Letters
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I had the golden opportunity to read a copy of Hinduism Today which was given to me by Shri Rajesh Khanna whom I met at the Arupadai Veedu Temple in Chennai along with some members of your renaissance team. It was a wonderful experience to meet foreign nationals totally devoted to the Hindu religion, in the most conventional Hindu dress. I have taken the privilege of telling as many people as possible about your team.

M.R. Krishnan, Chennai, India mrkrishnan44@rediffmail.com

Blast Those Queue Jumpers

I was reading your article on the Kumbha Mela festival (Apr/May/Jun 2004) with great interest and awe. It makes me proud to see how millions still carry on this age-old tradition and how Hinduism is thriving. I had the opportunity to visit India again after 19 years. The most unforgettable experience was the visit to Thirumalai. Unfortunately, as we proceeded through the queue for darshan of the Deity, mayhem started. There was a huge concentration of people at the end of the queue. We were literally sandwiched together to the extent that my amma's bangles were bent. If that wasn't enough, when we actually saw Lord Venkateswara, we were allowed less than ten seconds to pray before being shoved away by the temple staff.

Frankly, I haven't come across a temple with this many people visiting on a normal day. It is undoubtedly one of the great pilgrim places in the world and continues to

astonish people. Many have second thoughts of going there, mainly due to the poor crowd control. There is a saying among the devotees that hardship must be suffered to appreciate Lord Venkateswara. But I'm sure God wouldn't like people to suffer to see Him, and, moreover, the hardship is usually suffered by walking up the hill or by fasting.

The management there has improved tremendously over the years, but more needs to be done. I would really like to see a better management there and, in the future, a smoother flow of people and a more pleasant trip for all Hindus and others alike.

Sanjeev Kumar, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia ksanjeevk@hotmail.com

Why No Mention?

In your article, "Oh, for a fair view of Hinduism " (Apr/May/Jun 2004), I am surprised that you made no mention of Ed Viswanathan or his book, Daddy, Am I a Hindu? The book has received very good reviews from many magazines and newspapers. He also goes around the US and educates people about our culture. You also missed David Frawley and Arvind Sharma, to mention a few.

Govinda Prabhu, New York, New York govindaprabhu123@hotmail.com

Yes, you are correct, many Hindus doing good work are not mentioned in the article for lack of space. We received over a hundred responses to our request for names, and from those chose a cross-section of people from around the country. We specifically did not include scholars, such as Drs. Frawley and Sharma, who have in any case appeared several times in Hinduism Today. We don't share the same evaluation of Daddy, Am I a Hindu, because of its frequent references to Christianity.

Denim Is Not from India

I love your magazine and everything in it, but to my surprise you wrote that denim fabric came from India. Denim comes from de Nimes, which in French means "of Nimes, " Nimes being a town in the south of France. That is where the denim fabric comes from and was invented in the 16th century.

Frederick Douillet, San Francisco, California frederick.douillet@paymap.com

You are right, denim does come from de Nimes. It is not known where this particular weave of cotton was first created, only that it was present in France, Italy and India in the 16th century. The fabric coming from India was actually called "dungaree, " owing to its origins near the Dungri Fort outside Mumbai. So, it was not correct to say in our Did You Know that "Denim Comes from India."

Democracy in Hindu Temples

Hindus cannot live without democracy, but at the same time they do not know how to work within the democratic way. Recently, articles have been printed saying that members have taken the Ganesh Temple in New York to court. The newspaper says, "The Queens Supreme Court late last year dissolved the temple's board of trustees and appointed a referee to oversee an electoral process for the temple. The decision is a landmark, since only a few Hindu temples in this country have elections." Dr. Uma Mysorekar, society president, says, "For all these years, we just followed what had been done in the temple, and no one ever said anything." That means they do not have a democratic election. She also said, "I tell them we will do whatever the court says, but I also advise them not to have elections in their temples, it will only politicize the temple and make it messy, though that is strictly my personal opinion." Democracy does not make things "messy." It makes things run smoothly, and more people will participate. This is just a beginning. As more Indians learn American democratic ways, they are going to want to participate in running their temple activities in that manner.

One time I attended a temple meeting and they appointed a man as the president. Then he said, "Do it this way, because I said. I am the president." Then I taught them how to run democratically, that when there was a disagreement, to ask one of the members to put a resolution on the floor, discuss the resolution, let someone close the resolution, vote, and then let the majority idea prevail.

In America, people know the democratic way, and they learn it in their churches and schools. In India, all temples are run by a small group of people, and most of them are not run in a democratic way. One time there was a disagreement in a US temple and I told one of the trustees that what he was proposing was not in the constitution. He said, "Don't worry, I'll change it." That shows that they don't want to follow their constitution.

For the US, every temple should make an effort to write a good constitution and follow it properly. The democratic way is the best way to resolve disagreements peacefully and have more participation from all of the members. Democracy says an organization or social unit is governed ultimately by all its members or their elected representatives. This is the means of making sure all are given empowerment for ultimate efficiency and brotherhood.

If you are a member of a temple, ask for a copy of the constitution and read it. See if it is being followed. If it is not properly written, participate in making changes to the members' satisfaction.

Bharat J. Gajjar, Hockessin, Delaware bgajjar@comcast.net

Emory University Is Secular

We would like to clarify a few factual misconceptions about your recent portrayal of Emory University in the Hinduism Today April/May/June 2004 issue, whose cover story is "Tackling 10 Misconceptions About Hinduism." The portrayal of Emory is found in the cartoon pull-out titled "Hinduism as Taught in American Schools."

First, although Emory University was founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1936, its programs today are entirely secular, with the exception of those of the Candler School of Theology (other leading American universities, such as Harvard and Yale, show this same historical development). In no way does affiliation with the Methodist Church affect curriculum in the rest of the University; Emory College and Graduate School are committed to a secular, liberal arts education. To imply otherwise is misleading and factually incorrect.

Secondly, the characterization of Emory's curriculum and teaching of Hinduism is also incorrect. The scene that is caricatured in the cartoon is simply untrue, since Dr. Courtright's book Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings has never been taught in an undergraduate classroom. We stand by our record of achievement in developing a balanced and leading program in South Asian Studies at Emory.

Deepika Bahri, Joyce Flueckiger,
Laurie Patton and Rakesh Ranjan
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Sanskrit Starvation

Thank you very much for the excellent article "The Abuse Hinduism Receives in US Schools Is Intolerable " (Apr/May/Jun 2004).

On April 16, 2004, Hindu Press International reported on a news item "Neglect Affects Sanskrit Academy." The Sanskrit Academy and Research Institute in India continues to be neglected and starved of resources even though it is doing an excellent job. The HPI report quoted an official from the institute: "This is the only Sanskrit research institute in South India. We are just about managing to do skeletal work. The lack of funds has broken the back of the institute."

Is there any historical evidence that the Government of India and various provincial governments have systematically starved departments of Sanskrit in universities and other centers of higher learning? It is very important to know if this is true because: 1)Â Sanskrit is the mother of all Indo-European languages; 2)Â Our scriptures are written in Sanskrit, and all our rituals are performed in Sanskrit; 3)Â If it is adopted as the official language of India (as Hebrew is in Israel), Sanskrit can become a great unifying force for all Indians; 4)Â It is the most well organized language suitable for use with computers; 5)Â Our ancient culture has survived in spite of a multitude of barbaric invasions and oppressive rulers who did their best to wipe out our heritage.

The principles of satya [truthfulness] and ahimsa [nonviolence] from our scriptures are needed more today for the survival of the human race than at any time in history. They should be propagated very widely through the support and teaching of the Sanskrit language and literature. Communities of Hindus in all countries need to think about ways to support the study of Sanskrit at all levels from elementary school to university. I hope we can convince the central and provincial governments in India and other philanthropic organizations to support the survival of Sanskrit.

Arun J. Mehta, Vancouver, Canada
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The Tamil New Year

I am a Hindu from india settled in Switzerland and prepare a list of Indian holy days for the local Hindu community. As well, I am active in teaching and scientific writing on religion and culture here in Europe. I enjoy and benefit from your journal. Can you please throw some more light on the Hindu year 5105? When will 5106 start? Does it start on a fixed Gregorian calendar date? Is there a more specific name to this calendar system? What was the occasion at the start of this system of years?

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Starting with your last question, the years are counted from the beginning of the Kali Yuga, calculated as 3101 bce. This is the system of the Tamil calendar which we follow. The New Year commences on the first day of the month of Chaitra (April/May), considered auspicious because the Sun enters Aries, the first sign of the Zodiac at this time. There are several other calendars in use in India, and they have different New Years.