Hong Kong Hindu Temples 'Wait and See' for 1997
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Like the rest of Hong Kong's 12,000 Hindus, the priests of the tiny British colony's eight Hindu temples are concerned about the 1997 return to Chinese rule. But Hari N. Sharma, managing priest of the Hindu Mandir, told HINDUISM TODAY that no matter what happens, "I will not leave, I will continue on with my Gods, whether people come or not." Mahesh Shastri, head priest of the large Happy Valley Hindu Temple, believes that "The temple will probably remain as it is," even if many Hindus leave the colony.

Hong Kong's Hindus support 8 temples, a good number for only 12,000 devotees, but well within the resources of the wealthy community. To give one example, Hindus control fully 10% of Hong Kong's lucrative garment industry. In addition to the above two temples there are centers run by Satya Sai Baba, Hari Krishna, Satya Prakash, Annapur Guru, Sadhu Vaswani and the Brahma Kumaris.

The oldest shrine in Hong Kong is the Happy Valley Temple, founded in 1952 through the efforts of S.T. Melwani to fulfill the religious needs of Hong Kong's largely Sindhi community (90% of all Hindus). The only piece of land made available for the temple by the government was the Hindus' share of a cemetery being allocated among each of Hong Kong's religions in an area with the very Chinese name of "Happy Valley." The British administrators were apparently unaware that Hindus cremate their dead and have no use for a cemetery. But it was free land in a place where land prices are as high as any in the world, and the community decided to build a temple at the edge of the plot, out of sight of any of the cemetery areas overlooking a park.

Happy Valley's modern three-story building has a North-Indian-style temple sanctum on the top floor. The hall is relatively unadorned, with three identical sanctums lined up across the front of the room. The sides of the room are open to the cool breezes. The central shrine contains Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, the right shrine houses Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati and the left shrine is for

Jhulelan. The latter is worshipped by many Sindhi people as a protector and savior of dharma. Jhulelan is a historical figure who lived about 2,000 years ago in Sindh (now in Pakistan). He is regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu. Jhulelan is depicted sitting upon a fish and is also known as Amrilal, meaning "Lord of the Sea."

Hari N. Sharma, now of the Hindu Mandir, was brought to Hong Kong in 1953 to help design and then serve as priest for the Happy Valley Temple. In 1960 the Karachi-born Sindhi moved to a private temple purchased for him by the Harilela family. Mahesh Shastri, a long-time friend of Sharma's family, is the present Happy Valley priest. Every Sunday several hundred Hindus come to worship. Cultural programs, particularly Indian dances, are very popular. There is a community spirit about the performances, with all participating, young and old, novice and expert. Among the temple's social services is a free medical clinic, run by gynecologist Dr. Indira Chandran, which treats 40-50 patients every Sunday. The temple is run by the 500-member Hindu Association of Hong Kong under the chairmanship of K. Sital.

Though much smaller, Shastri's private Hindu Mandir serves nearly as many devotees. The arrangement of sanctums in the second floor apartment is identical to Happy Valley, but with the addition of the great Chinese prophet, Wong Tai Sing, placed behind the Radha/Krishna images. According to Shastri, more than 100 Chinese study Hinduism with him each Sunday. He explained that many Chinese are vegetarians (as is the case in Malaysia also), who find numerous similarities between their Confucian beliefs and Hindu beliefs. Additionally there are even common observances between the faiths, one of which is the "worship of green grass" on the third day after the full moon. He has also had a number of American students, but almost no British have shown interest.

Upwards of two hundred people visit the Hindu Mandir on any Sunday. Thursday evening has a well-attended devotional singing session organized by the ladies. But the largest number of people, 500-1,000, come on Monday for the milk abhishekam of the Siva Lingam.

Both temple priests go out into the community to perform ceremonies, particularly weddings, which are usually held at the large hotels, rather than the temples. Sharma proudly reported that, "Every Hindu child born in Hong Kong" is blessed by a priest either at home or at the temple.

Both priests are concerned about the fate of Hindus in Hong Kong after 1997. Sharma reported, "Seven out of ten believe they will go. But those who speak Chinese and have good friendships with the Chinese feel this is their home and will stay." Of those who leave, he said, the rich will go to Europe or America, the rest wherever they can. Britain has refused to give British citizenship to Hong Kong's Indians.

Shastri, a professional astrologer, is perhaps the only person in Hong Kong not particularly concerned with the recent events in China. He attributes the problems to the "slightly aggressive vibration of Uranus and what you call 'Dragon Mode.'" He points out, as have others, that China "has never done any harm to Hong Kong" in its hundred-year history. For China, he explains, "Hong Kong is a 'golden cage.' They get everything from Hong Kong [China's largest trading partner]." Asked about the astrology of the colony itself, Shastri opined from his research that "Jupiter conjunct with the Sun and Mercury is very favorable on the destiny of Hong Kong island." That's a more optimistic prediction than most are willing to make these days.

The address for Happy Valley Hindu Temple is: 1 Wong Nei Chung Rd, Happy Valley, Hong Kong (postal address is GPO box 76Q5, Hong Kong); and for Hindu Mandir (Temple): A1/A2 Carnarvon Mansion, 2nd Floor, No. 8-10 Carnarvon Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.