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Hindu Day

Malaysia's First Unity Celebration

Countdown. Sixty seconds sweeping by on town clocks and digital wristwatches across Malaysia till 10 AM. Three, two, one. When 10 hit, an estimated 100,000 Hindus scattered through 400 towns headily celebrated the precious heritage of their Hinduness and soberly reflected on keeping that heritage intact. The event, an historic first for Malaysia, was Hindu Day, held on May 11. It could have been Hindu Hour, for it lasted an all too brief two hours, officially till high noon, though some cultural shows were staged in the evening. The organization was impressive. The entire event was held simultaneously in hundreds of temple and ashram precincts, the main fare being impassioned speeches on defending and propagating Hinduism. Already, the planners are chalking out next year's event for a full day.

Hindu Day was the common denominator of Hinduism, linking 100,000 minds and souls in appreciation of all that is fundamental to each of Hinduism's sects and sampradayas. It also focused on problems common to all Hindus as discussed in the interview below. The Hindu Day organizers-Malaysia Hindu Sangam, Malaysian Hindu Youth Council, Malaysia Hindu Dharma Mahmantram, Malaysia Divine Life Society and Malaysia Saiva Siddhanta Mandram-are a broad band reading of diversity. Their welding together for Hindu Day demonstrated what Mahatma Gandhi and many Hindu saints knew well: enough people doing the same thing at the same time can carve deep canyons in history.

Hindu Day though short in time was long on import. Malaysia has never seen such a show of solidarity, discounting the annual That Pusam festival at Batu Caves where 750,000 Hindus amass in January. And Malaysia managed to beat everybody else around the world who has been contemplating similar Hindu solidarity days.

To date there are three different Hindu unity/solidarity days kicking around the planet, a curious absence of unity in itself, but understandable in that no single

spiritual hierarchy governs Hinduism. Last October's historic Dharm Samsad summit of Hindu monks and abbots in Udupi, India stated December 11th, the Ekadasi day of November/December as Hindu Unity Day. They envisioned the day as a worldwide amalgamation of Hindu sampradayas, a day to hoist the saffron flag from every Hindu rooftop. And as long as two years ago, H.H. Sivaya Subramuniaswami of Saiva Siddhanta Church was advocating Deepavali day as a worldwide Hindu Solidarity Day. Beginning this Deepavali, members of his Church Missions will visit other Hindu institutions in their locale and adopt their mode of worship and sadhana during Deepavali. 1986 will go down in the annals as the year Hindu amalgamation became public holidays. And if this is the sunrise of a trend, there could be dozens of Hindu days around the calendar.

Hinduism Today correspondent Jiva Rajagopal spoke with Mr. N. Arumugam, Chairman of the Religious Propagation Committee of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam and one of the chief architects of Hindu Day.

HT: Why May for Hindu Day?

A: It was agreed in the 1985 seminar to fix the second Sunday of May. It's an important month with many important events, like Labor Day, Teachers' Day and Women's' Day.

HT: What are the reasons for Hindu Day?

A: The Sangam felt that all Hindus should allocate one day to seriously think on the social religious problems. One of the major problems is conversion of Hindus by Christians. Another problem is doing service through religion. This falls into two groups-conducting classes and seminars on Hinduism and publishing books and looking into educational problems, giving financial aid for buying uniforms and books.

HT: What are the long-range aims intended by celebrating Hindu Day?

A: Our main aim is that every Hindu must realize the importance of this function and must participate. Secondly, every Hindu organization and temple must jointly organize this great day.

HT: What did this inaugural Hindu Day achieve?

A: Many children's classes have sprung up. A few organizations have adopted poor families. Major Hindu organizations have come forward to celebrate this one day jointly. In this way a better understanding and cooperation has developed among officials. And we've managed to stop many conversions.

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