WHF Augurs: "21st Century Belongs to Hindus."
Category : August/September/October/November 1996
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 01, 1970

WHF Augurs: "21st Century Belongs to Hindus."

Dr. Hari Bansh Jha, Nepal

With the message that the 21st century belongs to the Hindus, the three-day 11th International Executive Committee Meeting of the World Hindu Federation (WHF) ended on May 4, 1996, on top of the world at Kathmandu, Nepal. After reading a message of goodwill from His Majesty, the King, Nepal's Prime Minister, Bher Bahadur Deuba, inaugurated the meeting of WHF and told the multi-national audience that religious tolerance and communal harmony remain the national character of Nepal. Christian and Muslim conversion concerns dominated the meeting. WHF president Krishna Gopal Tandon noted with satisfaction that reconversion efforts were taking place with greater success in Nepal.

Nepal's State Minister for Land Reforms, Buddhi Man Tamang, (a Buddhist) reported that in the Dhading district he managed to reconvert nearly 7,000 Christians to Buddhism. Dhading has experienced more conversion than other districts in Nepal, particularly in the remote parts. Tamang said he had to apply force to chase Christian missionaries away from the districts. To the same end, he has launched various social service activities to offset the social service-based promulgation campaign of the Christians. Tamang proposed the

establishment of a Hindu Training Centre where young boys and girls would be given training to thwart conversion of poor and uneducated people. He reported that missionaries are attempting to create a rift between Hindus and Buddhists. He complained that Non-Governmental Organizations, who are supposed to be doing humanitarian work, are instead helping in the conversion efforts. The number of NGOs has increased from a few hundred before the political change in 1990 to 20,000 today. Billions of rupees are spent by Christian and Muslim missionaries for the conversion of the Nepalese people.

Ashok Singhal, Executive President of World Hindu Federation, India Chapter, and General Secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of India, concurred that the Nepal government should control the flow of money through NGOs if it really wants to preserve its indigenous culture, religion and Hindu identity.

WHF member, Hari Prasad Pandey, expressed concern over the conversion to Christianity of Bhutanese refugees in Nepalese camps. He recommended that the Chief District Office in all the districts should report to the WHF central body about the number and whereabouts of the converts so that an accurate evaluation may be made of the situation and the affected people reconverted. Nepalese law is firm, no one is allowed to convert one's faith. If a person is found to have converted his faith, he (or she) is to be punished by law and then again he has to return to his original faith. It is due to the weakness of enforcement that the number of the converts is growing, he noted.

Achyut Raj Regmi, president of the WHF Nepal chapter, noted

with pain that there has been a planned effort to reduce the ratio of Hindus in the total population of the country so that it might be declared secular. He appealed to all concerned Hindus outside Nepal to extend cooperation in countering the missionary efforts which are such a threat to the country.

Gajanand Agrawal, a WHF member, said Hindus should not allow their children to receive education in Christian missionary schools. He proposed that Hindus ought to have a small place of worship in their houses so that the children are more aware of Hinduism.

Protecting Hinduism in the World

Lord Krishna, according to Jay Pataka of Iskcon, predicted that the 21st century would be a time of rejuvenation of Hindus. "The 21st century will belong to the Hindus," he proclaimed. Pataka said it was very important that Hindus living in different countries of the world write letters to the concerned heads of government or the ambassadors whenever any kind of atrocities occurred against Hindus. Destruction of Hindu temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh was mentioned by several speakers.

At the end of the three-day meeting, the general impression of the participants was that Hindus need to be aggressive rather than defensive to make Hinduism a dynamic and vibrant force in the 21st century. Other resolutions echoed resolutions of previous WHF conferences--concerns about unethical conversion, caste discrimination at places of worship and the

need to welcome back those returning to the Hindu fold.

The house unanimously directed the secretariat of the WHF to take necessary steps to implement the World Hindu Federation Welfare Foundation on a global scale for the provision of welfare services, education, scholarships, medical needs, etc., specifically for the younger generation of Hindus and also to a1locate a part of the fund of the Foundation for the Global Hindu Community.

It was directed that a suitable person should be appointed to take a permanent seat in UNESCO to represent the WHF. Additionally, it was emphasized in the resolutions that the project for the development of the site granted by His Majesty's Government of Nepal for the building project of the International Hindu Centre be speedily implemented.

Some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction about the way the WHF has been functioning. Jay Prakash, Central Executive Member and Vice Chairman of Nepal Chapter, said that: "Instead of doing some action-oriented work we have merely made the WHF as a talking place." There was also a call among certain participants, including Dato S. Govinda Raj, Vice President, WHF, Pranlal V. Lakhani, President, S.A. Hindu Maha Sabha and Dr. I.B. Oka Punia Atmaja for the change in the leadership of the WHF to make it a vibrant force.

The World Hindu Federation was founded in 1981 under the patronship of His Majesty, King Birendra of Nepal. Its main purpose--yet to be realized--is to serve as a central

organization to coordinate the activities of and speak for the hundreds of Hindu organizations worldwide. Address: World Hindu Federation, Central Office, Pashupati Kshetra, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Dr. Hari Bansh Jha is associate professor of economics at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, executive director of the Centre for Economic and Technical Studies and economic advisor to the Kingdom of Nepal. He lives in Kathmandu with his wife and two children.

Sidebar: Hinduism in Goa

By Preety Sengupta, New York, USA

For the last 30 years, Goa's sugar-white beaches on the southwestern coast of India have attracted a large assortment of people ranging from Western hippies to honeymooners from various parts of India. Everyone knows there is something quite different about its Indian/European hybrid culture. But few know more than that Goa was forcibly taken back by the Indian army from the Portuguese in 1961 after a rule of 450 years. In the 16th century, Portuguese Christian missionaries arrived together with their country's navy--then one of the most powerful in the world. Together they set about creating such a bastion of Christianity that it remains a place of pilgrimage for that faith today. Despite the force and cruelty used to convert the people of Goa, the faith in and feelings for Hinduism never faded. When they could not pray publically, Hindus risked their lives and continued to worship in secret. As the Portuguese canons destroyed the temples, many deities were removed to far-away villages, or even hidden in corners

of private homes. Some of them may have been brought back to the temples later, but most of the Hindu temple sacred objects are now found in some of the Goa churches and in Bombay and Delhi museums. Only one 13th century Siva temple is almost intact on a faraway seashore in southern Goa, at Tambdi Surla. With the slate roof of its front hall in pieces, it stands forlorn amidst thick trees. Grass grows all around it and up on its multi-layered temple tower.

Modern visitors to Goa do not expect to see, nor do they notice, the strong presence of Hinduism in today's Goa, though the area is 60% Hindu. There are many modern temples, unique in their architecture, which has been influenced by all its rulers. Scholars have dubbed it "Indian Christian Baroque Art" [see top photograph for an example]. It is a workable if untraditional cross between an 18th century Christian church and a Hindu temple. Each temple is a complex, consisting of one or more houses of worship, offices, rooms for priests as well as visitors and a kitchen serving food all day. Outside their high walls there is a cistern, and inside the spacious compound, along with a pagoda-like structure, there is Tulsi Vrindavan,an Indian basil plant growing in a huge, elaborate, brightly painted cement or brick stand.

On the inner roads of Goa, Hindu houses are easily identified due to the tulsi shrine in front of the compounds. In a few, the plants may be dead or uncared for, in many they are big and healthy. One might even come upon signs proclaiming, "brahmin section." There are countless shrines for Siva and the Goddess erected on roadsides, under trees, in the middle of overpass bridges, on the beach, everywhere. Locals and out-of-towners alike throng the temples to enthusiastically

participate in the profusion of festivals that take place on many nights every month.