Diaspora
Category : October 1997
Published by Anonymous on Oct. 01, 1997

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FIJI
Political Rights Restored
On July 10 the Fijian Senate unanimously approved a new constitution that reduces the number of parliamentary seats guaranteed to indigenous Fijians and allows a nonindigenous Fijian to become Prime Minister. The removal of restrictions on the political power of Indians (nearly half the population, and mostly Hindu) means that Fiji can rejoin the Commonwealth, much to the joy of the people. It recognizes the special "influence" of Christianity but establishes no state religion, as was advocated by a vocal segment of Fijians.

MALAYSIA
Youth Camp
Nearly 600 Hindu youth studied, chanted, meditated, sang, learned ethics and stretched at the five-day Hindu Youth/Children Abhyasa Varga (training camp). The February event--produced by the Hindu Sevai Sangam--was the largest overnight retreat in Malaysian history--180 girls and 403 boys staying at the Tafe College in Seremban. The college offered classrooms, air-conditioned halls, lecture theaters and hostel rooms. Sixty-three of the youth--tapped for their experience with prior camps--served as instructors. The youth divided into seven groups to facilitate more personal teaching. The boys and girls split for separate groups for two sessions. They eagerly outreached to local Hindus during a one-day door-to-door visitation program.

MODERN SAGES
Farming the Soul of Sikhism
The brochure for Baba Virsa Singh Ji's Sikh-based programs speaks of his Shiv Sadan farm in India as a community filled with enthusiasm and dedication, devotees working extra high-yield farm fields happily sun-cooked day after day, non-stop recitation of the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib, stoking of a havan fire that never goes out, machine shops grinding out tools to keep everything humming, and round-the-clock meditation that hums with "Nam."

It is a Sikh community that Babaji has honed into a hub for interfaith teachings and social service such as bringing electricity to villages. A brother community, called Gobind Sadan, has been founded in New York. "Religion is meant to be practical, not theoretical," Babaji affirms. The practical power of his communities derives from chanting Nam, the devotional recitation of a phrase that means "There is one God, Who is the Truth, Supremely worshiped and wonderful beyond description."

PERFORMING ARTS

Storyteller Acclaimed

Hinduism's ancient stories are being taken to the broad public in English by a Westerner, Sankirtana Das (Andy Fraenkel.) A disciple of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and a member of the Hare Krishna movement, he has been much acclaimed in US and Indian schools and colleges for his dramatic story concerts. Assuming different characters and moods, he weaves together the craft of the actor, poet and storyteller. "Storytelling is a great educational tool," he observes. "It is a fun and lasting experience. The stories are vessels that carry the wisdom of ancient India. Young and old benefit by listening to them."

MULTINATIONAL

Bio-Piracy

Neem and turmeric, two natural substances used for thousands of years from the Hindu treasure chest of ayurvedic and folk cures, have been patented by US drug companies. In what is popularly called bio-piracy, drug companies in the West are patenting botanicals from biologically rich countries, and not even paying royalties built into international agreements. The patented cures form a worldwide market worth US$70 billion a year. The fever over neem and turmeric patents has hundreds of thousands of farmers in India worried sick with little legal salve to sooth their pain.

MAURITIUS

Dazzling Drum Dancing

Cosmic creation is marked by a drum on Siva Nataraja--an infinity of forms and forces rhythmed from a single vibration of consciousness. The Hindu drum dancers of Manipuri strike complicated, syncopated patterns on drums they carry while dancing, often explosively breaking into ballet-like leaps and airborn spins, sometimes playing one another's drums in a flurry of arms and

hands crossing. And while they aren't beating out a universe, they created white-tailed comets and solar flares of joyous wonder in the audiences of Mauritius.

It was Manipuri (in India near China) meets Mauritius--and the Manipuri Jagoi Marup troupe turned out to be the most popular dancers to ever tour there. The all-male troupe, founded in 1963, now with 2,500 international performances under its sash, also included a thrilling martial arts dance with real swords and spears, and a solo drum dance of mystical devotion set to a large drum (pung) with a range from watery whisper to ear-crunching thunder. Mauritian culture enthusiasts are looking forward to a return visit.

BANGLADESH
United Hindus
One group in dhaka is applying Mahatma Ghandian zeal to create a united Hindu front in this 90 percent Hindu country of Bangladesh. Shibsankar Chakraborty--president of the National Association of Hindus for Reformation of Society--says, "We should accelerate ourselves under a single banner of universal Hinduism. In this way Hindu society will step forward." Toward this end, the society is working to abolish the dowry system, the caste system and divisive philosophies in Hinduism. They repair ashrams and mandirs, organize religious gatherings and teach unity among all the Hindus.

THE VEDAS
God's Word, Sages' Voices

Instill in us a wholesome, happy mind, with goodwill and understanding. Then shall we ever delight in your friendship like cows who gladly rejoice in meadows green. This is my joyful message.
Rig Veda 10.25.1.

All this universe is in the glory of God, of Siva, the God of love. The heads and faces of men are His own, and He is in the hearts of all.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Svetasvatara Upanishad 3.11

He is the God of forms infinite, in whose glory all things are, smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Svetasvatara Upanishad 4.14

God is, in truth, the whole universe: what was, what is and what beyond shall ever be. He is the God of life immortal and of all life that lives by food. His hands and feet are everywhere. He has heads and mouths everywhere. He sees all, He hears all. He is in all, and He Is.
Krishna Yajur Veda, Svetasvatara Upanishad 3.15-16

Girded by the wind, they have donned ocher mud for a garment. So soon as the Gods have entered within them, they follow the wings of the wind, these silent ascetics.
Rig Veda 10.136.2

Let him approach with humility a guru who is learned in the scriptures and established in Brahman. To such a seeker, whose mind is tranquil and senses controlled, and who has approached him in the proper manner, let the learned guru impart the science of Brahman, through which the true, Imperishable Being is realized.
Atharva Veda, Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.12-13

Having transcended the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, the desire for worlds, they go about as mendicants. For the desire for sons is the desire for wealth, and the desire for wealth is the desire for worlds. All these are nothing but desires. He, the atman, is not this, not this.
Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.22

Verses are drawn from various sources. Those taken from The Vedic Experience by Prof. Raimon Panikkar are available at
www.HinduismToday.kauai.hi.us/ ... /Dir-New.html#VedExp.html