Hindu News Service Launched
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MEDIA

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Today's stories to a computer near you

By Kalyani Giri, Houston

Shortly after my first article was accepted for Hinduism Today, I was recruited to summarize stories for the magazine's newly formed Internet news service, Hindu Press International. I had no idea what was expected of me until I received the first story, on the Babri Masjid/Ayodhya Temple which had been scanned directly from the Deccan Chronicle newspaper and sent to me as an attachment. When opened, I found all the words on-screen so magnified that only two words could be seen at a time! Frustrated with my dangerously pathetic knowledge of computers and my antiquated PowerMac, I was compelled to send out an anguished S.O.S. to a friend who made it readable for me to summarize. The next day, when I saw the completed HPI page, with my summary one among several, I understood what a unique concept it was.

In an interview, HINDUISM TODAY'S publisher, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, explained to me that he had long ago envisioned a daily announcement of developing news and time-sensitive stories which could not be accommodated by the bimonthly Hinduism Today. Also, Gurudeva said, "The news media tend to take a negative point of view on Hinduism. Most religious news is slanted to the other faiths, not Hinduism. With this free public service, we hope to broaden the minds of media who can be quite flexible when shown a different perspective." He felt the nonstop coverage of the Kumbha Mela provided by HPI showed the strength of Hinduism and "sent out a strong message that Christian conversion just won't work." "HPI goes to the major wire services as well as hundreds of newspapers and magazines," Gurudeva said, "giving an instant channel for important Hindu news."

Now, almost to a year after it first appeared on computer screens, HPI has become for me an addictive source of news snippets from all over the world. Occasionally, HPI reports breaking news provided by HINDUISM TODAY correspondents, but mostly it is summaries of reports appearing on the web sites of wire services, newspapers and magazines all over the world. I was awestruck by the seemingly endless variety of news that arrived daily. It was impossible not to get emotionally involved with stories that came my way.

HPI is issued approximately 20 times a month and carries three to eight summaries a day. You can subscribe by sending any message to hpi_list-on@hindu.org. It is created by a volunteer staff, most of whom are spiritual students of Gurudeva. A research team of six is located in Canada, California, Singapore, India, England and Hawaii. They each have specific countries of publications to scan and select from a wide spectrum of subjects, including temples, conversion, Hinduism, ayurveda, vegetarianism, women's issues, ethnic/cultural diversity or conflict, health, yogaanything and everything pertaining to Hinduism. A smattering of political reports is selected if they deal with religious issues. Story options are e-mailed toHINDUISMTODAY in Hawaii, and selections are sent out to a second team who summarize and return the shortened versions, usually the same day. Those summaries are edited, then posted to the HPI website and sent out to the e-mail subscription list, which now numbers over 1,600. "If we were to improve," stated one of the editors, "it would likely be to include more regional and local language press reports. Many stories appear only in the Hindi papers, for example. If the paper has no website, then the article is scanned and e-mailed to us."

I interviewed the HPI team by e-mail, curious how they got involved. Kauai-based Tara Katir spends an hour a day browsing through several Indian and mainstream

media. She wrote, "How pervasive is the spread of Sanatana Dharma! Finding Hindu news coming from Russia was initially a surprise, but has now become a matter of course." Janaka Param in northern California explained he searches four Indian papers daily: Deccan Chronicle, Indian Express, Hindustan Times and The Hindu. Toshadeva Guhan of the Catalina Islands in Southern California told me that he enjoys reading reports on how Vedic culture is kept alive and woven through the daily lives of so many people. Then from UK, Vijay Pillai modestly claimed, "I must be one of the least contributors! There is hardly any news trickling down from Europe," which is his area of focus. He hopes to find more items pertaining to Hindu achievements. On the UK beat is Easan Katir of California, while Lavanya Saravan covers Singapore/Malaysia.

Four of us do the summaries myself, fellow Texan Tara Barrie-Hull, Chandra Sankara of California and Shama Vinayaga of Canada. "I'm inspired by stories about new temples and positive programs initiated by Hindu students. The Taliban displease me," Chandra told me. Shama found that with the writing process, creativity did not always flow at will! She finds that it is a "growing" process. "I am most affected by the plight of East Indian seniors when they move to America in the autumn of their lives."

With an e-mail poll of subscribers, I found people with genuine concerns for Hinduism. George Thundiparambil of Germany wrote that he is grateful HPI covers "news close to my heart Indians in general and Hindus in particular!" Jewish reader Paul Byck said he wants our help in galvanizing the world community of Jews to wear armbands in support of the Hindus in Taliban. Ramesh Zawar, a journalist from India said we need more coverage on the hard political angle of events. Dutt in UK wrote, "What I like most about HPI is that while it presents the sunny side of Hindu Dharma, it does not shirk from showing up the dark side, too."

HPI is at: www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/