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Letters

Education to Stop Conversions

I read about missionary activities in in Hinduism Today (Nov/Dec 2000). How do we stop this stupidity? Only by raising the literacy rate and thus improving the standard of living. While I was vacationing in India this summer, I found a lot of NRIs and locals opening up software companies, creating jobs and prosperity. But these are not really helping the uneducated, the really poor. This is increasing the gap between the haves and have-nots. This gap creates the opportunities for the likes of popes, Robertsons, Hinns and Southern Baptist crowds. Here in the US, we always hear how good the Indian community is doing and how the dot-com era has made many Indian entrepreneurs millions. I hope all of us living in US make a commitment to adopt a poor student, a family or a village and provide education to them. We can all choose according to our means and financial resources. An educated Hindu will never convert. She/He will not find anything in other religions that is not found in Hinduism. An educated Hindu will keep the missionaries and the jihads at bay. India has given all of us a lot in providing a great educational system at free or very low cost. This I think is very least we can do to protect our culture, our great religion and our loving Bharat Mata.

Anand Parvathaneni

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Why Focus on India's Cattle?

We were asked by Indians to come to India to help with a cattle crisis. Like the rest of the world, we naively thought there would be somewhat decent treatment of cattle still in India, but several circumstances, including Western influence, have changed things since I grew up there. What we found there was truly beyond hideous, by any standard! We carefully followed the cattle lorries and watched things done to the cows, their beloved calves and others that are in violation of the Constitution of India, a law I am sure you wish, as we do, to have enforced. When trying to achieve one goal, you must focus, of course. So, we told the Indian government that we would push for an Indian leather boycott if they would not take action. That has helped, for, sadly, pressure and not shame is what often makes things happen. How sad, but what can one do? Since the announcement, the leather industry in India has got involved to try to push the government to make reforms, too! If Hindus are concerned that this is a nationalistic attack, please dismiss the thought. It is anything but. Perhaps we naively believed India would be more receptive to imposing even minimally humane, or at least a little less cruel, standards for cows, but

as Indians pointed out to us when they asked us to help, India looks to world opinion. Thank you for being a part of the solution.

Ingrid Newkirk

President, PETA

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Sikh Debate Misconceptions

The facts supplied by Rajiv Srinivasan (November/December 2000) are mostly wrong. He says that Sikhism does not indulge in metaphysics. But he is wrong. The main emphasis of Sikhism is attainment of moksha by attaining jnana or metaphysical knowledge. The concepts of Brahma, maya and atma are there. And they call liberation moksha and not nirvana as suggested by the author. The author believes that the color of Sikhism is white. But he is wrong. The colour of Sikhism is also saffron, which is evident in the Sikh flag. Sikhs do not say that the

words of the Guru Grantha Sahib are the words of God. Each verse is listed with its author. The authors of the verses of the Guru Grantha Sahib are not only the Sikh gurus, but also Hindu poet-saints. Sikhism does not believe in the caste system. But Sikhs follow the caste system. In the same way, the Hindu religion does not advocate the caste system, but the society follows it. The Sikhs do not worship the book. But the book is the Guru who helps attain God.

Vegetarianism is an ideal for Sikhism also. It is only in war-like situations that a Sikh is allowed to eat meat, and even that after sacrifice to chandi (called jhatka). Alcohol, tobacco and beef are forbidden to a Sikh. Although idol worship is not indicated in Sikhism, many Sikhs attend Hindu temples. And, in fact, the Hindus of Punjab have traditionally attended the Sikh Gurudwaras. The author does not know the name of the last guru of the

Sikhs. He says that the last guru was Guru Teg Bahadur. But actually the last guru was Guru Gobind Singh. A person who does not even know the names of the gurus, how is he eligible to write about Sikhism? And how do you people at Hinduism Today publish his uncorrected article?

Premendra Priyadarshi

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New HPI Spotlights Appreciated

The New Hindu Press

International started by Hinduism Today in October, 2000, [see back cover for details] is a unique service which Hindus worldwide ought to be proud of. These short news snippets are not only interesting but very

informative. As an HPI subscriber and a journalist, I receive this veritable mine of information five times a week which enables me to get the latest news bulletins and a wider perspective of happenings in the Hindu world. And what I like most of HPI is that while it presents the sunny side of Hindu Dharma, it does not shirk from showing up the dark side too. In this context I would like to point out some HPI stories. The revelations at the Shri Sanatana Hindu temple in Alperton (London) regarding the low pay and shoddy treatment meted out to the Hindu stone masons specially brought out from India are rather startling. As for the Indian

government's funding of a Chair on Indian Studies in Oxford--the money could be better put to use on educational and research institutions within India itself.

Krishan Dutt

London, England

Ganesha--The High-Tech God

I thought your little Ganesha statue at the computer was great. Professional computer operators may well need a patron saint, as there are new ailments arising with this new technology. A statue like this on a desk may keep the operator in his right mind.

David Yuhas

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Please! More Sikh Coverage
I noticed your magazine is quite keen on giving news about Hinduism (whatever it means) and even about non-Hindu communities like the Jains and Buddhists. I find it really strange that your magazine doesn't give any substantial news about Sikhs. This is quite scandalous, as Sikhism is at least as rich and diverse as are Saivism,

Vaishnavism or Saktism. I would appreciate if your magazine could give us more news related to Sikhism. Eighty percent of the victims for the independence of India were Sikhs, and Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life for the protection of the Kashmiri Pandits and their traditions. I hope you don't forget that!

"Kaik"

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Some Killings Are

Unavoidable?

I was a bit disturbed by the fact that we often push back common sense in attempting to establish a humane relationship between humans and nature. Forget about the silver foil that covers the sweet (Meat-tainted Goodies, Nov/Dec 2000). What about the sugar that is an ingredient of the sweet? Where do we get the charcoal that is used in

whitening the sugar? Sometimes it is bone charcoal that makes the sugar white. Bones are also used to produce gelatin, a water soluble protein, which is used in the manufacture of certain glues. The use of gelatin varies with its grade level. It is used for confectionary, pharmaceutical capsules, table jellies, to name a few. It has also got its place in ice cream, mayonnaise,

vinegar, beer, wine and in non-food products, such as photographic film. The very well-known glycerine component in soaps is made mainly from animal fat, namely whale oil. Albumin that is used in making buttons and plywood adhesive comes from blood (serum albumin). Hair of pigs and horses are widely used in rugs and upholstery stuffings. The

anti-inflammatory drug cortisone was once an animal by-product, although it is now synthesized from ingredients contained in yams and soybeans. The list goes on.

Must we give up all animal derivatives to become a compassionate human being? It is impractical. But by following a vegetarian diet, we can contribute in an

indirect way to solve the problem of animal suffering. A person of goodwill will find a happy balance between spiritual ideals and a hyper-consumptive lifestyle which goes with modernity by practicing kindness without being totally withdrawn from the world.

Vijaya Krishnan

Edmonton, Alberta,
Canada

Sanskrit Chanting

I also decided to purchase Andrea and Sarah Forman's "Shanti Shanti" CD after reading about them in Hinduism Today. I have been studying Sanskrit since 1992 with several teachers, and I have not found anything in either the "Shanti Shanti" or the "Walking With The Devas" albums that was so badly mispronounced that the meaning was lost

(Letters, Jan/Feb, 2001). I am very impressed with the depth of the Forman sisters' Sanskrit scholarship. Just bringing Hindu dharma into a state (Nevada) where slot machines far outnumber Sanskrit pundits is quite an achievement. Even if there were a few pronunciation errors, I would still cut them some slack. They're only teenagers. Give them a few more years to learn and mature. For an example of

Sanskrit being mangled beyond recognition and exploited for commercial gain, you need look no further than Madonna. It is possible that Madonna has experienced a spiritual transformation through studying Sanskrit and is not just using Hindu symbols in the same way that she used Catholic symbols in the 1980s. Nonetheless, she did quite a hatchet job on the "Shanti Ashtangi"

verses in her "Ray of Light"
CD.

Mike Brooker

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USA Studies on India
Slanted

In a Hindutva
oriented discussion
group that I am
associated with, a
person made an

interesting point about academic studies in the USA. He wondered about the multitude of studies, leading up to Ph.D.s even, on subjects related to India, on the caste system, on the discarded Aryan Invasion theory and generally putting Hinduism and India in bad light. Not that he objects to them. But, he

wondered why there are no studies on aggressive behavior of Muslim and Christian missionaries in India, the way Hindus managed to preserve their own culture despite serious efforts to vandalize it, on the ancient sciences in India, etc., subjects which would project a positive side of Indian and Hindu

society. He recognized that these subjects are not covered in the universities in India either. I thought it useful to share this incisive observation.
Ashok Chowgule

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Accolades from Mumbai

I deeply appreciate the contribution which you and the periodical Hinduism Today are making for this principal religion in foreign lands. It came to my knowledge, when my business associate came to

India from Canada and gave me a copy. She even told me that this magazine is well read in Hindu circuits in North America. I congratulate you for the success you all have achieved. Indeed it is a mammoth task. Hindu literature has attracted millions of

people all around the world who are tired of living the materialistic life and are in search of spirituality. Amidst controversies, Hindu religion stands gracefully like a lighthouse, guiding millions of people on the path of tolerance, devotion, dedication

and eternal peace.
One should be proud
to be a Hindu.

Narendra Singh Rao
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Missionaries/Secessi
onism

I have watched with

horror the news about bombings of churches in Indonesia. This is a civil war that was a direct result of decades of covert missionary activity. For once I feel even India is faced with massive problems as

a result of illiteracy. Before, at least people had harikathas telling them the finer points of Vedanta. So people lived in contentment. I don't personally oppose any personal group or belief, but I feel

Christian missionaries are going to cause civil wars in India in the long run. And the security of India could be jeopardized. Christians say Jesus saved the world. But I believe that

actually Jesus may have caused all the wars, crusades and continuing deaths of innocent people. Followers of Jesus are blindly causing immense pain to humanity as they have for centuries, either through war

or deception. It would be interesting to lodge a complaint against Jesus in court. In today's international law, people are put to trial for crimes against humanity, for causing wars or other genocides.

Even if it is late, why can't there be a trial for Jesus for the crusades and continuing disturbances caused in various societies like South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam etc.? Though these disturbances are

given a communist coloration, Christian missionaries use them as effectively as crusades. If my opinions hurt feelings of others, then I am extremely sorry, but then my sensitivities are hurt by blind annihilation

of diversity and continued strife due to provocations of Christian missionary activity in the name of human rights. I am very respectful of Jesus Christ as a person who taught good, however I feel let down by the

fanaticism he generated among his followers. Maybe in the future things will change and people will come to accept that spirituality has many paths leading to the same goal.

Dasaradhi TikkiSETTY

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Who Is a Smarta?
I read with interest
your article Free at
Last! (Jan/Feb
2000). However, I
take exception to

the way you have
characterized
"Smarta
Hinduism." The
tradition initiated
by Adi Sankara
was based on pure
nondualism
(Shuddha
Advaitavada) as

taught by
Upanishads, which
are considered to
be Shrutis, the
revealed
scriptures. I fail to
see why this
tradition should be
termed "Smartism"
(the teaching

following Smriti, or tradition). By calling it Smartism, you give the impression that it is based on Smritis, the auxiliary scriptures, which are not as

authentic as
Shrutis. I have
been studying
Hinduism for more
than 25 years and I
have not yet found
a tradition which is
more intellectually
satisfying and
emotionally

gratifying than that
propounded by Adi
Sankara.

Pradeep Srivastava
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* The tradition
of Smarta
brahmins who now
espouse the

philosophy of Adi
Sankara pre-dates
Sankara by 600
years or more. The
term Smarta,
which is accepted
and used by these
brahmins
themselves,
correctly reflects

the fact that most of the rituals, daily personal, social and caste observances of this tradition, are based on Smritis and not on the Vedas.

Corrections

* The author of "What Future the Priesthood?" (September/October 2000), Sivakamasundari Shanmugasundaram is employed

in the Information
Technology
department of an
automotive
company and
resides in the
state of Michigan.
She no longer
owns her own

business as
stated in her
biographic
information.

* The aum on the
cover of
September/Octob

er 2000 issue was
created by Nemo
(www.nemo.org).
We are sorry that
the credit did not
appear in that
issue.

Letters, with
writer's name,
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daytime phone
number, should
be sent to:

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107

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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of Hinduism Today.