LETTERS
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LETTERS

Tackle the Misconceptions

I read with interest your journal and find it very interesting and enlightening. I hope you are successful in your mission with the grace of Lord Muruga. I would like you to start a column on common misconceptions about the Hindu religion and Hindu customs. This would be very useful to youngsters to rationally respond to questions posed to them by members of other faiths.

R. Vaidyanathan, vaidya@iimb.ernet.in

Citing Genetic Evidence

Beleaguered academics threatened by the publish or perish syndrome have jumped on

the bandwagon of the Aryan invasion, claiming to use genetics to prove it. In an article titled Genetic Evidence on the Origins of Indian Caste Populations, eighteen authors, mainly from Utah in the US and Vishakapatnam in India, led by Michael Bamshad of the Department of Pediatrics from the University of Utah, claim that there were several waves of immigration into India, the last of which (from Europe) was responsible for the caste system. In their words: "They purportedly admixed with or displaced Dravidic-speaking populations.

We are able to demonstrate unequivocally that the upper castes are more similar to Europeans than lower castes...."

To a scientifically trained person, genetics of course cannot tell if some people living thousands of years ago were Aryan speakers or Dravidic speakers. Bamshad and company

are simply presenting their presumption dressed up as science. Their claim is that upper caste Hindus are genetically closer to Europeans, whereas lower and middle castes are Asiatics. In one stroke this Utah pediatrician and his Dravidian colleagues, aided by samples from Vishakapatnam, propound that both the colonial-imposed Aryan invasion theory and the class-to-caste transition propounded by Indian Marxists (and Dravidian politicians) are supported by genetics!

But the sheen was off the claim soon after it was made. The same week, Bryan Sykes, a professor of genetics at Oxford University, made exactly the opposite claim: the British white population carries African and Asian genes. So Europeans could be carrying Indian traces rather than vice versa!

N.S. Rajaram, navarat@bgl.vsnl.net.in

Abuse of Hindu Yoga

True yoga comprises the many progres-sive spiritual disciplines of Sanatana Dharma/Hinduism. Naturally, these spiritual/religious teachings and practices are offered freely by qualified Hindus. What is crudely and irresponsibly presented as "yoga" today is simply an exercise fad peddled by unqualified (often falsely titling themselves "certified") personalities. The blatant misrepresentations of the Hindu Yoga disciplines exemplify the age-old immature, elitist and bigoted mind-set that has historically been responsible for stealing from and abusing whole cultures and religions.

Pratima Balkaran, Classical Yoga/Hindu Academy, Balkaran2@yahoo.com

Counter Sexual Revolution

I thoroughly enjoyed reading swami Brahmeshananda's article, "We Need a Different Sexual Revolution" (May/June 2001). Not only do we need a different sexual revolution, we need a counter-sexual revolution to counter-brainwash those brainwashed into believing Freud's theory of libido like a gospel. While Freud theorized that all psychological problems stem from sexual repression, our Vedas

have tirelessly, relentlessly and unequivocally taught celibacy (brahmacharya) to be a cardinal virtue and discouraged illicit, indiscriminate and excessive sex.

Pradeep Srivastava, pradeepscool@hotmail.com

Hinduism in Guyana

mr. mahabir has given a distorted viewof some aspects of the history and practice of

Hinduism in Guyana. ("Hindus of South America," Jan/Feb 2001) 1. Hindu religious practices were never oppressed in Guyana under any government. The main religious organizations, the Dharmic Sabha and the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha were politicized. Hence the establishment of independent organizations to protect HinduismÃthe Mahatma Gandhi Organization, the Pratinidhi Sabhas and community-based organizations. Mr Mahabir is kind to mention

my work in the Georgetown Prison, but I do not appreciate the derogatory reference "Jailhouse Preacher." I try not to preach, but attempt to teach Hinduism to a forgotten section of the population in the expectation that their rehabilitation to mainstream society will include some vestiges of spiritual awakening which will encourage them to stay on the path of Sanatana Dharma.

Bharat Kissoon, Georgetown,

Guyana

Our Own Missionary Work!

I am a fifteen-year-old girl who is ex-tremely proud of my religion. Every time I read something about other religions trying to convert Hindus, I feel as though my beliefs are being violated. It is incredibly base to target Hindus in particular, just because we preach tolerance and peace. We do not use vile

and cunning conversion schemes, such as bribing impoverished and ignorant people. We accept converts with open arms who learn about Hinduism of their own free will. We also are taught by the Lord Himself that we should be tolerant of other religions, since there are many ways to God. I revel in the wisdom of my faith and believe that every single person in the entire world can greatly better their lives by following basic Hindu beliefs. However, I will not denigrate my friends and fellow citizens of the

world just because they find another path to salvation. My best friends reflect thisÃthey are Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist. I think that we must continue our own missionary work and that international Hindu organizations must make it the number one priority. In places like Nepal, Bangladesh and other countries (especially now, with Hindus being persecuted in places like Afghanistan), we must reach out to people, and show them the beauty of our loving religion. We can do this

through educational and relief foundations set up in countries that honestly need this. Above all, we must remember that bribery is not the way: we must keep the honor of our religion alive.

Madhu RaoToronto, Canada

Christianity's Plunderous Past

The glowing report on the explosion of Christianity (Newsweek, April 16, 2001) omits mention of earlier explosions such as those that plundered and destroyed the Indian civilizations of the Americas and the native Hawaiian and Polynesian cultures. The current explosion in Asia is nothing new; in the case of India, it dates back to the 15th and the 16th century reign of terror

unleashed by the Portuguese colonists and the accompanying Jesuits. Result? Razing of Hindu temples, building churches on them, burning of "heretics," mass conversions and rapes of Hindu women. This hand-in-glove pattern between the colonists and the missionaries was continued into the 20th century by the British, in only a little less virulent

formÃ denigrating the Hindu culture and targeting the poor, illiterate and tribals who are easy prey for conversion. In independent India, this onslaught on Hindus today is further intensified by amply funded and aggressive evangelicals taking advantage of the secular basis of the Indian constitution, aided by converted Indians who turn against their own roots and

country. Hinduism makes no claim of having a direct and exclusive link to God and respects the right of each person to realize God in their own manner. This openness and the innate spiritual impulsion of Hindus towards God are exploited through sophisticated conversion drives. After all the conflicts and carnage in the name of superiority, is it not time to focus less on conversion

and proselytization and more on religious harmony, respect for the right of people to choose their own path to God and focus instead on improving the quality of spiritual life among Christians? Is there greater violence than uprooting and alienating people from their cultural roots, traditions and support systems?

Mukunda Rao,
mvrao@sunline.net

Hindus: Too Cool to Converts

I enjoyed your conversion article. I am a convert to Hinduism from Catholicism ("How to Become a Hindu,"

Nov/Dec 2000). I converted when I was 16 but only formally went through the ceremonies (name change, etc.) about four years ago. I am now 28. I have studied the Vedas and Upanishads, as well as other religious texts and even learned Hindi. I find, however, that there needs to be a "disclaimer" on

conversion to Hinduism. As an African-American, even after formal conversion and attending temple for many, many, years, I find it difficult for people to take a convert seriously. I attended a temple in Maryland and was astounded by their unacceptance and ignorance! As I was praying to Shri Krishna, a little girl and her mother

stared at me. The little girl kept exclaiming to her mother, "Mommy, Mommy, what is THAT?" pointing at me. The woman just mumbled something in Hindi one word of which I caught "Kahlu" (black). I suppose they thought that I didn't understand what they said? Well...I did. I was very hurt and, needless to say, did not attend

that temple ever again. I have experienced other acts of ignorance as well from other temples. I have attended my "home" temple here for over eight years and still only a handful of people converse with me! I have found a few temples in the area where the people are very warm and I feel welcome and not like an "alien," but it

has been a tough road to acceptance! Converts have to have a thick skin and remember why they chose Sanatana Dharma! Do not let others discourage you no matter what they may say or do. One does not have to be born into Hinduism to know its truths yet sometimes people tend to cloud themselves in their own discriminatory

ignorance. Be strong in the faith and in yourself!

Amba Siddhi, AmbaSiddhi@netscape.net

No Ad Hoc Streetside Temples!

Regarding street-side temples: it is high time something be done to avoid such public inconveniences. They cause traffic congestion, wasting time and valuable resources. We do not pay any great respect to our Gods by having them all over the place, uncared for and

unkempt. Hindu leaders should come up with basic criteria for setting up of temples, so that the place is respectable. They should also formalize a way of removing existing temples on streets in India and move them to more respectable and approachable places. In

some places I have seen people setting up a temple as a polished way of collecting money. Unscrupulous individuals resort to putting up small statues and play with people's sentiments, who offer donations, which ultimately only benefit these unscrupulous persons.

Piyush Agrawal, agrawal_piyush@hotmail.com

Romanians Call for Contact

I am from Romania and write you in the

name of a small group of students. After visiting your web site, we were truly amazed by your vision over the human spirit. We are a research and practicing group trying to evolve our body, mind and spirit, exploring, searching. Sadly, here in

Romania it is almost impossible to rise from the common mass, especially when the people are against you. They have such a limited vision, and anything they cannot understand they classify as "heresy" and never look at it again. You just cannot

imagine how refractory and rigid they are. But, you can imagine our struggle, our fight for freedom. We have such a great desire to read and study your works, but, you see, we also have a big problem. Unfortunately, we are just students here,

and I can assure you that you will never, ever want to be a student in Romania. Our life is so precarious. We are rich in spirit, but the wind is the one who fills our pockets. And now, we are asking for your help. Can we dare to hope that you

may have some used or deteriorated books which you do not need anymore? You will bring much joy among us if you can mail us anything you consider it can help us. I hope that we do not ask for too much. And, if we can ever do something for you

from here, from Romania, you can sure count on us.

Eduard Diaconu, P.O.Box 3-70Pitesti Arges, 0300 Romania
dyaconu_ro@hotmail.com

Caste Issue in the Limelight

the indian social institute's may 7th forum on caste denounced it as "worse than racism." True, caste is our

domestic problem and it should not be discussed outside. Even if it may have some merits, we know caste motivates both those who convert people and those who convert [to Christianity]. It is a

threat to Hindu unity, restricts cooperation and development of our society and damages the image of our great dharma to the outside world. It will be a great if HINDUISM TODAY could make a

complete study of this complex and politically sensitive subject its merit and demerits in the past, present and in the future how it is used and misused by other religions to damage Hinduism then come up with

an action plan to overcome these problems.

P. Madapalli, pmadapalli@hotmail.com

When Is Hindu New Year?

In your May/June 2000 issue, a letter mentioned that the "Hindu Year 5102" should appear in your publication. But

the different major Indian linguistic groups have different years of origin and celebrate the New Year at different times Tamils in April, Hindi and Telegu in March, Gujaratis after Deepavali etc. So,

one cannot call any one number the "Hindu Year." I would appreciate clarity. I have been a subscriber since Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami visited South Africa in the 1980's and thoroughly enjoy

every bit of the publication.

Mr. M.S. Padayachee, Durban, South Africa

Truethe Hindu year

varies. Any one is acceptable. We simply choose to use the South Indian option.

Please Accept Newcomers

The Sringeri Acharya should seriously apply his mind to the question of Westerners converting to Hinduism rather than dismissing it with platitudes from the past (Sringeri, Mar/Apr 2001) A

knowledge of Christian doctrine and practice shows that becoming a better Christian is not the essence of Hinduism no matter what his predecessor may have thought. If Westerners no

longer find solace in Christianity it is because Christianity has been exposed as spiritually bankrupt and has no solace to offer them. The Acharya presents himself as a universal and liberal Hindu leader, but he

refuses to guide and assist those Westerners who come to him for help in converting to Hinduism. He would be the first to agree that the Vedas belong to all of mankind. What will he do when all of

mankind decides to claim their birthright and join the Vedic religion?

Swami Devananda Saraswati, Ramana Ashram, Tiruvannamalai,

India

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number, should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today

107 Kaholalele Road

Kapaa, Hawaii,

96746-9304 USA

or faxed to:
808.822.4351

or e-mailed to:
letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity.