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Published by dharmalingam on Dec. 28, 2009

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Nepal

Pashupatinath Tensions

Rancorous fighting over who should be the priests of Nepal's famed Pasupathinath temple continued through the fall of 2009. In late 2008, the Maoist government had bowed under protest from Nepal's orthodox Hindus to remove the chief priest of the temple, Bishnu Dahal, a Nepali. Priests from the South Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were reinstated.

After the fall of the Maoist government in the spring of 2009, in August the Pashupatinath Area Development Trust (PADT) took the opportunity to increase the number of Indian priests by contacting four Indian peeths--sacred monasteries--in Karnataka, Orissa, Gujarat and Uttarakhand. The monasteries were to shortlist suitable candidates, who would be screened and interviewed by PADT, to help the temple during occasional illness or absences. This time, it was the Maoist camp that protested.

In September a group of 40-50 Maoists assaulted five newly-arrived Indian priests and made their demands again to overturn the 800-year-old tradition of having Indians be the main temple priests. The disruption forced closure of the temple for two days.

India's Ambassador to Nepal lodged a strong protest with the Home Minister. He demanded and got more security for the five Indian priests. The temple was reopened. However, security guards checked each and every devotee to prevent any Maoist infiltration.

The Maoists had also padlocked the temple offices. Tourist fees could not be collected and the PADT suffered a daily loss of us\$6,500 for two weeks. More than

600 tourists a day visit the area and each tourist is charged an entrance fee of Rs. 500. Under mounting pressure, the Maoists removed the padlocks and by the end of the month the flow of tourists and devotees nearly returned to normal. Only time will tell if the uneasy truce will keep Lord Siva's priests from further harassment.

You Tube

Failed Attempt at Conversion

The youtube video by two American girls attempting to convert a young Indian American (search "Christian girls try to convert Hindu girl") was sad, hilarious and encouraging all at once.

It was sad to see the utter depth of ignorance on the part of the young Christian girls about anything related to Hinduism or India. One girl could not even place India on the world map, inviting a rain of derisive on-line comments. It was hilarious because the comments by the Christian girls were mind-boogling to the point of being ludicrous, leading some to believe it was a spoof. It was encouraging because the young Hindu girl, Saraswati, stood her ground with articulate intelligence. She was a microcosm of Hinduism's historical endurance in the face of narrow ideologies.

India

Tuning In to Cosmic Forces

During the August 1, 2009, solar eclipse many Hindus immersed themselves in rivers, and performed japa and homa with the goal to avert it's negative influence. On the other hand Chandramauli Upadhyaya, a trustee of Kashi Vishvanath Temple, said Indian astrology actually doesn't say that eclipse has a direct bad influence on people. Still, it is well known that devotional practice at such times of intensity yield great results.

USA

Anju Bhargava On Obama's Committee

In August, 2009, forty-two-year-old Anju Bhargava became the second Indian American to be appointed to Obama's Faith Based and Community Partnerships Council. Bhargava came from Chennai when she was about twelve and has lived in the US ever since. She is the president of Asian Indian Women in America.

In an interview with the Express in Chennai, she said the Council is more about social initiatives than spiritual process. She said she will work for knowledge sharing and community service development among people of Indian origin in America. She plans to see that service initiatives such as the Hindu American Seva Charities, which she convened, receive the same funding as Christian organizations. "The churches have evolved as huge service organizations due to the support they receive from the government. We are seeking such a support, too." Bhargava is an ordained Hindu priest and works to instill Indian values and the inner meaning of Hindu practices into the new generation of Indian Americans.

Archeology/Linguistics

Computers Call it Language!

In July, 2009, a group of collaborating researchers from South India and the University of Washington submitted the results of their analysis of the Indus script to the National Academy of Sciences (see <http://www.pnas.org> and search "Indus script"). The report says, "Using the Markov probabilities model, we show how missing, ambiguous or unreadable signs on damaged objects can be filled in with most likely predictions from the model. Taken together, our results indicate that the Indus script exhibits rich syntactic structure and the ability to represent diverse content, both of which are suggestive of a linguistic writing system rather than a nonlinguistic symbol system."

India

Invoking Rain With Mantras

The long may, June 2009 drought in Maharashtra inspired 11 priests to sit in drums of water chanting mantras for over three hours on August 27th. "We do this to gain the goodwill of the rain god Varuna for abundant rains in the city and the country," explained 65-year-old Venkataraman Shastri, the head priest of the temple and one of the priests who sat inside a drum. "This time, the puja was conducted on the demand of the public. With another month left for the monsoons to end, the puja will help with regular rainfall so that there is a good harvest in the coming months," said S. Ramachandran, honorary treasurer of the Sankara Mattham in Mathunga where the ceremony was conducted.

Shortly before the ceremony rains picked up and afterwards rose dramatically, leading many to believe the ceremonies were effective. But later the comment became, "Be careful what you wish for." In subsequent months rains continued unabated and by October, Mumbai and much of India was experiencing record breaking monsoon rainfall and devastating floods.

Genetic Origins

Brahmins, Tribals, All Castes Originated in India

In January, 2009, the journal Human Genetics published an Indian genetic researchers' report titled, "The Indian Origin of Paternal Haplogroup R1a1 Substantiates the Autochthonous Origins of Brahmins and the Caste System." This report is sending tremors across academia, as it may deal a final and definitive blow to the Aryan Invasion theory. The highly technical, original report is available here: [http://www.nature.com/jhg/search "brahmins caste."](http://www.nature.com/jhg/search%20brahmins%20caste)

In summary: 1) If Central Asians invaded India to form the high castes, you would expect that brahmins have many Central Asian genes. They do not. 2) R1a1 genes associated with high caste brahmins are highly concentrated in India but sparse in Central Asians. 3) Brahmins, scheduled castes and tribals all show a common genetic ancestry. 4) The age of this yet to be determined common parentage goes back, in India itself, to at least 9,000 years and possibly 20,000 years, leaving no genetic support for recent migrations.

New York

Radical Western Belief Shift

In August, 2009, Newsweek published an article by Lisa Millar titled, "We Are All Hindus Now." What was remarkable was the editorial spin Ms. Miller brought to the piece. The article used a picture of many statues of Lord Ganesha and boldly declared the following:

"America is not a Christian nation. We are, it is true, a nation founded by Christians, and according to a 2008 survey, 76 percent of us continue to identify as Christian--the lowest percentage in American history. Two million Hindus live in the United States, a fraction of the billion who live on Earth. But recent poll data show that conceptually, at least, we are slowly becoming more like Hindus and less like traditional Christians in the ways we think about God, our selves, each other and eternity.

"The Rig Veda says this: 'Truth is One, but the sages speak of it by many names.' A Hindu believes there are many paths to God. The most traditional, conservative Christians have not been taught to think like this. They learn in Sunday school that

their religion is true, and others are false.

"Americans are no longer buying it. According to a 2008 Pew Forum survey, 65 percent of us believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life"-including 37 percent of white evangelicals, the group most likely to believe that salvation is theirs alone."

She also noted changing attitudes about life after death--more Americans are opting for cremation, which indicates they do not believe in the resurrection of the body at some time in the future. And, twenty-four percent of Americans are now willing to say that they believe in reincarnation.

Ms. Miller cited Stephen Prothero, religion professor at Boston University, who has long framed the American propensity for "the divine-deli-cafeteria religion" as "very much in the spirit of Hinduism. You're not picking and choosing from different religions because they're all the same," he says. "It isn't about orthodoxy. It's about whatever works. If going to yoga works, great--and if going to Catholic mass works, great. And if going to Catholic mass plus the yoga plus the Buddhist retreat works, that's great, too."

Hindus, of course, were gratified to see their philosophy touted at the top of the US mainstream media.

Briefly

Monsoon rains damaged 450-year old Vaishnava manuscripts at the Sri Madhvacharya Mutt in Mantralayam, Andhra Pradesh, last October. Library rooms were filled with mud and water and it is feared some manuscripts will be lost forever. The incident highlights the urgency to digitize India's literary heritage.

In October, 2009, police in Tamil Nadu had to shoot in the air to disperse a stone-throwing crowd of higher caste Hindus who were protesting against Dalits' entering a Hindu temple. The Dalits, described as low-caste untouchables, tried to enter several temples as part of their campaign to protest being barred from temple

entry. Such discrimination is against the law in India but still practiced.

An ancient Vietnamese Hindu Cham society sanctuary at Hue, Vietnam, was given a us\$32,000 grant for "protection works" in September, 2009. The site will have two guards permanently posted to prevent vandalism. The Chams were Saivite Hindus who flourished as early as the eighth century. Most Chams converted to Islam, but 15%-20% of present-day Cham people still practice Hinduism.

A rock engraving that is clearly a remnant of Harappan culture has been found in the Edakkal caves in neighboring Wayanad, Kerala. "There have also been indications of remnants akin to the Indus Valley civilization in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. These new findings in Kerala are further evidence that the Harappan civilization had a presence in the region and that the history of Kerala can be traced back beyond the Iron Age," historian M. R. Raghava Varier said.

In hopes of resolving tension in Malaysia that resulted from the government's dismantling and relocation of dozens of temples, a Hindu Temple Action Committee was formed in October of 2009. Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk M. Saravanan announced its purpose, "It is formed to solve issues of temple construction and the merger of small temples in the capital."