DIASPORA
Category : January/February/March 2002
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 02, 2002

DIASPORA

FRANCE

Paris Loves Lord Ganesha

On Sunday, September 2, 2001, in Paris, France, over ten thousand souls joined in the annual chariot festival of the Sri Manikka Vinayakar temple. After ten days of celebrations following Ganesha Chaturthi, the temple's utsava murthi [parade Deity] of Lord Ganesha went on procession. The temple was established nearly a decade ago by Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who were accepted into France and permitted to practice their faith unhindred. The temple grew, and with it the profile of Hinduism in Europe's old capital of haute cultureÃ a fitting residence for Lord Ganesha, the Hindu God of joyful, rich and lavish ceremony. A lot of advance press contributed to this year's big increase in turnout. This chariot festival is now France's largest Hindu festival, celebrated by over 10,000 devotees, largely Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils along with Hindus from other parts of

India, Madagascar, Mauritius and some French colonies. A Russian Orthodox priest and several French converts to Hinduism joined the procession to pull the chariot through the streets. Dancing groups and bhajana? singers accompanied Ganesha's five-meter tall chariot, which was preceeded by two water trucks that washed the road ahead of the procession. After covering a route of four miles in about four hours, the procession returned with much gaiety to the temple where several thousand coconuts were offered to Lord Ganesha before He was returned to the temple.

USA

Echoes of Freedom

The history of early South Asian immigration to the US is being dramatically highlighted by the "Echoes of Freedom" exhibit of photos and artifacts on display at the South/Southeast Asia Library of the University of California at Berkeley. Brainchild of librarian Suzanne McMahon, the sixty-photo exhibit, which includes artifacts,

portrays the challenging early 20th-century arrival and settlement of South Asians in California. Heretofore, the post-1965 era immigration rise of Indian professional, business and technology superstars has overshadowed the success stories of these early pioneers. In the face of great adversity, these were the ones, primarily Sikhs, who made their home and stayed on in this country. The exhibit is enthusiastically attended, not only by Indian students, but by tourists who are fascinated with this early addition to the US melting pot. An online duplicate of the exhibit is in the works and will include an interface for grade school social and history studies.

www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/echoes.html/

UTTAR PRADESH

Youth Study Stars and Rites

The Sanskrit Sansthan of Uttar Pradesh, India, with the help of a US$30,000 grant from the Central Government, has started three-month-long "Vedic courses" for young people in 60 centers in India's most populated state. Drawing on ancient scriptures, content includes learning the proper performance of yagnas, samskaras, puja, Vedic astrology and more. The city of Lucknow alone has 200 enrolled. Teacher Ramesh Kumar Awasthi says, "Youngsters are interested in the courses, especially in Vedic rites." Meera Kumari, an MA history student of Lucknow University, commented, "Now that we will ourselves be well versed in

propitiating the Gods and performing yagnas, we'll be able to catch dhongi pandits (fake priests). No one will be able to take us for a ride."

CANADA

Backlash Hits Hindus

At 5:30 am, September 15, fire completely gutted the Hindu Samaj Temple of Hamilton,

Ontario, Canada (near Toronto). Nine sacred images were destroyed, along with more than 3,000 books, unique and private collections donated by retired professors of McMasters University, some dating back to 1901. Arson was confirmed. Police suspect it was a misguided reprisal for the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Deputy police chief Brian Elwood said that morning, "We have been protecting mosques since Tuesday. Obviously there are people who don't know the

difference between a mosque and a Hindu temple. Now we'll be protecting the temples."

Temple vice-president Prem Sharma and his wife Rama wrote to HINDUISM TODAY, "Not only the adults, but the kids have been hit hard. My three kids, who grew up with this temple, are stunned. They have 15 years of memories from their childhood until now. I know a new temple will be built in the future, but the scar will stay on our hearts forever." His son,

21-year-old Rajrishi, says, "Other children in school used to go to Florida on their breaks, but I spent all my time at the mandir learning Hindu religion and culture. The news was a great shock. The only thing allowing me to carry on is the hope to rebuild it! Insurance coverage doesn't match damage costs, so we cannot promptly rebuild. As such, many Hindus will be without a place of worship until funds are collected." Donations and books may be sent to the address below.

contact: Hindu Samaj of Hamilton

6297 Twenty Road East

Hamilton, Ont, L0R 1PO

email:hindusamajhamilton@hotmail.com

1-800-667-1069

USA

Seeing God In New York

Stephen Huyler's other-worldly exhibit "Meeting God, Elements of Hindu Devotion" (see HINDUISM TODAY, Dec. 1996), which began five years ago at the Sackler Museum in Washington, D.C.,

has been taken to new dimensions at its present location in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City. The renowned venue, considered the root of modern anthropological science, boasts some of the most highly skilled presentation designers and craftsmen in the world. When the exhibit arrived for installation, 100 museum staff members turned their creative powers from dinosaurs to spiritual

displayÃ showing to the world the ways of Hindu worship at home, village, temple and in personal experience. New York Hindus are full of praise. Jyotirmoy Datta wrote in India Abroad, "After visiting the stunning exhibition, one is .... inclined to murmur, 'Why travel to Tirupati or Hardwar when you can spend enchanting hours at this great institution in Manhattan getting glimpses of the world's most ancient religion still practiced today

by almost a billion inhabitants of this planet?' " Stephen Huyler, the visionary behind the exhibit, has managed to convey his own "awe that the Divine permeates the daily lives of hundreds of millions of human beings in almost every aspect of their existence." He even had the exhibit consecrated by a priest. After the events of September 11, people are coming not only to see but for solace, to pray and to

make offerings.

USA

Ghee Finds New Fame

The virtues of ghee (clarified butter), well known to Hindus from

ancient times, are finding new celebrity in America. Health scientists report that conjugated linoleic acid, CLA, a key component of ghee, has been shown to slow the progress of some types of cancer and heart disease, and appears to help reduce body fat and increase lean muscle mass. The low-fat dairy fad may actually deprive humans of this important nutrient. Dr. Tilak Dhiman, Utah State

University animal scientist, who is examining ways to increase the CLA content of the milk, cheese and meat says, "We have a tendency to get a little information and think that all fat is bad. We must distinguish between types of fats. Nutrition is very complex, and we don't know everything about it." His studies show that cows grazing solely on grass produce six times the

amount of CLA in their milk. For more info and super ghee, contact: wetz@inebraska.com

TRANSITIONS

Amarjothi Passes On

Prabhushri Swami Amar Jyoti, founder of Jyoti Ashram (Pune, India) Gynana Ganga Ashram (Uttarkashi, India) Sacred Mountain Ashram (Colorado, USA) and Desert Ashram (Arizona, USA) attained Mahasamadhi in Colorado on June 13, 2001. He was 73. A vigil and Vedic rites, cremation and a memorial service were held in the

US and shraddhanajali prayers at Jyoti Ashram, India. His sacred remains were hand-carried to India for interment in a samadhi . Swami left no official successor, but his teachings will continue to be spread by devotees at his four ashrams.

LAW

Prayer for All

The christian right in America which champions a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary prayer in public schools cites a Gallup poll which shows

78% of Americans support such an amendment. The poll also revealed that 76% say the prayers should "reflect all major religions." So, were the unlikely amendment to pass, Hindu prayers would qualify.

BRIEFLY...

GALLUP POLL'S RECENTLY UPDATED audit of American beliefs determined that 25 % of Americans believe in reincarnation, a figure that cuts across faiths.

"LOOTING TEACHERS WAS THE ACCUSATION

made against UK schools that recruit teachers from overseas to fill vacancies. The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) says this is "sucking vital resources" from the world's poorest children and believes in the last year at least 1,000 UK teachers came from developing countries,

including India. The UK shortage pales in comparison with those countries.

IN AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY'S Anglican Archbishop, Rev. Peter Jensen at an August crusade made the shocking comment that

non-Christians and Buddhists in particular were brought to Australia by God to enable them to "share in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." Vehement objections were published in the The Sydney Herald. Dr. A. Balasubramaniam wrote, "Jenson's comments are

breathtaking in their arrrogance. Christians do not enjoy a monopoly on the route to heaven."

"HINDU'S IN AMERICA AIRED in August on the US Public Broadcasting System's "Religion and Ethics" series. Five

guests were interviewed. Discussions focused on Brij Sharma's lawsuit against McDonald's for their beef-flavored french fries.

AT A ASEPTEMBER CONFERENCE in Berlin on artificial intelligence,

famed British physicist Stephen Hawking advocated humans improve through genetic engineering. "In contrast with our intellect, computers double their performance every 18 months. So the danger is real that they could develop intelligence and take over the

world."

THE HINDU UNIVERSITY OF America has acquired a 12-acre site in Orlando and will begin programs at the new campus, where it is authorized by the state of Florida to conduct Master and Doctoral

programs in Hindu Studies. For information contact Braham R. Aggarwal, (407) 352-2889