

## [News in Brief](#)

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Electric funeral pyres may be the answer to India's shortage of wood for cremations, but they are not popular. The 21,000 Hindus who die each day consume 18-million pounds of wood, or 560-acres of forest. "When a Hindu dies, a tree dies with him," says environmentalist Sudhir Mukherjee. The Indian government has built 25 electric crematoria and plans 25 more, but Hindus won't use them, despite the cost savings. Cremation with wood costs us\$66, with electricity it costs us\$6.60. One man, asked if he would take his father-in-law to the electric crematory rather than the burning ghat, replied, "No, never. This is our tradition." Christians and Muslims, who favor burial and now face land shortages, are resorting to vertical graves, "all-in-one family pits," "easy-decay crypts" and re-use of burial plots. Hindus in the West have always used electric or gas cremation, for lack of any alternative.

Sri Lankans are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) on a wide scale in war-torn Jaffna. After 10 years of civil war, "at least 70 percent of the children are affected," says Daya Somasunderam, one of two psychiatrists serving the city. A survey of 101 Jaffna Tamils indicates 30% suffer PTSD, 50% suffer anxiety or depression and 80% have some psychological problem. "Women are the most affected. Their men have been killed, tortured, detained, or gone away. They took on all the responsibility for the family," said Somasunderam.

India's seafaring skills are being given new recognition after a scientific conference in New Delhi. French archeologist Jean-Francois Salles said hybrid cotton reached Latin America 4,000 years before Christopher Columbus reached the Caribbean in search of India, adding, "The bulk of exchange between the 4,500-year-old Indus civilization and West Asia was by sea." Ethnohistorian Lotika Varadarajan also said, "This cotton is a cross between Old World and New World cotton, and the only way it could have been in the Americas before Columbus was through direct human introduction." Other indications of Indian maritime history "prove beyond doubt that Tamil navigation was at its zenith before the Europeans

arrived," said G. Victor Rajamanickam.

Japan is pledging \$465 million directly to the Archeological Survey of India for a three-phase restoration and conservation program of Buddhist monuments at Sanchi and Satdhara in Madhya Pradesh. The plan will also develop an infrastructure for tourism and pilgrimage by Buddhists from Japan and other Southeast Asian countries.

Krishna Software Inc. has developed a Hindi Word Processor for PC's based on phonetics and using English keyboard equivalents. The program requires learning only the one keyboard mapping and boasts "If you can speak Hindi, Sanskrit, or Gujarati, you can write it." Contact: Vaisnava Books Ltd., P.O. Box 86065, Oakville, Ontario, L6H 5V6, Canada.

Native Americans are calling adoption and practice of Indian mystical rites and ways by adherents of the New Age movement as "the final phase of genocide." A New York Times article recently examined "adherents of the New Age movement who emulate Indian ways in a spiritual quest." John Lavelle, the Santee Sioux director of the center for Support and Protection of Indian Religions and Indigenous Traditions said, "First whites took the land and all that was physical. Now they're going after what is intangible."

Darpana Academy of Ahmedabad, the internationally known and acclaimed learning center established in 1948 "where art is a way of life," is seeking funding for a 300-seat amphitheater and a permanent home for the Vikram Sarabhai Festival. Bharata natyam, kuchupudi, kathakali, drama, puppetry, music and folk dance are all taught at this unique center of "tradition, continuity and creativity." Contact: Darpana Academy, Usmanpura, Ahmedabad, 380 013, India.

Traditional wedding ornamentation got 11-year-old Ritu Agarwal expelled from Bishop School in suburban Bhayandar, Maharashtra. Ritu had applied henna to the palms of her hands for her sister's wedding in keeping with Marwari community tradition, but in violation of the Christian school's rules. As punishment, she was first made to stand outside her class-six room. Later her school's principal demanded US\$2.50 per day until the henna wore off. Finally, after further protests from Ritu's parents and other supporters, the principal expelled her, and as quoted

in India Monitor, shouted, "If you are so fond of applying henna, Who don't you open your own Marwari school?"

A centuries-old Chola period Shiva temple along the Bay of Bengal is slowly but steadily being eroded by waves. The Hindu Religious Endowments Department of Tamil Nadu wants to protect the antiquity in Nagapattinam district. They plan to move the idols of Lingabhava, Brahma, Muruga, Ganesh, Dakshinamurthy, Vishnu and Durga to a new island temple.

The first USA East Coast Hindu Astrology Conference is planned for September 9-12, 1994, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Rockville, Maryland, USA. The 4-day event "will explore a range of popular techniques that support this most ancient sidereal system of practical forecasting" and feature Dr. Vedavyas, Kechav Dev Sharma and others. Contact: Richard Houck, 11324 Rambling Road, Gaithersburg, Maryland, 20879-3142, USA.

Cruel animal testing continues in India despite widespread opposition. According to published reports hundreds of labs experiment on thousands of animals, particularly non-human primates-some in collaboration with World Health Organization efforts-mostly for the testing of toiletries and cosmetics. Reports include testing chemicals in animal eyes, scalding in boiling water, force-feeding of lipsticks to Rhesus monkeys and inducement of heart attacks in dogs.

Ganesh images have been uncovered in places as diverse as Rome, Mexico, Cambodia, China, Nepal, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Turkey, Burma and Japan. The Bombay-based Akhil Mughbat Sarvajanic Shri Ganesh Mandal even mentions a 2,000-year old bearded Ganesh excavated in Iran and now on display in France.

Conch shells are mystical instruments of Hindu temple worship, but contemporary trombonist Steve Turre has taken the conch to a whole new level. His "Sanctified Shells" album marries Indian harmonies and drones, played on a 10-piece choir of conch shells, with layer after layer of Latin, Indian and African rhythms to create what some call "a beautiful, ethereal, provocative musical whole."

The Girl Scout pledge now has room for Hinduism's 33-million Gods. As reported in Liberty, the innovation is part of a strategy to expand membership; "Scouts can now insert the name of their divine being, creator, spirit guide, or whatever, in the slot once exclusively reserved for the Judeo-Christian deity."

Vegetarianism in the USA is now so common that Indiana Congressman Andrew Jacobs introduced a bill in the House of Representatives urging the United States Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program to add vegetarian meals for students who choose not to eat meat.

Transcendental Meditation is reportedly practiced at the highest levels of government in Mozambique, where the President of the war-torn southeastern African nation, Joaquim Alberto Chissano and his wife have both practiced TM since 1993, along with 35,000 servicemen and cabinet-level government officials. Meditating soldiers are even dispatched to violent disturbances to help restore harmony.

"Fetuses are aware in the womb"-as Hindus have always known-says David Cheek, a retired obstetrician and past president of the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis. "Babies are at least somewhat aware from the moment their mothers become aware of their pregnancy. Babies need almost constant encouragement and messages of welcome from their parents ... feelings of [pre-birth] rejection tend to override the reassurance a child receives after birth," he says.