Letters
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Hinduism Today's 16-page hindu history lesson ("Hinduism from Ancient Times, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007) is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. The Hinduism Today editorial staff deserves our sincere appreciation and gratitude for producing this positive and constructive account for sixth grade students anywhere in the world. In fact, if each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society. The crucial problem with Hindus has been our inability to succinctly describe Hinduism as a whole, or even to briefly explain it properly. Hinduism Today's narrative will go a long way in redressing this prevailing disability. I endorse it wholeheartedly and without reservations. It should be required reading for every Hindu.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Ph.D
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Coming from an organization which practices, teaches and spreads the message of the most ancient but most adoptive Hindu faith, naturally this lesson is well written, factual and clear in presentation for preteens to understand, learn and enjoy. Reading this material not only makes any Hindu child proud of his/her heritage, but it also gives the right facts on one of the major religions in the world. I strongly recommend "Hinduism from Ancient Times " as teaching material on Hinduism for ten-year-olds in schools in all states.

G.V. Raghu, M.D.
President, Chinmaya Mission of Atlanta;
Former Chairman, Education Committee,
Hindu Temple of Atlanta, GA, USA

This is a very clear introduction to Hinduism. It is in line with the requirements of a history lesson and yet manages to put across some of the more subtle ideas inherent in Hinduism in an eloquent and effective manner. The lesson allows us to picture life in ancient times and manages to interweave history with the key beliefs and practices of Hinduism. The correct historic perspective on the development of Hinduism is useful, as it allows Hinduism to take a lead role in directing how spirituality unfolds on the contemporary scene. Congratulations for publishing such a wonderful article to address the needs of Hindu youth in the West.

Jay Lakhani
Vivekananda Centre, London, UK

The supplement prepared by Hinduism Today for sixth grade students is a most valuable and worthwhile publication. It provides a simple and concise summary of Hinduism that is both correct and authentic. It is definitely better than any sixth grade school textbook portrayal of Hinduism currently in use in the USA.

Ved Prakash Chaudhary, Ph.D
President, Educators Society for the Heritage of India, Morganville, NJ, USA

For too long, school children beginning their first encounter with the most ancient of living religious traditions in the world have been subjected to inaccurate, incomplete and simplistic depictions of Hinduism. Presenting Hinduism from the perspective of its practitioners to those who are being introduced to it for the first time seems a simple enough concept. Yet, too many Hindu children to date have faced a perplexing disconnect as the religion they read about in school bears no resemblance to that which they practice at home. In contrast, Christian, Jewish and Muslim children do not face such a lack of association about their faith. With this document, the publishers of Hinduism Today fill a critical void in the educational syllabus for Hindu and non-Hindu students alike. Hinduism Today is recognized globally as the premier periodical documenting the experience of the Hindu community worldwide. Celebrated for its commitment to accuracy and professionalism, Hinduism Today has once again applied its high standards of rigorous editing and artistry to this latest production. While no document can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that "Hinduism from Ancient Times " compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation
Kensington, MD, USA

On behalf of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), I express our heartfelt congratulations and deep gratitude to the entire staff of Hinduism Today for the Hindu history lesson. Your "response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books " is timely and compelling, and you have articulated the message so thoughtfully and eloquently. On difficult or controversial issues, such as the Aryan invasion theory, your simple statement that "all the evidence for it is questionable, " says it all so effectively. The lesson provides an exemplary guide to the student to understand Hindu beliefs and scriptures and to appreciate what Hinduism in practice really means. It is indeed a significant contribution to creating awareness of Hinduism here in the West. Thank you for all that you do to spread Hindu wisdom.

Dr. Ved Nanda
President, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh; Vice Provost
University of Denver, CO, USA

Hinduism Today has performed an important public service by providing a clear and accessible text which presents Hinduism from a Hindu perspective. This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus, and which emphasize negatives such as untouchability, a practice to which many Hindus object. And yet it does so in a way which does not whitewash or ignore the problematic nature of caste. The particular strength of Hinduism Today's presentation is that not only does it not give a monolithic depiction of Hinduism, it distinguishes among the various Hindu traditions--Vaishnava, Saiva, Shakta and Smarta--with a degree of detail not typically found in basic introductions to Hinduism.

Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending these sections as review material for my college students. The section on the origins of Hinduism is likely to be the most controversial, given the ongoing debates about the Aryan migration theory. But I like the way this presentation emphasizes areas in which our knowledge is still lacking, rather than strongly affirming a counter-theory of indigenous Aryan origins as a Hindu nationalist history would do. All in all, excellent work! I am happy to endorse this presentation of Hinduism.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Religious Studies,
Elizabethtown College,
Elizabethtown, PA, USA

We are deeply grateful to Hinduism Today for its extraordinary work in presenting Hinduism in its appropriate historical light, with tangible facts gleaned from Hindu experts and scholars to support and broadcast the intrinsic values of the Hindu tradition.

It is distressing to see Hinduism's vast history belittled and whittled down by the hands of those whose personal agendas are ambitious and prejudiced, evidenced by the inured spate of fictitious theories, such as the Aryan Invasion/Migration theory once more being resurrected by Western Indologists, Christian theologians and academicians. Unlike any other spiritual tradition in America, with the inalienable right to have their culture portrayed accurately, Hindu academicians and scholars are given far less berth to rectify erroneous information about their culture. It is a breath of fresh air to see this ancient culture of harmony and nonviolence portrayed in accurate light, rather than witness more of the general bias perpetrated for too many centuries against it.

As we begin to address the disparaging light to which Hinduism is subjected by the many misinformed and misguided, we must all take part in undoing, rectifying and healing the crimes of the past. Specifically, let us not turn our backs on the humongous dilemma now pandemic within Hindu culture: the caste system. Apparently, this system is securely tied to the intricately engineered political missile programmed to perennially generate and inflict hurt, damage and destruction on Hinduism.

Factions against Hinduism can be found in many shapes and forms: among India's politicians and religious leaders, European historians and "experts " (who write their own version of Hinduism's history), and Western Indologists and academicians--all motivated by one or the other ingredient of the illusionary mix of power, fame, wealth, race and prejudice.

Whatever is the motivation for the ongoing epidemic of misinformation, we have got

to dig deep within ourselves to find the collective solution. To do so, we must come to terms with the most pertinent question of our time: How did Hinduism come to find itself mired in the irreverent and inhumane state that is the caste system?

The greatest contributor to the hurt and confusion within Hinduism is the perversion of its harmonious community concept of varnas, which refers to our inner divinity, the light of consciousness. A primary meaning of the word varna is "luster; light of dawn, " which reveals the core intention of the varna community constitution that has been erroneously and deviously retooled as the "caste system." This retooling was deliberately performed by the endless foreign invaders and incursions upon the body and spirit of Hinduism. These incursions served to seal the fate of the perverted caste system within India. But as the Hindu people know, the karma of fate is never sealed. In this case, it can and must be changed.

Sri Swamini Mayatitananda
Spiritual Head, Wise Earth Monastery
Candler, NC, USA

The lesson on Hinduism presents a lucid, authentic and easily-understandable picture of Hindu history, tradition and practices. I hear so many complaints from Hindu parents and students in the USA and Europe regarding the incorrect, and even frequently demeaning, presentation of Hinduism in world religions classes. It is time that the educational boards and textbook publishers take a sincere interest in presenting Hinduism in a factual manner. This is the most comprehensive summary of Hinduism's multi-faceted tradition that I have seen to date. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks for students.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati
Founder and Chairman,
India Heritage Research Foundation,
Rishikesh, India

I have been aware for some years of the poor presentation of Hinduism in our public schools. Both parents and children have complained to me about it. The Hindu religion is inadequately explained, and in unflattering terms in the elementary and middle school social studies and history books. In many places, we notice mutilation

of facts about Hinduism, and often these are getting quoted. I congratulate Hinduism Today for addressing this situation with its sixth-grade history lesson in Hinduism. This lesson corrects many of the errors in the current chapters on Hinduism, presents the religion in a sympathetic light and describes the religion in the way Hindus understand and practice it. The lesson is a commendable attempt to produce a simple history of Hinduism that is acceptable to nearly all in our religion.

C.K. Hiranya Gowda, M.D.
Former President, Hindu Temple of Nashville, TN, USA

Greatness of Hinduism

Thank you for Gurudeva's most profound and enlightening article ("Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World, " Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). I was not only moved by his home truths, but his divine greatness is apparent in the lofty philosophy which leaves Sanatana Dharma without any peer and, I must add, the only true living religion that will survive for all time. I am also mindful of the oft quoted saying, "What you cannot find in Hinduism, you will find nowhere else." The quest for a perfect life for every Hindu is intrinsically interwoven in the law of karma, which can be easily interpreted in the quotation, "All the good deeds of a lifetime are washed away in the flood caused by a single sin." The relentless pursuit to transform into the most perfect and eventually liberated soul harkens every Hindu on his spiritual journey back to God.

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An Eye for an Eye

I saw the phrase "An Eye for an Eye " used in the Letters section and "Hinduism and Modern Life " in the Apr/May/Jun, 2007, issue. I am a Jewish woman who regularly

reads and enjoys your magazine, and I would like to give your readers some background on that often misused and misunderstood phrase. It comes from the Jewish Torah, which is also the first five books of the Christian Bible, specifically from three different places: Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. This phrase does not mean that one should exact revenge for a wrong. It does mean that restitution should be just and fair. If someone causes another person harm, be it physical or monetary, he should only be responsible for returning the value of what was harmed. Prior to this concept, a man might take another man's life as revenge for a broken arm, for example. Justice is very important in the Jewish faith. The concept of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth " was designed to protect both the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong.

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Corrections

---In Diaspora, "Wiccan Wife Wins Cause, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007, it was indicated that officials approved the pentacle's placement on Sgt. Stewart's grave marker after his wife threatened a lawsuit. The grave marker in fact does display the Wiccan pentacle, but its presence is due to the memorial site's being state-owned, not under the authority of the VA, and Nevada's having deemed the pentacle an acceptable faith symbol. Additionally, in a settlement with Americans United for Separation of Church and State on April 23, 2007, the VA finally approved the Wiccan pentacle symbol for deceased veterans' grave markers in VA cemetaries.

---In "Canada's Hindu Youth, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007, the interviewees are from the Hindu Temple in Richmond Hill, not the Varasiddhi Vinayagar Temple; the correct website address is www.thehindutemple.ca; the photo of Sivakami Loganathan appears on page 53, not page 61, and the musical teacher's name is Bhuma Krishnan, not Uma Krishnan.

---The number of saints who authored the Panniru-Thirumurai is given as as 64 in "In Praise of Siva's Singers, " Apr/May/Jun, 2007. The correct number is 27. Photos in the article are by the author, Anantha Krishnan.