Global Dharma
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Russia

Swami Touches Russian Souls, Planting Virasaiva Seeds

In late May and early June, 2012, Shri 1008 Kashi Jagadguru Chandrashekhara Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, head of the Virasaiva Jangamvadi Math in Varanasi, made his second visit to Russia. He stayed at the country house of one of his devotees, performing daily puja and giving darshan.

On June 2-3 he conducted a public workshop at the Ashtanga Yoga Center, organized and promoted by his disciple Dinesh Zaenchkovsky. Among the events, he presented the famed Saiva text Shri Siddhanta Shikhamani, which has been translated into Russian by his disciple Ms. Gauri Kravchenko. The public program included Siva abhisheka puja, followed by initiations. He gave diksha to twelve disciples, and fifteen students received a personal mantra. The program concluded with kirtan in praise of Lord Siva.

When asked about the future of Hinduism in Russia, Swami said: "From my point of view, Hinduism will not become mainstream in Russia. It will gradually spread due to the people doing their sadhana--in other words, due to the yogis who are now getting their diksha, performing their daily puja or to others who are doing their spiritual practices. Each of these sadhakas will lay the foundation of Hinduism in Russia."

Now the world has twelve more Lingayats, twelve walking temples of Lord Shiva in Russia. It is a small but potent new development for one of Hinduism's ancient traditions.

By Dinanatha Bodhiswami and Ksenia Bakhtina

USA

USC Plans Hindu Studies Chair, the First in America

The Dharma Civilization Foundation is making a $3.24 million gift to the University of Southern California's School of Religion to set up the Swami Vivekananda Visiting Faculty in Hindu Studies and eventually the Dharma Civilization Foundation Chair in Hindu Studies. Duncan Williams, Chair of the School of Religion and ordained Buddhist priest, explained, "This gift highlights the department's commitment to study the enduring questions of human life and values."

Foundation trustee, professor Shiva Bajpai told Hinduism Today, "Our agreement with USC is unique in that we have established criteria for the choice of faculty to ensure that this chair does not become an ivory tower retirement position. The faculty must have a vision which goes beyond dry anthropology and includes the philosophy and theologies of dharmic faiths. They should actively develop the department, be a scholar/practitioner of dharmic religion and keep the chair relevant through engagement with living faith communities. It will be the first of its kind in US academia."

Africa

Tallest Hanuman in Africa

In a belated report we have learned that the tallest Lord Hanuman statue in the Africa was unveiled in January, 2011, at the Shri Vishnu Temple Society in Chatsworth, Durban.

The gigantic US$160,000 monument, over 42 feet tall, is the temple's contribution to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of indentured Indians in South Africa. Lord Hanuman is known as the embodiment of strength, righteousness and devotion--a symbol of power and strength, not only for Hindus but for all Indians.

The intricately and colorfully designed concrete structure was created by Umash Harripersadh, a resident of Ottawa, Canada.

USA

Hindu Ladies Tackle Issues

The first-ever "Hindu Women's Network" conference, an initiative of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, was convened at New Dorp High School in Staten Island, New York, on June 24, 2012.

The director and main convener of the day-long conference was Dr. Ila Sukhadia, a local pediatrician. Her primary objective was to highlight the various challenges faced by women and create an interactive network to guide them in times of crisis. With this goal in mind, the well-attended conference was divided into ten different sessions, headlining women's various needs as the nucleus of the family in USA. The subjects explored, in panels and with experts, were Family Relations, Self-Identity and Connecting with Your roots, Motivating Children, Caring for Aging Parents, Personal Loss and Loneliness, Marital and Conjugal Conflicts, Fitness and Health, Empowerment, Youth Sessions and Money Management.

The event so inspired the participants that the Hindu Women's Network is planning to convene more such forums throughout the USA.

Famous Vegetarians

Scott Jurek's Eat to Run BookHelps Mainstream Veganism

Recently, ultramarathons have become a highly publicized "extreme" sport. One veteran of the scene is Scott Jurek, a long-time vegan who has been running for 18 years. His longest race was 165.7 miles in 24 hours. His book, Eat to Run, is a wake-up call to those who believe animal protein is a necessity in a healthy diet. Recipes included. A marathon is 26 miles, 385 yards (42.195km). Ultramarathons cover greater, body punishing distances. Scott has run with Mexico's Tamahumara Indians, for whom running is a lifestyle requirement. They eat little protein and are known to run 600 miles in mountainous terrain to deliver messages. See: bit.ly/tarahum. Yoga

No New Yoga Copyrights. Will Bikram Yoga Rights Hold Up?

In June, 2012, the US patent office ruled that a sequence of yoga postures cannot be copyrighted. But they also decided not to revoke previous copyrights, which include Bikram Choudhury's famous 26-posture series done for 90 minutes in a heated room.

In 1994 Bikram started an accelerated teacher program. For $4,000 you can go through an intense training and open a Bikram Yoga Studio. The method and has healed and changed the lives of thousands. Today there are over 330 US Bikram

Yoga Studies.

But things are not all light in Bikram's world. One of his best students, Greg Gumucio, left and founded a new "Yoga to the People" chain of studios. Gumucio's program is an exact copy of Bikram's series in a heated room, billed as "traditional yoga." He is charging only $8 a class versus the normal $25 for a Bikram Yoga class; and teachers are not trained or certified by Bikram.

Bikram is suing him in Florida for copyright infringement. The US patent office ruling leaves the matter in the hands of the courts.

The fight has divided the yoga world. Bikram's supporters believe followers must respect the lineage and teach the series only with Bikram certification and within the Bikram franchise. Otherswise this is no accountability and the tradition will inevitably be diluted. Others insist these postures were passed to the public domain centuries ago and are free for all to use.

Military

Military Uses Ancient Yoga Practice to Reduce Stress

Faced with the highest suicide rates in 30 years, US military officials have turned to yoga to help treat psychologically wounded soldiers. The Walter Reed Health Deployment Clinical Center has developed a three-week treatment program that includes hatha yoga and Yoga Nidra (labeled "Integrative Restoration, iRest) to assuage stress and PTSD. Ten states have implemented iRest programs.

Briefly

The government of Himachal Pradesh is set to allow gold-rich temple trusts to melt tons of the precious metal in their coffers and turn it into mementos as is done at the Vaishno Devi shrine in Kashmir. Twenty-eight temples in the hill state hold an estimated us$18 million in gold and silver. "Fifty percent will be converted to coins and momentos. Of the remaining 50 percent, 10 percent is to be kept with the temple trust, 20 percent will be invested in gold bonds of the State Bank of India and the remaining will be used to adorn the Deities," said an official.

Thailand and Cambodia have pulled back their troops from the disputed border area around Preah Vihear, a ninth-century Hindu temple and World Heritage Site. This ends several years of a stand-off around the 900-year-old temple, during which it was badly damaged by military confrontations. The International Court of Justice will make a final ruling on ownership of the area next spring.

Maharashtra icon makers And pandal organizers are ignoring the state Forest and Environment Department's ban on plaster of paris images of Ganesha in preparation for this year's Ganesha Visarjana celebrations. They are charging half the cost in advance in case their statues are confiscated by authorities. They say that clay images may break during the festival, which would be considered an ill omen by the devotees.

In July, Varanasi police recovered a rare handwritten copy of Ramcharit Manas, the epic authored by Goswami Tulsidas. The manuscript had been stolen from the Hanuman Mandir at Tulsi Ghat in December, 2011. Other articles recovered at the same time included a statue and silver crown.