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Letters

Nine Questions

I read with interest the characterization of Hinduism in your May/June 2000 issue. In your "Nine Questions," you contrast the true Hindus, who follow some variant of Vedanta, from the ignorant and superstitious theistic Hindus, "the more uneducated people who are not able to understand high philosophy." Now, India is still a primarily rural country, and the majority of people in village India are sincere and practicing Hindus--however, they are not practicing Vedanta philosophy. That may be the province of the brahmin priest five villages away, but "real" Hinduism for them is the worship of deities, gods and goddesses and kshetrapalas and ancestors, who care for and protect them. Dismissing the majority of Hindus who follow bhakti devotionalism as "lower" and inferior, and calling their religious beliefs simply children's stories, is patronizing and elitist. It creates the same sorts of hierarchies that have plagued India through the caste system. It might be more respectful to other forms of Hindu belief to say that there are many understandings of Hinduism, and that your magazine wishes to emphasize a particular type. This would show more of the tolerance that Hinduism traditionally emphasizes, for as your article states, "we are very tolerant of all religions."

June McDaniel

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* The term "Vedanta" was not used in our answer, and our concept of "higher philosophy" does not at all exclude or denigrate theism or devotion, as your letter implies. We did not say, nor do we believe, that the Gods do not exist, and hold that devotion is very important for all Hindus. Our complaint lay with the Puranic stories associated with the Gods.

The May/June issue was such a special treat. The article "Nine Questions" was so well done. As a Hindu in a predominantly Christian community, I often get questioned (sometimes interrogated) about my religion and spiritual practices. I especially appreciated the three-phase answers you gave. It is so helpful to myself and also to a friend who is very interested in Hinduism.

Deepa Good

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Message to Sadhus

My request to our revered Hindu sadhus is not to speak much on Islam and

Christianity until our sadhus also become more familiar with the ideology and history of Islam and Christianity with relation to Hinduism. The slogans "Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai" ("Hindus and Muslims are brothers") or "Hindu-Christian Bhai Bhai" or "Islam, Christianity and Hinduism teach the same thing" are not doing good for Hindu society. These slogans are misleading Hindus; a one-way traffic has been established of conversion from Hinduism to Islam and from Hinduism to Christianity. A number of Hindu girls are marrying Muslims and Christians. They correctly tell their parents, "Your religious sadhus are declaring that all religions teach the same thing. Then why are you taking objection to our getting converted to Islam or Christianity?" Hindu parents have become helpless. They put the blame on Hindu sadhus for teaching such things. Muslim maulvis and Christian

ministers never teach their followers that all religions teach the same thing.

G. C. Asnani, Delhi
New Delhi, India

Hinduism and Polytheism

I am an archaeology student in the University of Sheffield, UK. I am from Hellas (Greece), and follow The Great Hellenic (Greek) Religion of the major and other hundreds of Gods, Goddesses, heroes, demons etc. Our religion belongs to the same group with all the other traditional (pagan) polytheistic religions. Like Hinduism, Shinto, the Northern tradition (Asatru, Vanatru, Odinism, Druidism), Chinese religion, Roman religion, etc., our religion almost disappeared from Christian and Muslim persecutions, yet survived after all these centuries of darkness underground and

reappeared in our days in a unique and glorious way. As you maybe already know, the Greek religion is very similar to Hinduism, and especially to Saivite Hinduism, which is the most ancient and traditional. We believe in karma (antipeponthos), metempsychosis and the immortality of the soul, with her voyage within the cycle of births and rebirths. I was disappointed though when I found that even in your path of Hinduism which we love so much--honestly--there are attempts to make it sound somehow essentially monotheistic, especially since contact with Islam and Christianity, and even more so during English occupation and the rest of the 20th century. Why are you trying to compromise your glorious religion in this way? Do you not believe that our glorious Gods are real entities and personalities? We believe the Gods are not created from one superior God. Very simply, they are the products of

mother nature. They are real beings and not the various forms of the One God. Zeus, Artemis, Afrodite, etc. are different divine entities which evolved within the cycle of births and rebirths here on Earth as humans first and then became immortal, escaping from the wheel of reincarnation and went to the higher subtle worlds retaining all their memories and character. They are filled with love and compassion for all the beings, especially the human beings. They are like you and me, real and different beings, but much, much more evolved, with a perfect soul and knowledge of the holy laws of nature and the universe.

Konstantinos Artemion Meimarides

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Bangladesh Hindus

I just read the article "a bleak Future for Bangladesh Hindus" [February 2000]. As a black male of mostly African descent, I was struck by your surprise that the suffering of Bangladeshi Hindus was relegated to one and two sentence "sound bites," which were not even true. I am from Guyana, and I have distant family from India. We brown and black people have never been paid much attention. I know that many Indians and people of Indian descent would rather not be considered part of the world's "black" (just using the word given to us all) population, but they must realize that our experiences are pretty much the same. We (black

and brown) are treated in the exact same manner by the white people of the world. Please consider this: that what happened in Rwanda, and in other places in Africa, was given the same treatment as what is happening to Hindus in Bangladesh. The Hindus who had to flee Bangladesh have my sympathy, and I will try to make my representatives in the US know and understand what is going on. I tried to do the same for the refugees from Rwanda; how could I do any less for any other oppressed people?

Kenrick Andrew Codrington-Valz
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Youth Page

I have recently started to subscribe to Hinduism Today and am pleased and proud the way articles are presented. They are so precise, yet so informative. It is so difficult to explain the concepts of Sanatana Dharma to an inquisitive person. Your articles have the right blend of spiritual and social aspects which makes it more interesting. However, there seem to be no articles for young children. Children growing up in Western society (even in India for that

matter now) unfortunately do not get any logical information about Hinduism from their parents. I hope that you will be able to target articles at young children of different age groups and levels of understanding.

Karthi Subramanian

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Tirupati Troubles

I just returned from Tirupati, India. After such a tiring journey from Madras,

I finally reached the temple at Tirumalai. My friends told me beforehand that the computerized ticketing system will make sure that you will get your chance to enter the shrine based on your ticket timing. When I checked in at 6:45pm, I got my turn for the next day at 12:05pm. We were quite surprised when two men approached us and offered to help, saying that we will be able to do everything,

shave and get darshan, if we are willing to spend 300 rupees each. We were really short of time, so we accepted the offer. We were really shocked when one of the management staff of the temple came to the gate to let us in even though the computerized ticket shows that it was not our turn yet. These management people use their positions to demand bribes just to enter the

temple. They know foreigners wouldn't mind spending some money to save as much time as possible. To solve this problem, there should be an express counter for foreigners. Even if the price is double, no one will mind, as the money would then go to the temple.

Jogeswar Rao

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Lacking Value for Women

Regarding your article, "the price Brides Pay," [May/June 2000]: This article was truly shocking, even chilling. The attempt to justify the abuse and even murder of brides for dowry because "dowry didn't evolve from India, Hindus got it from

Europeans," is abhorrent and indicates an unwillingness to accept responsibility. You continue to show your lack of compassion and caring for your daughters in another article in the same issue. There you state that sati was a "cultural misunderstanding" when Europeans encountered

the Sanatana Dharma. No, these so-called "sacrifices" are murder, pure and simple. It is cruel to suggest that a wife, out of piety, might want to burn herself alive. I wonder why no husbands were apparently willing to do this? As if this were not enough to show the lack of mercy and

appreciation for the value of the life of women and female children, there is more--the aborting of female fetuses and killing of female babies at birth that is practiced in some parts of India. Saddest of all, in this same issue a letter to the editor stated this: "Hindus know that every

human being is the
manifestation of God."
The revision of
inheritance or property
laws would begin to put
a stop to these
uncivilized practices.

Joy Rana

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No Conversion by Chaplains

Thank you for your letter of May 13, 2000, concerning an article in the Washington Post about evangelical chaplains in the United States Navy. I wish to thank you for making known your concern for the

religious welfare of Hindu military service members. Regardless of what may be reported in the news media, the military services, including the Navy, remain committed to the free exercise of religion for all service members. Each service chaplain

school teaches the importance of accommodating the religious needs of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of all faiths while remaining consistent with the tenets of their own faith. Additionally, periodic chaplain training initiatives

reinforce the necessity of chaplains to continually assess and facilitate for the religious needs of all personnel in the command. This is the foundation upon which the chaplaincy rests. As you know, chaplains are ordained or certified by

religious organizations to provide religious and spiritual ministry and to conduct worship ceremonies. While conducting faith-specific worship observances chaplains may employ theological concepts and language that are part of his or her

worship tradition. On the other hand, chaplains must also be sensitive to the religious needs of personnel who may represent religious traditions different from their own. In doing so, chaplains are strictly enjoined from proselytizing.

Rest assured that the military services are committed to safeguarding the free exercise of religion for all service members as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. I have never heard of an instance in which a chaplain from any of

the services has attempted to persuade a service member to abandon his or her religious faith in favor of the religion of the chaplain. If you know of any such instance, please let me know.

R. O. Gunter

Captain, Chaplain
Corps, U.S. Navy

Executive Director Armed Forces Chaplains Board

Great Magazine

As a practicing
Tibetan Buddhist of
twelve years, I yet find
Hinduism Today an
indispensable part of

my own education and rejoicing in all forms of dharma. I make time to read the magazine in the midst of a life of practice and community work and study in another tradition. I am always inspired by the stories of different holy people's lives. I read

news articles that I could not know from any other source. And I weep at the violence and misunderstandings in the world, between peoples, races, religions and nations, so pointedly noted through many articles. I use information, both

from letters and articles, to broaden the views and understandings of those in my life. Hinduism Today has opened me to many realms that, even in India, would have been closed to my eyes otherwise. While in India, twice through

five months over two years' time, I wanted to cry out to you, for your voice appears large. Please help the peoples and races and religions of the world understand each other. Please encourage Hindus, as you do, to live in their daily lives the most

immense wisdom, love and kindness that every aspect of their tradition provides them, the fountain for the streams of so many other traditions. And Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's Publishers Desk articles nourish the path in whatever

tradition!

Helece Rose

Questa, New
Mexico

Encyclopedia
Britannica

If you boot up the
ramakrishna page of
the Encyclopedia

Britannic online at
<http://search.britannica.com/search?m...238&query=Ramakrishna> you can see that Kali's Child (whose thesis is that Ramakrishna was homosexual) is the first book recommended, and also the fourth book

recommended.
Narasingha Sil's
appalling book
Ramakrishna Revisited
is number two. While
we find these two
books offensive, we
nevertheless are not
requesting that they
be stricken from their
list. What we would
like is a representative

list of the books
concerning Sri
Ramakrishna.

Naturally we would
hope that they would
include the basic
source books
concerning Sri
Ramakrishna: The
Gospel of Sri
Ramakrishna,
Ramakrishna: The

Great Master, and The
Life of Sri
Ramakrishna along
with more
contemporary books
such as Christopher
Isherwood's
Ramakrishna and His
Disciples or Richard
Schiffman's Sri
Ramakrishna: Prophet
for the New Age. I'd

like as many Hindus as possible to respond en masse to the Britannica's site (editor@britannica.com). While they can ignore 20 letters from irritated or offended Hindus, they might not be as cavalier with 1,000 letters. I would like ideas and lists of

Hindu organizations or individuals that might be interesting in responding to this issue. It's bad enough that Kali's Child was highly touted in academia and assigned in college classrooms; having it recommended (twice!) by the Encyclopedia

Britannica on their
website is even worse!
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Letters, with writer's
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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of Hinduism Today.