

[Global Dharma](#)

Category : [July 1994](#)

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A Monthly News Digest

Kanchi Math Expands Programs

The Shankar Math at Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, the divine seat of Shankaracharya Sri Chandrase-kharendra Saraswati Swamiji who passed away recently, has decided to give a big push to develop Indian culture and religion in a peaceful way. The schemes designed by the present head of the Math (monastery), Sri Jayendra Saraswati Swamiji and his second-in-command, Sri Shankara Vijayendra Saraswati Swamiji, include propagation of dharma, religion, and the cultural and spiritual background of India to children of non-resident Indians in the form of video cassettes. "These steps will help children and even elders living abroad to acquire a sound knowledge of our cultural fabric, which will serve as a cementing force within the several groups of the Indian community," says Swami Jayendra Saraswati.

In addition, the Math has drawn up ambitious programs to have educational institutions in his country conduct special classes during major holidays. "The facilities and time available for spiritual education are inadequate. Parents are busy and have no time for their children at home, unlike in the past when parents and grandparents would tell moral stories to children," says Sri Jayendra Saraswati. Among the Math's other plans is a model town called Chandrasekharapuram to teach Indian dance, yoga, meditation, music and prayers.

By Prakash M. Swami, Madras

Holding Trinidad Hindus Together

In March, Senator Suren Capildeo of Trinidad praised the country's Hindus during an event at the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha in observance of the International Year of the Family. "Our pandits, poverty-stricken, self-taught, unlettered in the English language, knowing only what their guru taught, the bare basic rudiments of our scriptures, walked this land in the tradition of their illustrious forebears as true children of the rishis. They held our Hindu community together. The challenge is that each Maha Sabha teacher must now rededicate himself or herself to the task of total education and restore teaching to the noble profession that it is." He refuted the charge that Hinduism is declining in numbers through conversion, intermarriage or rejection. "The fact is that Hindus are the only section of the entire population subjected to relentless conversion efforts by all other religions for the past 149 years. Yet we constantly form between 22 and 24 percent of Trinidad's population."

"Another myth," he went on, "is that intermarriage and cultural dominance are reducing the Hindu stock and pretty soon we will be wiped out. What kind of nonsense is this? Is not Hinduism a reflection of an amalgam of cultures that goes back in recorded history for more than 5,000 years? Haven't we survived and are the oldest living continuing civilization that the world has seen? I, for one, have no fear of cultural dominance or intermarriage. I have absolute confidence in the Hindu family structure. We frown on single parent families and must do everything to keep families together. What kind of rubbish is it to be told that there is a new phenomena of a working Hindu woman. The Hindu woman has always worked. Do not use that as an excuse to follow the crowd. You have your traditions: it is that of the joint family, the extended family. It is that which has held this nation together."

By Paras Ramoutar, Trinidad

How the Veggie Diet Beats Cancer

Scientists have again provided a new field of evidence indicating the benefits of a vegetarian diet: the recently identified phytochemicals—a large group of compounds found abundantly only in plants—have been shown to be effective in short-circuiting the cancer program in human cells.

Plants produce these power-packed molecules to protect themselves from the scorching effect of too much sunlight. As it turns out, the chemicals plants use to protect themselves protect us too. The method of action of these chemicals is wide-ranging. Sulforaphane, found in broccoli, commands our cells to mobilize their own defenses and eject carcinogenic interlopers. Capsaicin of hot chili peppers redirects carcinogens, including some found in tobacco smoke, away from "DNA binding," which could otherwise lead to tumors.

"There is growing evidence," stated Devra Lee Davis, senior science adviser at the U.S. Public Health Service, "that these natural products can take tumors and defuse them. They can turn off the proliferative process of cancer."

Other phytochemicals have been proven similarly effective, including those found in garlic and onions, soybeans and tomatoes. Though the forms and methods of these chemicals are diverse, one message comes across clearly: a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is currently the only source of the phytochemical anti-cancer arsenal.

Many people across the United States and Europe believe that simply swallowing a tablet containing synthesized nutrients will provide the balance in an unbalanced diet. The most popular pills in the past year have contained synthetic antioxidant vitamins such as C and E, of which megadoses have been linked to decreasing the incidence of heart disease and slowing down the aging process.

Unfortunately, a study performed in Finland of 29,000 male smokers has the health experts at the New England Journal of Medicine declaring that synthetic supplements may not only be a waste of money, but actually be harmful in some ways, as well as beneficial in others. A lot of vitamin lovers are going to be perplexed by this.

The Food and Drug Administration, though propounding that eating vitamin E-rich foods can help derail the cancer train, will not make the same claims about synthetic supplements without further testing in light of the Finnish study.

Journey Through Siva's Land-Yoga Brotherhood's Blissful Pilgrimage with Dr. Vedavyas

By Mrs. S. Sudha Madhuri

Log, February 24 to March 9, 1994: South India impresses the soul as 'the Land of Siva,' full of temples and pagodas! Fifty close-knit disciples followed Guru Dev Dr. Vedavyas on a "spiritual banquet" through 20 shrines sacred to Siva, Muruga, Ganesha, Mother Meenakshi and Lord Narayana, culminating at Mysore. At Kanchi, we marvelled at the Lord Ekambareswara temple architecture, hallowed by 4,000 years of devotion to Lord Siva, where stands even today a 3,000 year old mango tree, ancient and eternal like Hinduism itself, clinging with its massive branches to the ancient Sivalinga. At Tiruvannamalai, we feasted on the glory of Arunachaleswara Siva and sat in a mystic circle around the Samadhi of Sri Ramana Maharshi. With its canopy of foliage, peacock calls and meditating sadhus, none of us wanted to get out of such a spiritual steam-bath. But our bus-conductor guide drove us on to the royal palace of Lord Varadaraja's Temple, where the abbot Sri Ramanuja Acharya lived and fulfilled his messianic mission. On to Tanjore-the majestic vimanam of Brihadeswara, "the Expanding Lord" temple rose in the horizon. Its giant Sivalinga with a 32-foot circumference was the biggest Sivalinga I ever saw. Guru Deva Dr. Vedavyas enchanted us with his explanations of the temple, appearing like Siva in his holy ash. At Tanjore's famous library of ancient palm leaf books, Saraswati Mahal, Guru Dev buried himself in the ancient volumes 'till late evening. After tea and pakoras, our weary bodies ambled by bus to Madurai. We broke into bhajan-"Sivaya Nama Om, Sivaya Nama Om," and burst into tears of ecstasy-God knows where all our fatigue ran away-O, You are the only stimulant in this holy land of Siva! Jolting to an abrupt halt in front of the glimmering lights and a majestic towering gopuram rising in a crescendo of devotion, Meenakshi at last!

Trends to Watch: The Information Super Highway

Heads to India

Instant access to send and receive information, once the privilege of pentagons and airlines, has reached the masses. A housewife in Durban with a small computer

can send a message to President Bill Clinton while the idlis are steaming in the kitchen, ask questions of the Birla Institute of Science in India and send a memo to her friend in Chicago. Electronic networks span the earth. The largest network is Internet with over six million addresses worldwide, increasing by 100's of thousands each month, a connectivity revolution. The ancient Vedic ideal of "One God, one world, one family" takes electronic shape as Internet becomes a giant, planetary web of electric nadis, the cerebral cortex of a single infosphere. This electronic connectivity is a trend which impacts all other trends as information travels further and faster than ever before.

Why bother getting connected? It's efficient. Send a memo today, get a reply tomorrow, no more exasperating international phone tag. No more mail that arrives three months later, if at all. It's cheap. A single page E-mail to India could cost pennies-a 30-minute voice call to Delhi is US\$72.00. It's ecologically responsible: no paper. It's smart. Parents raising children open a window on information that makes the Encyclopedia Britannica look like a postage stamp.

Here is how it works. You find a local company, university or network that, for a small fee, provides access-a password, ID # and a phone number. You plug your phone line into a small device called a modem and plug the modem into a personal computer, type a message in your computer and "mail" it. In minutes the memo is zipping along the highway, from Madras to Hyderabad, to London to New York to San Deigo. It is transmitted by satellite from one computer to another until it arrives at its destination computer "mail box." Once a month you are billed.

While government institutions and universities in India have been on Internet for years, the commercial firm UUNET is looking to expand E-mail in India. This May 16th message generated connectivity euphoria at Hinduism Today:

"UUNET, Network for the Nation, Software for the World, has internet access.
Contact:

Mr. Narsimham; A-37/F, D.D.A. Flats; Munirka, New Delhi. Ph. 91-11-654608,
E-Mail: root@delhi.uunet.in

Giant Gandhi Center Opens

Dancing on the balcony of the boardroom at the April opening of the new Mahatma Gandhi Center in Auckland, New Zealand, ladies express the jubilation felt by the community upon completion of the enormous project. A local paper called it a "labour of love for 40,000 Indians who raised US\$1,173,502" to fund three years of intense work by a dozen Indian builders to transform a bakery into a three-story center. It includes a temple, ethnic shops, conference, bar and dining facilities, an Indian language school and a 1,500-seat auditorium.

Tackling Problems with Seva

Crashing Kenya's image of communal harmony, first ever random 1993 killings of Hindus and leaflets threatening institutions sparked a re-appraisal of Hindus' problems by the Hindu Council of Kenya. Secretary P.D. Pattni says, "We have been so absorbed among ourselves that we have ignored, like ostriches, the changing face of local politics and opinions." Hindus responded dynamically to the call for outreach during this decade's worst drought with individuals and institutions pledging three million shillings toward famine relief. Above, HCK distributes free food to hungry residents of famine stricken Mai Mahiu.

Baba Nityananda in Paradise

In April, 1994, Jeffrey Lindner held a three day yagna in an underground shrine at his Hawaiian homestead on Kauai. Three Indian priests installed a lifesized bronze statue of Sri Bhagavan Nityananda. This famed Karnataka avadhut was guru of Swami Muktananda, Lindner's guru who says he installed his Paramaguru "as my devotion to my guru and as a meditation place to build up some energy for spiritual practice." The original was sculpted by 80-year-old M. Manjrakar for Ganeshpuri in the 60's. Another was made for a Delhi ashram, two more for the Nityananda Institute in America and now one for the tropical Hawaii islands.

Save the Narmada

Her cause is water, but Gandhian-styled social activist Medha Patkar can get pretty fiery. Honored with an Alternate Nobel Prize (Right Livelihood), Patkar has been the most potent opponent of the 11.4 billion-dollar, 30-year Sardar Sarovar Dam project that promises to flood Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra with torrents of irrigation water and electric power for industrialization.

Patkar has been in the US recently, rallying NRI's not to invest in the dam-a scheme apparently hatched by the Gujarat government when the World Bank withdrew support.

Patkar claims the whole project is ill-conceived. What India needs is not some monstrous Hoover Dam look-alike that will leave permanent ecological and financial scars, but small, affordable dams built with, not against, the good-will and cooperation of those affected. Patkar adds, "The people of the valley worship the river Narmada as sacred. Every religious ritual has this river as its center."

Hinduism Today in Hindi

Chief Minister of Delhi Madanlal Khurana releases new Hindi edition.

On April 21st, the Chief Minister of Delhi inaugurated the release of a Hindi edition of Hinduism Today at his office. This edition will also be available to foreign subscribers (for \$12 per year) who prefer it to the English edition already published in India since 1993. Those attending the small function included: editor of Hinduism Today/India Edition, Dr. S. R. Kulkarni, chief executive Ms. Jaya Bhatt and Hindi edition editor Sri K. R. Malkani. Swami Pragyand blessed the occasion.

60' Shiva

On March 12th, a massive image of Lord Siva was consecrated in Birla Gardens, on the Delhi-Jaipur highway, near Delhi's international airport.