Editorial
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These are heady times for Hinduism. Our staff sees copious signs of a broad resurgence-a welling up of pride and enthusiasm, a new discovery of old spirituality, even a new-found indignation which, once timidly suppressed, now audaciously growls when confronted by what some called the "enemies" of Hindu dharma.

To be sure, Hinduism has its adversaries. I for one hope they are strong, not caring much for a wimpy rival. It seems to be the Law of Things that good rivals make for great achievement, whether in sport or science, politics or religion. I think of Sankara, Galileo, Gandhi, Socrates, Appar and Martin Luther King, men whose encounter with fierce opposition made them better for the experience. It's no different in money. New York billionaire Donald Trump has financial rivals which would buckle the knees of most national treasurers. Bill Gates of Microsoft has IBM as his marketplace adversary. Do these men bemoan the competition? Hardly. Their high-stakes financial encounters just keep making them more creative, more driven, more rich and powerful. I am reminded of a didactic dictum a sage once told me: "A truly great man can be measured by the greatness of his enemies." Wishing one's enemies strength is strength-inducing.

In that spirit, much gratitude is owed to the critics of Hinduism. I have collected criticisms, much like others collect first edition novels, baseball cards or exotic stamps. You may smile at this, but consider that a first-rate book will be gone in 500 years or so, while even a mediocre criticism will last 1000, usually more. Just ask Michael Jackson.

I am particularly fond of the slanderous story which American missionaries spread in the press following Swami Vivekananda's unexpected triumph at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of World Religions. There suddenly appeared in nearly every major paper the "truth" about the Indian faith followed by the turbaned Swami whose philosophy-so lofty, so full of compassion and thoughtfulness-had charmed Yankee audiences. The truth, missionaries contended, was that "Hindoos throw their

infant children into the open mouths of hungry river crocodiles." There is a kind of genius in the sheer simplicity of that ludicrous indictment. Similar accusations are being levied against Hinduism 100 years later, from the television podiums of men like Pat Robertson.

No one teaches us in school how to cope with criticism, how to turn it to our advantage. They should, but they don't. A fortunate few will learn-the aspiring opera singer or concert sitarist for whom reproach and incessant, mostly uncomplimentary, evaluation are a professional imperative. Great dancers and actors, athletes and politicians will employ critics, paying good money for the privilege of being corrected, faulted and assailed by negative feed-back. Professionals blossom under it; the rest of us wilt and wail.

To rectify the absence of training in "critical appreciation," we offer here the world's shortest course on "Adept Management of Criticism." Never cringe before criticism. Take it like a man, even if you're a woman. Winnow the true from the false, but keep them both. Rise above it. Smile at it. Better yet, understand it; best of all, learn from it. And never, never offer the offender quid pro quo. End of the course.

Now that we know just how useful criticism can be (and to allow readers to practice the above techniques), here is a condensed list of popular criticisms levied against Hinduism:

* Hindus are idol worshippers and have too many gods. (One is tempted always to respond that Hindus are among the most vigorous devotees in the world. By no means could our worship be called idle-observe the smile technique.)

* Hindus worship cows. (They honor cows, they worship God. Hindus abhor killing of any creature on the earth and one day will be honored for this nonviolent ideal. Nothing like rational explanation to thwart a mean-spirited jab.)

* Hinduism is life-negating and brings poverty to its followers. (One need only visit the slums of New York, Rome, Bangkok or Lebanon to know that no religion exists

which has eliminated human suffering, though all make the attempt.)

* Hinduism has no hell, no understanding of Satan, no real fear of God. (Guilty as charged.)

* Hinduism is too ritualistic, complex and contradictory. (The problem here is that an outsider is trying to comprehend Sanatana Dharma as a single creed when it is 10,000 independent religions, each allowed to believe as it chooses. I love ritual, the more intricate the better. But there are many Hindus who hate the simplest rites, and no one asks them to betray their natural inclinations.)

* Hinduism is fatalistic. (Only if your definition of fatalism includes the belief that all of creation is sacred, that all souls are equal, that all paths are good, that all experiences are of our own creation and that all beings without exception are destined to attain freedom, enlightenment and oneness with the Divine. If that's fatalism, then Hindus are incorrigibly fatalistic.)

* Hindus sacrifice animals. (I cannot defend against such a criticism, but can only hope that whatever few remaining expressions of an earlier time that may still persist will pass soon.)

* Hindu gurus all have their cults. (One man's cult is another man's spiritual family. The same complaint, couched not so differently, was levied against Buddha and Jesus and Socrates. All religions enjoy charismatic leaders, Hinduism no less than others. Fortunately, Hindu cults have never resulted in anything like the David Koresh or Jim Jones disasters.) * Temples are crowded, dirty and run like run-down government parks. (True. Let's try to remedy that.) * Casteism in India is a terrible injustice. (No thoughtful person will deny that. So is crime and homelessness and social inequality in Western nations. Neither one has anything to do with the religion of the population.)

Those are the classic insults levied against the Sanatana Dharma. Sadly, they are old and worn by use. It is rare to find a really innovative criticism. Not long ago, to my utter delight and astonishment, I stumbled on an award-winning,

fresh-as-the-morning-dew slur. It came courtesy of the Jehovah's Witnesses, as an article in the April, 1989, magazine Awake. Each month they print over 11 million of these pamphlets in 54 languages, so we're talking global character assassination here. According to the Jehovah Witnesses, the fatal flaw in Hinduism is-dare I say it-tolerance. That's right, Hindus are too open-minded, excessively sympathetic of another man's faith, and this tolerance, the article threatens, may open the door to lesser paths, to "bad religions."

This accusation will naturally find a cherished place in my collection. It reminds me of judging a woman "too beautiful" or a man "too rich," implying all sorts of unsavory, unsaid things about their deeper humanity. A religion that is too tolerant? In a world so frightfully full of hatred, bias and provincial consciousness, let us implore that the vice of tolerance may spread like a plague, engulf the earth and infect every inhabitant thereon.