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Published by Anonymous on Oct. 01, 2003

Letters

Useful Beyond Words

I find some of the Hinduism Today articles useful beyond words. When I read Self Knowledge (Atmabodha) by Shankaracharya, I thought it was the most impressive piece of spiritual writing. What was even more practical was "Karma Management" ("Insight," Oct/Dec 2002). I immediately sent the link to everyone I know. They all loved it.

Nambakam Ranganathan,
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No Varna Castes in Tamil Nadu

Like most articles on the issue of caste, your articles in the last issue assumes that the varna system (the four caste system) existed uniformly throughout India. When discussing the caste system, the insight and evidence that Tamil history and literature provides is never taken into account. Even a passing glance at Tamil history and literature makes it abundantly clear that the four-caste system never existed in Tamil society. Many scholars and historians have established the fact that the Tamil castes are indigenous to the Tamils and have nothing to do with the varna system. The Tamil society of Sri Lanka is further evidence for this fact. Granted, in the last couple of centuries, Tamils of Tamil Nadu, by their failure to define themselves in terms of their history, have allowed the shadow of the varna system to fall on their society. In this century, while the goal of the Tamils would be to level out the differences within the Tamil castes and to eventually eliminate caste as an identity, we will first assert the fact that the varna system has nothing to do with

the Tamils.

Renuka Kumarasamy, New Jersey, USA, re_ku@hotmail.com

Help Eradicate Untouchability!

The June 2003, National Geographic, article on "India's Untouchables" makes for gory reading and paints a pathetic picture of Hindu society. Nearly 20 percent of Hindus are so-called "untouchables." For thousands of years this large proportion of Hindu society has been persecuted, resulting in large-scale conversion to Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. If about 160 million backward class Hindus leave our religion because they are being ill-treated, even after 56 years of India's independence, then can you imagine the plight of Hinduism in its birth place--India? Your magazine is trying to tell the readers good things about Hinduism, and I hope that one of the motives is to stop conversions. If so, then you should also make attempts to eradicate the casteism and untouchability from our religion in India. Another problem is that today in India Hindus are ashamed of calling themselves Hindus because of so-called secularism. The younger generation does not know anything about Hinduism. Can you come out with some easily readable booklets which the young as well as not so young can read with interest?

Ashok Garg, Pune, India, gargsenior@eth.net

Use the Local Language

I agree with Mrs. Jamuna Vittal's suggestions (Letters, Apr/Jun 2003) and I feel that the loss you reported of 60,000 Hindus in Malaysia is mainly due to people not understanding the language in which the pujas are done. In Bali they do the pujas in their own language, and though many centuries have passed, still 90 percent of the population are Hindus. There need be no unifying language. The temples can use the language of the area, and all who want to worship can worship there. Hindus have migrated to Western countries, and millions are in English-speaking countries. In one more generation, unless the pujas are done in the language they understand, they will not go to the temples. I urge Hindism Today and all those interested to

prepare a program so that the pujas can be done in English. Today marriage ceremonies and others are done in a language which most do not understand and the purpose and significance of the religious ceremonies are lost. More translation to suit the tone of pujas must be done to ensure that our children and grandchildren are Hindus.

K. Mailvaganam, Mawson, Australia, tamilzca@apex.net.au

USA Not an Abrahmic Country

The article "has the United States become Judeo-Christian-Islamic?" sent on your daily e-mail service was well written, (HPI, May 18, 2003). I am always amazed at how much the so-called religious right in this country either doesn't know or won't say about our founding fathers. America was never meant to be Christian, Judeo-Christian, or any other religious nation. Most of the founding fathers and the signers of the Declaration of Independence, The Bill of Rights and The Constitution were, in fact, Deists. A Deist believes in God, and makes no reference to Jesus the Christ, or any other Prophet, Messenger, Avatar, Incarnation or whatever. A simple search for Deist on the net will turn up a lot of interesting information. I, for one, cannot understand why this information isn't known by more people. I was raised Roman Catholic and still knew about this history, as many of my friends who went to public school also knew. America suffers from the lack of education of her people. That's just one small reason that I chose to call myself Hindu, and make every effort to practice the dharma to the best of my ability. Education seems to be held in high regard by the Hindus and other South Asians that I am acquainted with, not to mention tolerance, acceptance and the ability to let individuals think freely. America's greatest strength is in her diversity, which is supposed to be inclusive of everyone no matter what. Sadly, these troubled times that we live in are made worse by those who seek to dominate and stamp out that diversity and impose their own rules and agenda on the masses. History lives on to show that anytime mass dominance was attempted, it ultimately failed. And it will continue to fail because people can only take just so much before they stand up for themselves and say "No!" to tyranny.

Steven Pfeiffer, St. Louis, Missouri, skanda2@earthlink.net

Temple News Uplifts Us

It was my fortune that I hit upon your website while searching for resources on Arunachaleswar. The story on the maha kumbhabhishekam of Arunachaleswara Temple ("New Life," Jan/Mar 2003) was very lively. Being in Delhi, I totally missed this great event. Now the regret of not witnessing the kumbhabhishekam has gone. Thanks again to Hinduism Today and your correspondent, Mr. Kesav Mallia. I look forward to reading your next internet issue. Maybe you can have a regular feature on some of our great temples that are lesser known or buried in history. This would give life to these temples and local economies, too, as more people will start travelling to these places. Pilgrimage tourism is the earliest form of travel and still a great motivating factor in India for people to travel.

D. Venkatesan, Delhi, India, dvenkatesan@hub.nic.in

Celebrating Hinduism

One of the things I have greatly appreciated about Hinduism Today is its unabashed celebration of Hinduism. As a Westerner, I enjoy Hinduism Today on so many levels: as a guide to a wonderful spiritual tradition, a great place to read what's going on in India and in other traditions around the world and a forum--one of the few--that shares my beliefs in compassion and vegetarianism. I was deeply saddened to read about the mistreatment of elephants in Hindu temples in India ("Elephant's Price," Jul/Sept 2003). We are, unfortunately, used to hearing about such abuse in circuses, but it is doubly distressing to learn about these noble creatures suffering abuse within a place of worship. I do not believe animals are put on Earth for our use in any form. I appreciate you publishing this story.

Mark Hawthorne, California, nga_sha_zamet@yahoo.com

Of Temples and of Character

One of my neighbors never goes to any temple, despite the fact that Nepal has many temples--from small jungle temples to famous traditional ones. But Hinduism is very broad, including Hindus who go to temples and good Hindus who don't. As my brother says, to be a good Hindu one must be honest, behave well and have character. Chanting, offering flowers, etc., can set an important example for our children, but devotion is the important thing, not putting on a show. Unfortunately, many Hindu hypocrites go to temples but are otherwise quite corrupt, saying one thing while doing another, causing the next generation to hate religion. Meanwhile there are others, like my mother, who think good thoughts, have respect for God in their hearts and make small temples in their very own homes.

Bylsujung Karki, kathmandu, Nepal, isu@enet.com.np

Some Jews Believe in Karma

Some of your publications say the beliefs in karma and reincarnation are fundamental differences between Judaism and Hinduism. I just want to say that these are actually part of Judaism also. Reincarnation is known as gilgul. Midda ka neged midda is the Jewish equivalent of karma: as one does so will he reap; good for good and bad for bad. Judaism also believes, as Hindus do, that an old soul can choose to reincarnate in a body well after birth, in someone who is say 15 or 22 years old, this is known as ibbur. If you ever have a chance to discuss this with an orthodox Jew, they will confirm this to you, especially the Lubavitch orthodox Jews, who have embraced cyber-space.

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