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Letters

Beastly Pageant?

These men and women activists ("ban-galore Battlefield," cover story, March '97) should turn their attention and campaign against the low-grade films churned out every year in hundreds by Bollywood where women are portrayed as vampish dolls of pleasure and sex objects. I agree with Mark West that the Indian screen is more damaging to our ancient culture. It was truly embarrassing for Hindus like me living outside of India to witness their fanaticism at the time. I do understand their fears and objections and share many of them, but they have damaged the Hindu image worldwide by the extremist measures they proposed to take and the sheer vehemence of their threats and overtones of violence. Indians themselves have many deeply ingrained prejudices regarding women and their physical attributes. How many matrimonial ads do we see where boys advertise for--and girls advertise themselves as--"fair, slim and attractive" as essential requirements? How many girls born in Indian families have a ruined self-confidence because they have been taunted for being born dark-skinned rather than light-skinned? A beauty pageant can neither enforce nor destroy these attitudes. Let's stop making this beauty pageant a dumping ground for all the problems Indian women have. Let us address the serious problems of child brides, dowry murders, wife beating, infanticide and aborting of female babies. In my opinion, these are the truly obscene menaces to Indian society. The West, or beauty, is not responsible for them. We are.

Rukmini Devi, Dublin, Ireland

Beauty pageants are dangerous! I applaud Jayati Ghosh and her supporters. I pray this Western poison never reaches the lips of India's purity and high regard for tolerance. They devalue the spirit of womankind, reducing her to a commodity to be used and disposed of. The standardization of beauty has devastated many women in the West. When I was a psychiatric aide, many of our young American women suffered from anorexia nervosa, starving themselves to fit a beauty ideal which is far from ideal. Sadly, it does not matter if a woman in our country is artistic, compassionate, nurturing and kind. If one does not fit the physical ideal of thinness, one is treated as a lesser being. It is as though only the outer shell of a woman matters and not the richness of her soul's voice. The spirit of woman is too precious to be compartmentalized into tiny notions of beauty. She is meant to be free. To me, giving an us\$80,000 cash prize to Miss Greece is a waste of money. Why not give that \$80,000 to a spiritual woman who gives of her heart and her soul--a woman who serves her village in providing medical care and nurturing? I think the West has lost the true spirit of womanhood. I mourn such a loss.

Womanhood is not about make-up and fitting an image of perfection that few of us can obtain. Womanhood is about nurturing, love and the joy of expression. I pray the West's notions of womanhood does not reach your Indian shores. It hurts too much.

Wendy Schuljan, New York, USA

I was somewhat bemused by the caption above the photo of students burning beauty pageant effigies. It says "Delhi university students in traditional Indian garb." But all the

people within the photo are wearing what appears to be Western shirts, jeans or trousers, and sneakers. Perhaps the caption was intended to read "students, in nontraditional Indian garb." In any case it seems ironic that students are protesting a "cultural invasion of India by the West" while wearing clothing which is itself a product of that invasion. What happened to dhotis and saris?

Mr. Kiwi, MrKiwi@aol.com

* We had the same question, hence our tongue-in-cheek caption. We are glad someone noticed.

Bali's Different Dharma

When i surfed your web site, it was like finding a treasure. We share the same spirit and faith, yet Hinduism in Bali is somewhat different from the rest of Hindus of the world. We don't understand why Hindus respect cows. Bali Hindus eat beef (except our priests). Our children are not encouraged to learn the Vedas because parents fear they will become crazy. Most of us never heard of them. Every village in Bali has at least three temples. Our priest never gave us spiritual guidance nor did we hear of the Upanishads or the Bhagavad Gita. We can only give a few explanations about our rituals. We have our own unique symbol of "Aum." I'll will be grateful if you could help me enlighten the Indonesian Bali Hindus.

Putu Bagus Krishna, Bali, Indonesia,

AGUSM@server2.mega.net.id

Caught in Indra's Web

I must say that your exquisitely beautiful religion and philosophy truly inspire me. I became so peaceful and loving to

all living things that I quickly converted to strict vegetarianism. Could you please send me something that explains your most important beliefs and how I might get in touch with a Hindu, especially a guru?

Scott Goolsby, Idaho, USA, rmsup@ix.netcom.com

The Yogic Life

In the West, yoga is seen as a form of exercise, perhaps with some "breathing" exercises thrown in. Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri, late, of Pondicherry in South India, taught us that "Yoga is Life." He taught that, without an understanding of and adherence to the yamas and niyamas [ethical restraints and observances] as outlined by Patanjali any attempt to "do" yoga could not succeed. Most importantly, he taught us to seek the guru within, satguru, that Truth which we must all strive to realize. I would not call myself a Hindu; but Hinduism and yoga are inextricably part of each other. And any seekers of the path could not help but be moved by Swami Bua's word ("Truth Prevails," Minister's Message, February '97). Surely in what he said lies the key to the Truth, the answer to the ills of the world.

Rudhra Kumar Giri, Queensland, Australia

Calcutta Kudos

I always felt deep connection to the staff of Hinduism Today, particularly Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami for his tireless efforts to inspire the people of this troubled planet to a higher energy field, to a higher quality of life. Swamiji's leadership to uphold the timeless spiritual heritage of Mother India and Sanatana Dharma will be remembered by seekers of Truth all over the world.

Swami Shuddhananda Brahmachari, Lokenath Divine Life

Mission, Calcutta, India, shudda@giasc101.vsnl.net.in

I never knew such a work of hindu brilliance ever existed until I bought your February issue. I'm enormously impressed with its contents. I particularly like your Karma Kat.

Anil Mahabir, Trinidad, West Indies

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