Global Dharma
Category : June 1995
Published by Anonymous on Jun. 02, 1995

Global Dharma

A Monthly News Digest

The Chitrakoot School Experiment

At the age of 75, Nanaji Deshmukh was tapped to head the Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishvavidyalaya, or Rural Renaissance University, in Madhya Pradesh. It is an innovative model of rural reconstruction and education. By last year, the school had 2,500 students studying in gurukula fashion, living with their teachers in extended families, according to V.V. Gokhale.

The modern Chitrakoot university is devoted to creating village-oriented, multi-dimensional men and women, versed in rural problems and equipped to solve these by virtue of a broad education. Yoga, ayurveda, organic farming and ecology are all taught as essential to the future well-being of the villages. At the same time, it has the facilities and programs of any modern university.

The system of examinations and marks has been replaced by rating through daily dialogues, the student's imagination, intuition and propensity for harmonious living.

Among their programs is one that takes destitute and orphaned youth into the university for training. The student teacher ratio is ten to one. Students are given upanayana ceremony (sacred thread) and taught to recite Gayatri Mantra daily. They learn Sanskrit, meditation, Agnihotra, Upanishads and standard academic subjects.

The 150-acre university has undertaken literacy, health and farming projects in all villages within a 50km radius, dramatically impacting the area. Reforestation of the denuded hills in and around Chitrakoot is a major activity. Another is a project to keep all children in 10 villages healthy through traditional medicines.

The troubles of technologies based on domination over nature with chemical fertilizers, pesticides and large dams, as well as iatrogenic (doctor-induced) diseases are getting increasingly exposed. In response, the university will strive to resurrect and improve the traditional sciences and technologies. The test of a student's deeper understanding is his ability to produce inexpensive, village-oriented, ecologically sound solutions.

The teachers, students and other staff are committed to making the university self-reliant in the next 15 years. Graduates are expected to have both a self-reliant career and some personal capital, earned through work programs at the school.

At a time when India (like other countries) is re-examining its fundamental concepts of education, Chitrakoot provides a useful example and possible pattern for the future.

Contact: Chitrakoot, Dist. Satna, Madhya Pradesh, 485 331, India.

Reported by V.V. Gokhale, Pune

Inner Peace

In an on-going study, western researchers announced an unusual discovery-a new personality syndrome they dubbed "Inner Peace." It has cropped up in isolated outbreaks across much of the world, and threatens to become epidemic in proportions. Among the most common symptoms are: loss of interest in conflict; loss of interest in judging other people; frequent, overwhelming epi-sodes of appreciation; contented feelings of connectedness with God, mankind and nature. If

the symptoms become unbearable, scientists report in this little-known study, a daily dose of television programs will usually alleviate the disorder within a few weeks to a month.

Buddhist Sect Furor Fallout for Hindus

The global furor over Aum Shinrikyo, the new-age Japanese Mahayana Buddhist sect that is being investigated for an alleged terrorist sarin gas attack on civilians March 20th in Tokyo, has Hindus worried. There are fears of guilt by association and fallout from the public defamation of India's sacred language and spiritual practices. For the record, Aum Shinrikyo has clearly defined itself as Buddhist-cum-universalist, despite prominent usage of Hindu icons and practices.

Dr. J. Gordon Melton, a world renowned expert of new religious movements, cautioned against making judgments about the group from fragmentary material. "Most importantly, we must refrain from name calling and the use of pejorative labels, especially the term `cult.' In every major incident connected with religious groups and violence, the substance of the story changed radically over the first two weeks. For every set of accusations which prove true, many more prove baseless."

No Laughing Matter

"Three-hundred people are walking in circles around a giant white altar that's shaped like the sun and a crescent moon. Fast-shifting images of twirling galaxies and exploding sunsets flit across the globe and a dozen TVs and massive projection screens that line the walls. Rippling waves of `techno-ambient' music-pumped out of a dozen speakers-wash over them." Meet the Nine O'Clock Service, a Christian "rave-style planetary mass," straight from Sheffield, England, as presented at San Francisco's famed Anglican Grace Cathedral. It's the Christian's latest attempt to reach out to disaffected youth.

The supposedly conservative Anglicans are also in the forefront of "the Toronto

Blessing." Newsweek says a recent meeting of 1,500 "began when a dozen pilgrims from Oregon got up to introduce themselves and then began to fall to the floor, laughing uncontrollably. An hour later, the huge new Toronto church looked like a field hospital. Dozens of men and women of all ages were lying on the floor: some were jerking spasmodically; others closed their eyes in silent ecstasy." Organizers explain the uninhibited laughing as a combined worship/celebration/catharsis, akin to but more fun than speaking in tongues. Worldwide 7,000 congregations have had the experience. The Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the Anglican Church, is non-judgmental on the laughing. He had heard reports that, "it is a very refreshing event."

All India Madhwa Philosophical Conference

On March 24th, the 17th All-India Madhwa Philosophical Conference was conducted in Madras for three days under the auspices of Akhila Bharatha Madhwa Maha Mandala (ABMMM). It was inaugurated by His Holiness Sri Satyaproda Theertha Swami of Sri Utharadi Math before 500 erudite Madhwa pandits and devotees from all over India. Pontiffs of all ten monastic institutions of the Madhwa tradition were present attesting to the continuing strength of one of Hinduism's largest schools of theology, the dualistic theism of the Vaishnava saint, Sri Madhwacharya. This Madhwa meeting owed its birth to the commitment of the Head of Sri Pejawar Math, His Holiness Sri Viswesha Theertha Swami, a frail, benign human dynamo, remembered for his struggle to reclaim Hindus converted to Islam in Meenakshi Puram in Tamil Nadu 15 years ago.

Sri K. Vishnumurthy, President, AABMM, fearlessly tackled the notorious casteism of conservative Vaishnavites in his introductory speech, "Why, today, only among Madhwas, have we no one but brahmins? In the 16th century, during the time of Vyasa Raja, there was one Kanaka Dasa-a sterling non-brahmin Vaishnavite. In this 20th century, the great pontiff late Sri Vibhudha Priya Theertha of Sri Adamar Math gave Vaishnava diksha, to fishermen-by mudhra dharana (giving tatoos of Vishnu insignia such as the disc and conch). Why did this noble tradition not progress?" Sri C.Y.V. Rao, president of the Conference Executive Committee said: "All the Mathadipatis have addressed this question and given their assent to receive those willing to embrace the Madhwa tenets and creed into their fold. They are seized with the question of where precisely to place these pious aspirants in the Hindu caste hierarchy so as not to jerk them out of their social and cultural milieu. All aspirants shall be accommodated. We are bent on it." The conference was designed to promote Sri Madhwa's Dvaita, a dualistic, devotional, theistic interpretation of Vedanta which he sharply differentiated from the monism of

Sankara.

By Gowri Shankar, Madras

Trends to Watch, Cutting Colonial Vines: Bombay to Mumbai

An old debate rages in Maharastra over changing the name of Bombay in all English contexts to Mumbai, which is the name of the city in both the Marathi and Gujarati languages. The Shiv Sena had sent this proposal to the central government twice in the past, but it was turned down. Now the Shiv Sena-BPJ coalition are in power, and they hope this third petition will pass.

Professor Shiva Bajpai in California explains, "Originally it was simply a phonetic problem. Hindi speakers pronounced Mumbai as Bambai, which the English then rendered as Bombay." But deeper issues underlie the move to Mumbai. Right wing media view the name change as the tip of a time bomb. The London Times said about the new government, "The saffron flag of Hindu militancy was raised in Bombay as religious zealots took power in India's commercial capital. The development represents a resurgence of Hindu nationalism and the aggressive Hindutva (Hinduness) movement. Several symbolic changes could come swiftly. Bombay could revert to its ancient name of Mumbaiâ¦"

Marathi linguist, Madhukar Samant makes it a very simple issue, "How can a proper name be different in different languages?" Last year, Samant convinced the courts to make Mumbai the only rendering in the Hindi devanagiri script. The Bambai spelling in Hindi is now officially illegal.

The Statesmen says that those clinging to the term Bombay, are scoffed at for their "rootless westernism." It does seem odd to many outsiders that in the land where the British beat Gandhi for making salt, there is any question at all. For the rest of the world, "progressive" has meant honoring the pre-colonial culture. The island of Hawaii, USA, is not called Captain Cook's Island. Nearly all African states have expunged their colonial titles. Salisbury, the capital of Rhodesia is now Harare in Zimbabwe. The Congo is now Zaire. Ceylon is now Sri Lanka. Burma is now

Myanmar; Peking is Beijing. In the late 1800's the British themselves changed the name of the strategic river town of Bytown in Canada to the name of the indigenous tribe-Ottawa became the capital of the second largest nation in the world. In Tamil Nadu Trivandrum is now Thiruvananthapuram. Perhaps one day India will be only Bharat in all languages.

Lanka Saivites Still Stand Strong

The 3-year-old Thevara Pan Isai Manram in Colombo reports that it is actively promoting the original music of the Tamil Devarams. Unique to their work is instruction in the ancient pann system of melodies used by the Tamil temple hymnists-the othuvar singers of old who were supported by the kings. The pann system was the forerunner of the modern Carnatic raga system. Today, temple othuvars in India enjoy paid careers, but not in Sri Lanka. The Manram holds annual competitions. Weekly classes free of charge. Donations may be sent to: 103/3, Hulftsdrop St., Colombo-12, Sri Lanka.

Son of Rajasthan Gives Back

On January 23, 1995, 51 pandits performed the foundation laying ceremony for Om Ashram in Rajasthan. Established by Paramahansa Swami Maheswarananda, who has been living and teaching in Europe for 25 years, the center will be shaped like an Om, with rooms for 108 residents. Om Ashram is dedicated to Swamiji's Paramaguru, Bhagwan Sri Deep Narayan Mahaprabhuji of Bari Khatu, Rajasthan, and will provide a Gurukula situation for spiritual study and research. Included will be facilities for medical treatment, orphanages, homes for the handicapped and aged and other social services.

Bright, Open, New UK Temple

UK's new Shree Jalaram Temple in Leicester is nearly finished. It has a Hindu exterior and a bright interior in contrast to the dark old homes, churches and the community center style buildings which house most UK Hindu places of worship. British bureauracy has generally resisted the erection of non-Christian looking

places of worship, but architect Rajan Gujeral originally from Chandigarh convinced the government to accept his novel design. He was determined to create a traditional look and a "user friendly, open, well-lit space." The first floor prayer hall will be done in white marble by craftsmen in India. The corner turret is a shikara.