Teaming Up for Dharma
Category : January/February/March 2005
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 01, 2005

LETTERS

Teaming Up for Dharma

Join Us to Strengthen Hinduism

Most secularists have attempted to tarnish the image of Lord Ram by the way he "handled " Sita (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2004). There are many schools of thought which hold that Lord Rama's banishing Sita to the forest and the subsequent incidents as portrayed in the Uttara Kanda, the last section of the Ramayana, are later interpolations. The language is not consistent with other parts written by Valmiki. However, just for argument's sake, if we were to accept that Lord Rama did banish Sita to the forest, we have to accept it as an action committed by a king, not by an ideal husband. It is difficult for us living in the Kali Yuga to understand the responsibilities of a king who ruled in the Treta Yuga. Unlike the current democratic system where the ruling parties obtain just 35% of the popular vote, in the ancient times, the kings were supposed to obtain the support of the entire population, 100%. Going by this argument, there was a small but significant population in Ayodhya unhappy with the reunion of Sita with Rama. Lord Rama's dharma was to make sure that no segment was left unhappy. If Lord Rama had any doubts about Sita before, he would not have brought her back to Ayodhya. It is only when one washerman cast doubt on Sita's chastity that Lord Rama sent her to the forest. Note here also that the opinion of even the washerman, a low caste, was taken into consideration by the rulers of that time. Today, would anyone listen to a washerman or a sweeper? Any serious student of the Ramayana will know that Lord Rama never doubted Sita's chastity. He loved her very dearly.

Nirmal Laungani, Hong Kong, jaibhthknetvigator.com

Concern for Temple Elephants

We are fortunate to get occasional copies of your magazine in India, and I take this opportunity to congratulate you on the very relevant topics and subjects that your magazine covers for its readers. In the last issue (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2004), there was a wonderful piece of writing by Jeffrey Mason honoring animals, but it seemed diluted by the blessing from a temple elephant in the same issue. I am the Hon. Vice-President of a registered and recognized animal welfare organization in India called Compassion Unlimited Plus Action, or CUPA for short. For the last few years we have been extensively working on the status and conditions of the captive Asian elephant, particularly the temple elephant, as we are based in Bangalore in South India. We have discovered appalling cruelties on part of the authorities in controlling the increasing trend amongst South Indian temples to own this animal, more for increasing the market value of the temples, rather than on any other merit.

The general public may not know the most basic information about these magnificent captive animals: 1) due to high stress levels, most of these animals do not or cannot reproduce; 2) their housing conditions means a pillar or post where they are tied for 18 to 20 hours a day; 3) most do not have running water or river to bathe in, one of the most elemental needs of the animal; 4) their mahout, the most important person in the animal's life, is often poorly paid, not insured, has no job security and often has no choice but to take out his frustrations on the animal. A study has revealed that over 70% are confirmed alcoholics.

Behind the glamor and romance of an elephant all dressed up in gold for temple processions lies a sordid tale of misery and sadness for the intelligent and sensitive animal, who has been likened to a human being in his awareness and dignity.

Most members of the public have no knowledge of the temple elephant situation as it exists in India today. I am sure that human beings will react positively to recommended changes that will benefit the animal and help in the survival of the species.

Suparna Baksi-Ganguly, Bangalore, India, suparnaganguly@hotmail.com

Yes, we share your concerns regarding the treatment of the temple elephants, and reported on them in depth in our July, 2003, issue (available on-line at:

http://hinduismtoday.com/archives/2003/7-9/66-68_elephants.shtml). See also page 29 of this issue for further commentary on the plight of elephants

Coming of Age for Tamil Girls

It is surprising that Ramya Gopal did not come across girls from Tamil Nadu communities who traditionally celebrate the coming of age of a girl with religious fervor (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2004). Excepting for the brahmins, most of the other communities do celebrate this event of a girl. Among Saiva Vellala people, especially from Tirunelveli, this is very prevalent. Quite often such celebrations are done on a scale equivalent to a wedding. It is called sadangu function, or, in pure Tamil form, called by the equivalent of sacred bath ceremony. The priest is present, and the girl is given a bath ceremoniously surrounded by women relatives. The girl's friend or a relative girl of the same age is dressed like a bridegroom and will be seated alongside the girl on the podium where the rites take place. The men folk are also invited for the function. The girl's maternal uncles are supposed to gift her richly; the girl's grandparents are supposed to gift her saris. Although the custom is on the wane, it is very much visibly present in the society. In an average year I attend at least one such function! My own granddaughter had such an event last year. We had the religious formalities done at home with a limited number of very close relatives attending. In the evening there was a grand reception where all kith and kin were invited.

As a side note to your article on the hazards of kumkuma in the same issue, this writer in his professional career as an environmental scientist has come across babies who got poisoned with lead due to their mothers anointing their foreheads with vermilion powder to protect them from common cold and fever!

K.S.V. Nambi, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India, ksvnambi@sancharnet.in

In reporting on the Hindus of Toronto, our feature story in this issue, we discovered that the coming of age ceremony for girls is enormously popular among Toronto's Sri Lankan Tamils.

Java's Example

Dr. Thomas Reuter's article on Hinduism's revival in Java (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2004) is such a welcome departure in a world beset with violence and intolerance spewed by fundamentalism. It is remarkable that a significant number of Javanese are returning to the religion of their ancestors, motivated by conviction rather than proselytization. I was reminded of an article in Hinduism Today several years ago when Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's visit to Reunion spurred the island's nominal Christians of Indian descent to return to their Hindu heritage. Let us hope that what is today a small trickle will become a flood and all Java will once again embrace Hinduism, restoring Indonesia's reputation for tolerance. I commend you for bringing to light such occurrences in global Hinduism.

V. Venkatesh, Dayton, Ohio, vvenkatesh@ameritech.net

Wear Bindis!

Every year I go to VHP summer children's camp. One time I tried to put a bindi on one of the girls. She said, "No no no! I don't wear bindi." I realized that the Indian girls in America do not know the importance of the bindi. It is good luck, it is womanhood, it is the third eye. It can be color coordinated, it can be stylish and it is a symbol of Hindu Dharma. So we started putting a bindi on all the boys, girls and all volunteers before evening worship at the camp. Now the children appreciate the bindi, as they are all anxious to learn their roots. Many secular, modern Westernized Hindus do not like to wear a bindi. I think in India Hindu organizations should celebrate Mother's Day the first day of Navaratri which comes in October before Deepavali. That day everyone should wear a bindi--men, women and children.

Bharat Gajjar, Hockessin, Deleware, USA, bgajjar@comcast.net

Not Enough Saivism

I am an avid reader of Hinduism Today for some years. It's a great magazine for Hindus all over the world especially when Hindus are attacked with silly questions. However, as a staunch Saivite (following Saiva Siddhantam of Kailaya Paramparai), I feel as a Saivite organization publishing a magazine, Kauai Aadheenam does not imply the importance of Saivism to the readers. While reading your magazine, one feels that the magazine is a general Hindu religious magazine that covers Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktism, Jainism, etc. Why does a Saivite Aadheenam not propagate Saivism seriously but merely highlights only?

Ponnusamy, Malaysia Saiva Natpani Kalagam, Kuala lumpur, Malaysia,
asho_lbt@tm.net.my

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami founded Hinduism Today for the purpose of informing all Hindus worldwide. To accomplish that goal, we report on all Hindu lineages. Still, we tend to write somewhat more on Saivism, as that is our background. We even get complaints, such as the letter that appeared in the Apr/May/Jun, 2004, issue accusing us of ignoring Vaishnavism. Saiva Siddhanta is well presented in all our other publications.

True Success

Hinduism Today is a triumphant voice of the Hindu population spread across the world. It embodies the wisdom of Sanatana Hindu Dharma in its pages and is a holier magazine than the journals professing other religious faiths. The essence of spirituality is said to have been absorbed in Saivite tradition and practice. In "What is True Success?" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2004) Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami expressed his deep concern that some Hindu parents feel that their children's participation in Hindu religious activities is a complete waste of time, meaning that it contributes nothing at all to their becoming successful. But Hinduism never advocates material success, but instead favors and furthers the pursuit of wealth, pleasure and happiness--all guided by dharma. Swami brings out a beautiful and succinct analysis of dharma, artha, kama and moksha, the exclusive qualities of a Hindu way of life. These four legitimate goals of piety, wealth, pleasure and liberation form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics, transmitted to us through a long line of teachers and disciples from the Hindu point of view.

Initially started as a trickle, Saiva Siddhanta Church accumulated like a holy river and made its way to the spiritual surface. It began its eternal flow from the origin and foundation of Kadavul Temple at Kapaa. It has been ordained by Yogaswami, who initiated Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Now the lineage continues in Bodhinatha Veylanswami, whose holy presence testifies to the victorious march of Hindus around the globe with dharma as its center pole of success, and happiness as its flag of victory.

Ever fresh in my memory is Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's pilgrimage to the Hindu temples and Saivite monasteries during his global spiritual odyssey in 1981. He was accorded with an overwhelming reception hailing him as a globe-trotting Hindu messiah. I was deeply impressed by the Satguru. It was an uncommon sight to see a foreign sadhu among the orthodox local Saivite puritans. The Hindus here and abroad will reverence his memory forever. The silver jubilee occasion of 25 years of Hinduism Today shines as a memorable experience, making us confident that the Satguru's message is widespread and known the world over.

R. Ramasami, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, India

Teaming Up for Dharma

Since the very beginning, in 1979, readers have encouraged Hinduism Today to do more of what they feel it does best: presenting Hinduism's culture and inner teachings with lucidity, relevance and impact. Parents, teachers, educators, spiritual leaders and seekers asked for more.

One way we responded was to reprint popular and useful articles for wider distribution. In the early 80's, a point-by-point comparison of the world's 12 major religions beliefs and practices proved relevant to so many that we reprinted it time and again over a 10-year period (now at: http://www.bnaiyer.com/studies/s-title.html). In the Apr-May-Jun '04 issue, an article gave trenchant answers to ten tough questions people ask about Hinduism (cows, caste, many Gods, etc.). It promised to be so important that many readers donated for a reprint pamphlet, and we eventually did print 85,000! Others volunteered to

distribute them all over the globe at their own expense, or ordered quantities for their classroom, satsang or family (contact: pamphlets@hindu.org). We are delighted to have all these great souls working as a team with us.

And we'd like to invite you to join that team and help us do even better over the next 25 years. You can help greatly by donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment which provides grants to enhance production capacity. Please consider becoming a Benefactor of Hinduism Today by making that fund the beneficiary of a gift of $5,000 or more in your estate plan.

For details, please contact us: http://www.hheonline.org/ht/plannedgiving/
808-822-3012, ext 244 -- email, hhe@hindu.org