Diaspora
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Modern Yoga Migrates to China

Google "beijing yoga " and, surprise--dozens of links to yoga retreats and events in Beijing! Next, go to http://www.yogafinder.com, click on "Find Yoga Classes " and then choose country "China " and city "Shanghai." From the way the list reads you might think you were in California. What is compelling is not only the array of options but the degree of cross-national integration: yoga teachers in California are holding programs in China in cooperation with Chinese yogis. China's 1980's policy to teach English in elementary schools, is paying off big time today. Political tensions still bristle between nations, but China's youth are all open arms.

While US-style holistic health jargon dominates the web site blurbs, we were happy to note in one article from Beijing's www.cityweekend.com.cn a "full disclosure " that the "Vedas of Hinduism are the source of other teachings, including Upanishads and karma. Modern Yoga is based on the four Vedic texts, the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas."

MAURITIUS

Shining Diaspora Success

In 1890 Jhummun Giri Napal Gossagne had a vision of the Grand Bassin lake of Mauritius springing directly from India's Ganges. He organized the first Mahasivaratri pilgrimage in 1897. The lake, known for deva sightings, is now a powerful Hindu tirtha--the Ganga Talao. This year 250,000 went up for March Mahasivaratri. This peaceful, pan-Hindu, all-island celebration has become a

diaspora success story of the transition of Hindu's culture and tolerance into the 21st century. The Jyothi Lingam temple is the most worshipped of the water's edge temples and devotees lovingly queue up for hours for worship. The Lingam was reported to have suddenly lit up during the Mahasivaratri worship. A pilgrim reveled: "There's an air of mysticism and divinity here. You really feel suddenly transformed into a spiritual being."

USA

Searching for Hope's Origins

US experts' computer models of the 45.52 carat Hope diamond "very much support the theory that it was cut from the French Blue diamond, " said Jeffrey Post, a Smithsonian institution museum curator. The 112-carat French Blue was purchased by Jean Baptist Tavernier, a 17th-century merchant, probably from the Kollur mine in India. It was sold to King Louis XIV of France in 1668, later recut to 67 carats and stolen in 1792. In 1812, a 44-carat deep blue diamond appeared in the collection of Henry Philip Hope. Changing hands several more times, it was finally donated to the Smithsonian. Research into the Tavernier stone, the French Blue and the Hope, showed that two smaller "versions " could fit into the Tavernier stone. Legend says the diamond is cursed because Tavernier stole it from the eye of a statue of the Hindu Goddess Sita. Many of its owners suffered grave misfortunes.

EUROPE

Swastika Ban Abandoned

In January, 2005, British Prince Harry wore a Nazi uniform to a costume ball sparking outrage, especially among Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in Germany, where the swastika is banned. They proposed that the European Union legally ban the use of the swastika across Europe. Many Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and civil rights groups raised articulate protests, and EU legislators dropped the proposal in late February. For the 10,000-year-old symbol of auspiciousness, it was an important victory over its dark night of abuse by Hitler's Third Reich.

Many pointed out that despite being banned in Germany, the East German neo-Nazi movement is vital and growing. Conservative MEP for northwest England, David Sumberg, who is Jewish, said, "I think it's the right decision. There are far more grave issues to confront than whether we ban this particular symbol. It's shown in a variety of guises and is impossible to enforce."

SINGAPORE

Woodlands Temple Relocated

With 13,763 persons per square mile, singapore is the fourth most densely populated place on Earth. City planning has been at the core of her success, and Singapore has often been forced to close small Hindu temples built decades ago on government land before the city became Earth's most urbanized society. Fortunately the city has been generous in its relocation and consolidation policies, and devotees have ended up with much-improved, properly built temples. A recent case was the relocation of Woodlands Sri Arasakesari Sivan temple to Sungei Kadut. The government's $16.25 million in compensation was used to build a beautiful new complex comprising a temple and a four-story building on 24,000 square feet of land with a pond and a tree in the middle of the prayer hall. It got off to a big start when over 8,000 enthusiastic devotees rushed to enter the temple during the March consecration ceremonies.

EGYPT

Hindu Palace Anomaly

It is said that in egypt the Hindu Palace of Cairo, after the Great Pyramid and Giza's Sphinx, is subject to more fable, legends and rumors than any other monument. No, it is not a temple. It was the extravaganza home of Belgium-born Baron-General Edouard Louis Joseph Empain (1852-1929) one of the greatest colonialist entrepeneurs of the 20th century. He set out building the new town of Heliopolis in the desert, ten miles outside Cairo in 1907. The theme for city development was modern "Moorish style." But for his own home he brought in the best Hindu artists and sculptors from Indonesia, where he had extensive business interests. Some

think it mimicks Angkor Wat; others say it was modeled after the great temples of Orissa. Today it is abandoned and under guard in the middle of what is now an upscale Cairo suburb. Visitors are not allowed, and rumors are that it is haunted.

ANDAMANS

Wise Tsunami Survivors

When the water in the creek suddenly ran out to sea on the morning of Dec. 26, 2004, the aboriginal Onge tribe scattered pig and turtle skulls around their settlement and hurled stones toward the ocean to occupy the attention of the evil spirits while they fled into the jungle, bearing amulets of ancestral bones for protection. Minutes later, the tsunami slammed into their tribal reserve in India's remote Andaman Islands. All 96 Onge survived, even as residents of the nearby town of Hut Bay perished.

While Thailand tourists didn't know what was happening when they suddenly found themselves standing on exposed seabed, and fishermen in Sri Lanka ran out to pick up stranded fish, the Onge (pronounced OHN-ghee) knew that the disappearing water meant danger. "The water went away very quickly, and, like breathing in and out of the body, the sea water had to come back very rapidly and in a big way, " Totanagey, an Onge man, explained to anthropologist Vishvajit Pandya.

"We knew that more land would soon become covered with sea, and angry spirits would descend down to hunt us away, " the 60-something man told Pandya. "But our ancestral spirits would come down to help us if we stayed together and carried our ancestral bones with us to ensure assistance from the good spirits."

The Onge are one of four Andamanese tribes believed to have migrated from Africa during the Stone Age, some 30,000 to 60,000 years ago. Black-skinned and short in stature, the tribes lived in isolation for millennia. Now, the surviving 97 Onge live on two reserves on Little Andaman Island.

Pandya found that the Onge reacted immediately to what was going on, guided by their concepts of evil spirits.

Knowing that the creek rises and falls with the tide, the Onge suspected that the extreme fall in their village creek meant "the sea was pulling back, preparing to strike like a fist." Totanagey told Pandya, a professor at the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute in Ghandinagar, India. They fled to the hills, as their ancestors had taught them and lived. But with much of their marine food habitat destroyed, the survival of the Onge still hangs in the balance.

INTERNATIONAL

India Victory: Neem Is Free!

In March the BBC reported from London that India won a 10-year-long battle at the European Patent Office (EPO) against a patent granted on an anti-fungal product, Neemix, derived from neem. The EPO initially granted the patent to the US Department of Agriculture and multinational WR Grace in 1995. But the Indian government successfully argued that the medicinal neem tree, azadirachta indica, is part of traditional Indian knowledge. The winning challenge comes after years of campaigning and legal efforts against "bio-piracy." Leading the campaign in the neem case was the European Union Parliament's Green Party, India-based Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). "Denying the patent means upholding the value of 'traditional' for millions of [people] not only in India but throughout the South. The free tree will stay free, " said RFSTE director, Dr. Vandana Shiva.

TRINIDAD

D'Bhuyaa Saaj Goes to India

Singers and musicians in countries of the diaspora have usually looked to India for

inspiration. In February of this year the river flowed upstream for a while when the first Indo-Caribbean/West Indian folk musical group, D'Bhuyaa Saaj from Trinidad and Tobago, traveled to India for a month-long tour to Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata. They toured with River of Babylon, a Jewish Indian group, and Sidi Goma, an African Indian group, under the auspices of the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology.

Trinidad's press was aglow with pride, "It is recognizing survivors of the Indian diaspora, accepting them not only as a by-product but as a part of Indian culture. For so many years, Indo-Trinidadians have looked to India as a source of cultural inspiration from which to construct an ethnic identity. But perhaps for the first time, the tables might be turned."

BRIEFLY...

Orissa's famous Jaganatha Temple is planning to sell off all plots of land it owns in this and other states in an effort to overcome its severe financial crunch. The 12th-century temple at Puri owns about 700 acres of land in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. In Orissa alone, its land holdings total around 5,400 acres. With the sale of real estate, the temple administration hopes to realize about US$23 million, the interests of which, when invested, would be sufficient to meet the temple's daily expenses and employees salaries.

A magnificent temple is under construction in Minneapolis in the American Midwest. Coming up on 40 pristine acres in Maple Grove area, the Vishnu temple when completed (most likely in 2006) will be the largest in the state.

In April, Maoist rebels in Nepal demanded that elite private schools shut down unless they lower admission and tuition costs, scrap singing of the national anthem, stop teaching Sanskrit and remove photographs of King Gyanendra. The demands are part of a drive by the Maoists to install their own "people's education."

Archaeologists in Mahabalipuram district have discovered remains of a 4th century Hindu temple built by the kings of the illustrious Pallava dynasty. The December 26, 2004, tsunami uncovered the temple, which is a huge complex. Offshore divers found extensive evidence of human activity. Excavations revealed the remains of a big temple with an entrance porch, open courtyard, a wall and many figures over six feet tall.

The Indian government is moving to bring about an act to regulate the management of the shrines and temples in Uttaranchal. It would cover the famed Himalayan tirthas of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri shrines. The Char Dham Teerth Bachao Sangharsh Samiti has threatened to not allow reopening of the temples' doors if the Government does not drop the plan, citing ulterior motives to create revenue centers and usurp the administrative powers of the priests and temple committees.

Anand Mohan Sharan teaches on the faculty of engineering at the Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. During a visit to Patna, Bihar, India, he offered that the Mahabharata war was fought between the Pandavas and Kauravas in 2156 bce. He used computers and several kinds of software to analyze astronomical evidence. His date is yet another estimate among those ranging from 3137-1400 bce.

India's National Mission for Manuscripts was taken aback when the results of a survey projected a staggering five million manuscripts in India, making it the largest storehouse of the "records of yore " in the world. And the count is not the final tally, says Mrs. Sudha Gopalakrishnan, the director of the mission. Seven hundred thousands of these are from only three states--Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. They came across a voluminous copy of the Mahabharata weighing a quintal--100 kilos!