Letters to the Editor
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No Excuse to Eat Meat

Padma Vaithynathan [High Fashion Hindu Women, Jan., 1994] says that she doesn't feel it is a big deal to eat meat as long as she lives the principles of the Vedas. Unfortunately, the decision not to eat meat is something deeply intertwined in our philosophy and is extremely important-especially for a brahmin, who should, quite honestly, know better.

I was born and raised in the US, but I owe my greatest debt to Indian civilization-the only civilization that is so advanced that 3,000 years ago it was decided that we should not even kill animals for food. Despite my American upbringing, I have never compromised being a vegetarian. Why? Because it is an ecologically and humanely sound, cruelty-free way of life. It seems completely unforgivable for those of us born into such a compassionate and progressive tradition to eat meat in a world where it is unnecessary to do so-and we all know it is unnecessary. We, as Indians, are lucky to be born into such an intellectual and enlightened tradition, and it is our duty to let the world know where this tradition originated.

Being a vegetarian is not just a random decision. It is a well thought out tradition, thousands of years old, based on intellectual, ethical and scientific reasons. To give that up is like regressing thousands of years.

Sarayu Srinivasan, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Hindu Civilizations

Your April, 1994 issue had a very interesting article on the Celts. It meant so much to me, as I visited this place quite recently and the parallels of these two societies, Celts and Hindus, was extremely well written. I also found some Aztecs and Mayan civilizations similar to the Indus civilization. The guide was very interested in hearing about Hindu civilization. In a city in Mexico I found Ganesha and Hanuman statues!

Sarojini, Riverdale, New York, USA

Rice Does Entice

[May, 1994] The editor's jest, full of zest is the best as he exalts us to eat the elite. Rice is so nice, served with sweetness or spice. Can we resist this taste treat? Basmati, Bahia, Arboria, Japonica-twice, thrice a day, cooked in a legion of ways; rice, we recite, the ambrosial delight, gracing our palate each day.

Mrs. Tara Katir, Kapaa, Hawaii, USA

Fresh and Charged

I am very much impressed to see your efforts to keep the minds of all our Indian Hindu folks ever fresh and charged with the rich culture, traditions and noble customs of Hinduism. I am sure even the younger generation over here, who have not breathed the Indian fragrance so far, will automatically feel the inspiration and a zeal to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors. Their eternal wisdom is a beacon light to the entire world, particularly to those who are totally materialistic and going away from the norms of mankind and humanity.

T.K. Pattabhiram, Matawan, New Jersey, USA

Hindu is Hindu!

On page 19 of your April, 1994 issue, you have supported the Ramakrishna Mission's "desperate legal move in 1985" to label itself as a 'minority' to escape from the Communist takeover of their educational institutions. This hogwash and balderdash argument is being advanced by many misguided folks. What are the facts? The Ramakrishna Mission obtained the 'religious minority' status from the Government of Bihar as early as 1969. Bihar, then and now, has never been ruled by the Communists.

When a Hindu is ashamed of his faith, the stigma is on that particular Hindu, and not on the mother-faith. No wonder, the Arya Samaj also styled itself as a minority in Punjab, just as the Brahmo Samaj did in Bengal. The Lingayats are "non-Hindus!" The Brahma Kumaris are "non-Hindus" and the cymbal-singing monks of the ISKCON are also "non-Hindus!"

This dangerous innovation of every Hindu sect opting out of the Hindu faith will endanger the Hindu religion to the extreme, much to the hidden glee of the Christian missionaries and the Muslim mullahs. You have to be either a Hindu or a minority. You cannot be both!

G.M. Jagtiani, Bombay, India

May May Be Best

I want to commend you on your May 1994 issue. It is very informative, relevent to our time and fits the objectives of your esteemed newspaper. The articles on the Yajur Veda, the news report on South Africa's Hindu Temple and the article on rice are excellent examples of constructive support to the cause of Hinduism everywhere.

Dr. Shiva Subramanya, Secretary, VHP of America, California, USA

Women Priests

I find that your article on women priests [February, 1994] was basically sentimental in tone and missed the fundamental issues of this contentious topic.

There have been many female ascetics, spiritual teachers, female rishis and female theologians, not to mention the supreme Goddess Herself! Qualified men and women can be initiated and taught to conduct the worship for the sake of oneself and the family, svarta, but temple and public worship was, is and will always remain the domain of males.

The principle orthodox objection to females' serving in a sacerdotal capacity is biological-menstruation. Although in modern Hindu society the rules regarding this subject have been relaxed and indeed it seems to be politically correct not to mention it, ritual restrictions imposed during menstruation cannot be construed as discriminatory because all excretions of the body (blood, mucous, tears, etc.) are considered as ritually impure, and all males and females in such a condition are excluded from any contact with the Deity or with yajnas.

In the case of a temple priestess, the daily rituals would be interrupted for one week every month. In a large temple with many staff this problem can be resolved, but in a temple with only one priestess what will be the result? If women were ordained as domestic priests (purohita), similar problems would arise.

A secondary, albeit minor, reason for rejecting the idea of female priests is the social intimacy which occurs between the yajamana, patron, and the purohita. For example, the tying of the sacred protection thread, kankanam, as a prelude to most rituals is never done by a male to a female or visa-versa, unless they are a married couple! It is customary for yajamana to give charity, danam, to the purohita. The accepting of gifts by a married priestess would constitute an act of samgrahana, or adultery (see Manu 8.357).

Due to the problems we have discussed, there are only two possible solutions: that female priests be unmarried or post menopausal. The former proposition is tricky to say the least. The second option is difficult because of the long and arduous training required. So, if a post menopausal woman who is free from family obligations is inclined to study and devote herself to the priesthood there can be no technical objections, except in the case of accepting danam.

Srirama Ramanuja Acharya, Randwick, Australia

Corrections

In the interview with Swami Divyananda Saraswati [May, 1994], we mistakenly wrote that his guru, Sri Swami Abhinava Satchitanand Tirtha Swamiji Maharaj, Shankaracharya of Dwarka Math, had asked Swami Divyananda to take up the leadership of the math. In fact, his guru only stated that he wanted to "put some big responsibility on your shoulders," but did not mention specifically what the responsibility was. Swami Divyananda did not inquire about the specifics before declining in favor of continuing his life of solitude in the Himalayas.

Editor's note: Our Celt article [May and June, 1994] was drawn from many sources. Invaluable assistance (including an interview) was given by Tadhg MacCrossan, author of "The Sacred Cauldron" and by Myles Dillon and Gerhard Herm. Mr. MacCrossan's scholarship comparing Old Irish with Vedic texts has been a 10-12-year study. Other scholars include Prof. Myles Dillon, Georges Dumezil, Bruce Lincoln and Brian O'Cuiv. Sincere thanks to you all.