Global Dharma
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A Monthly News Digest

Statistics Spark New Abuse Awareness

A fearless and long-overdue public examination of wife abuse issues continues. The New York Mayor's office released these figures on US domestic violence:

-- Domestic violence kills more than 10 American women every day.

-- A women is battered in America every 15 seconds.

-- Two to four million women are battered every year.

-- In over half the homes where women are being battered, their children are being abused as well.

These statistics shed new light on the international "balance of evil" equation, used as one of the most developed/civilized nations indicators. India's highly publicized female deaths due to dowry killings numbered 5,582 in 1993 in a national population of 844 million. Dowry burnings are used in western media's subtle "aren't they primitive" coverage of Asia. But in 1993 approximately 3,650 American women died from domestic violence in a population of only 252 million. Thus, roughly twice as many women, per capita, are killed at home in America than

in India, assuming India's female deaths due to other forms of domestic violence besides dowry killings are low. This hardly excuses the situation in India, but shows the problem's universal scale.

These statistics don't include the unseen legions too afraid to come forward. Only one in seven abused Indian American women register complaints. In New Zealand, Heather King says, "In my 14 years of co-coordinating women's refuges, I've never succeeded with Indian women following through and going it alone." They are conditioned to believe it is wrong to indict or leave their husband. And a network of "relatives from around the world will harass her with calls" to force her to stay at home and overlook her husband's abuse. They feel helpless, isolated, with nowhere to turn.

But women do have recourse. The law is there to support them, and getting increasingly tough on offenders. After six years of litigation, in July this year a Delhi woman was sentenced to death for burning her daughter-in-law. In America, immigration law will waive deportation of a woman where the husband refuses to file the joint petition necessary for her permanent residency (a threat many US Indian men make to newly arrived brides) if she can prove he abused her.

Experts agree that the problem only worsens if ignored. The advice to abused women is: act now, don't wait. Outside help is essential. If the public exposure of a police report is feared, get the help of a social work agency. They maintain strict security and anonymity. Seek rehabilitation of the abusive spouse. If nothing works out, move out of the hostile environment. Anyone aware of abuse must report it.

Educate Women to Control Population

The September UN Conference brought some 8,500 from 180 nations to Cairo to tackle population control issues and draft a "program of action" to implement at home. The initial 113-page draft fomented controversy on forum floors, highlighting irreconcilable differences on abortion and morality issues between the religious right (Muslims, Catholic and Right to Life) and women's rights. But underneath the fireworks, delegates succeeded with a "record degree of consensus," in adopting a new document. It supersedes a 20-year-old policy based on fear of the "population bomb." Strategies to fulfill quotas in mass distribution of contraceptives and fuel

western style economic development were deemed failures, often resented. The Cairo plan of action strikes in a new direction, defining programs to "empower women." Lack of security and infant mortality still drive women to have many children. The new objectives are educating women, giving them more economic power, including them in political processes and providing comprehensive reproductive health care based on real needs. The goal is to bring population growth to zero before an unsustainable world population causes major ecological destruction.

India's Kerala state was cited as a success story despite its status as "poor" in terms of the western development model. In Kerala, with 100 percent literacy among girls and targeted programs that reduce infant mortality, women have reduced the birth rate to two-the so-called replacement rate needed to stabilize population size.

Fiji Tries to Abolish Deepavali Holiday

Fiji's Hindu and Muslim communities reacted with disbelief and anger at a government decision announced September 5th to abolish Deepavali and Prophet Mohammed's birthday in favor of a single combined holiday to be called "Girmit Day." Josefa Serulagilagi, Permanent Secretary for Labor and Public Relations, said that by increasing the number of work days, the Fiji economy will receive a boost.

Jai Ram Reddy, the leader of the opposition, questioned the government's motives for the change saying it sought to further "detract from the rights and self-dignity of the Indian people." Fiji's largest Indian organization, All India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam, said, "This arbitrary move demonstrates lamentable bad faith on the part of the government and will attract defiance in many forms which will prove detrimental to economic growth." The name "Girmit Day" was particularly insulting. Girmit was coined years ago to replace the words Indenture Agreement, which workers could not pronounce. It is a reminder of their early virtual slave status as indentured workers for the British.

In the face of this overwhelming opposition, the following day the government backed down. The acting Prime Minister, Militoni Leweniqila, "clarified" that, "The

scrapping of the two religious holidays to be replaced by the Girmit Day was merely a suggestion." The retraction averted a call for noncooperation with the new holiday structure.

Kabir, Saint to Both Hindus and Muslims, Finds a Home in Canada

The Kabir Association of Canada (logo left) was started in 1976 by Dr. J. Das, president, in Surrey, British Columbia and officially registered in 1984. The association holds weekly satsang and meditation in his home. Local participants include 15-20 persons, with 100 registered members across Canada. Publications include a monthly 10-page Kabir Voice, an annual Kabir Jayanthi souvenir and occasional booklets with Kabir's writings. The association is raising funds for a center which will be open to the public for meditation and study of Kabir's teachings.

Kabir was born in the 15th century. Dr. Das says, "He was found by a small lake outside Varanasi, and raised by Muslim weavers. At age nine or ten he called out: Ram! Ram! Muslims complained that he should not refer to a Hindu God. Hindus complained that a Muslim shouldn't use a Hindu name." Kabir later became a disciple of the famous Hindu Vaishnava saint Swami Ramananda. Though he refused to call himself a Hindu or a Muslim, he matured to preach a philosophy of synthesis rooted in Hindu philosophy and sadhana and Islamic brotherhood, that was the forerunner of Sikhism and modern day universalism. Hailed as the father of Hindi poetry, his cogent two line verses sharply attack sectarianism, caste and hyprocracy with the powerful clarity of his profound mystic realization of God's immanence. Contact: Kabir Association of Canada, 5858-150th Street; Surrey, BC; CANADA V3S 5L5. Ph: 604-599-68976, Fax: 604-594-6255.

Trends to Watch: World Bank Berated for Failing Man and Mother Earth

1994 marks the 50th anniversary of the world's richest, most powerful development institution, the World Bank. But it is more a year of public relations damage control than celebration. Numerous organizations are pleading to stop the bank's socially and ecologically damaging programs. An international expose is underway. Noted economist and co-editor of "Perpetuating Poverty" Ian Vasquez says, "The Bank is not reformable." The best thing to do, he said is "abolish it

altogether." Congressmen are lobbying to cut off USA's large donations. Dozens of new books tell a dark story. Loans were given to poor nations with conditions attached to restructure their economies. Northern donor nations such as USA and France made project decisions often deeply resented by the people and non-government organizations of developing nations. In 50 years over 6,000 projects drafted by middle level bureaucrats were all approved by a few directors with poor access to impact assessments. Not one was ever rejected for its negative social and environmental fallout. To protect Northern vested interests abroad, politicians used the bank to infuse large doses of cash into struggling nations. But Washington's economists and engineers are far removed from the consequences of their decisions. Officials and the mega-development infrastructure elite in borrower nations get richer while the poor get poorer, watching their ecology collapse. Internal policy changes to transform the beleaguered bank into an nurturing mother of great means were supposedly made. Healthy strategies have been in place on paper for years. But implementation failed. Today, the bank is still funding 134 ongoing projects currently displacing 2 million people. More than a fifth of humanity-1.1 billion people-still live in crushing poverty. Billions of dollars are pouring into rain forest ravaging roads, devastating dams and soot belching coal power plants. Sustainable, environmentally safe programs directly affecting the quality of life, primary health and poverty receive only token support. The growing movement to transform or topple the monolithic World Bank faces enormous inertia, vested interests that will not give up easily. But proponents say it presages the changes, or lack thereof, that will decide the quality of life on earth for generations to come.

Bharatanatyam Metamorphosis

Shobana Jeyasingh won England's 1993 Prudential Award for Dance, a us$112,500 prize. Born in Madras, a soloist for seven years, now living in London, she has taken the solo format of Bharatanatyam and expanded it to five dancers and an open stage using avant garde western choreography and music. Maintaining the discipline and precision of Indian dance, she includes invented movements and group dynamics. The Independent on Sunday praised her work: "She ventures into thrilling new areas...free, personal dance, beautifully performed. Jeyasingh's imagination is boundless, her dance brave and exhilarating. She has established herself as one of this country's most brilliant creators."

Maha Yagna Mataji Passes On

Her Holiness, Smt. Bhagavati Devi Sharma, spouse of Pt. Sri Ram Sharma a noted freedom fighter and the eminent spiritual founder of the Gayatri Pariwar, attained samadhi on September 19th, 1994 at 11:50 am at her abode in Shanti Kunj, Hardwar. Her last wish to millions of the followers of the Mission was to continue, with full devotion and vigor, the unfinished spiritual upliftment of the masses. She became the head of the Gayatri Pariwar after her husband's death in 1990, greatly expanding its yagnas to include millions of participants. Her positive contributions towards moral values, spiritual awakening and cultural reconstruction will always be remembered. Last rites were performed at the ashram premises on the following day at 8 am.

Sanskrit Culture Heads North

From September 1992 to August 1993, Upender Rao, Ph.D. (right) taught Sanskrit and Bhagavadgita in the Netherlands, Russia and the Ukraine. Sponsored by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, he taught at Maharishi Vedic Universities in these areas. He was the first ever Sanskrit teacher at the University of Chelny, 600 miles east of Moscow. In less than three months, some students were speaking and singing simple Sanskrit sentences and songs. The Ukraine classes had students from Japan, Germany, France, England and other countries. He says these "foreigners," unlike many Indians, are thirsty for Vedic spiritual culture.