed that it accomplishes this in exalted and poetic religious language. The slokas in Chapters 4 and 6 of the Bhagavad Gita are perfect examples: "A yogi who has equanimity of mind will look at all forms of life as equal and will identify in himself others and all other forms of life in himself." Another example: "A pandit will consider a scholar or an illiterate both as his equal. He will have equanimity of mind when it comes to a dog, and elephant or a cow." This sloka absolutely and positively prohibits discrimination based on birth, education, knowledge, food habits or any such silly things. While Hindu scriptures argue for the dignity of man, some unscrupulous people still invoke these scriptures to justify hatred and violence. But the scriptures are not to blame.

Yasoda Eranky, M.D., Helotes, Texas, USA

Used & Abused Priests

Just this past week I learned about the sorry predicament of a priest whose contract with a major metropolitan temple was summarily not renewed, leaving him no recourse but to vacate the temple-provided living quarters where he lived with a wife and infant child. Due to the nature of such contractual agreements-where the customary benefits accorded to both secular and clergical American employees are purposely not given to Indian priests-he now finds himself with no unemployment insurance, medical coverage, etc,. He is sorely desperate to find work for himself and a new home for his family. Where is the logic in this? How can such a situation like this be anything but adharmic? I strongly suspect that the "leaders" of such communities purposely seek out relatively uninformed priests who have little, if any idea, of what to expect, regarding the full-scale of both their responsibilities and rights once they come to this country. An uninformed priest is one that can be kept in the dark, intimidated, exploited and cast aside once these "leaders" have exhausted him. As a member of the Veda Agama Sudha Advisory Committee, I, for one, plan to speak out strongly against such a state of affairs. Does any other religion in this country treat its clergy so shamefully? And how will this affect the growing presence of Hinduism in the US? We need to take a long, hard look.

Ganapati S. Durgadas, Veda Agama Sudha, Loudonville, New York, NY, USA

Laboring Children

If more and more people like your correspondent Rajiv Malik write about the "Exploitation of Child Labor" [March, `95] India can expect to take heed and bring about the necessary changes. Children are the most marvelous of God's creations. To exploit and dehumanize them is a great shame for India. All forms of child labor are bad. Prime Minister Rao has recently announced a US$2.5 billion program to eliminate child labor in hazardous industries beginning by the year 2000-that's five years too late.

Mac Lakhani, Sacramento, California, USA.

Yoga Pioneers

I have been following the great work Hinduism Today is doing in upholding the cultural heritage of sacred Bharat. You published a detailed article on our work abroad. Another time you gave a wonderful sketch of Lakshmi Kumariji, president of Vivekananda Kendra. On December 23-27, 1995, in Bangalore, India, we are holding our III International Conference on Yoga Research and Applications. We have been recognized as a pioneering yoga institute in India. For details your readers can contact us.

N.V. Raghur Ram, Vivekananda Kendra, Eknath Bhawan, 19 Gavipuram Cr., Bangalore 560-019, India.

Cellular Connectivity

After reading the Publisher's Desk on human rights [March, `95] I had these thoughts. Even though we have all been programmed from early childhood to discriminate and see ourselves as separate, we are not separate. We are one with all people, animals, plants, and much more. The deeper that modern science delves into answering the fundamental questions of the mechanics of life, the more apparent our connectivity becomes. You can think of yourself as a single cell in a large living body and everyone else around you as cells in that same body. Love is the unifying power that can transform our deeply held beliefs of separateness and replace them with beliefs and perceptions of our connectivity and unity. I call upon all of us to sacrifice our prejudices: racial, religious, national, social, economic environment and personal. Peace, joy and abundance on earth are a matter of choice. What choice are we making now?

Mahesh Subrahmanyam, Fairfield, Iowa, USA.

At Cross Purposes

The editorial "Hiding Behind the Cross" was excellent and it hit the bull's eye. It shows the swamiji has a very good perception of the modern day Hindu behavior.

That Hindus are cowardly in upholding the Vedic dharma in the context of the world is well known. But it is disgusting to see this behavior on the part of those who are perceived to carry the torch of Vedic dharma. Then again, who knows how really developed is their spiritual fiber. Professorial knowledge is often mistaken by the masses for spiritual advancement just because these teachers happen to wear a saffron robe. They behave like ordinary materialists, fearful of the hostile forces around. In their eagerness to please the basically hostile Christian crowds, they not only water down Vedic dharma but completely pollute it with popular western philosophy and scientifically acceptable ideas that are in vogue today.

How long will this hiding behind the cross continue? As long as we have teachers who seek fame and comfort abroad. Truly, such boneless jellyfish have been the curse of Hinduism for the last several centuries. Otherwise, who knows that Hinduism would have become truly a worldwide religion with billions of people on this planet living in peace and joy.

C. Viswanathan, S. Hayward, California, USA.

Aum Shinrikyo Fallout

I am concerned about the negative publicity our precious symbols "Aum," "Supreme Truth" and Lord Shiva are receiving lately by virtue of being constantly invoked in connection with the religious sect Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.

As members of the global family we wish to express our sorrow and condolences to our brothers and sisters in Japan who have become victims of the latest terrorist attack [poison gas on a Tokyo train]. We are very concerned about the way our precious symbol "aum" and words such as "Supreme Truth" are being smeared while the media covers the "religious sect" suspected of poisoning the commuters in Japan. Practitioners of yoga recognize aum as the sound of creation vibrating in every atom. Supreme Truth is the essential truth of all existence common to all humanity. We do not want these words or names of any traditional religion used to identify or describe any suspect practices. We will not allow ignorance, hatred and anger to contaminate our sacred symbols and names.

Buddhists, Christian, Hindus, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Zoroastrian or whatever faith we may belong to, we stand together to guard our precious symbols, names and values.

Nandini Y. Garud, San Jose, California, USA.