Publisher's Desk
Category : December 1994
Published by Anonymous on Dec. 01, 1994

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Let's Stop Bashing Our Priests

Satguru sivaya subramuniyaswami

Being kind to one another is an odd thing-everyone agrees it is the right and noble and really human thing to do, yet nearly everyone abuses someone else. In months gone by we have talked here about abuse of women and children, animals and our environment. There is another kind of abuse whose victims have silently suffered without our concern, without our intervention, and mostly without our even knowing about it. I'm speaking of abusing temple priests.

It is time that we talked about this new atrocity. Hindu priests, known as pujaris, are being bashed-physically, emotionally and mentally-by temple managers, trustees and sometimes even the devotees. We know that this is not right. Still, no one, well maybe a few, is objecting, except the priests themselves. Their objections and efforts to provide for their own security go largely unheard, as they are looked at by management as uneducated, simple people who perform rote rituals.

Priest bashing is a popular sport outside of India. Priests have their sangam and elders back home in India to stand up for them. When a priest goes into disfavor, the slightest excuses are used to hurt him, such as wrongdoing in handling money-that is a favorite and usually the first to be used. The list goes on, giving management the permission to yell at him, push him, ignore his needs, embarrass him in front of his peers and sometimes the public.

One priests' group in California through an attorney formed their own

organization for protection. Last October in Australia a priest spent two weeks in the hospital following a severe public humiliation incident.

Yes, Hindu temple priest bashing is a worldwide tragedy, and those who perpetrate these acts are also bashing the Sanatana Dharma. Abusing priests is not to be taken lightly. Those who can invoke blessings from the Gods can also invoke curses from asuric forces of this planet for their own protection when angered, embarrassed and deeply hurt. This very thing happened in Hawaii when the Christians were converting all the followers of the powerful native kahuna priesthood. Some angered and became some of the best black magicians, feared to this day. They now live in the pretaloka, astral plane close to Earth, afflicting wrongdoers and helping the faithful. It did not have to happen this way, but it did.

Hindu temple priests deserve the richness of their holy profession, the dignity of their office and this should not be interfered with. They have earned the same respect that any professional in "the real world" enjoys. When swami bashing was in vogue years ago, swamis took it seriously, got to know each other better, stood up for each other and put a stop to the nonsense. Women today are taking such a stand against their own husbands who take joy in beating them. When these transgressions are brought before the public, changes are often set in motion. Attitudes change. Soon, the media changes its own ways of handling abuse. Laws change. We have seen this happen with child abuse, with racial abuse, with sexual abuse. The time has now come for Hindus to change our attitudes about temple priests. This will require temple managers to adjust their thinking. It will also require the international priesthood of the Sanatana Dharma to take a firm stand against their molesters and refuse to submit themselves day in and day out to harrassment or to the humiliation of janitorial work and the handling of shoes. Some work 14 hours a day and more. They are considered servants of the manager rather than the temple Gods. Their final justice may not be found in man's law. It may be more mystical. They may decide to go to God's unfailing law or, if so inclined, to the darker realms for relief. Beware! Their mantras are powerful. History shows entire societies that have gone down with their priesthoods. Let's not have this happen again.

There have been too many cases for us to take lightly the himsa hurts inflicted upon priests serving in foreign lands. It's bad enough inside of India, but worse outside. At least inside India the priest is on home ground, knows the rules of the region and has moral, emotional and even legal support available. And, of course, he has his extended family to turn to. Many priests outside of Bharat are living away

from the support systems, often alone, often on a temporary basis. They don't know the customs of the country they serve in, and may not even know the language too well. They are at the mercy of the temple managers for everything. They are disadvantaged in another way, for the priest has to return to his village and face a second humiliation as elders and peers make them answer up to the gossip, hurts and accusations. Let's not have this happen anymore. Happy priest, happy temple, happy God, happy people. That's the way it works.