

[Global Dharma](#)

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Global Dharma Anti-Ayodhya Wrath Pounds Bangladesh In the frenzied aftermath of the razing of the Babri monument in Ayodhya by Hindu militants (December 1992), a campaign of revenge swept Muslim-majority Bangladesh. News of the atrocities inside Bangladesh has been sparse, and unconfirmed, due to tight censorship. Recently a Hindu student at Dhaka University wrote a short report to Hinduism Today. According to the student's statement-citing figures from a "general report" - 12 Hindus were killed, 2,000 injured, 2,600 women raped, 28,000 houses destroyed, 2,700 business wrecked and 3,600 temples razed or extensively damaged. It is estimated by this report that 2 million Hindus lost property. In January a memorandum was submitted by Hindu leaders to the speaker of the Bangladesh parliament, requesting restitution for the losses. Another newspaper report puts the number of temples destroyed at 350, 10% of this report's figure. The most prominent centers damaged are the 500 year old Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Temple at Dhaka Dakhin (birth place of Sri Chaitanya), a hundred year-old Kali temple and two Ramakrishna Missions.

ISKCON Settles End to 17-Year Legal War In the summer of 1983, when the jury in a southern California court awarded US \$32 million to Robin George and her mother in a cult-brainwashing case against four Hare Krishna ISKCON temples, even the Georges' attorney was astonished. The amount was twice what he asked for, four times the worth of the ISKCON centers. It would have bled the temples of California, New York, Louisiana and Ottawa, Canada to a quick fiscal death. The figure was so vindictive that US national religious councils (including Christian and Jewish) publicly worried over its impact on all religious institutions. The judge later reduced the award to US \$9.7 million, still a crippling amount. ISKCON appealed and went into receivership under a court-appointed third party. This case - filed in 1976 - became famous in the mid-80's across the US as a high voltage public battle between a perceived cult-Hare Krishna - and a minor, Robin George. She joined ISKCON in 1974 at the age of fourteen. After numerous appeals, including a hearing at the US Supreme Court, the court award for actual damages was downsized to US \$485,000. including interest, the total is US \$1 million. In June, 1993, the Georges - Robin is now 33 - and ISKCON, drained after 17 years of legal warring, agreed to an undisclosed cash settlement for the punitive damages rather than go to a new state trial. ISKCON said it would cost more to continue fighting the suit than to settle. the president of the Laguna Beach temple, Kosanma Dasi, said it was unlikely this settlement would seed other lawsuits. The Robin George suit was a landmark case in the legal territory of Hindu-related institutions in the US. As Robin testified at the trial, she

voluntarily left her home at age 14 in 1974 to join the Laguna Beach Hare Krishna temple. She had received permission from her parents to practice the Hare Krishna faith at home, but later they changed their minds, destroying her altar and books. She was cruelly punished by being chained to a toilet for several days by her father. She left home and joined the temple, received initiation and was sent to the New York, Louisiana and Ottawa temples at her request to avoid her parents. After a year, she returned home, but again left to join ISKCON. After police threatened to jail ISKCON leaders on kidnapping charges, Robin George was returned to her parents. The suit sought damages for false imprisonment, emotional distress, libel and invasion of privacy. ISKCON and Robin George said she was free to leave or communicate with her parents at any time. But ISKCON admitted they were irresponsible in allowing a minor to stay with them, and now require written permission. During the trial, testimony by religion experts on behalf of ISKCON attested to the validity of the the Krishna lifestyle as traditional Hindu practices to counter the mind-control (though Gita readings, early rising, japa etc.) allegations by the Georges' attorney. Surprisingly, the judge advised the jury to ignore religious authenticity in regard to alleged mental trauma.

Survey Blows Out India's Social Myths Quite a few idealistic myths about India's religious lifestyle and social fabric are hitting the historical dustbin with the release of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) office's 46,000-page *The Life of the People of India*. The survey - involving 500 field sociologists and 3,000 researchers crawling into every hamlet of India for eight years- has dropped like a huge meteor into India, with shockwaves jolting just about everybody. With a big baboom, the myth of Hindu vegetarianism exploded: 88% of India's Hindus dine on meat when they can afford or catch it, ranging from beef and mutton to baby crocodiles, jackals and field rats, depending on their means. However, only the middle and upper class could be identified as living on a daily meat-centered diet. Poor peasants eat meat frequently, but not daily. In the world's largest democracy, there are now 4,635 distinct communities (cast, sub-castes) that make up the social quilt of India. This makes India the most variegated, and segregated, nation on Earth. It has always been assumed that Hinduism was the most benign of converting faiths in India. But it has converted 383 communities to its body compared to Christianity's 267 and Islam's 112. The brahmin oligarchy on spiritual duties is being broken by 1,656 communities who have evolved their own priests. In the 1930's most non-brahmin families paid a bride price to the bride's family (to compensate for the girl's departure), but now 40% of those follow the brahmin custom of paying dowry to the boy's family.

India Rare Instruments Rebuilt Like Sherlock Holmes of ancient crafts, artisans at the Development Center for Musical Instruments ferreted out the design of old world instruments from temple carvings and scriptures and re-created them. An exhibition in Madras displayed the instruments. Included are a bell that produces an Aum tone when its edge is rubbed with a wooden stick, and ancient harp that was the precursor of the vina, the earliest form of Indian bowed instrument, a peacock vina with movable frets, a barrel shaped drum and several other rare items.

South Africa Cultural Interweaving In an effort to improve relations between India and South Africa, the Indian government's Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is establishing a cultural center in Johannesburg, South Africa. The center-available to

all South Africans, not just Indian ethnic nationals- may develop into an Indian embassy. The center is planned as a resource and educational hub, alongside its cultural usage. ICCR is starting the groundwork for an India Festival to be held in South Africa, similar to the successful Festivals staged in the US, UK, Japan and Russia. Fiji Nomad Hindu Minister Pundit Ashok Dwivedi is gaining a reputation as an erudite, nomadic preacher, having just completed a nine-day recitation and commentary on the Ramayana in Montreal, Canada - a lot of latitude north of his home in subtropical Fiji. Dwivedi was born in Kashi, India, religiously trained in Lucknow, educated as a physiotherapist in Germany and Canada, and married a girl from Fiji, where he settled down and eventually became the editor of Fiji's oldest Hindi weekly newspaper, Shanti Dut. He has preached all over Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and the US.