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Published by Anonymous on Sep. 02, 1994

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A Monthly News Digest

Saivite Conference Biggest in West

Commendable teamwork by the Canadian Council of Hindus brought 500 delegates together from various nations for a successful International Conference on Saivite Philosophy, held three days each in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, July 1-10.

In an interview with Hinduism Today, president of the Canadian Council of Hindus and conference secretary, Mr. K. Venkataraman, said that presentors included Somaskanda Gurukkal from Sri Lanka (on Agamas), Acharya Poorna Pragna (the scientific angle), Dr. Rama Ghose from Benares Hindu University (Saiva Siddhanta), Dr. R. Nagaswamy, an archeologist from Madras (history) and eminent Canadian professors. Sri Lankans played a prominent role in the conference as presentors and participants. He related, "As for practicalities, we resolved to establish education and information centers for our youth and also tackled some tough issues like the hotly debated panchangam (religious calendar) problem-how to implement it outside of India. We achieved a high level of communication and exchange of information. We are already planning to hold another one on Shaktism in 1995 and later a conference on the Sankara Shanmata. Perhaps the only negative thing was a \$300.00 shortfall. But it was well worth it." A journal of conference results is being prepared now.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami opened the conference with a two-hour talk that focused on practical matters. He said that philosophical truths such as the omnipresence of God Siva and the nature of God Siva as Divine Love must be translated into daily life realities. Wife-beating, meat eating, teenage suicides [a major problem in Canada] would never happen if spiritual truths were actualized. He

proposed that the community give practical shape to their religious beliefs through better education and by forming a council of local elders to serve as counselors and problem solvers. Youth may not be able to talk to their parents but would talk to a sympathetic adult respected by all.

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Maybe We Can Get Back Our Sacred Art

Mother India may demand to see the return of her lost art children in the very near future. Art dealers and museums in the "art poor/cash rich" nations are trembling in the face of litigation by "art rich/cash poor" nations seeking to reclaim art and artifacts that were stolen, seized as war booty or exported illegally. The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reports that over the past three years, Croatia, Hungary, Lebanon, Peru, Ecuador, Cyprus, Guatemala, Greece and Turkey have successfully reclaimed or filed suit to reclaim art from USA, Britain and Germany.

The litigious movement will get official backing when the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law completes work on its Unidroit "One Law" agreement, reported WSJ. The agreement, to be debated at a diplomatic conference in 1995, "would make it extremely difficult to trade any art object if moving it would endanger it; if it is a sacred object of a living culture or religion; if it is of outstanding cultural significance or stolen. Art dealers and museum curators fear an end to a million-dollar business. But Unidroit proponents shed few tears for dealers. They hope to return property to rightful owners, end illicit trade and destructive looting such as last year's assault on Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple. High tech thieves hacked away at faces of the statues and chopped up entire wall reliefs, shipping the pieces off to Thailand for resale." According to a report from London by Sanjay Suri, the UK has hundreds of thousands of Indian artifacts from colonial days. UK collectors, rarely parting with their hoard, actively continue acquisitions. Unidroit is designed to change this and may allow Hindus to get back temple deities and other sacred objects stolen over the years.

Australian Temple May Get Auctioned

A sad and bitter struggle continues to surround the Sri Vishwanath Temple project in Miranda, New South Wales, Australia. The Australia Supreme Court gave a judgement on July 1st to pay the temple builder, Mr. Prem Misra, US\$337,500. Since the Hindu Heritage Research Foundation who owns the temple has inadequate resources to pay such a large amount, the temple land and half-finished temple may be put on public auction. At press time a proposal had been made to transfer the site to a charity controlled by Misra, who intends to complete the temple. In addition to transferring the land, Misra has asked for his legal fees to be paid (\$41,000) and that the temple committee publically acknowledge the error of their ways.

If negotiations are unsuccessful, the temple will be sold at auction to the highest bidder—an unprecedented disaster for any temple outside of India. If purchased by anyone other than Misra himself, the project will be a complete loss. Devotees bought the land for \$300,000. It is possible that one of the hostile Christian community, which bitterly fought against the temple in 1991, will purchase the site just to be rid of the temple. It is also possible that the Muslim mosque which is adjacent to the temple will buy it, perhaps for a parking lot.

The local Hindu community is bitterly divided between supporters of Misra (who originally conceived the unique underground temple and offered to finance and build it) and the HHRF, which was originally constituted to promote the Encyclopedia of Hinduism project under the guidance of Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji) of Parmath Niketan, India, but took on the temple project at Misra's urging. Signed and unsigned acrimonious letters, rumors, claims and counterclaims are regularly circulated in the community. The challenge now is to find some way to heal the rift, avoid a public auction and allow the temple to be built.

Trends to Watch

Green Revolution Disasters Provoke Return to Polyculture

A July '94 Scientific American article by social anthropologist Francesca Bray reports that exportation of US/European agricultural modernization, referred to as "The Green Revolution" is disastrous for many societies. The western model calls for monoculture of a few high-yielding varieties of wheat, corn and rice, and heavy use

of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. Small farms are consolidated into large holdings justifying mechanization which replaces labor.

This model has produced enough grain to feed the world, but that food rarely reaches the starving. Today, many areas that adopted the green revolution are in deep trouble, experiencing soil erosion, water pollution, and loss of beneficial life forms and biodiversity. Ruthless land consolidation by the rich has driven out small farmers and laborers, filling urban slums.

Statistics measuring only grain production to promote the green revolution distort the picture by glossing over the variety of food and cash crops previously grown by self-sustaining, polycultural rural communities. Ms. Bray says that in the orient, "the use of land was intensified over the centuries because of the increasing availability of skilled labor. Small holdings predominated and intensive cropping sustained mixed farming and a highly diversified rural economy that could provide a living for large populations....The high but intermittent labor requirements of wet-rice allowed peasants to use rice farming as a basis for the commercial production of vegetable, sugar, silk or tea or for household manufacture of textiles, bean curd or handicrafts." She cites the recent experience of Japan and China, where monoculture has been reversed through land and price controls that protect small farmer polyculture, fueling growth rates through rural development. This awareness of the economic feasibility of small farms and natural methods is reaching people in high places. After two decades of helping Asian rice growers reduce their dependence on pesticides, Peter Kenmore, regional coordinator for the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization program, has received a grant of US\$260,000 from the MacArthur Foundation to disseminate natural farming techniques to countries in Asia, Africa and Central America. The movement is not small: Kenmore manages a staff of 10,000 in 10 countries across Asia.

Traditional Polyculture: Oil crops, beans & pulses, fiber crops, cereals, grain/straw

Green Revolution Monoculture: Dwarf high-yield varieties of cereals

Late Swami's Hindu Temple Legacy Inaugurated in Canada

From July 5 to July 24, installation ceremonies were held at the Subramanya and Ayyappa temple at the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Camp in Val Morin, Canada, for murthis of Subramanya, Ayyappa, Ganesha and Mookambika Devi. The temple is sheltered from the harsh Canadian winter climate inside a superstructure on this 250-acre ashram, 50 miles north of Montreal in the beautiful Laurentien mountains of Quebec. A press release from the Yoga Camp calls it a "Hindu temple with a universal message, beautiful and innovative, the Subramanya-Ayyappa Temple. Built in traditional South India style, it was the last project of the ashram's founder, Swami Vishnu-devananda, before his death last year (at age 65). It is seen as an international symbol of peace and brotherhood, the same spirit of universal love which guided Swami Vishnu's life." Lord Subramanya was an important deity in Swami's youth as well as for his own guru, Swami Sivananda, who built a Muruga temple in Rishikesh near his Divine Life Society.

While Swami Vishnu's life has been called "an embodiment of parables for inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding and world peace," the organization's spring '94 journal, Yoga Life recounts that Swami spent his latter years deeply involved in his Hindu roots. He took western devotees to sacred Hindu sites in India and put the Hindu temple in Canada at the top of his list. For three decades he focused on five yogic principles: 1) proper exercise, 2) proper breathing, 3) proper relaxation 4) proper diet 5) proper thinking and meditation. Near the end he said, "Without devotion, without God's Grace, all our efforts are meaningless; we cannot reach the top. No matter how much we strive, maya will overpower and push us down. God's Grace must be there." Ceremonies were conducted by Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala, Swamiji's home state.

UK Broadens Ganesha's Fame

May 13th-June 26, Lon-don's Commonwealth Institute hosted a major exhibition of images by India's famed photographer, Karan Kapoor. Highlighting the exhibition were Ganesh's immersion ceremonies held annually in Bombay on the 4th day of the waxing moon in the month of Simha after weeklong worship and celebrations. Shown here, Lord Ganesha sinks into the sea against a Bombay city sky line. The "Fotowala" exhibition was attended by thousands of visitors and children, continuing a global trend of a growing cross-national, cross-cultural awareness of our beloved Hindu God Ganesha.

San Deigo Storefront Temple

On July 17th, 1994, opening rites were done for the Shri Mandir, a 2,200 square foot store space in the Little India shopping center, San Diego, California, often called the "New Age Capital of the World." This modest beginning marks another major Hindu expansion in the US. In a money-smart, let's-stay-debt-free move the Hindu community arranged to lease a near rent free (\$1.00 per year) temporary site from a local Indian realtor. A modest goal of US\$30,000 is being raised initially to create a beautiful place of worship which can grow over time. Daily pujas began immediately. For use by both Hindus and Jains, the temple will serve 1,200 Hindu families in the area.

60,000 Women Meet in Delhi

The All-India Women's Sammelan held May 7 brought 60,000 women from all of India to reflect on the duty of Hindu women today. Notable was their repudiation of westernization, including the "feminist" movement. Speakers rejected the idea of women competing with men, and spoke of the power, the shakti, of women to raise Hindu society, safeguard the family values and culture and thereby protect the country.