Letter to the Editor
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Bigotry in Little Fiji

We are concerned about very conservative and fundamentalist trends in the Methodist church which wants Fiji to be called a "Christian" country. They are the ones who want the Sunday ban enforced on the nation and who probably wanted to do away with religious holidays for Diwali and Prophet Mohammed's birthday [see page 22]. The Methodist is by far the biggest Christian church in Fiji (30-35% of the population).

Other Christian groups which concern us are the new right-winged fundamentalist churches coming in from the US. Most of them seem to have little appreciation of non-Christian religious traditions. We have heard some disturbing stories about their methods of seeking converts and the demands they make on new converts.

Please be assured that there are many Christians who are deeply disturbed by incidents of religious intolerance which victimize Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. In fact, we Catholics have also come in for a number of attacks from some Christian fundamentalists. They do not like our tolerance for other religions, our more open approach to the bible and our concern for justice and the poor.

Rev. Fr. Kevin J. Barr, M.S.C., Suva, Fiji

Let Freedom Ring

It was great to read about the new $1.2 million temple in Fiji. It is a credit to the three hundred thousand Hindus in that beautiful country. The only disturbing part of all this celebration and unity of the Indians there is the proposed non-religious holiday to be called "Girmit Day," i.e. "Indenture Day," which will do away with the Hindu Diwali and Prophet Mohammed's birthday. The world community and the U.N. should not remain silent on this matter. Religious freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. Let freedom ring loud and clear!

Mac Lakhani, Sacramento, California, USA

The Ruse of St. Thomas

I have studied the legend of St. Thomas for many years and have just completed a second book on the subject, and I can say with some certainty that St. Thomas did not come to India. If he traveled at all (there are some reputed historians who say that he did not live at all) it was to Edessa, in Syria, and perhaps further east into Parthia, where he is said to have established the church of Persia.

In 1953 the Vatican stated that the visit of St. Thomas to India was unverified and today no Catholic university in Europe teaches his legend as history. But, in India it is still used as a stick to beat Hindus with-as they are the Apostle's alleged killers.

Ishwar Sharan, Madras, Tamil Nadu, India

Good News

I have been thinking of the plethora of news, oftentimes sensational and often very tragic and negative. The thought occurred that this may be a fine opportunity for readers of Hinduism Today to write in on how they have seen the positive manifestations of inner God-consciousness manifesting in their lives as well as that

of the mass-consciousness conditions. It would be a balance to the bad news and actually a more accurate reading of what is happening today.

Indivar Sivanathan, Bend, Oregon, USA, MCI: 667-1815

Be Careful with Caste

I feel compelled to draw your attention to what appears to this longtime reader as a distressing slide toward favoring some of the less-savory aspects of Hindu social practice, such as caste. Permit me to assure you that your abhorrence of the negative aspects of caste practice does not shine through, either in your editorial pages or in the letters, articles and news items that you choose to showcase.

Caste practice in India today is nowhere benign. It diminishes everybody, high and low! It has created a sense of ritual pollution among Hindus. It divides them, and defeats their hopes and aspirations. Ultimately, it isn't even necessary.

Samir Dutt, De Soto, Texas, USA, dutt@chandan.ssc.gov

Don't Condemn Dialogue

How can any Hindu condemn a mere discussion of caste [Letters, October, 1994]? Those who condemn free discussion are mere ideologues of the Judeo-Christo-Islamic flavor. Bear in mind that this "flavor" kills those who don't believe in its "only" truth and "one" true God-and they burn books. Hindus do neither.

Dr. Adolf von Wurttemberg, Lawrenceville, Georgia, USA, Compuserve: 72330,2237

Hindus in Hiding

Thank you for the wonderful Publisher's Desk you wrote in the October issue. I cannot agree more that to hide behind symbols such as the cross is either subterfuge or dishonesty. Sanatana Dharma is a tradition of eternal verities and one should only speak of such things of which one has personal experience. I do hope that Ramakrishna Mission, Self-Realization Fellowship and other such organizations will learn from your sage words.

Subhash Kak, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA, kak@gate.ee.lsu.edu

More Yoga, Please

I hope you will publish a center page on yoga, as I have found yoga to be a superb path. Siva and yoga are almost inseparably connected, known from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization. Yoga (the whole spectrum) is becoming much more popular in the West.

Raja Bhat, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA , CompuServe: 71450,201

Self-Realization Defense

We were astonished to read that the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF) spokesperson [October, 1994] says they are not seeking "service mark" rights in their lawsuit against Ananda-for this is precisely what they are seeking, in ways far more restrictive than just the name of Ananda's Church. The facts are a matter of public record. To research it, contact us for case numbers, etc. Documents are enclosed for the editors.

More is at stake here than the fate of two organizations. Thousands of years of

Hindu/Yoga tradition is jeopardized when one group can gain exclusive rights over a guru's name and a concept as fundamental as "Self-realization." Ananda, like SRF, is dedicated to Paramhansa Yogananda. But SRF apparently believes that Yogananda is SRF. They feel they have the right to govern every expression of Yogananda's teachings. Obviously, we disagree. Our immediate goal, however, is not to persuade SRF, but to safeguard the Hindu/Yoga tradition in America and the future of Yogananda's mission. A service mark holder can sue anyone for violating his exclusive rights. Legal defense is extremely expensive. One organization, which holds several service marks for universal terms, has already discovered that merely threatening to sue is an effective way to enforce its exclusive rights. Another service mark holder won its lawsuit by default when legal costs drove the defendant into bankruptcy and he had to give up.

As long as Ananda is being sued, we will defend ourselves. We've held on for four-and-a-half years and a million dollars in expenses, and we'll see it through to the end. Important legal precedents are being established. The Patent and Trademark Office is learning the true nature of these terms. But we say, let Divine Law decide. Lawsuits are not the way to settle misunderstandings among disciples of the same guru. As the New Testament states, "If what they are doing is the will of God, nothing we do will be able to stop them. And if it is not the will of God, nothing they do will endure."

Asha Praver, Ananda Community, Mountain View, California, USA

Corrections

In the Nrityagram photo essay [October, 1994] we inadvertently omitted accrediting the following photographers for their splendid photos: Pankaj Shah, Dhiren Chauhan, Bharath Ramamruthan and Lynne Fernandez. We apologize for the oversight.

Editor's note: If you send us your letters via e-mail (which we welcome), please also include your postal, i.e. "snail-mail," address. Thank you.