Diaspora
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PAKISTAN

Upset Pilgrims

Shiva Bajaj and 86 fellow Indian pilgrims didn't enjoy the serene experience they expected during a week-long pilgrimage to the Shri Kattasraj temples in Pakistan. Upon arriving they found that only a dozen out of the original 192 Hindu temples still stand, and those were in shambles. Deities were either missing or damaged, and pujas were absent. Bajaj, organizer of the pilgrimage, has requested the government to construct bathing ghats, renovate temples and allow a priest to perform puja. This year the government allowed just 87 pilgrims to enter the Muslim nation, though an official Indo-Pakistani agreement calls for 200.

ARCHITECTURE

Building with Nature

Yes, house-building can be done without bulldozing every tree in sight. The Sanskrutha Pathashala (Sanskrit training school for kids) branch of Sringeri Math was selected from 42 entries to receive India's first "Inside Outside Designer of the Year" award for eco-friendly architecture and interior design. Two Bangalore-based architects, Gayathri and Namith, got the credit. Says Gayathri, "The idea was to be sensitive to the surroundings and create a balance between man, nature and architecture." The building is all natural, even the sills and lintels are granite, and no concrete was used. The floors are

terra cotta, the walls are burnt bricks and clay, and the roof uses Mangalore tiles.

PLAYTIME

Toys R Them

Tiny figurines of parade elephants, Ganesha, Vishnu, divine horses, a king in procession, you name it--kids in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, get their fill of faith through simple toys. The best known toys of Andhra Pradesh, according to Discover India magazine, hail from the toy-making community of Aryakshatriyas in Kondapalli village. Their playthings are made of a kind of light wood known locally as punki. Each wooden piece is first cut, then slowly heated to draw out all the moisture. Different parts of the image--be it a figure representing scenes from daily life, Hindu Gods or animals--are carved separately, then stuck together with an adhesive made from crushed tamarind seeds. After this dries, another adhesive called lime glue is applied. Brilliant colors, both water and oil, are then chosen to paint the toy or figurine, using brushes made of goat's hair. You'll find figures of Siva, Vishnu, a single hut with a woman cooking, a man climbing a palm tree, youngsters tending sheep, or a woman pounding grain or spinning on a wheel. Nirmal village is another toy making center, where, the story goes, ancient craftsmen manufactured a material as glowing and enduring as gold, from herbal extraction! Even the predominant color in Nirmal toys is gold. A boost for toy making is found in the Navaratri festival, during which toys and dolls are displayed in front of homes.

INTERFAITH

Let Art Do the Talking

Religious ignorance is dissolving in north carolina. Led by Ray Williams, curator at the Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina, artists, scholars, clergy, parents and children are fueling the Five Faiths Project. Affiliated with Harvard's Pluralism Project, it's made up of storytelling groups, photography workshops, museum exhibits, classroom projects and community performances. The goal is community-wide exploration of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam through ancient art and contemporary practice. Williams is preparing multimedia resources to help educators nationwide teach about religions through art, including art reproductions, scholarly commentary, sacred texts, stories and more. "Something about museums can leave people with an impression that Hinduism, for example, stopped in the 12th century and only existed in India," he says. "I make it clear these are living religions--that icons like a bronze statue of Krishna are still used today and millions of people believe in Krishna as God." Photos will be a key resource. Jewish and Hindu children (so far) were trained for eight weeks to create photo representations of their faith. Each group thought the other's photos were more interesting than their own. Danielle Strauss, a Jewish 6th grader, said the young Hindu photographers "really did a good job of portraying all their different customs."

INDIA

Music Power

This man knows his tunes. Writer of a 12,000-page book in two volumes on the history of Indian music and working on a third, Hariharan Nair is an eminent carnatic vocalist. He built the Sariga Sangitha Academy in India at a cost of Rs. 500,000 and teaches 150 young people classical music--all after losing both arms in an accident in 1971. The deeply religious

Hariharan believes that his achievements are due to a divine force within that drives him to great heights.

TRADEMARKS

Pitta TeaÂª

Atrocious and immoral." That's how ayurvedic doctor K.C. Katiyar feels about the Maharishi Ayur-Veda corporation trademarking terms from India's system of medicine. The company markets powdered medicines, teas and aromatic oils with the prefixes vatta, pitta and kapha. For example, "Vatta Tea" is trademarked (but not "Vatta" itself). But there's no issue, Robert Hensley of Maharishi Ayur-Veda told Hinduism Today. "You see common English words trademarked all the time. We have as much right to market our products under trademarked names as does the company that markets 'Power Bars.'" The real issue ayurvedic doctors should focus on, feels Hensley, is India's dilemma of US companies trying to patent their "discovery" of the disinfectant properties of neem leaves and the medicinal properties of turmeric. "Patenting life is very dangerous and wrong," says Hensley.

SOUTH KOREA

Buddhist Temple Stormed

Renegade buddhist monks at the chogye temple in Seoul got serious in late December when 4,500 riot police, using water cannons and tear gas, raided South Korea's chief monastery to end a 40-day standoff over who will control the country's largest Buddhist order. Monks responded by throwing rocks and firebombs, a few even stabbed themselves with knives in protest and threatened to commit suicide. About 20 police and monks were injured, some seriously, and 100 monks and followers were arrested in the 30-minute clash.

Chogye temple is (or was) the spiritual home for eight million Buddhists. It's been the scene of frequent violent clashes sparked by leadership disputes since November, 1998. In one clash in early December, more than 60 people were injured. This latest raid came after court officials had twice failed to serve an expulsion notice to 100 dissident monks who had been in control of the building since November 11.

ISRAEL

All for Youth

What can Hindus do with extra funds to preserve cultural connections? Do what the Jews are doing--spend $300 million on the next generation. In the Birthright program for the year 2000, every Jewish youth age 16 to 29 can spend several weeks in Israel for free to explore the religion and homeland. It will all be paid for by Israel's government and wealthy Jewish philanthropists. It's also a great idea for Hindus to send kids to India. If the government can't afford it, there are plenty of wealthy Hindu philanthropists who could.

CEREMONY

5,500 Year Old Yagya

An estimated three to five million devotees from all over India attended a Rajsuy Mahayagya (great fire ceremony) performed for the first time in November, 1998, after 5,500 years. It was blessed and organized in Madhya Pradesh by Swami Pragyanand of the Sai Pragya Dham. Slokas of the Sama Veda were chanted by 105-year-old Sanskrit scholar Shri Dada Bhai from Banaras, amid 108 sacrificial fires. The ceremony's goal is to promote universal well-being, brotherhood, mutual tolerance, environment cleanliness, moral values and the shunning of terrorism and violence. Pragyanand

gave 500 people initiation as they vowed to relinquish meat, drinking and smoking. Culminating the event was the bestowal of the title Pragyapeethadhishwar Jagadguru Dharmaraj on Swamiji.

USA

India Enthralls Theater Goers

You can't get much more mainstream USA than the Sylvia and Danny Kay Playhouse in Hunter College, New York, which usually hosts performances like the Yorkville Nutcracker. Yet, according to director Joseph A. LoSchiavo, what has been drawing larger crowds recently is the season's opening program of Indian dances. Last fall's "Indrani: Dancers and Musicians from India," included dancers Ramli Ibrahim from Malaysia, Shagun Butani and Ardriane Erdos. They charmed the largely American audience with the Odissi, Bharatanatyam and Chau styles. Indrani Rahman organized the event. "Indian-Americans are more interested in Bollywood film dances," says Indrani, daughter of legendary dancer Ragini Devi. "But, other Americans have become very interested in classical Indian music and dance." Each year, during the opening program, she presents several dances, each only eight minutes long, so that "people get converted and are ready for a two-hour solo performance."

TRINIDAD

Stirring Visit

Keep close contact with God at all times, and don't accept materialism as the greatest part of life." This was the message of Swami Purnatmanandaji Maharaj of India's Bharat Sevashram Sangha to Hindus as he recently held a series of lectures and worship sessions in Trinidad. Swami, who

renounced his family at age 20 to participate in Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent movement, reminded that "self-control is at the root of health, happiness, peace and power. It gives enthusiasm, zeal and perseverance in the heart of man."

BANGLADESH

Gandhi Award

Sannyasini Jharnadhara Chowdhury accepted the Gandhi International Award of Raman Lal Bajaj Foundation, for her yeoman service as manager of the Gandhi Ashram in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Sannyasini Jharna, as she is known, is vigorously dedicated to improving basic life standards, both material and spiritual, through social activities for the poor and disadvantaged, especially through agriculture.

THE VEDAS

God's Word, Sages' Voices

May the wind blow us joy, may the sun shine down joy on us,

May our days pass with joy, may the night be a gift of joyful peace!

May the dawn bring us joy at its coming!

ATHARVA VEDA 7.69

He is the God of light, immortal in his glory, pure consciousness, omnipresent, the loving protector of all.

He is the everlasting ruler of the world: could there be any ruler but he?

KRISHA YAJUR VEDA, SHVETASHVATARA UPANISHAD 7.17

He, the Self, is not this, not this. He is ungraspable for He is

not grasped.

He is indestructible for He cannot be destroyed, He is unattached for

He does not cling to anything, He is unbound, He does not suffer nor is He injured.

SHUKLA YAJUR VEDA, BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD 4.5.15

God Isvara has maya under His control.

He is all-knowing, the first cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world.

He takes the form of the sprout of the world (the seed from which the world grows).

PAINGALA UPANISHAD 1.4

Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's Supreme Court. On July 2, 1995, the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."