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USA

Guru Vandana in California

Since 2005 the Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh in California has held an annual Guru Vandana, or Teacher's Appreciation day. In June, 2011, 15 teachers participated and were delighted, with tears in their eyes, to have their feet touched and tilak applied by Hindu teens and young children. The kids were thrilled to express appreciation to those who have worked so hard to help them learn. <http://bit.ly/guruvandana>

Bangladesh

US Hindu Mission

In December 2011 Vishwa Niketan, a school for poor children, opened in Bangladesh, funded by a US non-profit, International Gita Society (IGS). IGS was founded in 1984 by Dr. Ramanananda Prasad, retired US Navy official and professor at San Jose State University. To date the IGS has distributed over 100,000 copies of the Bhagavad Gita worldwide. It is one of several new initiatives by Hindus in the United States to strengthen Hindu communities in the lands of their roots.

Australia

Sanskrit Is Well Down Under

Students of Australia's Sydney sanskrit school are not just studying Sanskrit, they are conversing in the language. Five years after being founded, the school is growing in numbers. Its annual Samskrutotsavam, literally "Sanskrit festival," held in November 2011 at the Dundas Community Centre, was a huge success. All the performances and many keynote speeches were voiced in Sanskrit. Shri Cha Mu Krishna Shastry, the founder of Samskrita Bharati, an organization advocating the revival of spoken Sanskrit, was invited as the guest of honor from India. See samskritabharati.in and www.samskritabharatiusa.org for information on this growing movement. The mission targets this vision: "Revival of Sanskrit as a mass communication language and facilitation of common man's access to its vast knowledge treasure. To attain social harmony and national integration by taking Sanskrit to the masses, regardless of caste and creed." Hindus in Australia are

taking giant steps toward fulfill these goals.

India

Honoring Swami Vivekananda

India declared Swami Vivekananda's birthday a National Youth Day in 1984. This year was his 150th birth anniversary. On January 12, 2012, the Swarna Bhoomi Gurukulam School in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu staged a special tribute to honor the Hindu leader and his noble values as a source of inspiration. Dressed as Swami Vivekananda, 370 students from kindergarten to standard 10 stood in his "most famous and attractive posture" for fifteen minutes. The student body received two world records for their feat, one for the most people dressed up like Swami Vivekananda and a second for the most people to stand in the same posture for 15 minutes without moving.

Pakistan

Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan

In November 2011 the US Commission on International Religious Freedom released an unusual study, "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan," as part of its work to monitor the rise of religious extremism in that country. The study was conducted by the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) in Washington, DC, in partnership with Pakistan's own Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad.

According to the study, despite Pakistan's constitutional mandate to protect members of all faiths, its education system was infused with rigid Islamic content by General Zia-Ul Haq. In 1979, he set policy to "reorganize curriculum content around Islamic thought so that Islamic ideology permeates the thinking of the younger generation and helps them with the necessary conviction and ability to refashion society according to Islamic tenets." In 2006, the government of Pakistan took steps toward reform, including efforts to reverse educational Islamization. But there has been little progress. Incidents of violence against minorities—Hindus, Christians and Ahmadi Muslims (a peaceful, modern reformist sect of Islam)—continue on a regular basis. The study constituted an effort to better understand the situation and help define remedies.

ICRD and SDPI reviewed more than 100 textbooks from grades 1 to 10 from all of Pakistan's four provinces. In addition they interviewed 277 students and teachers

from 37 public middle and high schools and 226 students and teachers from 19 madrassas (religious schools).

The report states, "The results are eye-opening and concerning. Hindus were described in especially negative terms, and references to Christians were often inaccurate and offensive. A majority of students viewed non-Muslims as the enemies of Islam. This is particularly troubling in light of the fact that nearly all students considered jihad (the violent form) to be obligatory." Search "Connecting the Dots" at www.uscirf.gov.

India/China

Hindu Murtis from China

China's legendary power of securing market share by manufacturing replicas of products originally designed and produced in other countries have recently turned to India. China Willken Arts and Crafts Ltd. in Xiamen has mastered the craft of inexpensive polyresin religious statues. A couple of years ago they introduced Ganesha and Buddha for auto dashboards. They sold well. Realizing the potential, the company extended the offering to include larger statues meant for puja rooms. Today their Hindu God Statues line has more than 500 images.

The manufacturer has done their homework. Even statues of saints like Baba Loknath, Shirdi Sai Baba and Ramakrishna Paramahansa have gone into production and sale. A minimum order is 500 pieces. During India's festival season they arrive in container loads at Kolkata. Indian distributors say they are hand finished by Chinese households, inexpensive, can be sold for low prices and don't threaten local craftsmen because Indians don't make this type of statue. See:

www.alibaba.com/member/dongqiuqing.html

Vietnam

UNESCO Protects My Son

In 1999 unesco designated the My Son sanctuary in Vietnam a World Heritage site. This is good news for Hindus, who can now rest assured that this treasure will be preserved. The site represents an ancient settlement and sanctuary area; eight groups of tower temples have been singled out. All are constructed in fired brick with stone pillars.

The Hindu architecture of Cambodia and Indonesia are well known, but not many know that a Hindu kingdom also reigned along the Vietnamese coast from the 4th to the 13th centuries. My Son, a small valley flanked by mountains, was the capital and religious center of the Champa Kingdom, which originated in 192 ce and was deeply influenced by the Saiva Agama tradition. Between the sixth and tenth centuries, fine temples were built for Krishna and Vishnu, but above all for Siva. Champa was eventually absorbed by the growing power of Vietnam to the North. Read more at: whc.unesco.org/en/list/949

Briefly

Madrassa Baitul Islam, a Deobandi Muslim seminary in Matli, Pakistan, is buying Hindu conversions. They keep meticulous logs, and, as of December 22, 2011, they had converted their 428th Hindu to Islam. A conversion can cost from a few thousand to fifty thousand rupees. A newly converted family receives Rs 5,000, a copy of the Koran, free housing for several months, ready access to medical care, national ID cards and land.

Hindu and Muslim priests in India are starting a campaign to add a new marriage vow to the ceremony: a promise never to indulge in the illegal practice of pre-natal sex determination. Over 308 pandits and maulvis have pledged their support in this campaign to save female children.

temple elephants in Tamil Nadu were given a 48-day vacation in December, 2011. Trucks fetched elephants from various temples and maths and took 45 weary pachyderms to a rejuvenation camp in the Mudumalai coastal forests for rest and a nourishing diet that included herbal medications and vitamins.

Hindus as Depicted in Textbooks

Excerpts From a Study Conducted by ICRD

"Overall, Hindus are portrayed as enemies of Pakistan and Muslims in Urdu and Social and Pakistan Studies textbooks.

Social and Pakistan Studies textbooks express hatred towards India and Great Britain, but Hindus are often singled out as particularly inferior or evil.

"Hindus are repeatedly described as extremists and eternal enemies of Islam whose culture and society is based on injustice and cruelty, while Islam delivers a message of peace and brotherhood, concepts portrayed as alien to the Hindu. Thus, negative depictions of Hindus are manifested through both historical distortions and the framing of concepts through religious language that promotes the superiority of Islam over Hinduism, as in the following examples from textbooks:

"Before the Arab conquest the people were fed up with the teachings of Buddhists and Hindus.

"Islam's social equality and justice to all freed the caste ridden Hindu society and paved the way for spread of Islam. We know that low caste Hindus suffered due to the caste system. Hindus belonging to lower castes were tortured, insulted and disgraced.

"Hindu leadership has not only shown their religious hatred but also expressed their political hatred by opposing to celebrate their independence day on the same day.

"Hindus have tried all their means to harm Muslims of Indian sub-continent and killed millions of Muslims. They were deprived of their assets and properties."